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PREFACE

The Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary, based on the International Lessons Series, was developed consistent with the curriculum guidelines of the Committee on the Uniform Series, Education Leadership Ministries Commission, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Selected Christian scholars and theologians—who themselves embrace the precepts, doctrines, and positions on biblical interpretation that we have come to believe—are contributors to this publication. By participating in Scripture selection and the development of the matrices for the Guidelines for Lesson Development with the Committee on the Uniform Series, this presentation reflects the historic faith that we share within a rich heritage of worship and witness.

The format of the Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary lessons consists of the following: the Unit Title, the general subject with age-level topics, Printed Text from the King James Version and the New International Version of the Bible, Objectives of the Lesson, Unifying Lesson Principles, Points to Be Emphasized, Topical Outline of the Lesson—with the Biblical Background of the Lesson, Exposition and Application of the Scripture, and Concluding Reflection (designed to focus on the salient points of the lesson), Word Power, and the Home Daily Bible Readings. Each lesson concludes with a prayer.

The Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary is designed as an instructional aid for persons involved in the ministry of Christian education. While the autonomy of the individual soul before God is affirmed, we believe that biblical truths find their highest expression within the community of believers whose corporate experiences serve as monitors to preserve the integrity of the Christian faith. As such, the Word of God must not only be understood, but it must also be embodied in the concrete realities of daily life. This serves to allow the Word of God to intersect in a meaningful way with those realities of life.

The presentation of the lessons anticipates the fact that some concepts and Scripture references do not lend themselves to meaningful comprehension by children. Hence, when this occurs, alternative passages of Scripture are used, along with appropriate content emphases, that are designed to assist children in their spiritual growth. There will, however, remain a consistent connection between the children, youth, and adult lessons through the Unifying Principle developed for each session.

We stand firm in our commitment to Christian growth, to the end that lives will be transformed through personal and group interaction with the Word of God. The challenge issued by the apostle Paul continues to find relevance for our faith journey: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, NRSV). May we all commit ourselves to the affirmation expressed by the psalmist: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105, NIV).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Townsend Press Sunday School Commentary is recognized as the centerpiece of a family of church-school literature designed especially to assist teachers in their presentation of the lessons as well as to broaden the knowledge base of students from the biblical perspective. Our mission has been and will always be to provide religious educational experiences and spiritual resources for our constituency throughout this nation, as well as many foreign countries. To achieve this end, the collaborative efforts of many people provide the needed expertise in the various areas of the production process. The editorial personnel, too numerous to list, approach their respective tasks with the dedication and devotion of those who serve God by serving His people. This Commentary is presented with gratitude to God for all those who desire a more comprehensive treatment of the selected Scriptures than is provided in the church-school quarterlies, and it is intended to be a complementary resource to the quarterlies.

This Commentary came into being as a result of employees with expertise in their assigned areas whose self-understanding is that of “workers together with God” and partners with those who labor in the vineyard of teaching the Word of God in order to make disciples and nurture others toward a mature faith.

Our gratitude is expressed to Dr. Geoffrey V. Guns, expositor for the Fall and Spring Quarters, Dr. William F. Buchanan, expositor for the Winter Quarter, and Dr. Michael Minor, expositor for the Summer Quarter, for their devotion to the development of the respective lessons. These three writers bring diversity and a broad spectrum of ministerial, theological, and educational experience to bear on the exposition and application of the Scripture.

The task in which we are all involved would be meaningless and fruitless were it not for the many readers for whom this publication has been so diligently prepared. The faithfulness of our constituency has been enduring for over a century, and we consider ourselves blessed to be their servants in the ministry of the printed Word exalting the living Word, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray that God’s grace will complement our efforts so that lives will be transformed within and beyond the confines of classroom interaction as the Spirit of God manifests Himself through the intersection of teaching and learning.
Reverend Dr. William F. Buchanan ▼
Winter Quarter

William F. Buchanan was born in Bruxton, Georgia—the third of four children born to the late Millinease and John L. Buchanan. He spent his formative years in Georgia, but later the family moved to Florida, where he graduated from high school. In 1976, he received a Bachelor of Science degree from Bethune-Cookman College. He later matriculated at the University of Florida’s business school in Gainesville. In 1983, he received a Master of Divinity degree in Pastoral Counseling from the Morehouse School of Religion—Interdenominational Theological Center. Subsequently, he was a Proctor-Booth Fellow at United Theological Seminary, where he earned the Doctor of Ministry degree in 1995.

Dr. Buchanan was ordained into the ministry in 1985, and from 1985 to 1988 served as youth minister at Greenforest Baptist Church in Decatur, Georgia, and as a chaplain intern at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta. He was called to
be the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Huntington, West Virginia, in 1988. In 1994, he was called to the pastorate of the historic Fifteenth Avenue Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

Since coming to Fifteenth Avenue, Dr. Buchanan has transformed this church into a beacon of light for all persons in the community. The church continues to grow spiritually and numerically, and to serve as a model for twenty-first-century ministry.

Dr. Buchanan has received many awards and honors. He was most recently honored with being named the recipient of the Lily Foundation’s Clergy General Grant, which allowed him to take a brief sabbatical to study at Harvard University’s School of Divinity. He is a board member of the Nashville Housing Fund, Oasis, Saint Thomas Pastoral Care Advisory Board (chairman), Vanderbilt Divinity School Board of Visitors, and Operation Andrew Group (former board chairman). Dr. Buchanan is an adjunct professor at American Baptist College in Nashville, and a Field Education supervisor at Vanderbilt University’s School of Divinity. Additionally, he is in great demand as a preacher, lecturer, and facilitator at churches throughout the nation.

In addition to his busy schedule as a pastor and teacher, Dr. Buchanan is the loving husband of Audrey Cave Buchanan. They are the parents of four children—Kwame, Shani, Dashan, and Aubrey Buchanan—and have six grandchildren.

Reverend Dr. Michael Minor
Summer Quarter

The writer for this quarter of studies is Dr. Michael O. Minor.

Dr. Michael O. Minor presently serves as the under-shepherd of Oak Hill Baptist Church in Hernando, Mississippi. During his fifteen-year tenure there, Dr. Minor has revitalized the Christian education ministry, completed organizational restructuring, overseen a successful mortgage elimination program, and led the God-sized Project effort, resulting in a new worship center.

Additionally, Dr. Minor is the president of the North Mississippi Baptist State Congress of Christian Education, co-chair of the One Mississippi National Baptist Unity Conference, dean of the Hammond Hill District Congress of Christian Education, and chair of the Mississippi Faith-based Health and Wellness Network.

Dr. Minor has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from Harvard University, a Masters in Business Administration in Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate, a Master of Science in Real Estate Development, and a Doctorate in Higher and Adult Education from the University of Memphis.
The Christian Community Comes Alive

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This quarter has three units, each of which is a study in the Acts of the Apostles and each of which takes a different look at the Christian community coming alive.

**Unit I, “Seeds of New Growth,”** is a four-lesson study of some of the ways that people in the early church community lived out and shared their faith in Jesus, thus paving the way for the future growth of the movement.

**Unit II, “Giving Bold Testimony,”** has four lessons that look at the witness of Saul and Peter as the Good News was shared with the believers and even among the Gentiles, resulting in ever-increasing and ever-broadening community among those who followed “The Way.”

**Unit III, “Spreading the Gospel,”** is a five-lesson study of the further growth of the community as Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, and Silas bravely proclaimed the Gospel in Jerusalem and in faraway places.
LESSON 1

September 6, 2015

PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Be Bold

Devotional Reading: Matthew 6:9-15
Print Passage: Acts 4:23-31

Background Scripture: Acts 4:1-31
Key Verse: Acts 4:31

Acts 4:23-31—KJV
23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.
24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:
25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?
26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.
27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,
28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.
29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,
30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.
31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Acts 4:23-31—NIV
23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.
24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.
25 “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
26 “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’
27 “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.
28 “They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.
29 “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.
30 “Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”
31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
At critical times in their lives, people search for strength to weather the storm. Where do they find the necessary strength? The followers of Christ raised their voices together to God in prayer, and the Holy Spirit filled them with strength to speak God’s Word with boldness.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. What to Do in a Crisis
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Peter and John’s Report (Acts 4:23)
   B. The Community’s Prayer (Acts 4:24-28)
   C. The Community’s Request for Boldness (Acts 4:29-30)
   D. The Results of the Community’s Prayer (Acts 4:31)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review the apostles’ prayer for strength to speak with boldness and to continue Jesus’ ministry while under political duress;
2. Gain insights into prayer as a means through which Christians can remain strong voices for change and effective ministries in their communities today; and,
3. Ask God in bold prayers to empower their mission and ministry.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Be Bold
Youth Topic: Help to Be Strong
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Acts 4:31
Print Passage: Acts 4:23-31
—Within the apostles’ prayer runs a solid thread from the sovereign Creator God to David to Jesus to the early church, demonstrating the unity of God’s purpose despite hostility.
—The apostles’ prayer focused on ensuring the ongoing witness of the Good News rather than on protecting the disciples from persecution.
—The word used to describe the disciples as God’s “servants” in Acts 4:29 is  
   
   doulos (“slave”), which is different from the word used to describe David (verse 25) and Jesus (verses 27, 30) as the Lord’s “servant” (pais, in each case, “child” or “personal servant”).
—The prayer draws on Psalm 2:1-2 to recognize the earthly powers that were united against the Lord and the Lord’s Messiah, both in the time of David and in the circumstances of the early church.
—The prayer is a communal one that asks God for empowerment to speak with boldness in facing the threats and challenges of fulfilling God’s calling and mission.
—Upon completing the prayer, the disciples experienced God’s power and were empowered to speak with boldness.
—Peter and John had not been trained in the rabbinic schools, nor did they hold official positions in recognized religious circles. The people took note of these men because they had been with Jesus and were displaying some of His power and authority (4:13).

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Shout Out!
Key Verse: Acts 4:31b  
Print Passage: Acts 4:23-31
—Peter and John’s preaching led some to believe in and others, like the Sadducees, to oppose what they were doing.
—The Sadducees recognized the boldness and courage of Peter and John but considered them uneducated in the Law.
—Peter and John, having prayed for boldness, stood up for what they believed and refused to give in to the demands of the Sadducees.
—The believers prayed together, were filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke God’s Word boldly.
—The Sadducees were a powerful political and religious influence in the time of Jesus.
—This passage includes a quote from Psalm 2.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. What to Do in a Crisis
What do you do when you are faced with a personal or family crisis? At critical times in their lives, people search for strength to weather the storm. Where do they find the necessary strength? The early Christians found themselves facing many challenges because of their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. When confronted by a major challenge from the Jewish religious leaders, the followers of Christ raised their voices together to God in prayer, and the Holy Spirit filled them with strength to speak God’s Word with boldness.

B. Biblical Background
The biblical context for today’s lesson begins with Acts 3:1 and concludes with Acts 5:32. In the opening verses, it is stated that Peter and John went to the Temple for their usual time of prayer (see Acts 3:1). They subsequently healed a man who was lame from birth. This act opened the door for them to witness to the people that God had raised Jesus from the dead (see Acts 3:11-26). When the captain of the guard, the Sadducees, and the priests heard Peter and John’s preaching, they had Peter and John arrested (see Acts 4:1-3). They were kept in prison overnight and brought before the Sanhedrin court the next day (see Acts 4:5-12). The Jewish religious leaders were both annoyed and afraid that the news about the healing of the lame man would cause more defections from the traditional Jewish faith. At the hearing, they commanded Peter and John not to teach or preach anymore in the name of Jesus (see Acts 4:18). They were told not to even mention the name of Jesus anymore. After they had been thoroughly warned and threatened, the court released Peter and John because they were afraid of the people (see Acts 4:21).

Upon being released, Peter and John returned to the other apostles and believers and told them all that had happened to them (see Acts 4:23). At that very moment, they began to pray and thank God that they had been counted worthy to suffer for the Lord. The prayer
of the church was not for deliverance from their trials, but that they would be empowered with greater boldness to speak the Word of God.

In this passage, we learn several things about the early Christian church. First, they were deeply committed to the spread of the Gospel; thus, they prayed for boldness. Second, they turned to God as the Sovereign ruler; thus, He could be trusted in times of crisis and when there was a need for direction. Third, they saw Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the eternal plan of God to save the world from sin.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Peter and John’s Report
   (Acts 4:23)

   And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

   The other believers had probably become very concerned about Peter and John, who were the two most prominent apostles in the group. They had been missing for nearly twenty-four hours and no one knew where they were. We do not know if the remaining members of the infant church knew that Peter and John had been detained while attending the morning prayer at the Temple. The two men were placed in the Temple jail overnight. The next day the two men were questioned by the Sanhedrin court and released from Jewish custody. They were commanded not to teach or preach about Jesus anymore.

   They returned to “their own people,” a reference to the members of the infant church. When they arrived, there was, no doubt, a huge sigh of relief and joy. Peter and John proceeded to tell the others all of the things that God had done through them and what had befallen them at the Temple.

B. The Community’s Prayer
   (Acts 4:24-28)

   And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

   When the believers heard the witness of Peter and John, they responded by lifting their voices in prayer. Prayer is one of the church’s most potent weapons. One of the most overlooked aspects of the early church’s communal life was their commitment to prayer (see Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4, 6; 7:59-60; 8:15; 9:11, 40; 11:2, 4, 30-31; 13:3; compare with Hezekiah’s prayer in Isaiah 37:16-20). We cannot conclude that all of the believers prayed the same prayer in unison. Luke meant that one of the leaders most likely prayed, while the others listened in agreement and offered praise to God. The use of the phrase “they raised their voices together” means that this was a time of corporate prayer by the entire community of believers. One point that is not clear is how many of the believers had gathered together for this moment of praise, thanksgiving, and petition. Remember that they had already experienced tremendous growth, and so we
have no way of knowing how many of the three thousand converted on Pentecost remained in Jerusalem or were present at the location where they met.

In verse 24, God is referred to as “Sovereign” (Greek: *depotes*). We derive from this term the English word *despot*, which refers to someone who is an unquestioned, absolute ruler. God is acknowledged as the Creator, the one who made the heavens and the Earth, including the seas and all that is contained in them. The prayer is steeped in the theology of the Old Testament faith (see Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 146:5-6; Isaiah 40:28; 45:18).

Verses 25-26 comprise a direct quote from Psalm 2:1-2, exactly as they are found in the Septuagint. The Septuagint (also represented by the Roman numerals LXX) is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and was the Bible used by many Gentile believers in the New Testament church. Psalm 2 is one of the passages from the Old Testament that foretold of the coming of the Messiah and that He would face untold suffering at the hands of people. This is the only reference in the New Testament where God spoke through the Holy Spirit and through David. In the prayer, David is referred to as both the servant of the Lord and father of the people.

“Why do the nations rage?” is a rhetorical question that pointed to the futility of men and women’s attempt to thwart God’s will and plan. What God had planned and purposed would surely come to pass and no one would be able to stop it. There are times when believers find themselves facing the turbulence of persecution. The knowledge that God is always in control is our strength against the threats of the enemy.

In verse 27, Herod Antipas is a representation of the kings of the Earth, and Pontius Pilate represents the rulers, who joined with the Romans and the Jewish people in a conspiracy against Jesus. In the verse, Jesus is the holy servant and the Lord’s anointed (Greek: *Christos*). In the KJV and NASB, the word *anointed* is properly translated as “Christ,” which is not a proper name, but a title. Jesus was not just another prophet, preacher, or rabbinic teacher, He was/is Messiah, the Lord’s anointed and chosen Redeemer. He was and is the very Son of God, anointed from birth and approved at His baptism to execute the Father’s plan for human redemption (see Luke 3:21; compare with Psalm 2:7; Isaiah 42:1).

According to verse 28, the kings and rulers thought that they were executing their own wicked and diabolical scheme. But, in reality, they were fulfilling the very will of God that all men and women who believe would be saved from sin and death (see Acts 2:23). The words *decided beforehand* are translated from the Greek word *proorizo* (pro-or-id’-zo), which literally means “to decide before the time, predestine, or to appoint beforehand” (see Romans 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:5, 11). Some might want to suggest that this act by God usurps human freedom. However, there is no contradiction here between human freedom and the sovereign will of God. Humans are free to live, make decisions, and choose their own courses of action. But human freedom never operates outside the sovereign will and plan of God, who is free to take human plans and shape them so that they conform to His divine will (see Genesis 50:20).

C. The Community’s Request for Boldness (Acts 4:29-30)

And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that
signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

The believers prayed that the Lord would take notice of the situation that they were facing. They were up against the very might of the Jewish nation, which was represented by the Sanhedrin. Peter and John had been previously threatened by them, and now their fury was directed at the entire church. The same people who had marshaled themselves and their hatred against Jesus were turning their aggression against them.

There are times when believers should remind God that they face threats and that they want Him to be aware of their situation. The believers were not asking God to rescue them from their circumstances, nor strike down their enemies. Instead, they wanted greater boldness and courage to stand and witness for Him. Boldness (Greek: parrhesia, pronounced [par-rhay-see’-ah]) literally means “freedom to speak or to stand with fearless confidence.” They had been commanded not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus nor to mention His name publicly or privately. The very witness of the church depended upon their being willing to defy the Sanhedrin and obey God (see Acts 4:12-13, 19-21). How were they to handle this situation? They had been ordered by the government to cease all evangelistic activities.

In verse 30, they requested that God stretch out His hand, which was a summons for God to act. The believers were not requesting God to act in a negative way toward their opposition. Rather, they wanted God to heal the sick and cure those with infirmities, just as He had done to the lame man at the Temple a few days earlier.

Signs and wonders would be the means by which men and women would be brought to faith in Jesus Christ.

D. The Results of the Community’s Prayer (Acts 4:31)

And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Luke reported that the prayer had an immediate impact. They were in a tough spot and there was an immediate need. There were three results of the prayer meeting. First, God heard and responded by shaking the place where they were meeting. This may or may not have been a physical rattling of the doors and windows. It was definitely an indication that they were experiencing an unusual manifestation of God’s presence (see Exodus 19:18; Isaiah 6:4). We are not told what this manifestation of God’s presence consisted of. There are times when God moves and words cannot fully capture the radiance and power of that moment.

Second, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Was this a second Pentecostal experience? No! God was confirming His presence with them and reassuring them that their prayer had been heard. The filling of the Holy Spirit is the gift of every believer (see 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Third, they spoke the Word of God with boldness. They gained a newfound freedom and power to speak in the name of Jesus Christ and to declare God’s gracious act of redemption through His shed blood.
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The lesson reminds us that all Christians are called to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. Our ability and vitality as witnesses flow out of sincere and earnest prayer that God will empower us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The resurrection of Jesus Christ means that we can trust God’s plan to save the lost of this world. We can also have confidence that what we have purposed to do in His name will succeed. There is one other crucial lesson that emerges from this narrative. The power of the church to effectively witness and bring change in the world has nothing to do with the number of elite and highly educated members of our congregation. It all stems from the power of God. In Him, we live, move, and have our being.

There are three thoughts we glean from this lesson for the church today. First, the church must be prepared to face opposition that will surely come when she seeks to do God’s will. Second, we must remember that there is power in corporate prayer. Third, we must never be surprised by God’s manifestation of Himself when we pray requesting His power to witness.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, grant that Your servants will be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to witness and serve You. May we never be overcome by the spirit of fear and intimidation. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

One Accord (Greek: homothumadon [hom-oth-oo-mad-oń])—a term used eleven times in the book of Acts to describe the common communal life of the early Christian church. It is a combination of two words: homo (same) and thymos (mind). It literally means “to think the same thoughts about a matter or situation.” Unity was one of the key traits that enabled the church to survive the constant onslaught of persecution (see Acts 1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:10; 15:25; 18:12; 19:26; Romans 15:16). Oneness is one of the most precious characteristics of the Holy Spirit given to the local congregation.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(August 31–September 6, 2015)

Praying for One Another

MONDAY, August 31: “Prayer of Humility” (Matthew 6:9-15)
TUESDAY, September 1: “Prayer of Gratitude” (2 Chronicles 6:1-15)
WEDNESDAY, September 2: “Open-hearted Life” (2 Corinthians 6:1-13)
THURSDAY, September 3: “Greater Things through Prayer” (John 14:11-13)
FRIDAY, September 4: “No One Else” (Acts 4:1-12)
SATURDAY, September 5: “No Other Authority” (Acts 4:13-22)
SUNDAY, September 6: “Praying with Boldness/No Other Power” (Acts 4:23-32)
SHARING ALL THINGS

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** Be Generous

**Devotional Reading:** Isaiah 1:15-18

**Print Passage:** Acts 4:34-37; 5:1-10

**Background Scripture:** Acts 4:32–5:11

**Key Verse:** Acts 4:34

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**Acts 4:34-37; 5:1-10—KJV**

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, 
35 And laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. 
36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 
37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

**Acts 4:34-37; 5:1-10—NIV**

34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 
35 and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), 
37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.

NOW A man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 
2 With his wife’s full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles’ feet.

3 Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 
4 “Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.” 
5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened.

6 Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

8 Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?” “Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Although there are exceptions, most people are glad to share what they have with those in need. What enables people to give up what is theirs for the good of someone else? The early followers of Jesus shared everything with one another, and, although some did not cooperate and were punished as a result, there was not a needy person among them.

9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.
10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

9 Peter said to her, “How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”
10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Understanding Biblical Giving
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Community’s Spirit of Generosity
      (Acts 4:34-35)
   B. The Example of Barnabas
      (Acts 4:36-37)
   C. The Tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira
      (Acts 5:1-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand the sacrifices and rewards emanating from the early Christians’ willingness to share their possessions with others;
2. Examine one’s motivation for making sacrificial offerings that benefit the larger community; and,
3. Draft a list of statements that would motivate others to contribute freely to a community project.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Be Generous
Youth Topic: Free to Share
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Acts 4:34
Print Passage: Acts 4:34-37; 5:1-10
—Acts 4:34 recalls Deuteronomy 15:4: “There will, however, be no one in need among you. …”
—Luke carefully noted that Barnabas was a Levite, one dedicated to serving God and nurturing Israel’s spiritual well-being. His owning land, selling it, and laying the proceeds at the apostles’ feet was significant. His actions showed submission to the apostles’ authority and reflected the economic reversal begun by Jesus.
—The apostles gave the name Barnabas (“son of encouragement”) to Joseph, reflecting the biblical tradition of name changes marking significant events in a person’s life and God’s favor upon him or her.
—The condemning sin of Ananias and Sapphira was deceit. They claimed to give all the proceeds of their sale to the church but secretly withheld part of the profits.
—The sharing in the early church was not legislated; it was spontaneous and voluntary. Thus, there was no compulsion for Ananias to sell his property. Peter’s rebuke makes clear that the property was Ananias’s to do with as he pleased (Acts 5:4).
—Citing Barnabas as an example is evidence that the sharing of one’s resources was voluntary.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Let’s Share
Key Verse: Acts 4:34a
Print Passage: Acts 4:32-37

—The witness of the apostles and the presence of the Holy Spirit had a powerful effect on the believers.
—The believers had oneness of heart and mind, which resulted in the sharing of their material goods and the pooling of their possessions.
—Thus, there were no needy persons among the believers.
—There were those, however, such as Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the community, withholding some of their possessions and thus causing a breach in the community.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Understanding Biblical Giving
One of the most nagging problems of the Christian church since her birth has been and remains in giving to support the work of ministry and missions. Convincing believers of the beneficial blessedness of giving is both problematic and challenging. It is problematic in that few of us want to equate giving with grace. Many congregational leaders are challenged by the never-ending constancy of the problem of poor stewardship and meager giving among the members of their respective churches. It never ends, abates, or retreats. The lack of giving is an ever-present problem in the majority of churches around the world.

The question is this: How do we overcome our lack of understanding regarding the biblical principles of giving? The only way this can happen is through teaching and preaching the Bible’s principles regarding stewardship.

Barnabas was truthful and sincerely generous, while Ananias and Sapphira were the exact opposite. However, many people are glad to share what they have with those in need. What enables people to give up what is theirs for the good of someone else? The early followers of Jesus shared everything with one another, and, although someone did not cooperate and were punished, as a result there was not a needy person among them.

B. Biblical Background
Today’s lesson is a portrait of two types of people: one extremely generous, and the other full of deceit and greed. This lesson helps us see that the early Christian church was filled with many different kinds of people. In the New Testament, there are some good and bad examples of giving (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-6). According to Acts 4:34f, the members of the church in Jerusalem gave so generously of their possessions that there was not a needy person among them. Barnabas was one of those great giants. Society today
would not deem him to be a person of high social standing. However, he was a man greatly respected during his day. William Barclay called Barnabas “the man with the biggest heart in the church.” Luke carefully noted that Barnabas was a Levite, one dedicated to serving God and nurturing Israel’s faith and spiritual well-being.

In the church of Jerusalem, there was a fairly affluent couple. In Acts 5:1-11, we read the account of Ananias and Sapphira, a husband and wife who sold some property and were planning to give the proceeds to the church. They sold the property and held back part of the proceeds. The two conspired together and lied to the Holy Spirit about the proceeds from the sale. Both came under the condemnation of the Holy Spirit and died instantly.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Community’s Spirit of Generosity
   (Acts 4:34-35)

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

Verses 34 and 35 are summary statements about the overall communal life and fellowship that existed within the early Christian church (see Acts 2:42-47). These words reflect the Deuteronomic Code that poverty was to be nonexistent and eradicated among the Hebrew people (see Deuteronomy 15:4). The people of God were to do everything within their means to ensure that everyone’s basic needs were met. There was a particular concern for widows and orphans (see Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 27:19; Isaiah 1:17, 23). We have no way of knowing the level of poverty or the percentage of members in the church who were poor. Given Jerusalem’s location in the central highlands and the absence of abundant farmland, it is easy to see how the leaders of the church could be faced with providing for the needs of large numbers of people. The region of Judea was rocky, mountainous, and often gripped by drought and famine.

The summary makes an extraordinary statement about the attitude of some members of the church. There were no needy persons among them. The believers shared their resources with persons who had need. In these acts, we witness overwhelming generosity among the early Christians.

B. The Example of Barnabas
   (Acts 4:36-37)

And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.

Beginning with verse 36, we have two examples of generosity at its best and worst. The best is demonstrated by Barnabas, and the worst example is one of greed and selfishness manifested in Ananias and Sapphira. Barnabas was a Levite whose native country was the island of Cyprus, which is located in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of modern-day Turkey. His birth name was Joseph (or “Joses” in the KJV) and was later changed to Barnabas.
by the apostles because they saw in him a man who possessed the traits of a servant. The name Barnabas means “son of encouragement.”

Barnabas was a member of the Jewish Diaspora. These were Jews who lived throughout the Roman Empire and Ancient Near East. We are not told if he ever spent time serving in the Temple at Jerusalem as a priest. Barnabas had a big heart. It was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 9:26-27).

Luke described Barnabas as an extremely generous man. He was a man of means; he owned property and was willing to invest in the work of the church. When he sold the property that he owned, he placed the money at the feet of the apostles (see Acts 4:37). Again, this was an act of submission to their leadership and a confident trust that they would do the right thing.

C. The Tragedy of Ananias and Sapphira
(Acts 5:1-10)

BUT A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

Acts 5:1-10 gives us a picture of the tragic demise of two of the early Christian church’s more prosperous members. The husband was Ananias, whose name means “whom Jehovah has graciously given,” and his wife was Sapphira, whose name means “sapphire or precious stone.” These two people stood in stark contrast to Barnabas. Like Barnabas, they sold a piece of property with the intention of presenting the proceeds to the church for its use in ministry. Unlike Barnabas, their intentions were less than honorable. Ben Witherington III stated in his commentary, however, “One act of secrecy and selfishness violates the character of openness and honesty which characterizes the early community of believers.” Verse 2 states that the two of them conspired and concocted a tale of deceit. With the full and complete knowledge of Sapphira, Ananias kept back a portion of the money for himself. Laying the money at the feet of the apostles was an indication that Ananias was willing to submit to leadership. It also was a public display of his support for the work of the church. Unfortunately, it was all a sham.

In verse 3, Peter immediately began to address the lie and conspiracy of Ananias. This probably took place in the presence of all twelve apostles and maybe other prominent members of the congregation. How did Peter know what was going on in the heart of Ananias? The adverb “then” (NIV) indicates that at that very moment the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter that Satan had filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the apostles about the money. Peter may have
had the gift of discernment or been given direct revelation by the Holy Spirit. At any rate, he saw right through the lie.

According to the practice of that day, Ananias was not under any obligation to sell what he owned. In verse 4, Peter made that clear. Ananias sold the property and was perfectly free to keep all or a small portion for him and Sapphira. Rather than be honest, however, Ananias gave the impression that he was giving all of the money to the church. Peter stated that he had not lied to men but to God.

The consequence of Ananias’s sin was immediate. He fell down and died. There has been much debate among interpreters regarding the sudden death of Ananias and whether or not God was fair and just. First, we must remember that the Christian church was in its infancy—and any public corruption, greed, or evidence of theft among believers would conjure up images of some Temple practices. The church had to be free of those kinds of stumbling blocks. Second, God’s judgment of Ananias created a new climate of reverence and respect for the apostles.

According to verse 6, Ananias was not accorded the customary Jewish burial and period of mourning (see Leviticus 10:1-5; compare Joshua 7:25). Ananias was buried in shame. None of his family was notified and there was no funeral. He was immediately picked up, wrapped up, and taken to a burial site.

Verse 7 states that three hours after Ananias had met his untimely end, his wife showed up. We are not sure why she had no knowledge of what had happened to her husband. She had a chance to right the wrong that had been perpetrated by the two of them. She let the moment go by.

In verse 8, Peter addressed her with the same question. Peter pointed to the proceeds of the sale that Ananias brought in and asked if this was the correct amount. She immediately affirmed, “That is the price.”

We cannot tell whether Peter raised his voice at this point. He asked Sapphira how she could agree and conspire with her husband to tempt the Spirit of the Lord. At this point, Sapphira must have been in a state of panic. For the first time, she heard what had happened to her husband. He had suddenly died, and the very same men who had buried him were coming to carry her away to be buried as well.

Verse 10 states that at that very moment she collapsed and died. Was it a massive heart attack brought on by extreme stress, guilt, and the fact that she was a woman standing before the most prominent men in the early Christian church? We do not know. What is known is that she was buried in shame and disgrace as her husband was. What is known is that the Holy Spirit meted out judgment, and it was swift and final.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

I was asked once how one spurs greater levels of giving among the members of a congregation. My response was simple: “Be honest, open, and accountable to the church when it comes to money, and hold everyone who deals with money to the same standard.” The lesson points out what are two extremes of the same pole that is often at the center of the stewardship of money in many congregations.
Ananias and Sapphira were extremely secretive about what they were doing with the money they had raised. They also intended to paint a picture of themselves as generous when in fact they were full of deceit and selfish greed. In some churches, there is a lack of accountability and openness regarding the finances of the church. In these closed communities, it is possible that a small group of people can conspire to pilfer and siphon off the money for themselves or their pet projects without the knowledge of members. Congregations that thrive financially are those that encourage openness, strict accountability, separation of duties among financial officers, and regular financial reporting to the larger congregation. In the early Christian community, the Holy Spirit ensured that everything was done decently and in order. He kept the spirit of deceit and greed from overshadowing what God was doing in the world through the infant, yet innocent church. The punishment meted out to Ananias and Sapphira seems harsh and insensitive to us, but the Lord God had to ensure that there were never any questions about the integrity of the leaders and believers. The growth of the church was bigger than both Ananias and Sapphira.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, grant that Your servants may never be gripped by the sin of greed. May we be filled at all times with the spirit of generosity. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

*Levite (Greek: Leuties [lyoo–ee–tace])—a member of the tribe of Levi. In this context, the reference to Barnabas as a Levite does not mean that he was a descendant of Aaron. Rather, it denotes his position as a servant of the Temple, assisting the priests in the care of the sacred items used in the Temple worship. What is significant is that the Gospel cut across all religious and social boundaries, reaching groups who rejected the message of Jesus of Nazareth but later accepted Him as Lord based upon the preaching and witness of the apostles.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(September 7-13, 2015)*

**Sharing All Things**

**MONDAY,** September 7: “Rescuing the Weak” (Psalm 82)

**TUESDAY,** September 8: “Living Blamelessly” (Psalm 26)

**WEDNESDAY,** September 9: “Sharing Generously” (1 Timothy 5:11-19)

**THURSDAY,** September 10: “Sharing with All” (Isaiah 1:15-18)

**FRIDAY,** September 11: “Sharing Troubles” (Philippians 4:1-14)


**SUNDAY,** September 13: “Sharing All Things” (Acts 4:34–5:10)
LESSON 3

UNIT I: Seeds of New Growth

WITNESSING TO THE TRUTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Speak Out

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 22:1–7
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 5:27–29, 33–42

Acts 5:27–29, 33–42—KJV
27And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,
28Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.
29Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Acts 5:27–29, 33–42—NIV
27 Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.
28 “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”
29 Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men!”

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 5:12–42
KEY VERSE: Acts 5:29

33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.
34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;
35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.
36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.
37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.
38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:
39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.
40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called

33 When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.
34 But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.
35 Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.
36 “Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing.
37 “After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.
38 “Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.
39 “But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”
40 His speech persuaded them. They called the
the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.
41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.
42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Sometimes people are so dedicated to a cause that they will go to any lengths—even enduring pain and suffering—to achieve their goals. What is the source of their commitment? As the apostles continued to teach about Jesus as the Messiah and to help many people become believers, they knew that, even though the authorities tried to stop them, they were obeying God’s calling rather than that of any human authority.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Committed to Speaking Out
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Peter and John Appear before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27-29)
   B. The Jewish Leaders’ Reaction to Peter’s Defiance (Acts 5:33-35)
   C. The Failed Examples of Theudas and Judas (Acts 5:36-37)
   D. The Advice of Gamaliel (Acts 5:38-42)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Study the apostles’ promotion of Jesus as the Messiah despite being ordered not to do so by the Sanhedrin;
2. Help the participants compare their commitment to witnessing to that of the apostles’; and,
3. Discuss and overcome barriers to evangelism efforts within and without the church community.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Speak Out
Youth Topic: Empowered to Speak
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Acts 5:29
Print Passage: Acts 5:27-29, 33-42
—Peter’s claim, “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (see verse 29) was something with which the high priest would not have disagreed.
—Peter’s speech not only rendered the leadership of the Jerusalem rulers illegitimate, unnecessary, and powerless, but also gave their authority and that of the Temple’s to the apostles. It characterized the Jewish religious rulers as being disobedient to God and therefore lacking God’s Spirit.
—Gamaliel was a respected teacher among the Pharisees of the first century. Paul listed him as one of his own teachers (Acts 22:3).
—While the Sanhedrin seemed incensed that the apostles would “bring this man’s blood upon us” (Acts 5:28), that is exactly what the crowd had asked for in demanding Jesus’ execution (see Matthew 27:25).
—The apostles’ response to their treatment by the Sanhedrin
(verse 41) recalls Jesus’ command in Matthew 5:11-12.
—The apostles did not seek a reprieve from the authority figures; rather, they made it clear that they would continue to obey God over human authorities.
—Although the apostles were released, they were still punished with a flogging. The flogging and threats, however, only led to greater boldness in their preaching and teaching.

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Don’t Stop Now!
Key Verse: Acts 5:42b
Print Passage: Acts 5:27-29, 33-42

—The apostles’ teaching and preaching about Jesus threatened the elders of Israel, and they wanted to kill them.
—The apostles clearly believed that God had called them to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.
—The apostles were able to endure imprisonment and flogging, and they did not waver from their cause.
—Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, convinced the elders of Israel not to interfere with the apostles in case their work was of God, not man.
—When the council released the apostles, they rejoiced that they could suffer dishonor in the name of Jesus.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Committed to Speaking Out

Sometimes people are so dedicated to a cause that they will go to any lengths, even enduring pain and suffering, to achieve their goals. What is the source of their commitment? As the apostles continued to teach Jesus as the Messiah and to help many people become believers, they knew, even though the authorities tried to stop them, that they were obeying God’s calling rather than human authority.

B. Biblical Background

According to Acts 5:12, the apostles experienced amazing success in their preaching and teaching ministry. They were attracting large crowds and leading large numbers of people to faith in Jesus every day (see Acts 2:47b; 4:4; 5:14). The irony is clear: they were having their greatest successes in the Temple complex, specifically around the area of Solomon’s portico. This was a large colonnaded area that ran the entire eastern length of the Temple. It was in the area of the Court of the Gentiles, so there were always large crowds of people gathered there. This was the area where the believers gathered to preach, teach, and be taught. It was in this area that Peter and John were arrested a second time by the Temple authorities (see Acts 5:17-18; compare with Acts 4:1-21). They were kept in the public prison overnight and were to be arraigned the next day. When the captain of the guard went to bring them out they were gone, although the prison house had been locked and the guards were standing at the doors (see Acts 5:19-24). No one had seen anything. As
the guards were reporting to the high priest, his associates, and to the Sadducees, it was announced that Peter and John were back in the Temple area, preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus (see Acts 5:25).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Peter and John Appear before the Sanhedrin
   (Acts 5:27-29)

And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

The apostles were quietly arrested so as not to arouse the anger of the people against the religious authorities (verse 26). The Jewish authorities were afraid that they would create an uproar if they arrested the apostles by force. They thought that the people might rise up and stone them. We are not sure if there were other apostles with Peter and John on this occasion. No other names are mentioned; thus, we can only assume that these were the same two men. The apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin for a second time to answer charges of religious subversion and spreading false teaching regarding the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. The high priest began the questioning by reminding the apostles that they had been given strict orders not to preach and teach in the name of Jesus (see Acts 4:18).

However, Peter and John completely ignored the orders and continued to preach and teach in the name of Jesus. The Jewish religious leaders accused the apostles of two things. First, they had completely filled Jerusalem with the message of the Gospel. The Resurrection they preached throughout the city attracted crowds and made converts. Second, the high priest and his associates felt they were being accused of killing Jesus. The expression “determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood” is another way of saying that they were responsible for the death of Jesus (see Matthew 27:25; compare with 2 Samuel 1:16; Ezekiel 18:13; Hosea 12:14).

The apostles were once again put in a tough position. To whom would they give their loyalty and devotion? In verse 29, Peter, along with the other apostles, declared that they must be committed to obeying God rather than human beings (see Daniel 3:16-18; compare with 1 Kings 18:21; Matthew 6:24). In this act of defiance, we see the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus that His followers would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Confidence and boldness are still graces of the Holy Spirit given to believers in times of adversity, especially when we must declare the truth to the power structures in our society. We are all fully capable of speaking truth to power in the most difficult circumstances. Peter and John were not afraid to take a stand for Jesus and His Gospel (see 2 Timothy 1:12).
B. The Jewish Leaders’ Reaction to Peter’s Defiance
(Acts 5:33-35)

When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

Verse 33 points out that, upon hearing Peter’s response, the high priest and all of his associates were outraged that these peasants would defy their orders. The majority of the members of the Sanhedrin were political appointees who were wealthy aristocrats concerned not with religious matters but with commercial and economic prosperity. The Temple with its various feast days was the economic engine that fueled their accumulation of wealth. The Jewish religious authorities were so incensed that they wanted to immediately have the apostles taken out and stoned to death. (Stoning was the most common form of capital punishment used by the Jews.)

But before they could carry out their plan, a highly regarded rabbinic scholar and Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up and brought calm to the situation. The Sanhedrin was comprised of members of the party of Pharisees and Sadducees. Among the common people the Pharisees were more highly regarded and respected. They were highly respected for their commitment to the Torah and oral tradition. If the high priest and his associates were going to take action against the apostles, it would be important to get the support of the Pharisees.

With Peter and John excused from the room, Gamaliel now had the opportunity to address the council about what they were planning to do. He cautioned them to carefully weigh their actions against Peter and John. Gamaliel no doubt knew, as they all did, that the apostles were highly regarded in Jerusalem. This was remarkable, because a few months prior to this very setting, the apostles were hiding out for fear of the Jews (see John 20:19). After Pentecost and being filled with the Holy Spirit, they were preaching and teaching in the Temple complex, healing the sick, performing mighty miracles, and enjoying the kind of freedom that Jesus never experienced. The Holy Spirit gave them boldness, and that boldness is available for every believer in every generation.

C. The Failed Examples of Theudas and Judas
(Acts 5:36-37)

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

One of the challenges of literary studies of the Scriptures is the inability at times to sense the tone and tenor of a speaker unless we are given adequate information. It is easy to assume that Gamaliel was defending the apostles, when in reality he was casting Jesus in the same light as two failed revolutionaries and radicals. Theudas (4 BC) and Judas (AD 4–6) were two political radicals who sought to overthrow the government. They were among several different movements that rose up and were crushed by the Romans.

Verse 36 presents the first of two failed
examples of movements that could not be sustained. In the case of Theudas, Gamaliel stated that he claimed to be someone important or someone who would lead Israel into a new day. He was able to gather four hundred followers. Eventually, he was either captured and killed, or killed in battle. After his death, all of his followers dispersed and the movement faded as quickly as it rose.

The second example of a failed revolutionary movement was led by a man named Judas, who was from Galilee. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus wrote that Judas was the founder of the “fourth sect of Jewish philosophy” known as “the Essenes.” As a movement they were very opposed to the rule of Rome and were the instigators of the revolt against Rome in 66–70 CE. This was not the Judas who followed Jesus; the name Judas was rather common in that day. Gamaliel stated that the movement begun by Judas took place during the time of the general census, a reference to the census mentioned in Luke 2:1-3. He, too, was killed, and all of his followers scattered; the movement came to nothing.

In some congregations there are people who rise up and want to claim for themselves positions of power and authority where none has been given. They establish followers and become a disruption in the life of the congregation. As soon as they leave the church or are chased out of office, the followers who joined them scatter and leave the church as well. Leaders must be on guard for those who seek to create tension in the body.

D. The Advice of Gamaliel
(Acts 5:38-42)

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

Using the previous two examples of failed religious and political movements, Gamaliel cautioned the Sanhedrin to leave the apostles alone. In verse 38, he advised that they be released. He thought that if the infant Christian movement was the product of human thinking and creation it would surely come to nothing and fail. But if it was God’s doing, then neither they nor anyone else would be able to stop them. In their case, they would be guilty of fighting against God (see Matthew 16:18; compare with Acts 9:4-5).

In verse 40, we are told that Gamaliel was able to persuade the council to take a wait-and-see approach to the infant Christian movement. Rather than try to convict the men of treason or blasphemy, they had them flogged, or beaten. This could have been thirty-nine lashes or some other form of punishment. The apostles were then ordered a second time not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore and were released.

Verses 41 and 42 describe the reaction of the apostles to their arrest and release. At this point we see men who were just the opposite of their pre-Pentecostal filling of the Holy Spirit. They counted themselves blessed to have suffered disgrace and humiliation for the name of Jesus (see Luke 6:22-23; 10:20; 1 Peter 1:6; 4:13). Verse 42 is a summary statement that describes the communal life and commitment of the early Christians. Rather than run away in fear, they continued to preach among the Jews.
in the Temple courts. They went from house to house. This may mean one of two things. First, it can mean they gathered in the homes of other Christians and taught the Word, encouraging and building up one another. Second, they may have circulated throughout the city of Jerusalem, preaching and teaching in every neighborhood. Both suggestions are possible, given that they were accused of filling the city with the message about Jesus (see Acts 5:28).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In the lesson today, we see the inner strength of the apostles to persevere in their ministries in spite of their opposition. When believers walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to direct their activities, several outcomes can be expected. First, we will become bolder witnesses of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Second, the same Holy Spirit who filled the apostles is at work in the church today. His presence empowers the church and guarantees that we will never be intimidated by the people and forces that seek to drown out the witness of the church. Third, the Holy Spirit will authenticate our witness and work. He will reveal the difference between those who are truly Christ’s disciples and those who are counterfeits.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we be never moved by or fearful of the wickedness of men and women who may seek to undermine our work of mission and ministry. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Sadducees—members of the wealthy class. They were the chief holders of the office of the high priest. Their ranks comprised the party of the rulers, and many were members of the influential families of Jerusalem. The Sadducees are mentioned only in the Synoptic Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles (see Matthew 3:7; 16:1-12; 22:23-34; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40; Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:6-8). The Sadducees did not share many of the beliefs of the Pharisees.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(September 14-20, 2015)

Witnessing to the Truth

MONDAY, September 14: “The Cause of Truth” (Psalm 45:1-4, 6-7)
TUESDAY, September 15: “The Life of Truth” (Proverbs 14:22-29)
THURSDAY, September 17: “Avoid Foolishness; Live Truthfully” (2 Timothy 2:14-16, 22-26)
FRIDAY, September 18: “Trustworthy and Truth” (Revelation 22:1-7)
SATURDAY, September 19: “Prevailing Truth” (Acts 4:5-12)

End Notes

2. Ibid., 18.1.6.25.
REMEMBERING GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Stand Firm

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 7:2-4, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-47, 53

Acts 7:2-4, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-47, 53
—KJV

2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, 3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, 10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.

33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

Acts 7:2-4, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-47, 53
—NIV

2 To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.

3 “Leave your country and your people,” God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.”

4 “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.”

8 “Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

9 “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10 “and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his house.”

17 “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased.”

33 “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground.

34 “I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People will defend against all criticism of their beliefs, even if their defense is life-threatening. How do people stand up to such perilous criticism? When Stephen spoke to his accusers in the council, he summarized the history of God’s faithfulness to the Israelites and then challenged the council members for not keeping the Law themselves.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Standing Up for One’s Beliefs
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Stephen’s Speech about Abraham
      (Acts 7:2-4)
   B. Stephen’s Speech about Joseph
      (Acts 7:8-10, 17)
   C. Stephen’s Speech about Moses
      (Acts 7:33-34)
   D. Stephen’s Speech about the Tabernacle
      (Acts 7:45-47)
   E. Stephen’s Conclusion about His Fellow Jews
      (Acts 7:53)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review Stephen’s proclamation before the council in which he reminded the Jews of God’s faithfulness through the ages and their disregard of God’s law;
2. Reflect on the meaning of beliefs and a willingness to stand firm in the midst of life-threatening circumstances;
3. Commit to stand for beliefs about God in all circumstances.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Stand Firm
Youth Topic: Stand Up; Speak Up
Adult Key Verse: Acts 7:49
Youth Key Verse: Acts 7:53
Print Passage: Acts 7:2-4, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-47, 53

—Like Peter at Pentecost, Stephen defended the Gospel through a long speech that narrated the story of God’s work through Israelite history.
—Stephen’s response to the high priest’s question turned the charges against him onto the Jerusalem religious leadership. He never answered the charges against him.
Stephen’s broad condemnation of Judaism has been used frequently and wrongly by those promoting anti-Semitism.

Strong parallels exist between the crucifixion of Jesus and the stoning of Stephen, the church’s first martyr.

Stephen’s “defense” before the council highlighted the history of the people of God, noting God’s initiatives and faithfulness and sometimes when the people were unfaithful to God and the covenant.

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Stop! Turn Around!

Key Verse: Acts 7:53

Print Passage: Acts 7:2-4, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-47, 53

—Stephen used the story of God’s faithfulness to answer his accusers.  
—Stephen’s summary of the unity of the Jerusalem community and God’s powerful presence with them showed that Stephen was convinced that God was on his side.  
—The council allowed Stephen to tell his story and state even his challenge at the end.  
—Stephen concluded with a powerful accusation, declaring that the members of the council had not kept the Law.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Standing Up for One’s Beliefs

People will defend against all criticism of their beliefs, even if their defense is life-threatening. How do people stand up to such perilous and threatening criticism? In the early church, there was a man named Stephen who spoke to his accusers in the Sanhedrin council. During his defense, he summarized the history of Israel and challenged the very leaders whose responsibility it was to teach the people the Law. Stephen said that they were just as guilty as the people who willfully refused to obey God.

B. Biblical Background

In today’s lesson, we meet a man named Stephen, who was one of the first servants chosen to serve the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 6:5-6). As the congregation grew in Jerusalem so did the challenges, human needs, and problems. Stephen was the perfect man to assist the apostles in their work. According to Luke, he was deeply spiritual and filled with wisdom and integrity. Stephen did not confine his service to just working with widows and seeing that their daily needs were met; he also performed great wonders and signs among the people (see Acts 6:8). Stephen proved to be a bold servant and defender of the Christian message. He was so convincingly strong and influential that he caused an uproar among a group known as the Synagogue of the Freedmen (see Acts 6:9-12). Eventually, the Freedmen had Stephen brought before the Sanhedrin on charges that he preached against the Law of Moses and the Temple. He was accused of preaching that Jesus was going to destroy the Temple and alter the customs handed down by Moses. None of the charges were true, and the strength of their case rested squarely on the back of a group of false witnesses that they either hired or recruited from among their own ranks.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Stephen’s Speech about Abraham
   (Acts 7:2-4)

   And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The
   God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when
   he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,
   And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from
   thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew
   thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans,
   and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father
   was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye
   now dwell.

   Stephen appealed to the members of the Sanhedrin as brothers and fathers—both terms of endearment. It was important that they not see him as their enemy. He called upon them to listen and take careful heed to his words. He made it known that before Abraham ever stepped foot in Canaan, he lived in Mesopotamia. The point was that before there was a tabernacle, Torah, or Temple, the very God of glory had appeared in a pagan land to their chief patriarch.

   Verses 3 states that all was not well among the patriarchs, because jealousy and pride entered their hearts against their brother, Joseph (see Genesis 37:3-4, 7-8, 11, 28). God’s favor and blessings were not confined to Canaan. God was with Joseph even in Egypt and showered him with great wisdom and favor with Pharaoh, king of Egypt (see Genesis 39:2, 4, 21, 23, 38-43). Joseph rose from being a slave in a foreign land to become second in charge of all of Egypt. When God has given you His favor and blessings, nothing or no one can stand in your path.

   In verse 17, Stephen stated that God had caused the descendants of Abraham to prosper in Egypt. Their numbers increased, and the family began to grow into a fledgling nation.

B. Stephen’s Speech about Joseph
   (Acts 7:8-10, 17)

   And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so
   Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth
day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve
patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold
Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, And delivered
him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and
wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he
made him governor over Egypt and all his house. . . . But
when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had
sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in
Egypt.

   Stephen continued to make his case that God is not to be confined to just the Temple in Jerusalem. He stated that while Abraham was still in Haran, God made a covenant with him, and the sign of its perpetuation would be the ritual of circumcision (see Genesis 17:9-12). According to the covenant, every male child born in Abraham’s family must be circumcised on the eighth day.

   Verse 9 states that all was not well among the patriarchs, because jealousy and pride entered their hearts against their brother, Joseph (see Genesis 37:3-4, 7-8, 11, 28). God’s favor and blessings were not confined to Canaan. God was with Joseph even in Egypt and showered him with great wisdom and favor with Pharaoh, king of Egypt (see Genesis 39:2, 4, 21, 23, 38-43). Joseph rose from being a slave in a foreign land to become second in charge of all of Egypt. When God has given you His favor and blessings, nothing or no one can stand in your path.

   In verse 17, Stephen stated that God had caused the descendants of Abraham to prosper in Egypt. Their numbers increased, and the family began to grow into a fledgling nation.

C. Stephen’s Speech about Moses
   (Acts 7:33-34)

   Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet:
for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have
seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in
Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come
down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee
into Egypt.

Verses 33 and 34 are part of the larger
discussion about the life and call of Moses
to lead the Hebrew people to freedom from
Egyptian slavery. The narrative about Moses
begins with verse 20 and concludes with verse
44. In verse 33, Moses encountered the Lord
on Mount Sinai in the form of a burning bush
that was not consumed. Out of the flames
Moses heard a voice commanding that he take
off his sandals because he was standing on holy
ground (see Exodus 3:5).

In verse 34, God made it clear that the
oppression of the Israelites had not gone
unnoticed. He had seen their struggles against
their Egyptian oppressors, and their groaning
had reached His ears. At that very moment,
Moses received a startling revelation: the Lord
Himself had come down from heaven to deliver
His people, and that deliverance was going to
come through Moses.

D. Stephen’s Speech about the Tabernacle
(Acts 7:45-47)

Which also our fathers that came after brought in with
Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God
drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days
of David; Who found favour before God, and desired to
find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built
him an house.

After the death of Moses, Joshua became
the leader of the children of Israel (see Joshua
1:1-5). When the Israelites entered the land of
Canaan they brought with them the tabernacle
constructed by Moses, and it continued to serve
as their sacred meeting place (verse 45; compare
with Joshua 3:14; 18:1; 23:9). The ark was the
symbol of God’s presence and the reminder of
His promise as they drove out the nations that
occupied the land of Canaan (see Exodus 25:8).

The tabernacle remained with them until
the time of David, Israel’s most revered king.
David enjoyed the favor of the Lord and was
blessed in many ways. Yet, his greatest desire
was to build a permanent resting place for the
ark (see 2 Samuel 7:1-14; 1 Chronicles 17:1-
14). David was forbidden from building the
Temple; that responsibility and honor was given
to Solomon (see 1 Chronicles 28:2-3; compare
with 2 Chronicles 6:8).

E. Stephen’s Conclusion about His Fellow Jews
(Acts 7:53)

Who have received the law by the disposition of angels,
and have not kept it.

At the end of his speech, Stephen issued
a stinging indictment and rebuke against the
Jewish religious leaders. He had recounted
their history, listing all of the patriarchs by
name, and detailed the establishment of the
official religion of the Hebrew people. Out
of all of the people on the Earth, Israel’s
history was filled with countless personal
revelations of God’s presence and power.
They had received the Law of God through
the servant of God (see Exodus 17:14; 34:27;
Deuteronomy 17:18-19). And here was the
irony of it all: they had not obeyed the Word of
God. Imagine the courage it took for Stephen
to stand in the midst of the leaders of the
Sanhedrin court and declare to their faces that
they were no more than heathen hypocrites.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Some New Testament interpreters believe
that Stephen’s speech was not a defense of the
Christian faith; rather, it was his accusers who were put on the defensive. Stephen’s example teaches us that believers are called to stand firm in their convictions regarding the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The ability to remain resolute against the entrenched, godless might of Satan is through the aid of the Holy Spirit, who empowers the believer with God’s very presence.

One of the most important lessons from Stephen’s speech is the reality that God is not restricted to buildings, places, or local boundaries. He is everywhere at the same time, all of the time. This clearly debunks the notion that some believers have that the very ground their sanctuaries are constructed on is the only place where they can meet and find God. They would restrict God to the narrow confines of their experience and places of worship. God is bigger than any single place, and Stephen helped us discern that truth.

**PRAYER**

Lord God of all creation, grant that Your servants will come to trust You in everything and in every place. May we walk in the full assurance that You stand with us even in our most pressing and trying moments. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**WORD POWER**

Tabernacle—the sacred tent-temple where Israel would gather for worship, for sacrifice, and to receive forgiveness for their sins. Moses was charged by God to raise an offering from the sons of Israel and to use the contributions to build the tabernacle (see Exodus 25). The tabernacle was the place where the ark of the covenant was kept, behind the sacred curtain that created the Holy of Holies. All of the furnishings, utensils, and coverings were constructed and fashioned out of the gifts brought for the tabernacle. During the time of David, plans were laid to begin the construction of a permanent place of worship for the Lord (see 1 Chronicles 28-29).

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(September 21-27, 2015)*

**Remembering God’s Faithfulness**


**WEDNESDAY**, September 23: “Remembering God’s Word” (Psalm 119:89-94)

**THURSDAY**, September 24: “Remembering God’s Grace” (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)

**FRIDAY**, September 25: “Remembering God’s Will” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-25)

**SATURDAY**, September 26: “Responding to God’s Faithfulness” (Acts 6:7-15)

**SUNDAY**, September 27: “Remembering God’s Faithfulness” (Acts 7:2-4, 8-10, 17, 33-34, 45-47, 53)
THE SPIRIT IS NOT FOR SALE

Adult/Young Adult Topic: The Source of True Power

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 3:5-10
Print Passage: Acts 8:9-24

Background Scripture: Acts 8:9-25
Key Verse: Acts 8:22

Acts 8:9-24—KJV
9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which
beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched
the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was
some great one:
10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the
greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.
11 And to him they had regard, because that of long
time he had bewitched them with sorceries.
12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things
concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus
Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.
13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was
baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered,
beholding the miracles and signs which were done.
14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem
heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they
sent unto them Peter and John:
15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them,
that they might receive the Holy Ghost:
16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only
they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)
17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they
received the Holy Ghost.
18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the
apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered
them money,
19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever
I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.
20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with
thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God
may be purchased with money.
21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy
heart is not right in the sight of God.

Acts 8:9-24—NIV
9 Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced
sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria.
He boasted that he was someone great, and
10 all the people, both high and low, gave him
their attention and exclaimed, “This man is the divine
power known as the Great Power.”
11 They followed him because he had amazed them for
a long time with his magic.
12 But when they believed Philip as he preached the
good news of the kingdom of God and the name of
Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.
13 Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he
followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great
signs and miracles he saw.
14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria
had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and
John to them.
15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they
might receive the Holy Spirit,
16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any
of them; they had simply been baptized into the name
of the Lord Jesus.
17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they
received the Holy Spirit.
18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the
laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money
19 and said, “Give me also this ability so that everyone
on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.”
20 Peter answered: “May your money perish with you,
because you thought you could buy the gift of God
with money!
21 “You have no part or share in this ministry, because
your heart is not right before God.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People gather in both small and large crowds to listen to inspiring speakers. What gives speakers such power? Peter claimed that such spiritual power was given when one’s heart was right before God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.
23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.
24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

22 “Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart.
23 “For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.”
24 Then Simon answered, “Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
A. The Simon Syndrome
B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
A. Simon the Sorcerer
   (Acts 8:9-13)
B. The Reports about Philip’s Successes
   (Acts 8:14-17)
C. Simon’s Request and Repentance
   (Acts 8:18-24)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and to reveal the power of the Holy Spirit;
2. Affirm the necessity of being right with God in order to receive spiritual power from God; and,
3. Decide and act on witnessing to others about the power of the Holy Spirit.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: The Source of True Power
Youth Topic: Where Is Your Heart?
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Acts 8:22
Print Passage: Acts 8:9-24
—The Philip in this story is not one of the Twelve. This Philip was chosen, along with Stephen and others, as one of the first deacons (see Acts 6:5). He was most likely a Hellenistic Jew who grew up outside of Judea.
—In early Christian literature, the “sorcerer” (Simon Magus) is described as the arch-heretic of the church and the “father” of Gnostic teaching. (See 2 Kings 17:17 regarding sorcery.)
—At first glance, Simon may appear to be more naive than possessing wicked intentions. The subtlety of what is in one’s heart is a challenge for Christians. The problem of what was wrong within Simon’s heart becomes much clearer when his heart and motives are compared with those of Philip’s.
—Although the book of Acts states it without fanfare, note that Philip had carried the Gospel to the Samaritans and that
traditional relationships between Jews and Samaritans were strained, although Jesus had treated Samaritans in more positive terms and relationships.

—In this passage, Luke (through the book of Acts) emphasized that the Spirit is God’s gift, not something that can be purchased. Humans cannot control or manipulate God.

—Peters recognized that God, not Peter, was the final judge of Simon and that Simon’s help could come only from God, who could change Simon’s heart.

—There was a possible hint of Simon’s change of heart when he asked Peter to pray on his behalf. There was no arrogance and certainly some recognition of his limitations.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Get It Right!
Key Verse: Acts 8:21
Print Passage: Acts 8:9-24b
—Those who fled from persecution had the opportunity to evangelize new believers in Samaria, resulting in great joy in that city.

—Although Simon, a magician, believed and was baptized, he had not received the Holy Spirit.

—Peter declared that Simon found that the Holy Spirit is a gift from God, not a magical power that could be bought.

—When Simon realized that his heart was not right with God, he asked Peter to pray for him.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Simon Syndrome

People like Simon are present in many congregations. They are people who believe that their titles or positions give them power and authority over the congregation. Pastor Philip was a Spirit-filled, inspirational preacher who lifted the members out of the doldrums of despair. He gave them hope. In the lesson today, we will see that God often uses men and women in extraordinary ways when they submit their lives to Him. What gives speakers such power? Peter claimed that such spiritual power is given when one’s heart is right before God.

B. Biblical Background

Philip, one of the original seven charged with “serving tables,” left Jerusalem and went down to Samaria and began preaching Christ to the people (see Acts 8:1-6).

The region of Samaria was bordered by Judea to the south and Galilee to the north. The main road that connected Galilee and Judea ran right through Samaria, and this would have been a natural route to take for people fleeing Jerusalem. The Samaritans evolved over hundreds of years after being mixed with Assyrians and other ethnic groups. For centuries, conquering forces had imported foreign people into Samaria (see 2 Kings 17:24-33). By New Testament times, Jews looked down on Samaria as largely a land of Gentiles. They considered them to be pagans with a thin veneer of piety.
Philip had extraordinary success in Samaria. His preaching and healing ministry attracted a lot of new converts, and eventually his work reached the ears of the apostles in Jerusalem. They sent Peter and John to investigate. Their arrival prompted a clash between the apostles and Simon, who had been a highly regarded man in town. When he met Peter and John he learned where real power is found.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Simon the Sorcerer

(Acts 8:9-13)

But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

In Acts 8:1-8, we are introduced to the ministry of Philip in Samaria and the amazing success he achieved. In Samaria, there was a man named Simon who had practiced sorcery in the city. In these verses, we see how the Gospel continued to conquer people whom many Jews believed were nothing more than the scum of the Earth. Simon was the agent of paganism, while Philip represented Jesus Christ and the Gospel. We do not have any biographical information about Simon; we only know that he had resided in the city for quite some time. As a sorcerer, he had amazed the people and had them believing that he was a very great man (verse 9).

Verse 10 tells us that his ploy worked. He was highly regarded by both small and great. This is not a reference to physical size, but to social and economic status. The people believed that he was some sort of divine person with unusual power that enabled him to gather a large following of people. In the mind of Simon, everything had to revolve around him and his power; people referred to him as the “Great Power.” For many years, he had been able to wow them with his magic. We are not told exactly what he did; whatever it was, it was enough to make him the most influential man in town. However, all of that changed when Philip came to Samaria and preached Jesus Christ to them.

Philip’s ministry had a tremendous impact in Samaria. The people believed him and the Word of God he preached regarding the Christ. Philip’s speech rang convincingly with truth and integrity. In verse 12, we note several differences between the work of Simon and the ministry of Philip. Whereas Simon was about himself, Philip came and preached the message of salvation and redemption through Christ. His message was one of Good News (see Mark 1:15-17). It was the message that the very rule of God had entered the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Philip did not use the reference to Jesus of Nazareth, because the Samaritans may have rejected his message. They understood very well the prophecy concerning Messiah (“Christ” in Greek). Also, Philip did
not try to make a name for himself. Everything that he did and the miracles he performed were all done in the name of Jesus Christ (see Philippians 2:5-11). There was an added feature that distinguished Philip from Simon: men and women were baptized in the name of Jesus. This was a clear break with their past and an indication that they had turned away from Simon’s sorcery and embraced the Good News of Jesus Christ. Nothing like this had ever happened in Samaria.

In verse 13, we are told that even Simon himself believed and was baptized. Interpreters are divided over whether Simon was truly converted or was just interested in what he could receive. The context gives the sense that maybe he had not truly repented but was more interested in the acquisition of the power to work miracles for his personal use. Simon followed Philip everywhere he went—being amazed by the signs and wonders that he performed.

B. The Reports about Philip’s Successes (Acts 8:14-17)

Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

Verse 14 reports that news of the successes Philip was having in Samaria reached the apostles in Jerusalem. The apostles sent Peter and John to investigate and report back to them their findings. In the early days of the church’s existence, Peter and John often worked together (see Acts 3:1-4). It is likely that someone travelling through Samaria or someone living in Samaria may have travelled to Jerusalem and reported Philip’s ministry successes to the apostles. It made sense to send Peter and John, since they were two of the key apostolic leaders. Their testimony would verify whether the report was true. Ben Witherington III noted in his commentary that given John’s attitude toward Samaritans, he would be the best person to verify that it was all true.¹

When they arrived, the two apostles did not make any attempts to preach to or teach the Samaritans. Philip’s work spoke for itself. They prayed for the people—that they might receive the Holy Spirit—because none of Philip’s converts had received the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism (see Acts 2:37-39; compare with 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). This is in no way to infer that Philip’s work was less than that of the apostles’. Peter and John laid hands on them and they all received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There has been vigorous debate by interpreters across the years regarding the reason why the Samaritans did not receive the Holy Spirit at baptism. In some camps, it has given rise to the idea that even after conversion there is a need for a second, confirming work of grace, often called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” In some denominations, baptism of the Holy Spirit is viewed as an act of confirmation of one’s salvation. However, this position is not supported by New Testament teaching. The plausible explanation may be better understood given the historical context of the relationship between Jews and Samaritans. It would be inconceivable for Jewish Christians to believe that God would pour out His Spirit upon hated

¹
and despised Samaritans. Craig S. Keener offers what may be the best explanation. He writes, “The most common and plausible explanation is that God waited for apostolic ratification to maintain the unity of the Jerusalem and Samaritan churches.”

C. Simon’s Request and Repentance
(Acts 8:18-24)

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

Simon recognized a good thing when he saw it. When he saw people receiving the Holy Spirit when Peter and John laid hands on them, he wanted the ability to do the same thing. He offered them money (verse 18). He wanted to be able to lay hands on people, thereby dispensing the Holy Spirit as he saw fit. This would give him control—maintain his stature in the city after the apostles had departed—and also provide him with an additional means for making money. In verse 20, Peter issued a stern and harsh denunciation of Simon: “May you and your money perish by assuming that you can buy the Spirit of God” (my paraphrase). The power of God is not for sale! Not only did Peter announce destruction upon Simon, but he also banned him from participation and partnership in the ministry because Simon’s heart was evil and filled with wickedness (verse 21).

In verse 22, Peter called upon Simon to repent of his evil intentions and pray that God would not bring a more destructive and damning punishment. Here, we learn that God is gracious and merciful, always willing to forgive us of our sins and wickedness. Verse 23 speaks to Peter’s gift of discernment, because he saw in Simon the bitterness that gripped his life and his bondage to sin. Peter’s words shook Simon to the very core of his being. It created a deep sense of dread because he knew that the words of Peter were not an idle or empty threat. He had seen the miracles, and he saw the demonstrations of God’s power. Simon knew that he could lose it all, including his life. He was genuinely remorseful and repentant. He asked that Peter pray for him that none of what he had said would befall him. We are not told the outcome of the prayer. It is very likely that Simon never attempted to make money through magic or trying to sell the Holy Spirit.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the questions that grows out of this lesson pertains to the reception and role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and in the lives of individual believers. It is apparent that the Holy Spirit was working in a different way in Samaria. Why God would wait for the apostles to come to lay hands on the believers has been hotly debated. But we must remember that God is sovereign and reserves the right to move in His own way (see Isaiah 55:8-9). We are not in any position to declare that unless God operates in the same way in every situation, the spiritual experiences...
of other people are invalid. Another point in the lesson is God’s willingness to empower all believers regardless of ethnicity and economic status. God can take the despised among us and do a great work. Philip’s work in Samaria proved that God is able to work in any setting with any people. This means that He is able to work in your church and in your life in very powerful ways. We simply have to yield ourselves to that end.

**PRAYER**

Lord, grant that Your servants will never take for granted Your power in our lives. May we recognize that You are free to use anyone as You deem necessary. Grant us the freedom and power to speak in places where we are uncomfortable and have been reluctant to share Your Word. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**WORD POWER**

Laying on of Hands (Greek: *epithesis* [ep–ith’–es–is])—this term has a wide and varied usage in secular and sacred Greek writings. It means “to lay down,” “to put to,” “to set on.” In the LXX (Septuagint), the word appears more than 270 times in a variety of usages. Within Judaism, the word came to signify the passing on of divine favor, setting the Spirit upon someone (see Numbers 11:17, 25; Isaiah 44:3). The Christian church adopted this practice and made it the means by which authority is passed along or one is set aside for a specific function (see 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; Hebrews 6:2). In the lesson, the Holy Spirit was received by the Samaritan converts through the laying on of hands by the apostles. This is not to infer that this was to be a normal means by which one receives the Holy Spirit. Rather, God used this instance to verify to the disciples that the Christian faith was not restricted to the Jews only, but was a global movement.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(September 28–October 4, 2015)*

**The Spirit Is Not for Sale**

**MONDAY,** September 28: “Never Moved” (Psalm 15)

**TUESDAY,** September 29: “Be Content” (Hebrews 13:5-10)

**WEDNESDAY,** September 30: “Stand Firm” (Ephesians 6:14-18)

**THURSDAY,** October 1: “Stand Boldly” (Acts 13:52–14:3)

**FRIDAY,** October 2: “Stand Regardless” (Acts 8:1-8)

**SATURDAY,** October 3: “Stand Ready” (Acts 8:26–40)


**End Notes**


3. Witherington, 286.

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LESSON 6

October 11, 2015

SAUL EARNs CREDIBILITY

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Earning the Right to Be Heard

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 18:20-30
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 9:19b-31

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:19b-31
KEY VERSE: Acts 9:20

Acts 9:19b-31—KJV
19 Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.
20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.
21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?
22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.
23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:
24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.
25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.
26 When he came to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.
27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.
28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.
29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.
30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

Acts 9:19b-31—NIV
19 Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.
20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.
21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?”
22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.
23 After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him,
24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.
25 But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.
26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.
27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.
28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.
29 He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.
30 When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Effective advocates boldly tell others about their deepest convictions. What impact does a strong and bold testimony have on the lives of others? The Scripture claims that Saul’s bold preaching of the Gospel was powerful, amazed the people, gave peace to many churches, and caused an increase in the number of followers.

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. A Convincing Witness
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Saul’s Ministry in Damascus
      (Acts 9:19b-22)
   B. Saul’s Escape from Damascus
   C. Saul’s Experience in Jerusalem
      (Acts 9:26-30)
   D. The Church at Peace
      (Acts 9:31)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall Saul’s acceptance as a Christian and the reward of his zeal in preaching about Jesus;
2. Examine the church’s willingness to accept and meaningfully include in the body of Christ those whose backgrounds are perceived as being suspect and encourage their bold witness about the change in their lives; and,
3. Celebrate those whose lives were transformed by Jesus Christ and then become bold witnesses for His cause.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Earning the Right to Be Heard
Youth Topic: From Foe to Advocate
Adult Key Verse: Acts 9:20
Youth Key Verse: Acts 9:27
Print Passage: Acts 9:19b-31

—Saul had travelled to Damascus to investigate the synagogues there and take any Christians he discovered back to Jerusalem as prisoners (see Acts 9:1-2). On the road to Damascus, he had a dramatic encounter with the risen Christ (see 9:3-9).
—According to Galatians 1:15-21, after Paul was converted and had regained his sight, he went immediately to Arabia and then later returned to Damascus. He stayed in Arabia for three years before going to Jerusalem, where he visited with Peter for fifteen days.
—When Saul angered the Jews in Damascus by preaching the Gospel, the local believers helped him flee for his life to Jerusalem. (See also 2 Corinthians 11:32-33.) After angering the Jews there, the local believers helped him flee for his life to nearby Caesarea. From there, he set sail for his hometown of Tarsus.
—For his first assignment, Barnabas asked that Paul help him with the new growing church in nearby Antioch. He taught and ministered there for a year, and there followers of Christ were first called Christians (see Acts 11:19-30).

—Saul’s boldness is all the more amazing because he had to deal with both the hostility of his original religious community and the suspicion and near rejection from his new religious community. Saul was “a man without a country.”

—That Paul’s preaching was so convincing and increasingly more powerful is evidence of the honesty and validity of his conversion.

—Saul was a charismatic preacher.
—Saul’s previous reputation caused some people to question his motives.
—Even the disciples were afraid of Saul at first.
—Saul’s bold preaching resulted in his being evacuated from both Damascus and Jerusalem when people wanted to kill him.
—As Saul preached, the church in many places increased in numbers.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. A Convincing Witness

Ronald James was known as one of the city’s most notorious gang leaders. He had been involved with gangs since his adolescence and was highly regarded by the members of his gang and rival gangs. He had made his reputation as a hard-nosed, ruthless drug dealer as well as through extortion of some of the small businesses in the community. Ronald terrorized the community through his gang, which led many people to stop attending any community events held in the evening.

In the community, there was a small congregation of Christians that was led by a young, energetic pastor named James Brown. Shortly after Pastor Brown assumed the role of pastor of the church, he began to reach out to the members of the gangs in an effort to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ. One day as Pastor Brown witnessed to Ronald, the Lord opened his heart and Ronald was moved to accept Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Initially, people were very skeptical and reluctant to believe that Ronald had been changed. It was not long before Ronald began to witness to members of his own gang and members of rival gangs. During the course of one year, Ronald led more than eighty gang members to faith in Jesus Christ. His boldness and courage made him a convincing witness for Jesus Christ. In the lesson today, we learn that effective advocates boldly tell others about their deepest convictions. What impact does a strong and bold testimony have on the lives of others? The Scripture claims that Saul’s bold preaching of the Gospel was powerful, amazed the people, gave peace to many churches, and caused an increase in the number of followers.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

B. Biblical Background

In Acts 9:19b-31, the sequel to Saul’s conversion, which took place on the Road to Damascus, is recounted. We also learn what happened to him after he left Jerusalem and before he was recruited by Barnabas to assist with the work in Antioch. Prior to his conversion, Saul had been a prominent Pharisee who was well-known and highly regarded in Jewish religious circles.

Saul was among the earliest Jewish persecutors of Christians who relentlessly tried to stamp out the early Christian church (see Acts 22:4; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13, 23; Philippians 3:6). Saul gained permission from Jewish authorities to travel to Damascus and arrest anyone who identified with the Jesus movement, referring to the people of the “Way” (see Acts 9:1-2, 22:4; 24:14). On the road to Damascus, he had an encounter with the risen Christ that transformed his life forever (see Acts 9:3-9). Saul was rendered blind until Jesus sent a man named Ananias to restore his sight.

Shortly after his sight was restored Saul began to preach in the synagogues of Damascus and to witness throughout the city. Some people found it hard to believe that it was really him. Luke reported that opposition to his preaching emerged in Damascus and Jerusalem. After a few weeks, he escaped those conspiring to murder him and returned to Tarsus.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Saul’s Ministry in Damascus

(Acts 9:19b-22)

Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

According to verse 19b, Saul spent a considerable amount of time with the disciples in Damascus. We are not given a specific number of days that elapsed before he began preaching in the synagogues. Verse 20 gives the impression that Saul began preaching almost immediately after regaining his sight. However, it is more likely that he spent many days learning the message, ministry, and mission of Jesus. He may have also had some prior knowledge regarding Jesus and His message from them. Saul preached in the local synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God, which was one of the main theological themes of Saul’s message.

Verse 21 indicates that the reaction to Saul’s ministry was one of astonishment. Many people in Damascus found it hard to believe that the very man who had come to wreak havoc on the disciples of Jesus was now preaching that Jesus was the Son of God. It also appears that Saul’s efforts to arrest as many disciples as possible were well-known throughout Damascus.

In verse 22, Saul demonstrated a mastery of the interpretation of the Scriptures. His training as a Jewish rabbi and his commitment to being a Pharisee were two reasons why he was steeped in his understanding of the
Scriptures. The more he preached, the more he was able to expand his understanding of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. His depth of knowledge and boldness in preaching baffled the Jews living in Damascus. He was able to take the Old Testament and prove to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.


And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

In verse 23, we are not given the details regarding how much time had elapsed. The text suggests that enough time had gone by for Saul to have convinced people that his conversion was not a hoax. The Jews in Damascus were alarmed by Saul’s preaching and his ability to attract people. They conspired to kill him. This was an early precursor to what would be repeated throughout his life’s work (see Acts 13:50; 14:2, 9; 20:3).

According to verse 24, Saul learned of the diabolical plot to kill him. Exactly how he learned of it is not stated. It may be that the Lord revealed the plot of the conspirators to Saul through a vision or from people who may have heard about it. The Jews were so intent on killing Saul that day and night they watched the city gates to see if he would leave. At this point, Saul’s life was under God’s direction and his work was just beginning. It would certainly not begin and end in Damascus.

In verse 25, we learn that Saul had gathered followers from among the very people whom he went to destroy, and possibly some converts through his preaching. The fact that he had followers is a witness to the power of his testimony and the very credible way the Holy Spirit validated his conversion. The cover of darkness would provide an ideal time to escape, especially if done on an evening when there was no moonlight. That he was lowered in a basket speaks clearly to the very humble manner in which he had to leave Damascus.


And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

According to Galatians 1:18, three years had elapsed before Saul returned to Jerusalem. When Saul returned to Jerusalem, he was an entirely different man (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). He was no longer the zealous Pharisee intent on stamping out the infant Christian movement. He had been apprehended by the very One whom he sought to apprehend (see Philippians 3:12). It is clear from the context that Saul was no longer interested in remaining a part of the Jewish religious establishment. He tried to join the local Christian community, but they were all afraid of him. There was no way to know for sure if he had really been converted—after all, he had tried to kill them, and some of them
may have had relatives or friends who were arrested and imprisoned by Saul.

How and when Saul met Barnabas we are not told. It may be that Barnabas, like all of the believers living in Jerusalem, had heard of Saul’s return and wanted to give him a chance to explain and share his testimony. In this action, Barnabas lived up to his name as “son of encouragement” (see Acts 4:36). Rather than leave Saul stranded and without friends, Barnabas took him and introduced him to the apostles, most likely Peter and James. Barnabas put his reputation on the line, standing up for Saul and convincingly relating how Saul preached the Gospel without fear in Damascus. The very name that he despised he now proclaimed with boldness.

In verse 28, we see a confident Saul, moving freely in and around Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of Jesus. Luke did not mention these details, but we can safely assume that Saul’s emergence as a Christian preacher raised eyebrows and caused consternation among the Jewish religious elite. After all, he had been one of them and had been commissioned by the high priest to eradicate the people of “The Way” in Damascus. His return to Jerusalem posed a different problem, for Saul was highly skilled in the Scriptures and was a learned man, unlike Peter and John (see Acts 4:13).

The Grecian Jews were the same ones whom Stephen had debated (see Acts 6:9-10). In Saul they had met not only a zealot, but also an intellectual who could argue the truth of Scripture from many aspects. His ability to interpret the death and resurrection of Jesus in light of the prophets made him a formidable foe. They felt that the only way to stop him was to kill him.

Did Saul finally win over the reluctant and suspicious believers in Jerusalem? Evidently, he was able to connect to some of them because they rescued him from the hands of his enemies. Here he was, once the proud Pharisee respected among the Jews and feared by the Christians, now forced to leave the city he loved. The brothers took him to Caesarea, the coastal city and harbor built by Herod the Great. There they put him on a ship bound for his home in Tarsus. Caesarea is about seventy miles from Jerusalem on the Mediterranean coast, and at the time it was the primary shipping port for Israel and the residence of the Roman governor.

D. The Church at Peace
(Acts 9:31)

Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

This is a summary statement about the social and political climate of Israel and how the church was able to live in relative peace. Verse 31 is a summary statement that serves as a transition from Saul’s conversion to Peter’s ministry in Lydda. The context suggests that after Saul departed, there was a period of relative peace throughout all of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. The church had grown and moved beyond the walls of Jerusalem into Samaria and for the first time into Galilee. Not only did the church grow numerically and spiritually, but it was built up and encouraged through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. How did the Holy Spirit encourage the believers? The Holy Spirit
was the source of their boldness and the means by which the church grew.

It is apparent that when the Holy Spirit is in control, the church grows, is at peace, and experiences the edifying presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke indicated that although the followers of Jesus were scattered throughout the region—Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and Samaria—it was one church. They grew because of the spirit of cooperation and unity. The church of this generation can learn great lessons in unity, cooperation, and leadership from the pioneers of the Christian faith.

### III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There is no substitute for credibility. Without credibility we will not be believed or trusted. In simple terms, credibility is the quality of believability. In today’s lesson, Saul, a highly regarded and respected Pharisee, faced a credibility gap in both Damascus and Jerusalem. His past caught up with him. Even though some of the believers in Damascus and in Jerusalem may have seen and heard him, they found it hard to believe him. However, as time went by and as Saul persisted in ministry, the gap between his past and present widened and the disciples came to accept him as one of them.

There is a need for believers today to beware of how the world around us perceives us. Are we passionately devoted to Jesus Christ, not only in word, but also in our actions? Our words mean absolutely nothing when our actions are a contradiction. Preaching must match practice.

### PRAYER

Lord, grant that Your servants may never walk in shame. May the power of the Holy Spirit enliven us with power and passion for the lost. Grant that we will never lose our right to speak Your Word with conviction. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### WORD POWER

**Boldly** (Greek: *parrhesiazomai* [par-hay-see-ad’-zom-ahee])—literally refers to having the freedom to speak or speaking freely. It has in it the idea of growing in confidence. Thus, as Saul preached and taught the Word, he grew more confident in his message. He spoke freely, openly, and without fear.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

**(October 5-11, 2015)**

**Saul Earns Credibility**

**MONDAY,** October 5: “God’s Perfect Way” (Psalm 18:20-30)

**TUESDAY,** October 6: “God’s Trustworthy Way” (Psalm 112:1-2, 6-9)

**WEDNESDAY,** October 7: “God’s Holy Way” (1 Peter 1:16-19)

**THURSDAY,** October 8: “God’s Generous Way” (Luke 11:32-36)

**FRIDAY,** October 9: “God’s Surprising Way” (Acts 9:1-9)

**SATURDAY,** October 10: “God’s Unconventional Way” (Acts 9:10-19)

**SUNDAY,** October 11: “Saul Earns Credibility” (Acts 9:20-31)
LESSON 7

UNIT II: Giving Bold Testimony

October 18, 2015

PETER TAKES A RISK

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 8:31-39
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 10:24-38

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 10:1-44
KEY VERSES: Acts 10:34-35

Acts 10:24-38—KJV
24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.
25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.
26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.
27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.
28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.
29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?
30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,
31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.
32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.
33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.
34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:
35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Acts 10:24-38—NIV
24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.
25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence.
26 But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”
27 Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.
28 He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.
29 “So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”
30 Cornelius answered: “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me
31 “and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor.
32 “Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’
33 “So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”
34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism
35 “but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
It is very natural for humans to show partiality to some persons and not to others. What are some possibilities when a person risks being open and welcoming to all? Peter’s recognition that God shows no partiality allowed him to tell the Good News to the Gentiles.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all;)
37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;
38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all;) 37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached—
38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. No Partiality Allowed!
   B. Biblical Background
II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Peter Arrives in Caesarea (Acts 10:24-28)
   B. Peter’s Inquiry (Acts 10:29-33)
   C. Peter’s Message to the Household of Cornelius (Acts 10:34-38)
III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Show Peter’s willingness to tell the Good News of Jesus Christ to Cornelius, a Gentile;
2. Appreciate that Peter risked possible scorn from his Jewish Christian brothers and openly accepted an invitation to tell Cornelius about Jesus; and,
3. Identify, support, and give voice to risk takers for Christ in the local and world community.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?
Youth Topic: Tear Down the Fences
Adult/Youth Key Verses: Acts 10:34-35
Print Passage: Acts 10:24-38
—Peter’s encounter with Cornelius allowed him to understand fully the vision in Acts 10:11-16. God told him not merely what could and could not be eaten, but also who was and was not clean.
—The conversion of Cornelius is important, not because he was the first Gentile converted in the book of Acts (the Ethiopian eunuch was first), but because his conversion was the first one publicly acknowledged by the Jerusalem church. The mission was shifting from one that was Jewish-centered to one that was inclusive of non-Jews.
—Peter faced a big risk in Acts 10. His actions challenged several cultural norms, including what a Jewish person could eat and with whom he or she could associate. This passage set up a confrontation with the Jerusalem church.
The vision God sent to Peter as well as Peter’s encounter with Cornelius cues the reader to the rightness of Peter’s argument about the place of the Gentiles in the church.
—Peter’s rejection of Cornelius’s act of worship is echoed elsewhere in Acts (see Acts 4:35; 14:15).
—In Acts 10:26, though Cornelius probably meant to honor Peter as a messenger of God, Peter rejected being treated as more than merely another creature. The Bible reserves worship for only God, not for angels, people, or idols (see Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7; Matthew 22:37-38; Mark 12:29-30; Luke 10:27; Acts 12:20-23; 14:11-17; 1 Corinthians 10:14; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3; 1 John 5:21; 9:20; 22:8-9).
—Although God is impartial and accepts all people regardless of position, possessions, language, or ethnicity (see Deuteronomy 10:17; 2 Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:19; Luke 20:21; Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17), because mercy is better than judgment (see James 2:1-13), God still requires that people fear God and do right (Acts 10:35; see also Micah 6:8 and Romans 10:11-13).
—God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power (see Acts 10:38; see also Luke 3:21-22; 4:17-21; and Isaiah 61:1-3).

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Taking a Risk

Key Verse: Acts 10:34b

Print Passage: Acts 10:24-38

—Cornelius, a Roman citizen, was a religious man who was sympathetic to Judaism.
—Both Cornelius and Peter had visions from God.
—Peter followed the command of the Spirit to go with Cornelius’s Gentile messengers.
—God showed Peter that he should not call anyone, including Gentiles, unclean.
—Peter received a new understanding: God extended the offer of salvation to all.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. No Partiality Allowed!

In many Hollywood presentations, the problems get resolved and everyone lives happily ever after—all within the span of two hours.

Hollywood endings are not the reality for the majority of people living today. Prejudice and partiality are everyday occurrences in society. But that is not how God sees the world or how He expects His people to live. It is very natural for humans to show favoritism to some and not to others. What are some possibilities when a person risks being open and welcoming to all? Peter’s recognition that God shows no partiality allowed him to tell the Good News to the Gentiles.

B. Biblical Background

Acts 10 is a continuation of the ministry of preaching and healing by Peter as he travelled along the coastal region of Israel (see Acts 9:32-43). In these passages, we see him without the apostle John, who had been a constant companion in the early days of the Christian movement (see Acts 3:1). In Acts 10:1-8, we are introduced to a man named Cornelius, a devout Roman centurion. Verses 11-16 contain a vision that Peter
had that would eventually come to life when he was called to travel to Caesarea to meet Cornelius and share the Gospel with him and his family. In the vision, God reminded Peter that he was to call nothing unclean that God had created. God wanted him to learn that Gentile uncleanness had been removed as an obstacle to table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers. In verses 24-38, Peter was invited to Cornelius’s home for the purpose of sharing the Gospel with Cornelius and his household.

Cornelius, a Roman centurion, is the first Gentile convert acknowledged by the church in Jerusalem. Peter faced a big risk in Acts 10. His actions challenged several cultural norms and traditions that Jews held regarding Gentiles. This would become a major hurdle for the church in Jerusalem.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Peter Arrives in Caesarea

(Acts 10:24-28)

And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

According to Acts 10:23, Peter arrived in Caesarea two days after his departure from Joppa. The journey would have taken two days, since it is about thirty miles between the two cities. He was accompanied by several brothers from Joppa (see Acts 10:23, 11:12). Luke stated that Cornelius eagerly anticipated Peter’s arrival. He had assembled his family along with several close friends—possibly business or military associates—to receive Peter and hear the message sent to them through him.

In verse 25, as Peter entered the house (courtyard), Cornelius met him and began to bow at his feet. The word reverence (Greek: proskuneo) has in it the idea of worship, respect, reverence, or to kneel. It is likely that Cornelius was not bowing to worship Peter. Earlier in the chapter, Luke indicated that Cornelius was a God-fearing and devout man. Cornelius would surely know not to worship another man. More than likely this was the formal greeting of respect often used in the Ancient Near East.

Peter quickly responded, probably not wanting the actions of Cornelius to be misunderstood by the assembled guests or the men who had come with him from Joppa. He reminded Cornelius that he was not a god, but just a man (verse 26).

In verse 27, the two men, along with the others, went into the house talking and getting acquainted. Once inside, they found a large gathering of people. Peter immediately responded to the situation confronting him, saying that it was against Jewish law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or to even visit him. Over time, given the trauma of the Babylonian Exile and the dissolution of the Northern Kingdom, it was ingrained in the fabric of Jewish culture not to associate with non-Jews.

In verse 28b, Peter reversed the ancient stereotypes and announced that God had shown him that it was not his place to decide
who was unclean or impure. In the vision, God had shown him that everything in creation was clean. Hence, neither Peter nor anyone else could declare that a man or woman was unclean because he or she was of a different race.

B. Peter’s Inquiry
(Acts 10:29-33)

Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

In verse 29, Peter quickly turned the conversation away from issues of Jews visiting the home of Gentiles. He said that when the men arrived and requested him to accompany them to Caesarea, he came without hesitation or resistance. Is it possible that in Peter’s mind the request was no different than previous requests for his assistance? He wanted to know why they had sent for him.

Verses 30-33 contain Cornelius’s retelling of the events that led up to Peter’s coming to Caesarea. Verse 30 is Cornelius’s explanation as to why he requested Peter to come. “Four days ago” refers back to Acts 10:3-8, when Cornelius received a vision from God that his prayers had been heard and his acts of kindness shown to the poor had not gone unnoticed.

Cornelius indicated that it was the ninth hour of prayer, which would have been three in the afternoon. While he was praying, a man in shining clothes appeared and told him that his prayers had been heard. The appearance of the man in shining clothes was without warning or expectation. Bright or shining clothes were always an indication of an angelic being’s presence (see Luke 1:11). Cornelius’s gifts and ministry to the poor had touched the heart of God, marking him as a man of deep faith and obedience (see Luke 1:13; Ephesians 2:8-10; Hebrews 6:10; 1 John 3:22; James 1:27). Faith is not just about our acts of piety and worship, but also about our work, especially on behalf of others.

The angel of the Lord commanded Cornelius to send to Joppa for Simon, who was called Peter. Cornelius indicated that the instructions were quite detailed. The men whom he sent would find Peter lodging at the home of a man named Simon, who was a tanner living by the sea.

Peter’s coming to Caesarea was not by chance. It was a divinely planned encounter intended to further expand the message of the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. In Cornelius there would be a Roman connection to the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. In verse 33, we see Cornelius’s obedience to God. He immediately sent for Peter. Cornelius gathered everyone in his household and probably some close friends to hear Peter. He stated that their gathering was before the Lord, and clearly there was something specific that God wanted Peter to share with them. Their hearts and ears were open, and their hearts were ready to receive the Word of the Lord.
C. Peter’s Message to the Household of Cornelius
(Acts 10:34-38)

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Verse 34 is the beginning of Peter’s message about the universal love and grace of God (it concludes at verse 43). Peter indicated that his entire worldview had been shaped by Jewish beliefs and customs. These views were diametrically opposed to the character and nature of God, who shows no favoritism (see Deuteronomy 10:17; James 2:1-12; 1 Peter 1:17). He had come to that realization through the vision he received.

According to verse 35, Peter affirmed that God is open to all people who reverence and obey Him by doing what is right according to His Word. “Doing right” refers to one’s standing before God, which shapes the whole of one’s life and conduct.

Verses 36-38 presuppose a prior knowledge of the ministry of Jesus by Cornelius. “You know...” (verse 37). One could assume that Cornelius would be familiar with Jesus of Nazareth, given that some of his very own soldiers may have participated in the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter announced that through Jesus, God sent the message of peace (see Isaiah 52:7; 54:10; 57:19; see also Romans 5:1-10; 8:12). Jesus is not only the Christ, but He is also Lord of all, a further reference to the universality of God’s grace and mercy.

The ministry of Jesus was not limited to just Galilee. It went throughout Judea after the baptism that John preached. This is a chronological reference to the time period when Jesus began His ministry (see Mark 1:9, 14). Jesus was anointed by God with the power of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 4:1, 14, 18). His ministry not only was one of preaching and teaching, but also consisted of doing good works (see Matthew 4:23-25). Luke mentioned three activities of Jesus: doing good, healing, and exorcisms. He was able to do these things because the power of God was with Him.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There are several important lessons that emerge from this passage. First, in the example of Peter and Cornelius we see that taking risks can lead to enormous leaps in personal and corporate spiritual growth. Peter’s commitment to following the leading of the Holy Spirit led to the beginning of a new era in the history of the Christian faith. The willingness of Cornelius to follow the command of the angelic being opened the door for his entire family, for his circle of close friends, and for him to hear the life-transforming Gospel of peace. It takes courage for us to step out of our comfort zones and cross racial, geographical, and religious barriers.

Second, in the example of Cornelius we see faith impacting practice. In theological terms, we refer to this as orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxis (right practice). What Cornelius believed about responsible social concern and action was demonstrated in the act of giving or doing alms. Believers are called and saved not only to talk their faith, but also to walk...
it as well (see Ephesians 2:8-10; 4:1; James 2:14-26). Many congregations are so saddled by their “sacred traditions” that they have never ventured beyond the cloistered walls of their sanctuaries to serve the needs of the people of God.

This third lesson may be the most important reflection of all. When the people of God take seriously the command to be witnesses for Jesus Christ by preaching the message of peace, great things can happen and do happen in the lives of people and in the church. When Peter went to Cornelius’s house and preached the Gospel, he in effect lived out the command of Jesus in Acts 1:8. He became a witness of the Gospel’s power to reach around the world.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, grant that Your servants will never shrink back from serving the purposes of Your kingdom. Give to each of us the courage to go forth into uncharted territories and declare the unsearchable riches of the Gospel of peace. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

Favoritism (Greek: *prosopoleptes* [pros-o-pol-ape-tace])—Favoritism or “responder of persons” is a combination of three Greek words: *pros* and *ops*, which mean “before the eye or face,” and *lambano*, which means “to take or to receive.” The word came to be used to refer to the judgment of God. God does not regard one man or one nation any more than He does another. In the lesson, Peter learned that God is open to all people’s receiving the gift of eternal life. (See the following references for ways the word is used: Deuteronomy 10:17; Matthew 22:16; Mark 12:14.)

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(October 12-18, 2015)*

**Peter Takes a Risk**

**MONDAY, October 12:** “God’s Love Prevails” (Romans 8:31-39)

**TUESDAY, October 13:** “Peter Takes a Risk” (Matthew 14:22-33)

**WEDNESDAY, October 14:** “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:1-8)

**THURSDAY, October 15:** “Peter Is Stretched” (Acts 10:1-16)

**FRIDAY, October 16:** “Peter Follows Through” (Acts 10:17-23)

**SATURDAY, October 17:** “God for All” (Acts 10:39-48)

**SUNDAY, October 18:** “Peter Takes Another Risk” (Acts 10:24-38)
LESSON 8                                 October 25, 2015

UNIT II: Giving Bold Testimony  
C HILDREN’S UNIT: Giving Bold Testimony  
FALL QUARTER

TRUSTING THE SPIRIT

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: The Welcoming Committee

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-7
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 11:1-18a

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 11:1-18
KEY VERSE: Acts 11:17

Acts 11:1-18a—KJV
AND THE apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.
1 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,
2 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.
3 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,
4 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:
5 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
6 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.
7 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.
8 The voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.
9 This was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.
10 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me.
11 The spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man’s house:
12 And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;
13 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

Acts 11:1-18a—NIV
THE APOSTLES and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.
2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him
3 and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”
4 Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it happened:
5 “I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was.
6 “I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air.
7 “Then I heard a voice telling me, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’
8 “I replied, ‘Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’
9 “The voice spoke from heaven a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’
10 “This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.
11 “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying.
12 “The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house.
13 “He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter.
14 “He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
When someone’s actions are contrary to community norms, he or she will be required to report the results of his or her work. How can he or she justify what he or she has done? Peter’s report of how the Holy Spirit had converted the Gentiles gave rise to the Jerusalem church’s endorsement of his actions.

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.
16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.
17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?
18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Confronting Change
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application
    of the Scripture
   A. Peter Is Accused of Heresy
      (Acts 11:1-3)
   B. Peter’s Defense and Witness
      (Acts 11:4-15)
   C. God Was at Work
      (Acts 11:16-17)
   D. Confirmation and Celebration of the Witness of Peter
      (Acts 11:18a)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Learn that Peter’s preaching to the Gentiles was affirmed by the believers in Jerusalem;
2. Feel comfortable with reaching out to persons who are different from themselves; and,
3. Identify and live out Christian Scriptures that emphasize inclusion of all people in the body of Christ.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: The Welcoming Committee
Youth Topic: Heresy Trial!
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Acts 11:17
Print Passage: Acts 11:1-18a
—The “circumcised believers” (verse 2) were followers of Jesus who continued to identify strongly with their Jewish heritage. Peter’s vision in Acts 10 suggests that he was also once in this category.
—In ancient Judaism, “eating with” (11:3) implied intimate
fellowship and complete acceptance. Strict taboos and religious laws regulated table fellowship.

—Peter’s speech in 11:5-17 had already been recounted by Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, in Acts 10. The repetition emphasizes the importance of the event.

—The language of salvation (“be saved,” 11:14) was not used in the earlier account of the event (Acts 10).

—Note that the circumcised believers criticized Peter for entering the house of uncircumcised men and eating with them (Acts 11:2-3), but Peter’s defense did not deal with associating and eating with Gentiles; it was intended to prove that God wanted the Gentiles also to be Christians (verse 17).

—The concern about eating with “uncircumcised men” (11:3) rose because Gentiles did not follow Jewish food restrictions regarding unclean and clean food and the strict preparation of food and whether the food had been offered to idols in pagan worship (see Peter’s claim in verse 8).

—Although the issue seems to have been solved so that the church could live “happily ever after” (verse 18), this whole issue arose again in Acts 15 with the Jerusalem council, at which Peter repeated his testimony from Acts 11 (15:7-11).

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Get Out of the Way!

Key Verse: Acts 11:17b

Print Passage: Acts 11:1-18b

—Peter was placed in a position of having to defend his actions regarding the Gentiles.

—Peter had to explain again what happened step by step.

—The important point Peter made was that what happened was God’s doing.

—Peter declared that belief in Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was God’s gifts and that he could not stand in the way.

—The ability to respond to God’s gift that had been given to the Jews earlier was now being given to the Gentiles.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Confronting Change

As we approach this chapter, we must acknowledge that the Gentiles in Caesarea were now a part of the Christian faith.

In the past, Jewish believers had a very low opinion of the Gentiles, but now they were side-by-side, fellowshipping as one body in Christ. The church in Jerusalem had to be educated, as the Jewish, Samaritan, and Gentile believers were now recipients of the Holy Spirit and served the same God.

In today’s lesson, Peter was summoned to give a report to the apostles in Jerusalem regarding why he met with Gentiles. Peter’s report of how the Holy Spirit had converted the Gentiles and filled each of them gave rise to the Jerusalem church’s endorsement of his actions. When challenged about his actions in the lesson, Peter responded that he was in no position to say who could and could not be called and used by God.

B. Biblical Background

The current passage is a continuation of the great work done by Peter in Caesarea.
Two key questions answered in the passage are, “What was the reaction of the Jewish Christian leaders when they found out that Gentiles had received salvation? How would they respond to the inclusion in the church of people whom many of them considered to be unclean?” According to Acts 10:48, Peter remained in Caesarea for a few days after witnessing the Holy Spirit falling upon the people in Cornelius’s house. The men who had accompanied him from Joppa evidently remained with him.

After a few days, Peter decided it was time to return to Jerusalem. Before he could enter Jerusalem and report what had happened, however, word had already spread to the apostles. In the passage we learn something about the social composition of the congregation in Jerusalem. The church was made up of men who continued to practice many of the traditional Jewish customs, particularly circumcision. This is what the reference to “the circumcised believers” refers to. The biggest concern that the circumcised group had with Peter was not his message with Gentiles; rather, it was his willingness to sit and eat with converts who had not been circumcised.

During his defense, Peter retold the account of the vision he received in Joppa. He went on to relate how God confirmed it with a vision to Cornelius and Cornelius’s request that Peter come to Caesarea and speak to his people. The high point is Peter’s statement that he was not one to oppose God and make a determination as to whom God could and would not save.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Peter Is Accused of Heresy

(Acts 11:1-3)

AND THE apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

Verse 1 indicates that the news of the conversion of Cornelius and his family had spread throughout Judea. Cornelius was not mentioned by name; it was just said that Gentiles had received the Word of God. This is not to be taken as Luke’s attempt to minimize what had happened with Cornelius and his family. How the apostles and brothers came to know about the ministry of Peter in Caesarea was never disclosed. What would appear to be an initial cause for celebration turned into an inquiry into the behavior of Peter among Gentiles.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Peter went to meet with the other apostles. We do not know how long the interval was between Peter’s arrival and the actual meeting. Nor are we told anything regarding a summons by the church for Peter to come and explain his actions. Whenever and wherever they met, there were other persons present besides the apostles. According to verse 2, “the circumcised believers criticized him.” This is a reference to a specific group within the church who continued to practice Jewish rituals, of which circumcision was a distinct badge of honor (see Genesis 17:11-13; Luke 1:59; Galatians 6:12-13; Philippians 3:5). This ritual act identified them with the promise made to Abraham and as one of his true descendants.
In verse 3, the critics of Peter’s actions went straight to the point. They charged Peter with going into the home of uncircumcised men and then eating with them. This, for them, was the epitome of lawless behavior. They were not interested in hearing what had happened in Caesarea. Their primary concern was why Peter associated with these uncircumcised men.

B. Peter’s Defense and Witness
(Acts 11:4-15)

But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man’s house: And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

Verses 4-15 contain Peter’s explanation and answer to the charges brought against him by the circumcised believers that he had fellowship with Gentiles. Verse 4 states that he began by giving the facts exactly as they happened. Peter offered no rebuke of his critics, nor did he try to defend his actions.

Rather than tell the story from the perspective of Cornelius, Peter’s intention was to relate the events from his perspective.

In verse 5, Peter reported that he was in Joppa praying when things started to unfold. Peter indicated that while he was praying, he went into a trance and saw a vision. He saw a vision of a large sheet being let down from heaven by four corners. There is no mention of hands or anything holding the sheet. Peter said the sheet was not off in a distance; it came to the place where he was located. Because the sheet had its origin in heaven, Peter knew this had to be a message from the Lord.

Verses 6-8 describe exactly what Peter saw. This was the first appearance and the first time he heard the voice. We are not sure how large this sheet was, or whether Peter was transported out of the body to stand above the sheet to look down into it. Evidently, he was able to closely inspect the contents of the large sheet. He saw all kinds of four-footed animals, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds. There would certainly be animals in this sheet that were not part of the everyday diet of ancient Jewish people, which is found in Leviticus 11:1-47. Peter then said that he heard a voice speak, telling him to get up, kill, and eat. He made it clear to the voice that he had never, under any circumstances, eaten anything unclean.

Verses 9-10 pointed out that this was not a one-time occurrence. It happened a second time, and this time the voice commanded that Peter not call anything unclean that God has created. At this point, Peter surely recognized that he was not having a dream but that he had encountered the Lord Himself. The same vision was repeated three times, an indication that this was a serious matter. Just as quickly as it had appeared, the sheet returned to heaven.
Verses 10-15 pick up the story from the perspective of Cornelius. Peter did not mention any personal information regarding the identity or the nationality of Cornelius. At the very moment that the sheet was returned to heaven, three men from Caesarea appeared at the door of the house of Simon the tanner. The Spirit spoke to Peter at that moment and said that he was to go with these men without hesitation. Peter revealed that he did not travel alone; the six men who were standing with him also made the trip from Joppa, and they were his corroborating witnesses. They, too, entered the home of the man who had sent for Peter. They, too, were witnesses of all that had been said and done in Caesarea.

In verse 13, Peter stated that the man (Cornelius) told all of them how he had seen an angel in his house. This angel told him to send messengers to Joppa to request for a man named Simon who was called Peter to come to Caesarea and speak to them. This man would bring a message through which Cornelius and his entire household would be saved (verse 14). Peter said that just as he began to speak, the Holy Spirit came upon them just as He had upon him and the other disciples on the Day of Pentecost.

C. God Was at Work
(Acts 11:16-17)

Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

Peter’s reaction was one of amazement, and he remembered the words of the Lord—that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. These words were spoken by Jesus just prior to His ascension and ten days prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit in the world (see Acts 1:5).

In a remarkable turn of events, Peter stated that these uncircumcised men, as they were referred to, had received the same gift of the Holy Spirit. The people in the house of Cornelius had believed in the same Jesus Christ that the apostles had. They, too, had acknowledged that Jesus was Lord. Peter admitted that he was in no position to say who God would and would not bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit upon. “Who am I to oppose God?”

D. Confirmation and Celebration of the Witness of Peter
(Acts 11:18a)

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God.

Peter’s testimony was convincing. When they heard his words all of their questions were answered. Peter was one of the inner circle of Jesus and one of the most prominent apostles in the church. Not only had he given his testimony, but also he had six additional witnesses should the need arise. The gathered apostles and those who formed the group of circumcised believers celebrated and praised God for the great things that had occurred in Caesarea.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

All congregations struggle with how to close the back door. The “back door” simply refers to the reality that in all congregations people may join the church but some or many of them may never complete the process of full assimilation and then eventually leave. Why this is the case is a mystery to many
congregational leaders. I suspect that this lesson may provide some clues and answers for us.

First, we notice the attitude of a segment of the Jerusalem church that was suspicious of new persons connecting to the Christian faith, to say nothing of their being filled with the Holy Spirit. Being open to accepting new people is critical to closing the back door.

Second, there are times when we may want to question the conversion experience of others, especially if they do not share our cultural or racial background. God is able to save the most hardened criminal and the most callous sinner. We are all witnesses of that fact.

Third, the most important aspect of this lesson is that God works in many ways through many different people. God is able to use women, men, and children to bring about His purposes in the world. Not everyone’s experience may be the same, but it is the same God who works in all people, in every generation, and in every nation (see Ephesians 4:3-4).

**PRAYER**

*Lord, give us the wisdom to see Your mighty hand at work in the world. May we never question Your right to save whosoever will believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

Trance (Greek: *ekstasis* [ek'-stas-is])—literally means the casting down of a thing from its proper place; it implies displacement. *Ekstasis* is the throwing of the mind out of its normal state. This word also gives us the English word *ecstasy*. In this instance, *ekstasis* is the picture of a man or woman who is drawn away into a deep state of spiritual contemplation to the extent that he or she is transfixed completely on the divine. During the moments that Peter spent praying he was caught up in a spirit of ecstasy so that he was able to hear God and see things he would not normally see (see Isaiah 6:1-10; Ezekiel 37:1-10; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4; Revelation 1:9-16).

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(October 19-25, 2015)*

**Trusting the Spirit**

**MONDAY**, October 19: “A Light to the Nations” (Isaiah 49:5-7)

**TUESDAY**, October 20: “Water for Everyone” (John 4:3-14)


**THURSDAY**, October 22: “Strangers Become Heaven’s Citizens” (Ephesians 2:11-22)

**FRIDAY**, October 23: “Following Good Examples” (Philippians 3:17-21)


GOD RESCUES PETER

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Who Will Come to the Rescue?

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 18:1-9
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 12:1-11

Acts 12:1-11—KJV
NOW ABOUT that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.
2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.
3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)
4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.
5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.
6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.
7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.
8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.
9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.
10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.
11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

Acts 12:1-11—NIV
IT WAS about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.
2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.
3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.
5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.
6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.
7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. “Quick, get up!” he said, and the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.
8 Then the angel said to him, “Put on your clothes and sandals.” And Peter did so. “Wrap your cloak around you and follow me,” the angel told him.
9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision.
10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.
11 Then Peter came to himself and said, “Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
In the midst of perilous life situations, deliverance sometimes appears to come through miraculous means. How might the faithful be rescued from dangerous life circumstances? The book of Acts shows that the fervent prayer of the church and the work of an angel provided Peter’s deliverance.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Pray for Deliverance
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Persecution against the Church Intensifies
      (Acts 12:1-4)
   B. The Church Prayed for Peter’s Deliverance
      (Acts 12:5)
   C. Peter Is Miraculously Delivered
      (Acts 12:6-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the story of Peter’s deliverance from prison;
2. Recognize and appreciate the power of prayer in difficult situations; and,
3. Commit to praying for those whose witness puts them in life-threatening or difficult situations.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Who Will Come to the Rescue?
Youth Topic: Miraculous Prison Break!
Adult Key Verse: Acts 12:5
Youth Key Verse: Acts 12:11
Print Passage: Acts 12:1-11


—The timing of James’s death and Peter’s imprisonment around the time of Passover parallels the death of Jesus. Luke’s reference to James’s martyrdom indicates the seriousness of Peter’s circumstances.

—Peter’s release was dramatic but not instantaneous. Luke’s narrative describes in detail the degree to which Peter was bound and confined, making his escape impossible. It describes in equally intricate detail the angel’s actions and all of the movements necessary for Peter to gain freedom.

—King Herod was Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great and son of Aristobulus, and nephew of Herod Antipas, who had executed John the Baptist (see Mark 6:14-29), and was the one to whom Pilate sent Jesus for trial (see Luke 23:8-12). Since Herod Agrippa I died in AD 44, the event in this passage probably happened in AD 43, about fourteen years after Jesus ascended to heaven.

—James, the brother of John, was the apostle James, son of Zebedee (see Matthew 4:21). Jesus had alerted the apostles of the sufferings they would endure (see Matthew 20:23).

—“Killed with the sword” (12:2) meant beheading in the system of justice of that time.
CHILDREN

Children Topic: Rescued!
Key Verse: Acts 12:11a
Print Passage: Acts 12:1-11a
— The faithful witness of the apostles led to persecution of the church.
— Roman officials were involved in the persecution of Christian leaders as part of their political agenda.

In this text, King Herod refers to Herod Agrippa, the nephew of Herod Antipas, who questioned Jesus during His trial.
— As part of Jesus’ inner circle, James, John, and Peter were prime targets for public persecution, ridicule, and imprisonment.
— Roman prisons often placed prisoners between guards as an added precaution against escape.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Pray for Deliverance

Most Christians living in America do not know the kind of persecution and hatred that many fellow believers experience in some places around the world. Christians must pray that Christians in places that are filled with hatred will be delivered from the stench of satanic hatred. In the midst of perilous life situations, deliverance sometimes appears to come through miraculous means. How might the faithful be rescued from dangerous life circumstances? The book of Acts shows that the fervent prayer of the church and the work of an angel provided Peter’s deliverance.

B. Biblical Background

The early Christian church experienced persecution in waves. According to Acts 9:31, there was a period of calm and peace in the church which resulted in the church’s growing and expanding throughout ancient Israel. Then, a few years later, the persecution reignited with even greater intensity. In Acts 11:19, we are told that the persecution led to many Christians leaving Jerusalem, travelling as far north as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch.

One of the biggest blows to the church was the arrest and murder of the apostle James—the brother of John—both of whom were sons of Zebedee (see Matthew 4:21). King Herod was bent on destroying the church because he knew it would please the Jews. After James was murdered, Peter was arrested. Herod had planned to execute Peter during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when many Jews would be in Jerusalem to witness the spectacle. Peter was kept in prison, bound by chains at both legs, chained to guards, and locked in the most secure prison cell. There was no way humanly possible that he could escape. While this was going on, the church was in fervent prayer. And just prior to his date with the executioner’s sword, God miraculously delivered him.

In the lesson today, we will be reminded of the importance of praying for church leaders and believers around the world who face intense persecution. The Word of God teaches that believers are to pray in confidence, knowing that God is able to bring deliverance, ultimately achieving His plan for the world.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Persecution against the Church Intensifies
   (Acts 12:1-4)

NOW ABOUT that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

Verse 1 begins with a rather vague reference to the time period that these events took place. We are certain that they could not have occurred later than AD 44, the year Herod died. The Herod in this case was Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great. He ruled Judea and Samaria from about AD 41 to AD 44. Luke recorded that Herod had some of the members of the Jerusalem church arrested. We do not know how many people were arrested, nor do we know the final disposition of their cases. What is clear is that during this period of time, the church faced enormous opposition from the political power brokers who were bent on the church's destruction. We must remember that the early Christians were not among the social and economic elite. There were some members who were blessed with property and wealth; however, the majority of them were, like the apostles, at the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

In verse 2, we learn that one of the persons put to death was James, the brother of John. Scholars are not sure what is meant by “put to death with the sword.” Some think that it may be in reference to the victim being thrust through the chest and heart with the sword or being beheaded with the sword. How do you stifle and starve a movement of life? You cut off its leadership, and if there is no one to step in, it soon withers and dies.

Herod was just like his father and grandfather before him. They all courted the favor of the Jews. They were all interested in making sure that the Jewish hierarchy was pleased. When Herod saw that the Jewish religious leaders were pleased that he had slain one of the primary leaders of the Jerusalem church, he proceeded to arrest Peter. Luke let us know that all of these events took place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was one of the three annual Jewish celebrations, when every Jewish male who lived in Israel must come to Jerusalem. What better time to make an example of the most prominent leader in the early Christian church?

According to verse 4, Peter was arrested and put into prison. Ben Witherington stated that Herod followed the Roman procedures regarding the arrest and detainment of prisoners. He noted that the Roman procedure called for a high-value prisoner to be guarded by four squads of soldiers, each squad consisting of four soldiers.1 Also, the Roman procedure called for the guards to change every four hours, hence the need for four squads.2 Like his grandfather and father, Herod Agrippa had great respect for the Jewish religious observances. He would not bring Peter before the people until after the Passover. At that point, he intended to have a public trial and then publicly execute him, if he could get a conviction.

B. The Church Prayed for Peter’s Deliverance
   (Acts 12:5)

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.
Verse 5 sets up the contrast between how Herod dealt with problems and how the church dealt with them. Herod believed that he could exercise physical control and restraint. The church took the matter before God and laid it at His feet (see 2 Kings 19:14). Luke provided none of the details regarding the arrest and preliminary arraignment of Peter before a judge. He was detained and put into prison. We are not told anything about the numbers of people present on the occasion of the church’s prayer meeting. Nor are we told the exact nature of their prayer. What we are told is that they prayed earnestly and fervently for Peter.

C. Peter Is Miraculously Delivered
   (Acts 12:6-11)

   And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

   According to verse 6, Herod had already planned to have Peter tried shortly after Passover. That same night, the church had been in fervent prayer for Peter. Herod intended that Peter would not be able to escape. He had Peter chained to two soldiers, with guards standing watch at the door. Peter appeared to be unfazed or moved to fear. He lay peacefully sleeping between two guards, quite possibly on a cold, damp floor. Ancient prisons were dismal places, often filled with the stench of urine and human waste, and the smell of death. During the time of year that Herod planned to execute Peter, the weather would have been still cold, making the prison cells miserable places to be. Yet in this verse, we see the Word of God in action. He keeps those who love Him in perfect peace when their minds are stayed on Him (see Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 3:6-7).

   Verse 7 states that without warning an angel of the Lord appeared and the cell lit up with his presence. The soldiers guarding Peter were evidently placed in an unconscious condition and could neither see nor hear anything that went on. The angel struck Peter, who was in a very deep state of rest. He told Peter to quickly get up. At the moment he struck Peter the chains fell off Peter’s wrists.

   According to verse 8, Peter was told to get up and put on his clothes and not to forget his sandals. The angel told him to wrap his cloak around him. This would serve two purposes: first, it would keep him warm in the brisk, cool air; second, it would not arouse suspicion in people moving through the streets of Jerusalem. Peter was told to follow the angel.

   Peter thought that he was still dreaming or quite possibly seeing a vision. This points out how quickly the events occurred. One moment he was lying on the floor, sound asleep. The very next he had been awakened, told to get dressed and ushered out of the prison cell. Who would
not think this? Did Peter have any expectations that he would be delivered from his situation? We do not know.

Verse 10 stressed the intentionality of Herod to keep Peter locked away until the time he planned to execute him. There were several layers of guards, not including the ones to whom Peter was chained. The final hurdle was the large iron gate that led from the prison to the streets that led to the city. Luke used the words “It opened for them by itself” (NIV), which is translated from a single Greek word, *automatos*. We get the English word *automatic* from this word. The moment they appeared at the gate, it opened. God had so orchestrated the escape that no one saw anything, heard anything, or had any idea what had happened. The angel escorted Peter out of the prison, through the gate, and down the street. And just as suddenly as he had appeared, he departed and left Peter alone.

Verse 11 states that Peter came to himself, indicating that he was then fully awake and aware of his situation and surroundings. Peter began to talk to himself—whether aloud or not we do not know. “Now I know....” God really did send His angel to rescue Peter. God saved Peter out of all of his troubles, especially from the wrath of Herod and the hatred of the Jewish religious leaders. They meant it for evil, but God reversed their plans and saved Peter.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The lesson today offers several important lessons for the church of the twenty-first century. These are just a few of many that one can glean from the verses that we have studied today. The first lesson highlights the importance of prayer, both private and corporate. The most difficult thing to get the saints of God to come together and do is pray. Prayer is our greatest spiritual weapon, yet it is the least used by the corporate body. Great things begin to happen among God’s people when they pray. The Bible is full of examples of men and women who knew the power of prayer. One such giant of the Christian faith was the apostle Paul.

A second truth highlighted in the lesson is the importance of praying for congregational leaders. The members of the church recognized that they could ill-afford to lose Peter. Not only did he historically connect them to the ministry of Jesus, but also just his presence alone provided strength and encouragement for them to relentlessly pursue the mission of the Savior. As you reflect over the application of the truths of the lesson, look for ways that you can become a more engaged and active member of your congregation. Look for ways to be more attuned to the need to pray for the church and her leaders.

PRAYER

Lord, give us the spirit of calm as we seek to be more fully engaged in the work of missions and ministry. May we never grow weary in serving You nor the people to whom You sent us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(October 26–November 1, 2015)

God Rescues Peter

MONDAY, October 26: “The Rock that Saves” (Psalm 18:1-9)
WEDNESDAY, October 28: “God Saves Daniel” (Daniel 6:19-23)
THURSDAY, October 29: “The Faithful God” (Daniel 6:25-28)
SUNDAY, November 1: “God Rescues Peter” (Acts 12:1-11)

End Notes

2. Ibid.
AND CERTAIN men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.  
2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.  
3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.  
4 When they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.  
5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.  
6 The apostles and elders met to consider this question.  
7 After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.  
8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;  
9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.  
10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Because law is an integral part of civilized society, some laws must change as society changes. When can laws be revised or even eliminated? Luke claimed the governing authority, the Jerusalem council, had power to change the laws of Moses in order to make them congruent to God’s actions.

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.
12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

11 “No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”
12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Tradition versus God’s Word
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Trouble from Afar (Acts 15:1-2)
   B. Paul and Barnabas Travel to Jerusalem (Acts 15:3-5)
   C. The Church Meets to Resolve Its Differences (Acts 15:6-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review the story of how the Jerusalem council listened to Paul and Barnabas as they told of the signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles;
2. Reflect on how difficult it can be to reconcile the Law and God’s action; and,
3. Initiate a process of discernment of God’s will when the Law and God’s actions appear in conflict.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: A New Way for a New Day
Youth Topic: Laws Change
Adult Key Verses: Acts 15:8-9
Youth Key Verses: Acts 15:10-11
Print Passage: Acts 15:1-12
—Peter’s rebuttal to the argument in favor of circumcision for Gentiles was enough to silence the objectors (verse 12).
—Peter spoke as though the issue over circumcision requirements for Gentiles had already been settled.
—Acts 15 marked a critical turning point in the Christian movement. While it began within the traditions of Judaism and moved outward to include Samaritans, God fearers, and others, the events recorded in Acts 15 propelled it further to include Gentiles.
—The issue for the Jerusalem council arose when Christians from a Jewish background came to the Gentile-dominated church in Antioch and taught their legalism, saying that Gentile Christians must be circumcised to be saved. That Gentiles could be God’s people still bothered Jews even later when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem (see Acts 22:21-22).
—Several meetings happened at the Jerusalem Council: (a) a report to a general audience of God’s activity among the Gentiles (15:4-5); (b) a separate meeting of the apostles and leaders to consider the matter (15:6-11); and (c) a general and final meeting to conclude the Council (15:12-22).
—Peter’s report was his testimony of how God miraculously showed him that Gentiles could be Christians (see Acts 10:9-48), an event he had to defend before the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (see Acts 11:1-19).
—Peter was not alone in calling the Law an unbearable yoke. (See Matthew 11:28-29; Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:1.)

CHILDREN
Children Topic: All One Family

Key Verse: Acts 15:9
Print Passage: Acts 15:1-12
—In a meeting of early church leaders, some maintained that Christian converts must be circumcised and obey the other ceremonial laws of Judaism.
—While Peter was the first to testify to the Gentiles about salvation through Jesus Christ, Paul and Barnabas had a ministry that took them into heavily populated Gentile areas.
—Scholars debate whether James, who led the Jerusalem council and wrote the book of James, was indeed Jesus’ natural brother.
—This passage raised the issue of whether God’s actions or a set of human-made rules should take precedence.
—Peter explained to the early church leaders that God did not make distinctions among persons.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Tradition versus God’s Word

In the lesson today, the early Christian church came face-to-face with one of Judaism’s most sacred rituals—circumcision. The debate centered on whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. In the passage, Luke claimed that the governing authority, the Jerusalem council, had the opportunity to interpret the Law of Moses in the fuller context of the people of God after Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. This is the only way to understand that God’s Word is always congruent with God’s actions. Today, we will have an opportunity to examine our own personal biases toward people who may think differently about the things we hold to be dear. Further, we will see that God is not interested in our traditions as much as He is interested in our witness to the unchurched and unsaved (see Amos 5:21-24; Matthew 23:16-23).

B. Biblical Background

The church in Antioch was probably one of the first great Christian congregations. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians” (see Acts 11:26). The church in Antioch was the first congregation in history to ordain and send forth missionaries to preach the Gospel (see Acts 13:1-3). They were ethnically diverse and free of the historical and tradition-laced baggage that often characterized the church of Jerusalem.
One day a group of men came down to Antioch from Judea and began teaching that in order to be saved one had to be circumcised. This new teaching caused an uproar in the church in Antioch and threatened to undermine all the growth and progress that had taken place among them. The leaders of the church in Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabas to go up to Jerusalem and settle this question once and for all. Peter had already testified to the council that the Gentiles had experienced salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. When Barnabas and Paul stood before the council of apostles and elders, they presented the evidence of God’s grace among the Gentiles and how great signs and wonders had been performed by God. Peter would also explain that God made no distinction between people and that He was not a respecter of persons.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Trouble from Afar
(Acts 15:1-2)

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey with reports that sizzled with success and excitement. God had used them in amazing ways to “open a door of faith to the Gentiles” (see Acts 14:27). We are not sure how long they had been in Antioch before a group of men arrived from Judea. The men who came from Judea were teachers, and they taught that faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not enough. They may have been members of the party of the circumcised (see Acts 11:1-18, especially verse 2). Were they Pharisees? We are not sure; however, they did believe that the Law of Moses should play a prominent role in the life of the new convert. These men added the requirement of circumcision, stating that unless one kept the Law of Moses, it was impossible to be saved. Some interpreters think that this is the same incident recorded by Paul in Galatians 2:1-10.

Paul and Barnabas had been theologically prepared and hardened during their first missionary journey. They, more than anyone else in the congregation, were prepared to dispute this new doctrine being taught by the visitors from Jerusalem. The contention was sharp and the language gives the sense that it was just about face-to-face. Paul and Barnabas could not afford to have a group of teachers infiltrate their home church with a doctrine that had no basis in Scripture or, worse, was a misinterpretation of Scripture.

The leaders of the church appointed a delegation led by Paul and Barnabas to travel to Jerusalem to settle the question regarding the circumcision of Gentiles. Luke reported that they went to meet with the apostles and elders of the church. It appears that there was some formal leadership structure in place in the church of Jerusalem that consisted of the apostles and elders.

This incident points out how quickly congregations can be thrown into turmoil by
false and misleading teaching and preaching. Congregations have been split because individuals come to the church and are able to ease their way into the hearts and minds of unsuspecting saints. Their teaching or preaching can set off sparks of controversy that disrupt the fellowship in the congregation and damage longtime relationships.

B. Paul and Barnabas Travel to Jerusalem (Acts 15:3-5)

And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

According to verse 3, the church sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. They were not sent by the leaders, or a group of concerned members. Rather, it was the entire congregation that agreed on the mission to Jerusalem. We are not sure of the exact number in the delegation. It may have been anywhere between eight and twelve. The trip to Jerusalem would take several weeks and would cover a distance of about 250 miles. We are not sure of the mode of transportation; more than likely, it may have been a combination of sea and land travel. The group travelled through Phoenicia, which borders upper a Galilee. It is quite plausible that they took the inland route—which would have come through the center of Samaria—and eventually travelled up to Jerusalem.

As they travelled, they reported how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles and that many had been converted. The brothers were delighted to hear the news. We have no way of knowing whether they shared the reason for their journey to Jerusalem. In verse 4, upon arriving in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders. They reported everything that God had done through them.

Verse 5 states that while Paul and Barnabas were giving their report, some of the believers, who were also Pharisees, began to insist that the Gentile believers had to be circumcised. They also insisted that Gentiles be required to keep the Law of Moses. This more than likely refers to the oral tradition, which was a body of oral religious rules and interpretations of the Law that were handed down through the generations. The Pharisees attached great value to these oral traditions. These men were willing to tack on a requirement that Jesus never demanded.

C. The Church Meets to Resolve Its Differences (Acts 15:6-12)

And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

Verse 6 points out that the leaders of the
church in Jerusalem came together to consider the question. The debate lasted for some time. Whether it covered days or hours, we have no way of knowing. At some point, Peter stood and addressed the gathering. He stated that the Lord God used him to preach the Gospel to Gentiles and to bring them into the family of God.

In verse 8, Peter stated that God sees what humans cannot see—our hearts and thoughts. God accepted the Gentiles on the basis of their faith in the message of the Gospel. The evidence of God’s acceptance of the Gentiles was their receiving of the Holy Spirit. In this act, God showed no distinction between Jews and Gentiles (verse 9). Just as the hearts of the Jews had been purified, so, too, had the hearts of the Gentiles been purified as well.

Peter wanted to know why they would want to put upon the Gentiles a requirement that they themselves were not even able to keep. He referred to it as a yoke around their necks. History had already proven that neither the current nor previous generations had been able to keep the whole Law, much less follow every tradition. If they could not do it, then why would they place that burden on others?

Verse 11 is a declaration by Peter of what is the very essence of the Christian faith. We are saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 2:8-10). It is the full acknowledgment that Jesus is Lord and although not stated, clearly one must believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Verse 12 reverses the order between Barnabas and Paul. Up to this moment, Paul had been listed first, indicating that he was the speaker and the leader. At this point, Barnabas spoke first. This quite possibly pointed back to the high esteem and respect accorded Barnabas by the apostles and the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 4:36-37; 11:22-24). As Barnabas spoke, the whole church sat silently, another indicator of the respect they had for him. They listened as the two men shared with the church how God had done miraculous signs and wonders among the Gentiles through them. Just as God had used the apostles in Jerusalem to work miracles, the Lord also validated the mission and message of Paul and Barnabas in the same way. Who could not help but believe that God was at work among the Gentiles?

### III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Congregations can become bitterly divided over just about anything. There are times when what appears to be the simplest change can set off a firestorm of controversy within a local church. Something as simple as removing the responsive reading from the Sunday liturgy can send some longtime members into panic. There is nothing sacred about a responsive reading in a worship service; it is merely an element in the liturgy.

Conflict can erupt over changes in positions of authority and leadership, which happened from time to time among the disciples of Jesus (see Mark 9:33-37; 10:33-45). In the Jerusalem church, conflict erupted over how the congregation provided for the widows (see Acts 6:1-3). Then, the church in Philippi had a situation in which two of the prominent women in the congregation were at odds with each other (see Philippians 4:2).

Congregations must contend from time to time with conflict and disagreement. “One
way to define conflict is to say that conflict (1) begins when someone takes an action that (2) is perceived as a threat to someone else’s territory (physical, social, power, position) and (3) the threatened person launches a reaction aimed at protecting the territory."

The lesson today provides a framework for confronting and resolving conflict within the local congregation. Resolving congregational conflict begins when leaders are willing to bring the entire congregation together, to peacefully and openly and objectively hear every side of a matter. In the case of this conflict, the Holy Spirit gave the apostle James wisdom, objectivity, and the calm demeanor necessary for defusing a tense situation. The matter was resolved to everyone’s satisfaction.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, may our lives be enriched and strengthened by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. May we rest confidently in the knowledge that each day Your mercies are new and abundant. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

Saved (Greek: σοζω [sode'–zo])—derived from the Greek word soteria, which means “to rescue from danger or to be delivered by God.” The word is a part of a larger theological discussion that spans both the Old and New Testaments and deals with salvation in a broad spectrum of uses. In some instances in the Old Testament, it literally refers to being rescued from enemies or some dangerous situation (see Exodus 14:30; 2 Chronicles 32:22; Psalm 34:6). In the New Testament, the words save, salvation, or saved refer to being rescued from the dominion of Satan and the power of sin. It denotes entry into a right relationship with God that begins with repentance and faith in the risen Christ (see Acts 2:37-39; Ephesians 2:8-10). The introduction of circumcision as a prerequisite for salvation precipitated a crisis in the church of Antioch which eventually led to the council in Jerusalem.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**(November 2-8, 2015)**

**God Makes No Distinction**

**MONDAY,** November 2: “Thanking God” (Romans 1:8-15)  
**TUESDAY,** November 3: “The Forgiving God” (Nehemiah 9:6-21)  
**WEDNESDAY,** November 4: “Abundant Grace” (Romans 16:25-27)  
**THURSDAY,** November 5: “Accessible God” (Hebrews 4:12-16)  
**FRIDAY,** November 6: “God Is Making All Things New” (Revelation 21:1-5)  
**SATURDAY,** November 7: “Grace for Gentiles” (Galatians 3:6-14)  
**SUNDAY,** November 8: “God Makes No Distinction” (Acts 15:1-12)
FROM DERBE TO PHILIPPI

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Ready, Set, Go!

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 8:1-17
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 16:1-5, 8-15

Acts 16:1-5, 8-15—KJV
THEN CAME he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: 2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. 5 And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Acts 16:1-5, 8-15—NIV
HE CAME to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer, but whose father was a Greek. 2 The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. 11 From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day on to Neapolis. 12 From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. 13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Sometimes what starts as a small project turns out to be much larger—having an unexpected effect on the lives of others. How do such results come about? Because Paul respected the decisions of the apostles and elders and because of his response to the vision he had received from God, his preaching resulted in the Good News being spread into new regions.

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.
15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Missions on Purpose
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Paul Recruits Timothy (Acts 16:1-3)
   B. Paul and His Team Deliver the Message (Acts 16:4-5)
   C. Paul’s Vision of the Man from Macedonia (Acts 16:8-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall how Paul added Timothy to his missionary team and their labors in spreading the Gospel from Derbe to Philippi;
2. Reflect on those characteristics needed for members of a successful evangelism team; and,
3. Challenge the participants to spread the Gospel in every aspect of their lives.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Ready, Set, Go!
Youth Topic: More than Expected
Adult Key Verse: Acts 16:10
Youth Key Verses: Acts 16:4-5
Print Passage: Acts 16:1-5, 8-15

—Paul and his team carefully and obediently followed God’s direction in choosing new ministry locations.
—The religious atmosphere in Philippi was a mix of ancient pagan, Greek, and Roman religions and mystery cults.
—Lydia’s confession of faith in Jesus resulted in the action of gracious hospitality.
—The book of Acts introduced Lydia as a religious person apart from a husband and without a religious “pedigree.” As a convert to Christianity, she provided her home as the area’s spiritual center and became a spiritual leader.
—Paul circumcised Timothy to make the evangelism of Jews more effective, but later he refused to circumcise Titus in
order to refute the claim that circumcision was essential for salvation (see Galatians 2:3).

—With few Jewish residents in Philippi, there was no synagogue there, so the Jews met on the sides of the Gangites River, since it was customary for outside prayer gatherings to be close to running water.

—Like Cornelius (see Acts 10:2), Lydia had left paganism and was devoted to God and Jewish morals—though not fully a Jew—which made her receptive to the Gospel of Jesus.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Spreading the News

Key Verse: Acts 16:10b
Print Passage: Acts 16:1-5, 8-15

—These events occurred during Paul’s second missionary journey.

—Paul’s directions were presumed to have come from God, even though “a man” or angelic being spoke the words.

—Twice, the Holy Spirit stopped Paul’s journey.

—In verse 10, where the pronoun changes to “we,” Luke had apparently joined Paul and Silas.

—The mission of Paul and Silas was to deliver the teaching decided on by James and the Jerusalem council (see Acts 15), a decision that resulted in strengthening faith and growing churches.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Missions on Purpose

The central purpose of the Christian church is to be on mission for God. The church is the product of the intentional will of God, and hence her chief goal is to galvanize and marshal all of her resources, energy, and commitment to the fulfillment of the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). The church is most like Jesus Christ her Lord when missionaries are dispatched either on short-term mission trips or for longer periods of time.

When the apostle Paul went on his first short-term mission trip, he was sowing seeds for what would become his life’s work. Sometimes, what starts as a small project turns out to be much larger, having an unexpected impact on the lives of others. How do such results come about? Because Paul respected the decisions of the apostles and elders and because of his response to the vision he had received from God, his preaching resulted in the Good News being spread into new regions. To better grasp the breadth of Paul’s work, you may do well to study the geography of ancient Asia Minor and track Paul’s travels, using a Bible Atlas.

B. Biblical Background

According to Acts 15:36, Paul and Barnabas spent a considerable amount of time in Antioch prior to deciding to visit the churches they had established on what became their first missionary journey (see Acts 13:1–14:27). Luke recorded in Acts 15:37-41 that an intense disagreement broke out between the two giants over whether John Mark would be permitted to travel with the team on this second journey. Unable to resolve the issue, Paul and Barnabas agreed to separate (verse 39). Paul would take Silas, and Barnabas
would be accompanied by John Mark. In Acts 15:41, Luke reported that the new team of Paul and Silas travelled through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches.

According to Acts 16:1, they arrived in the areas of Derbe and then Lystra, small cities in the district of Lycaonia in the Roman province of Galatia.

Luke reported that when the newly constituted team departed Lystra and Iconium, they headed west, intending to travel north to Bithynia (verse 7), but the Holy Spirit led them west toward the seaport city of Troas. Departing Troas, they travelled by ship to Neapolis, a port city in Macedonia. In the Roman city of Philippi, they met and converted a lady named Lydia, who became one of the first converts in Europe.

As you study this lesson today, look for things that you can do to (and ways that you can) become a more effective member of an evangelistic or short-term mission team. Ask the Holy Spirit to remove all doubts and fears you may have regarding how you may become a more effective witness for Jesus Christ.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Paul Recruits Timothy

(Acts 16:1-3)

THEN CAME he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

Paul and Barnabas first visited Derbe during their first missionary journey (see Acts 14:20). Their evangelistic efforts bore great fruit with many converts being added to the faith. Their journey took them through Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, and Lystra, where they experienced persecutions and great suffering (see 2 Timothy 3:11; compare with Acts 14:1-21).

Verse 1 is the beginning of the second missionary journey, which began in Syrian Antioch, passed through Tarsus and the Cilician Gates, and on to the Great Anatolian Plateau. Rather than approach the region of Lycaonia from the west, they began in the east, arriving first in Derbe. From Derbe they travelled to Lystra, which was about twenty miles to the west—where he met a young man named Timothy. His mother was both Jewish and Christian. However, his father was of Greek descent and was not a believer. Why did Luke find it necessary to mention that his father was Greek? More than likely it was to prepare the reader for the actions that Paul would later take regarding the circumcision of Timothy.

Like his mother and grandmother (see 2 Timothy 1:5), Timothy was probably converted during the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. We have no way of knowing Timothy’s age, and any guessing would be mere speculation. Timothy had made a good name for himself among the brothers in Lystra and Iconium (verse 2). The two cities were separated by a distance of about sixty miles. This speaks of the widespread appreciation and esteem in which the brothers held Timothy. He may have been actively engaged in preaching and teaching the Gospel, as he had learned it from Paul during his first trip.
Verse 3 has been puzzling for some interpreters, especially given Paul’s adamant stand against circumcision as a requirement for salvation in Galatians 2:1-10. Paul wanted to take Timothy with them, but his presence could pose a serious problem for the work. Remember that Paul was still beginning his preaching ministry with the Jewish synagogues in every city. Were he to take Timothy—the son of a Jewish mother and Greek father—with him into these settings, he would be faced with serious challenges to his message. The Jews knew Timothy’s father was Greek, which probably created some concern for many of them regarding Timothy’s place in the Jewish community of Lystra. Many Jews believed that if the mother were Jew and the father Gentile, then the child would be considered a Jew. What would it look like for Paul to carry an uncircumcised Jewish into the synagogue? It would be disastrous. Thus, Paul felt that it was expedient that Timothy be circumcised so that there would be no issues with Timothy’s presence or message in the Jewish synagogues. Was Paul compromising his beliefs? Some people have thought so, but it was the right thing to do, given the nature of the work. He was not against circumcision; he simply did not believe it was necessary in order for one to be saved.

B. Paul and His Team Deliver the Message
(Acts 16:4-5)

And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

In these verses, there are two primary reasons given for the trip. First, they wanted to deliver the message regarding the decision (Greek: dogma) reached by the apostles that Gentiles would not have to submit to circumcision. Nor would they need to abide by the Mosaic Law. They would, however, need to refrain from things contaminated by idols, fornication, and meat that had been strangled and from blood (see Acts 15:20).

The second reason is that as they travelled they strengthened the churches in the faith. We are not told what this meant. They more than likely spent considerable time with the believers in each of the cities they visited, sharing more of the Gospel and the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

C. Paul’s Vision of the Man from Macedonia
(Acts 16:8-12)

And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

When they departed the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, the missionaries had completed delivering the message from the apostolic conference in Jerusalem. They were forbidden to preach in the regions where Paul wanted to go and were directed instead to travel west toward Troas, a major seaport town on the Aegean Coast. Luke said that Paul, Titus, and Timothy passed by Mysia, a large region located on the southern coast of the Sea of Marma and just west of Bithynia. The journey from Antioch of
Pisidia to Troas would have taken several weeks and carried them through several large and small cities. Yet, throughout this part of their travels there is no record of any churches being established or the Gospel being preached.

Verse 9 states that during the night—that is, one night while he was sleeping or meditating—Paul had a vision. In the vision, he saw a man of Macedonia standing and begging that they come over and help them. We are never told the nature of the help that the man was soliciting, only that they needed help. Nor do we know the identity of the man who made the appeal.

According to verse 10, the group departed at once for Macedonia. It was probably on the first available ship going to Macedonia. In this verse, Luke wrote that “we got ready at once....” For the first time, Luke had joined the team, or at least identified himself as a member of the team. Luke intimated that the group concluded that this was where the Lord wanted them to go and preach the Gospel. How would they know that this was the next assignment? When men and women walk in close communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, He will make His will known in clear, unmistakable terms (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-12).

In verse 12, the group wasted no time going to Philippi, which was the major city in that region of Macedonia. The distance between Neapolis and Philippi was ten miles.

D. The First Convert in Europe
   (Acts 16:13-15)

And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

There was no synagogue in Philippi, which suggests that the Jewish population was not very large or barely existed. Upon arrival, the group may have inquired as to where people gathered for worship and were told about the weekly gatherings at the river. On the Sabbath, they went down to the river expecting to find some sort of worship gathering taking place. Here, we learn something about early religious gatherings. Cities without permanent worship sites would meet at prominent landmarks to conduct their rituals. When they arrived at the site, Paul and his companions found a group of women who had gathered for prayer.

According to verse 14, there was a woman in the group who was a worshipper of God. This meant that Lydia was among a group of Gentile women who met with Jewish women for worship. We are told several details about Lydia. First, she was a businesswoman whose primary product was purple dye. Second, she was from the town of Thyatira, which was a wealthy town in northern Asia. The town was known for its textile industry and various dyes used to add color to fabrics. Its most famous dye was purple, a dye extracted from the murex shell found in the Mediterranean Sea. Purple dye was rare and very expensive to produce. Third, Luke reported that the Lord opened her heart to respond to the message of Paul. This indicates that Lydia had a receptive heart and an open mind to hearing the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 15, we learn that she was baptized, along with the members of her household. When God saves the head of the house, it is
likely and possible for every member of that family to come to know Jesus Christ. Lydia extended an invitation for the missionaries to stay in her home. She stated that if Paul considered her to be a true believer, he would honor her by staying in her home. They were all convinced that God had worked the miracle of salvation in her life.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The lesson offers several opportunities to examine our beliefs about who we say we are as Christians and what we believe God has called us to do in the world.

First, it is always God who leads and directs our work in ministry and missions. We may not always understand why God will lead in one direction and not another. Yet, it is always according to His will (see Romans 8:28).

Second, the leading of God is always clear and without ambiguity. We will never know why Paul was prohibited from preaching in some cities and allowed to do so in others. But the vision will always be plain and clear. As we walk in close harmony with God, He reveals more and more of Himself and His purpose for us to pursue.

Third, there is no such thing as a stagnant ministry. What do I mean by this? There are many congregations that have never ventured beyond the comfortable confines of their own four walls. All Christians and all churches are called to stretch themselves beyond their local gathering places. Ministry and mission are successfully done when we open ourselves to the larger vision of God.

PRAYER

God, may we never take for granted the vastness of the world that You have called us to visit and see. Open our eyes to see the wonder of Your grace in the most remote places. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

“They delivered them” (Greek: paradidomi autos [par-ad-id’-o-mee ow-tos])—this phrase literally means to put into the hands of another for safekeeping or for managing. It is written in the Greek imperfect active tense, which is used to express continuous action. The implication is that Paul and Silas received the decisions from the apostles in Jerusalem and travelled to all of the churches to ensure that they received the Word.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(November 9-15, 2015)

From Derbe to Philippi

MONDAY, November 9: “The Way We Should Go” (Jeremiah 26:1-6)
TUESDAY, November 10: “Boundless Riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:7-12)
WEDNESDAY, November 11: “Generosity of God” (Ezekiel 36:22-30)
THURSDAY, November 12: “The Cost of Following” (Matthew 8:18-22)
SATURDAY, November 14: “Paul and Silas Escape” (Acts 16:25-40)
SUNDAY, November 15: “From Derbe to Philippi” (Acts 16:1-5, 8-15)
THESSALONICA, BEREA, AND ATHENS

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Turning the World Upside Down

DEVOATIONAL READING: Psalm 47
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-25, 28

Background Scripture: Acts 17:1-32
Key Verse: Acts 17:23

Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-25, 28—KJV

NOW WHEN they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:
2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,
3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.
4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.
11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.
12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.
23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-25, 28—NIV

WHEN THEY had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.
2 As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,
3 explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,” he said.
4 Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.

10 As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.
11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
12 Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.
23 “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Some people accept verbal convictions while others reject them. How do Christians respond when those they hope will accept their messages reject them? Luke showed that Paul was undeterred and continued telling the Good News story and preaching with strong passion and conviction.

24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;
25 Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.

28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. An Instrument of Change
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Paul Preaches in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4)
   B. Paul’s Mission in Berea (Acts 17:10-12)
   C. Paul Preaches in Athens (Acts 17:22-25, 28)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Learn that although Paul and Silas’s message was accepted by some (but not all), God received the glory;
2. Reflect on the effects of rejection in the lives of those who serve God; and,
3. Seek out and use spiritual resources that support perseverance in the midst of rejection.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Turning the World Upside Down
Youth Topic: Hang in There!
Adult Key Verse: Acts 17:23
Youth Key Verse: Acts 17:4
Print Passage: Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-25, 28
—Paul carefully used Hebrew Scriptures to support his claims of the Messiah.
—Luke specifically noted that the Jews in Berea were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah after they had studied the Scriptures daily.
—Paul’s response to the presence of idols in Athens reflected his Jewish perspective.
—Thessalonica offered opportunities for Paul to present the Gospel in a Jewish synagogue, which was lacking in Philippi, Amphipolis, and Apollonia.
—“Devout Greeks” in verse 4 is translated “God-fearing Greek men” in the New Living Translation (NLT) and were
Gentiles who were receptive to Jewish morals, but hesitant to be circumcised to become full-on Jews. Cornelius was such a person (Acts 10:2).
—Paul probably found receptivity among the Greeks who were attracted to Jewish morals because becoming a Christian did not require circumcision and other Jewish practices that seemed odd to the Hellenistic mind.
—Because the Greeks in the high council of Athens were not familiar with Jewish Scripture and monotheism, Paul did not base his presentation of the Gospel to them on the Hebrew texts as he had done in the synagogues (see Acts 17:2), but built on their extensive intellectual learning and their polytheism and idolatry.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. An Instrument of Change
   In the lesson today, we follow Paul as he ministered the Word of God in three different locations. Some people rejected his message, while others received it and were persuaded to follow Jesus Christ. How do Christians respond when those they hope will accept their message reject it? Luke showed that Paul was undeterred and continued telling the Good News and preaching with strong passion and conviction.

B. Biblical Background
   Luke never referred to the travels of Paul as missionary journeys. No one is quite sure when they came to be called missionary journeys. This particular journey began in Antioch and proceeded through Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, Troas, Neapolis, and finally Philippi. We last saw Paul and his team in Philippi, where they experienced a tremendous amount of success and persecution (see Acts 16:16-40). Lydia became the first Christian convert in Europe and quite possibly the host of the first Christian church established in Philippi.
   From Philippi, Paul and his team would have travelled west on the Via Egnatia, the main Roman road that ran from Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul) to Rome. This journey took them the entire length of the Greek peninsula, beginning in the north and culminating in the south at Corinth. Along the way they preached in Thessalonica, attempting to convince the Jews in the local synagogue that Jesus was the Christ. Their
efforts were not very fruitful, and they were forced to leave hurriedly. Prior to leaving, Paul left in place a small nucleus of believers who formed the first Christian church in that city. From Thessalonica they continued south to Berea, where there was a more gracious reception and a more hospitable audience.

In the final section of the lesson, Paul was alone in Athens, where he delivered one of the most important sermons recorded in the book of Acts. In Athens, Paul encountered paganism and the presence of idols on a scale that he had never witnessed before. Into this city of intellectuals and philosophers this Jewish preacher went with a message about a crucified Savior who was raised from the dead.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Paul Preaches in Thessalonica

(Acts 17:1-4)

NOW WHEN they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

Upon leaving Philippi, Paul and his team headed south toward Thessalonica, the largest city in Macedonia. It was and is today the second-largest city in Greece and is a major industrial and commercial center.

The distance between the two cities was about one hundred miles. Luke indicated that they passed through and most likely stopped in Amphipolis and Appollonia on their way to Thessalonica, known today as Salonika. There is no indication that Paul spent any time in either place preaching or teaching. Why this was the case we are not told. Unlike Philippi, there was a synagogue in Thessalonica.

Verse 2 points out that Paul went to the synagogue on three Sabbath days. This indicates that he was in the city for at least three weeks, possibly longer. He employed his customary methods of evangelism. He reasoned (Greek: *dialegomai*) or debated or discussed with Jews from the Scriptures. Here, we have a reference to the many messianic passages in the Old Testament from which Paul drew the substance of this preaching. Over the years Paul had developed a well-crafted theological understanding of the redemptive plan of God.

Verse 3 pointed out the persistence of Paul as he continued his evangelistic push to get the Jews in Thessalonica to accept his teachings. Paul employed several strategic evangelistic methods. He spent time explaining (Greek: *dianoigo*), literally opening up the Word of God to those whose minds had previously been closed. Not only did he open the Scriptures, but also, he additionally spent time proving (Greek: *paratithemi*—meaning to place side-by-side to draw out comparisons) that Jesus is the Christ. A fourth strategy Paul used was proclaiming (Greek: *kataggello*), which means to publicly announce or proclaim. There was no doubt in the mind of Paul that Jesus was the Christ—that is, the Jewish Messiah.

Verse 4 states that some of the Jews were persuaded (Greek: *peitho*), that is, they were induced to believe the message of Paul and...
Silas. We are not told what Silas said or did during these visits to the synagogue. The work paid huge dividends because many God-fearing Greeks believed. These were people who embraced Jewish beliefs and teachings, but may not have wanted to submit to circumcision. They were joined by a few prominent women, a reference to both their financial and social status. Paul proved that the Gospel cuts across social and economic boundaries. Preaching the Gospel is the declaration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18).

B. Paul’s Mission in Berea
(Acts 17:10-12)

And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

The interim verses 5-9 point out that Paul encountered massive resistance from the Jews regarding his methods and message. In order to protect Paul and Silas from the mob that was out to kill him, they led them out of the city at night. Here is recounted shades of Paul’s escape from Damascus at night (see Acts 9:23-25). Berea was about thirty miles from Thessalonica along the Via Egnatia. There was a Jewish synagogue in Berea, and that was Paul’s next stop.

Verse 11 states that the Bereans were a different type of people, specifically a reference to the Jewish residents of the city. Luke said that they possessed a more noble character. He defined what he meant by that statement in the next few lines. They were open to receiving the Word without preconceived ideas of its validity or truthfulness. They were eager to hear the Word of God, and they did not just blindly take it in. Rather, they spent time poring over the scriptural references that Paul alluded to for the purpose of determining their accuracy. The Bereans were unlike many of the Jews in Thessalonica who were simply dismissive of Paul and Silas.

In verse 12, we see where the message again bore much fruit. Many of the Jews believed, along with some very prominent Greek women and Greek men. Luke was very careful to point out that there was a mixture of Jews and Greeks that came to faith in Jesus Christ. In this verse, we see that the earliest urban Christian communities were not made up of just poor people, but there were many well-to-do individuals and families who comprised the first Christian churches.

C. Paul Preaches in Athens
(Acts 17:22-25, 28)

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things. ...For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Paul was forced to leave Berea because the hate-filled Jews from Thessalonica followed him there and stirred up trouble (see Acts 17:14). The brothers took Paul down to the
harbor and escorted him to Athens. Upon arrival, Paul sent word by them for Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens. He no doubt spent a few days moving around the city to get a feel for the culture. One of the places to learn a lot about the inner workings of a community would be to visit its local market or agora.

There was no synagogue in Athens, which indicated that either the Jewish population was small or it was rather unorganized. The more prominent men gathered atop a large marble stone near the Acropolis to meet and exchange ideas. In some versions, the place is called “Mars Hill.” The gathering of men was called the Areopagus, which was an assembly of judges who came together to hear and decide legal matters in the city. If one wanted to gain introduction into the city, it would be here first.

It appears that Paul was very much aware of where he was and to whom he was preaching. He appeared to be more philosophical, probably in an attempt to reach the Athenians who had no connection to or knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures or of the Jews’ monotheistic beliefs. Paul acknowledged that they were very religious, a point that connected him to the Athenians. He did not call attention to their pagan beliefs. Was the reference to their many religious shrines a compliment or a cynical way of referring to their various religious beliefs?

Verse 23 makes reference to the many objects of worship that were found throughout the city. In the agora (marketplace), there was a long street with columns on both sides, each holding one of the many deities worshipped by the Greeks. He noticed these many gods that were located throughout the city. Paul said that in his moving around Athens, he came across an inscription “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” This was the God he wanted to make known to them.

In verse 24, Paul stated that the God whom they ignorantly worshipped as unknown was really the very God who made the heaven and Earth. He is the Creator of the universe and all that is contained in it. This God does not live in temples made by human hands. The Athenians had plenty of temples, each dedicated to a different god. Paul made it clear that the one true God is not bound by human limitations and does not need a man-made temple to be who He is. Paul pointed out that this God is the one who sustains life, for He gives breath to all people. In many cultures, conversely, the gods were given offerings of vegetables and fruit so that they would have food.

Verse 28 contains two commonly known Greek sayings. There has been some debate as to exactly who is the original source for the words, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” Some scholars think that it originated with Epimenides of Crete in his work *Cretica*. The second quote was written by Cilician poet Aratus in his work *Phaenomena*. These two Greek sayings were very common knowledge at the time, and Paul’s use of them conveys the breadth of his knowledge and the sensitivity to which he approached every preaching moment.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Visiting the places where Paul preached the Gospel gives a greater appreciation for the magnitude of Paul’s ministry and inner strength that it took to travel those distances preaching the Gospel. It is quite the feat to imagine showing up in a city with an entirely different culture, language, and religious background and creating opportunities to share the Gospel with its people.
There are several things that we learn from Paul. First, we should never underestimate the power of the Scriptures to speak to the hearts and minds of people. Second, one should never make assumptions about people because they live in a smaller town. The Bereans were open to hearing the Word and were willing to search the Scriptures daily. Third, we should never assume that people of financial means are not interested in the things that matter with God. In every instance, God touched the hearts of those who were among the most influential and wealthy in the city to join the church. We must remember that it did take lots of money for Paul to travel around the Mediterranean area, and Lydia was probably a major contributor. The work of the kingdom can be helped by believers at all income levels who are willing to freely give.

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, grant that Your servants will seek to spread the Good News of Your Son in every place. Give us the boldness and courage we need to venture forth boldly for You. May we never appear to be ashamed or afraid. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**WORD POWER**

**Custom (Greek: eiothos)**—Paul went first to the synagogue in whatever city he would minister. This behavior was based on his habit, tradition, or *custom*. This may refer to his normal practice as an apostle, but more likely alludes to his practice as a devout Jew and Pharisee. What is notable is that his behavior (once at the synagogue) had changed since he was arrested by the Christ on the Damascus Road. He now preached Christ, even inside his traditional Jewish habits. But when there was no synagogue—as in Athens and Macedonia—Paul still preached Christ. Ministry of the Word must be our focus, regardless of whether it fits our tradition.

**Eagerness (Greek: prothymias)**—This is a compound word meaning “before” and “passion.” It conveys the idea that the eager, or ready (KJV), Bible student is already willing to receive the Word of God. Consequently, that person searches the Scriptures without being prodded or persuaded. The Bereans were already inclined to accept sound biblical instruction, and this was what caused the marked difference between them and the Thessalonian Jews. It is still the distinguishing feature among churchgoers today.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**(November 16-22, 2015)**

**Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens**

**MONDAY**, November 16: “Creator God” (Deuteronomy 32:1-12)
**TUESDAY**, November 17: “Promises of God for All” (Genesis 9:8-17)
**WEDNESDAY**, November 18: “Blessing of God for All” (Genesis 12:1-4)
**THURSDAY**, November 19: “Majesty of God” (Psalm 8)
**FRIDAY**, November 20: “Goodness of God” (Psalm 33:13-22)
**SATURDAY**, November 21: “Reign of God” (Psalm 47)
**SUNDAY**, November 22: “Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens” (Acts 17:1-4, 10-12, 22-25, 28)
Acts 18:1-11, 18-21a—KJV

AFTER THESE things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;
2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.
3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.
4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.
5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.
6 But when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.
7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.
8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.
9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.
11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

....

18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila;

Acts 18:1-11, 18-21a—NIV

AFTER THIS, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.
2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.
4 Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.
5 When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.
6 But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”
7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.
8 Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized.
9 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.
10 “For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.”
11 So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

....

18 Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People can be persistent when they really believe that what they are doing and saying are the right things. How do people sustain their enthusiasm for their work or vocation? Luke pointed out that the success in Paul’s Corinthian mission and God’s affirmation led Paul to extend his mission of proclaiming the Good News to Syria and Ephesus.

having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.
20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;
21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Price of Rejection
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Arrival and Ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:1-8)
   B. God’s Promise of Protection (Acts 18:9-11)
   C. Paul’s First Visit to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21a)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of this lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review Paul’s zeal for teaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, after he was rejected by the Jews;

2. Explore feelings after making a transition from a vocation in which one’s knowledge and skills are rejected to a situation in which one is enthusiastically embraced; and,
3. Pray for the success of those whom God has placed in a new and challenging situation.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Speak without Fear
Youth Topic: Keep Your Enthusiasm
Adult Key Verses: Acts 18:9-10
Youth Key Verses: Acts 18:9-11
Print Passage: Acts 18:1-11, 18-21a

—Corinth, an important commercial crossroads and known for its debauchery, was a good place to plant the Gospel. Even though the mission to the Gentiles had been approved, Paul, as was his pattern, continued to preach to Jewish audiences in synagogues.
—Paul’s leadership strategy moved from itinerant evangelistic team to pastoral team composed of local residents. His affinity with Priscilla and Aquila was natural. All three were Jews, they were living away from their homes, and they were “tentmakers” (most likely leatherworkers).
—The Jewish rejection of the Gospel eventually drew strong
statements from Paul; shaking dust from his clothes echoes the example of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 5:13) in a similar situation.
—Ironic and bold, Paul’s fruitful ministry continued at a house next door to the synagogue.
—God’s affirming vision for Paul was timely and fulfilled.
—Paul’s vow in verse 18 was most likely a temporary nazirite vow. The proper ending observance was for a person to shave his head and offer the hair at the Jerusalem Temple.
—Under Paul’s direction, Aquila and Priscilla grew into a strong husband-and-wife team that served the Lord in several places and roles (Acts 18:18-19, 24-28; Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19).
—Paul claimed to have baptized Crispus in 1 Corinthians 1:14. Synagogue rulers appointed readers and speakers for the services, planned the services, and kept order.
—Paul’s promise to return to Ephesus was fulfilled on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1-20:1).

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Speak Out!
Key Verse: Acts 18:9
Print Passage: Acts 18:1-11, 18-21a
—This lesson records the end of Paul’s second missionary journey.
—Despite Paul’s rejection in the synagogue, he continued to reach out to Jews and Gentiles.
—In this text, Paul established a relationship with two people who would become pivotal in his life and ministry—Aquila and Priscilla.
—The Greek city of Corinth was a financial and intellectual center.
—Although Paul experienced rejection in some places, he experienced success in others and was encouraged to continue his missionary journeys in Achaia, Syria, Jerusalem, and Galatia.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Price of Rejection

Nothing can be more heartbreaking than rejection. For many people, it is a pain that never recedes. In ministry, when people experience rejection, it can deal such a crushing blow to their enthusiasm that some completely abandon the church. How do people sustain their enthusiasm for their work or vocation? Luke pointed out that the success in Paul’s Corinthian mission and God’s affirmation led Paul to extend his mission of proclaiming the Good News to Syria and Ephesus.

B. Biblical Background

It is generally believed that Paul went to the Greek city of Corinth about AD 49–50. The evidence used for dating the visit comes from an inscription found at Delphi in Central Greece, which indicated that Gallio was proconsul of the region of Achaia in AD 52–53, the office he held during Paul’s stay (see Acts 18:12ff). Gallio was the son of Seneca the rhetorician, and the brother of Seneca, the Greek philosopher.

Paul began his ministry in Corinth the same way he began in every new city: he went to the Jewish synagogue. Every day Paul went to the synagogue to share the Good News, and every day the reaction was mixed. He faced stiff criticism and rejection of his message in the
synagogue. Undeterred, he moved to a house next door to the synagogue and continued to teach and preach the Gospel. While in Corinth, Paul met a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently arrived from Rome. Together, they worked in Corinth until he departed for Ephesus and Syria. While in Corinth, Paul wrote his first letter, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians (see 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 3:1).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Arrival and Ministry in Corinth

(Acts 18:1-8)

AFTER THESE things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man’s house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

We have no way of knowing how long Paul remained in Athens. He did have some converts in the city, but the Athenians were basically dismissive of his message (see Acts 17:32-34). He left Athens and headed south to the more prosperous city of Corinth. The distance between Athens and Corinth was about 55 miles, and it took Paul two days to cover that distance. Luke reported that at some point after his arrival he met a man named Aquila, who was a Jewish immigrant from Pontus, a region located along the Black Sea in northern Asia (modern-day Turkey). His wife was named Priscilla and they had recently arrived from Rome, along with other Jews who had been expelled by Claudius (see “Word Power” for a fuller explanation). Paul more than likely met the couple during one of the synagogue services.

In verse 3, we learn that Paul connected very quickly with his new friends. They shared a common trade—tent making—which many scholars believe more likely meant that they worked with leather goods. Corinth would have been the ideal place to set up shop, given its strategic location and large population of wealthy people. Paul lived in the home of Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them (as well as in their common trade).

Luke stated that Paul’s weekly routine centered on going to the synagogue and
meeting with whomever would listen to him. He reasoned (Greek: *dialegomai*) with both Jews and Greeks, trying to persuade (Greek: *peitho*) them that Jesus was indeed the Christ. Here, we have a picture of a multicultural congregation of Jews and Greek God fearers.

When Paul was hastily ushered out of Berea, he left behind Silas and Timothy. We have no record indicating why they stayed or why he left them there. Most likely they remained behind to continue training the new believers in Berea and quite possibly they may have returned to Philippi. The arrival of Silas and Timothy freed Paul to devote his time to preaching the redemptive message of salvation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Silas and Timothy may have also brought along with them a special gift of financial support from the saints in Macedonia (see 2 Corinthians 11:8-9; compare with Philippians 4:15-16).

Verse 6 was the turning point in the missionary work of Paul. Here for the first time, Paul indicated that he would begin to devote himself exclusively to reaching out to Gentiles in Corinth. At some point, Paul realized that he was fighting a losing battle in the synagogue, because the wording in Greek suggests that he faced constant conflict over his message. He was being abused and opposed at every turn, and we can be sure that some of this opposition and abuse was physical.

The statement, “Your blood be on your own heads,” meant that Paul had done his job of preaching, but they had rejected the truth. Any future judgment would be their responsibility.

Sometimes people may believe that the work of God will die if they reject the message. But in Paul’s case, the work multiplied and grew. God opened a door next door to the synagogue in the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile who had embraced the Jewish religious practices and worship. But that was not all. Crispus, the ruler and leader of the synagogue, was also converted, and he joined the ministry of Paul. As Paul continued to preach and teach in Corinth, the work grew. Luke stated that a large number of people heard the message, believed, and were baptized.

**B. God’s Promise of Protection**

(Acts 18:9-11)

*Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

Imagine that you are Paul and for the past five years you have been buffeted by agitators, antagonists, and people who were simply out to sabotage your ministry. No doubt Paul may have felt that Corinth was about to be a repeat of Lystra, Antioch of Pisidia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Every time the work was begun, Satan raised an enemy to disrupt the preaching of the Gospel.

We have no way of knowing at what point this vision came to Paul. When he received it, it was a word in due season. The Lord spoke to Paul and gave him a sterling promise of support and protection. First, he was told not to be afraid. Rather than be silent, he was exhorted to continue preaching. He was not to be silenced. Is it possible that Paul also thought back to the moment he first heard the voice of the Lord?

In verse 10, Paul heard the words that have been the wind beneath the wings of many of the Lord’s servants: “For I am with you” (see
1 Corinthians 2:3; compare with Joshua 1:3-5; Jeremiah 1:5-8; 15:19-21). Every servant of God knows the fear that can grip one’s heart when it seems that he or she is all alone in the fight. There were other saints in the cadre of missionaries, but if Paul lost courage, the others could quite possibly falter and quit.

Not only was God with him, but also there was the reassurance that his preaching and teaching would bear much fruit. The reference to “many people in this city” could mean that there were many converts yet to be reached, or that there were a large number of converts already in the city. We are not sure. At any rate, Paul was encouraged by the prospects of a mighty army of God rising from the heaps of corruption in Corinth. Buttressed by this astounding word of hope and encouragement, Paul stayed eighteen months, teaching the newly converted believers the Word of God.

C. Paul’s First Visit to Ephesus
(Acts 18:18-21a)

And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will.

Corinth was one of the very few places Paul was not forced to leave. Verse 18 brings the eighteen-month stay to a conclusion and serves as the transition for beginning the journey back to Antioch of Syria. Upon his departure, Aquila and Priscilla left with him, as did Silas and Timothy. Cenchrea was a harbor town located on the eastern side of the Corinthian isthmus. Scholars are not quite sure of the vow that Paul had taken. Maybe it was a vow that he would return one day to Corinth.

According to verse 19, Paul and his entire team of missionaries arrived in Ephesus, the leading city in Asia. On his next trip Paul would end up spending a considerable amount of time in the ancient city. As was his custom, Paul attended the synagogue service on the Sabbath to meet and talk to Jews living in Ephesus. He reasoned with them regarding the message of salvation and redemption that comes through Jesus the Christ. We are not sure why Paul refused to stay in Ephesus. When Paul departed from Ephesus, he left Aquila and Priscilla in the city to preach and work with the few people who had probably converted to Christianity. Paul was set on returning to Syria; after a few meetings he left, but he told them that he would return if it was God’s will.

Paul departed Ephesus without the stress and anxiety associated with many of the other cities in which he had preached. God granted his servant peace for the long, arduous journey back to Jerusalem and Syria.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The apostle Paul ranks as one of the greatest Christians to have ever lived. Not only did he write thirteen of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament canon, but he was also responsible for the spread of the Gospel throughout the Mediterranean and eventually into Europe. The example that we have seen is a man who was relentless in his pursuit of “the high calling of Christ Jesus.” There are very few contemporary Christians who would subject themselves to the kind of deprivation and overt hostility that Paul and his missionary partners faced and endured.
In these lessons, we have learned several valuable lessons that should reinforce the need for the church of this generation to remain true to her calling. First, the mission of Christ will not fail because we have a powerful message of hope. The preaching of the Cross still draws men and women into its orbit of eternal life. Second, when we face opposition to our work of mission and ministry, the Lord is still our keeper. He reassured Paul that he would not be alone because the Lord would be with him and there were many people in the city who would be a source of support. Finally, we see the example of partnership and collaboration in ministry. Paul, Silas, Timothy, Aquila, and Priscilla teach us that there is no substitute for committed persons who come together to work as a team.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we learn the lessons of our predecessors who followed You to the ends of the Earth. May we learn that we are never alone and that Your promise of provision and protection is true in every generation. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Suetonius (Claudius 25.4)—a Roman historian who wrote a book detailing the lives of the Roman emperors, entitled De Vita Caesarum, or Lives of the Twelve Caesars. In his work he recounts how Claudius dealt with various ethnic groups. During Claudius’s reign, riots broke out in the Jewish community in Rome. According to Acts 18:2, Claudius commanded all Jews to leave Rome. In his book, Suetonius noted why Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome: “He expelled the Jews from Rome, on account of the riots which they were constantly indulging, at the instigation of Chrestus.”

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(November 23-29, 2015)

Teaching God’s Word

MONDAY, November 23: “Learning from God” (Psalm 25:8-12, 20-21)

TUESDAY, November 24: “Living with God” (Psalm 27:4-5, 8-9, 11-14)

WEDNESDAY, November 25: “Wisdom from God” (Proverbs 16:19-24)

THURSDAY, November 26: “Commissioned to Teach” (Matthew 28:16-20)

FRIDAY, November 27: “Teach Me Your Ways” (Exodus 33:12-18)

SATURDAY, November 28: “Apollos Grows in Ministry” (Acts 18:24-28)

SUNDAY, November 29: “Teaching God’s Word” (Acts 18:1-11, 18-21a)

End Notes


2. Ibid.
Sacred Gifts and Holy Gatherings

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The study this quarter explores the theme of “tradition” in three ways based on passages from both the Old and New Testaments. Included are the traditions by which we honor God, observe special occasions in life, and celebrate holy times together.

Unit I, “What We Bring to God,” is a four-lesson study of ways that God’s people honor God—by observing the Sabbath, following the commandments, dedicating firstborn children, and giving our gifts with a humble spirit.

Unit II, “Four Weddings and a Funeral,” has five lessons that look at four stories about traditions of love and marriage and their various expressions in the relationships between male and female—plus one story that deals with the issue of death and the traditions surrounding its finality.

Unit III, “Holy Days,” has four lessons that deal with the traditions related to four special commemorations celebrated by the Jews: Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Atonement, and the Festival of Booths.
UNIT I: What We Bring to God

December 6, 2015

THE LORD’S DAY

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Holding On to Principles

DEVOTIONAL READING: Hebrews 4:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-16
KEY VERSE: Exodus 20:8

EXODUS 20:8-11; 31:12-16—KJV
8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:
10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:
11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-16—NIV
8 “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
9 “Six days you shall labor and do all your work,
10 “but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.
11 “For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
In this new age, some people have turned away from those traditions that provide firm underpinnings for their lives. How can they maintain spiritual stability in a rapidly changing world? Scripture informs them of a God who set aside the Sabbath as a day to remember and to recommit to holy living.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Keeping It Holy
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application
    of the Scripture
   A. Remembering the Sabbath
      (Exodus 20:8-11)
   B. A Perpetual Covenant
      (Exodus 31:12-13)
   C. Observing the Sabbath
      (Exodus 31:14-16)

III. Concluding Reflection

LEsson OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the meaning of the Sabbath as expressed in the book of Exodus;
2. Recognize and appreciate the importance of the Sabbath; and,

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Holding On to Principles
Youth Topic: Purposeful Rest
Adult /Youth Key Verse: Exodus 20:8
Print Passage: Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-16
—God urged Israel to honor the Sabbath as a sign of God’s covenant relationship with them and as a reminder of God’s sanctifying them as a people (see Exodus 31:13).
—Keeping the Sabbath was a very important part of Israel’s covenant relationship with God; in observing it, they honored both God and themselves.
—Throughout the ages and scriptural traditions, ways of honoring and observing the Sabbath have changed (see Matthew 12:1-14).
—The Sabbath is very important to Christians, who have different views regarding its observance.
—God at Creation established the weekly rhythm of six days of work followed by one day of rest (see Genesis 1:1–2:3). God continued to form this pattern in the lives of His people through His instructions to the Israelites for collecting manna (see Exodus 16:22-26).
—The Sabbath originally occurred from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: A Special Day
Key Verse: Exodus 20:8
Print Passage: Exodus 20:8-11
—The commandment to observe the Sabbath day is one of the Ten Commandments.
—God at various times revealed to the Israelites the
importance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship.
—God revealed the need to observe a regular rhythm of work and rest for the well-being of humans, animals, and the Earth itself.
—Worship on the Sabbath continued as the early church spread throughout Asia Minor.
—In the Christian Scriptures, Jesus taught that the Sabbath was given for the benefit of humankind.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Keeping It Holy

As a child of the 1950s, I recall that keeping the Sabbath holy had a radically different meaning than it does today. By no means do I intend to criticize the theological insights and understanding of our foreparents, but keeping the Sabbath holy was arbitrary. Simple chores and non-essential activities such as ironing clothes, cooking, shopping, gathering firewood, and playing games were strictly forbidden to the point of corporal punishment. These negative injunctions of the Sabbath observance were codified in homes throughout our nation, especially in the Bible Belt. Likewise, there were civil codes for merchants and consumers; businesses were closed on Sunday and consumers were not allowed to shop except for necessities. But herein was the ambiguity: biblical Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, Saturday, and not Sunday. Our ancestors may not have been as theologically astute as we are today, but they knew intuitively that good religion requires a time of rest, reflection, and reverence.

Today, ours is an age whereby we try to fill each and every minute of the day with activities, and at the end of the day we are heard declaring, “I just don’t have enough time!” Simultaneously, we are bombarded with advertising that urges us to spend more money, which ultimately depends on more work, so we are too busy to rest because all of our days are filled with vain pursuits. Dorothy Bass says this in her essay, “Keeping Sabbath”: “Sabbath keeping bears a longing that all human beings will have good work, as well as a longing that no one will be required to toil without respite.” So rather than a day of rest, the Sabbath has become just another day to satisfy our vain pursuits. And except for the Jewish people, Sabbath rest is all but an extinct discipline, and the lack of its observance is evidenced throughout our society. But if Yahweh rested (although He did not need it), how much more do we as finite creatures need Sabbath rest? Finally, Jesus’ perspective of the Sabbath was “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27, NIV). Hence, as a people we need to discover ways to honor this sacred principle of Sabbath rest if we are to become more effective caretakers of God’s creation.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Exodus was written by Moses and chronicles Yahweh’s covenant relationship with the people of Israel. Our lesson today is a part of the long narrative that
includes communications given to Moses by Yahweh on Mount Sinai. Chapter 20 primarily is composed of the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) and is the beginning of the Law of Moses. These laws represent God’s gracious gift to the people of Israel. However, the “thou shalt not” language has been construed historically by some scholars as restraining and punitive, but these commandments in their totality were given to regulate life within the covenant community. Also, it is impossible to fully understand this lesson without an examination of the preamble (verses 1-2) of these commandments. First, Moses made it clear that these were Yahweh’s words and not his. “And God spoke all these words, saying: I am the Lord your God” (NKJV). Last, Yahweh assured the people that He is the God of their exodus and it was His right to make these commands of them: “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (verse 2, NKJV). Thus, the people could identify with Yahweh, and His words and works would resonate with them. Their immediate past history bespeaks a people who were brought and established by Yahweh (see Exodus 3:6-9).

Finally, this lesson will explore the fourth commandment, which is instructional: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” This call to remembrance is predicated on what Yahweh did on the seventh day of the Creation—He rested. He created all that was created in six days, and on the seventh day He rested. Genesis 2:3 says that Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. The people were to keep the Sabbath day separate from the other six days as time unto the Lord. The prophet Ezekiel said, “Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them” (20:12). Therefore, this commandment honors God, blesses creation, and affirms Israel’s covenant relationship with God the Creator of heaven and Earth.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Remembering the Sabbath
   (Exodus 20:8-11)

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Yahweh gave these commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. They were given to regulate life within the covenant community of Israel. Yahweh established that any violation of these laws was a gross offense against Yahweh. However, of the Ten Commandments, the fourth one is particular in that it is not a prohibition, but, rather, an admonition to remember something and keep something: “Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy.” According to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, there is only one prior mention in the book of Exodus of the Sabbath (Exodus 16), and it refers to it as “the day unto the Lord.” Some Old
Testament scholars connect the restrictive use of the Sabbath to the Old Testament principle of the part representing the whole. A portion of all possessions was set aside as holy unto the Lord—that is, the tithe, first fruits, and firstborn. The laws of Israel declared that what belongs to the Lord must be set aside as “holy unto the Lord” (see Leviticus 27:30-32), and the Sabbath was such an occasion. God gives us six days and commands that the seventh be set aside to be used for His glory.

Therefore, the people of Israel were called to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy. The act of remembering is the mental process of keeping active a past event. We are a people who can be short on memory and quick to forget. However, implicit in the admonition is not just to remember a day, but to remember what God had done for the people in the Exodus. In the original command, there was no reference to worship—just to remember the Sabbath. It appeared to be a day of reflection and remembrance of the great acts of Yahweh, who liberated them. As a matter of historical record, worship was not codified into Sabbath ritual until much later in the life of Israel. Finally, Sabbath was for all of creation, so those who owned land and had authority over other living creatures—including children, livestock, servants, and so forth—had to give them rest also. In *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume One*, Walter Brueggemann writes, “The healing of creation, and of our lives as creatures of God, requires a disengagement from the dominant systems of power and wealth; consequently, there are limits to the use of human persons, and of all creatures as instrumental means to other ends.”

Perhaps one of the reasons there is so much chaos and anxiety in our societies is that the hustle and bustle of life is a means to an end of gaining and maintaining profit and a certain lifestyle. As finite creatures, do we need quality time for rest and reflection? Of course we do! An older pastor I once knew had a rollaway bed in his office because he took daily naps. He believed that one of the keys to a long and effective ministry was keeping his mind and body fresh and alert. He said that he was at his best to be used by God and to be present with the people when well rested. It is not coincidental that when one is physically ill, medical doctors prescribe rest as part of the healing therapy.

**B. A Perpetual Covenant**

(Exodus 31:12-13)

> And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.

Between the Decalogue in chapter 20 and chapter 31, Yahweh gave Moses additional laws to regulate life within the covenant community: blueprints for the tabernacle; the artifacts and furniture thereof; priestly ceremonial garb; anointing oils and incenses; laws of commerce; ethical and legal codes for the treatment of slaves; and the protection of personal and property rights. Then, seemingly abruptly, the imperatives to observe the Sabbath were given in Exodus 31:12-13: “You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy” (NIV). The first lesson is “my Sabbaths.” This was the first time Yahweh declared that the Sabbath was His. Hence, He only refers to it as the Sabbath. The word *my* is a possessive
adjective that indicates ownership of a thing; the Sabbath belongs to the Lord.

Throughout the Books of the Law, Yahweh declared ownership of the whole, sanctifying the whole through sacrifice of a part by the people (see Leviticus 27:30-32). Thus, the Sabbath is more than just an abstract concept or a day to abstain from work; it connects us as creatures to our Creator through honor, reverence, and rest. Herein, Yahweh declared the purpose of the Sabbath as a “sign between me and you for the generations to come” (verse 12, NIV). The Hebrew concept of “sign” is something that pointed beyond itself to something much greater. In this case, it pointed to God. So the Sabbath was a sign to remind future generations that God liberated them through the Exodus. It is in the preamble to the Decalogue that Yahweh proclaimed, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exodus 20:2, NIV). Therefore, Sabbath as a sign enabled future generations to connect the dots of their past, present, and future and to know to whom they owed their freedom.

Finally, Yahweh again used the name for Himself that He gave Moses in the desert of Horeb: “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). The concept of “I Am,” though much debated, seemingly implies the very presence of Yahweh among the people (see Exodus 3:12). As the people observed the Sabbath, they would remember existentially that their God is the same God who was present and active in the lives of their people in history—and He is present now as He was then. However, as believers, our understanding and practice of the Sabbath today is radically different from what it was in the Hebrew Bible; but clearly the principle of Sabbath is in the world today. Again, it is more than just a day of observance; it encompasses the totality of creation and of our relationship with God. It is synergy with the Creator and creation, and when we observe it, we not only bless God, but we also bless ourselves.

C. Observing the Sabbath
(Exodus 31:14-16)

Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

Yahweh reiterated the significance of the Sabbath by declaring it to be holy. However, this time He said, “It is holy to you” (verse 14, NIV), whereas in chapter 20, Yahweh simply declared it holy (verse 11). Nevertheless, the Sabbath was created for humanity and set aside (sanctified, made holy) as a day of rest, reverence, and remembrance (see Mark 2:27). There is a punishment associated with profaning it; yet, there is no biblical record of anyone being put to death for violating the Sabbath. So the sentence of death for the violators may be akin to one aspect of Yahweh’s admonition to Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Genesis 2:17 declares that the violator will “surely die”; yet, Adam and Eve did not immediately die upon eating from the forbidden tree. Instead, Adam lived to be 930 years old. The other aspect of this declaration is that Adam and Eve were separated from God and thus died spiritually. This seems to be the promise of the text; those
who profaned the Sabbath were cut off from Yahweh and from the covenant community. In closing, as believers, we are under the New Testament and recognize Sunday as our Sabbath day of rest. Yet, the principle of Sabbath is still applicable to us. In order to become the spiritual beings in Christ that we are called to be, we must find significant time out for rest, reflection, and reverence.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Perhaps one of the tragedies in society today is our failures to connect the historical dots of our lives. We live as if life began when we were born, as if there were no prior experiences that helped to determine our destiny and shape our future. Yet, according to these Scriptures, Sabbath observance enabled the people of Israel to connect the dots of their lives. Sabbath was, above all, a time of remembrance of Yahweh and honor to Yahweh, who had brought the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt. Concomitantly, as African-American people, we must remember and pass on to subsequent generations the richness of our history and who it was that liberated us. Thus, the real lesson of this text for all peoples is that we must set aside time whereby we honor and worship God, and reflect on the meaning and the significance of our lives as part of Yahweh’s larger narrative. The relevant question for us, however, in light of a consumerist culture, is this: How can we truly keep the Sabbath or even the Lord’s Day?

PRAYER

O Lord, our Lord, how awesome are Your deeds in all of creation. We give You thanks for Your infinite wisdom that saw the need to install a season of rest and renewal for Your creation. Now, we ask for the wisdom to appreciate the rhythms of life that call us to this Sabbath rest. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Observe (Keeping) (tereo)—to keep in view or to guard (see Isaiah 58:13-14).
Profane (belelos)—to desecrate a thing (see Nehemiah 13:17-18).
Sabbath (sabbaton)—the seventh day or a time of rest (see Leviticus 23:2-3, 25:4, Deuteronomy 5:12-14).

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(-November 30–December 6, 2015-)

The Lord’s Day
M O N D A Y, November 30: “It Is Good” (Genesis 1:28–2:3)
T U E S D A Y, December 1: “Day of Atonement” (Leviticus 16:29-34)
T H U R S D A Y, December 3: “Promised Rest” (Hebrews 4:1-11)
S A T U R D A Y, December 5: “Work then Rest” (Exodus 16:22-26)
S U N D A Y, December 6: “The Lord’s Day” (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-16)
ACCEPTABLE OFFERINGS

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** Choosing the Right Gift

**Devotional Reading:** Hebrews 11:4-16

**Print Passage:** Leviticus 22:17-25, 31-33

**Key Verse:** Romans 12:1

**Background Scripture:** Leviticus 22:17-33; 23:9-14, 31-32; Deuteronomy 22:6-7; Isaiah 1:10-20; Micah 6:6-8; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 10:14-22

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**Leviticus 22:17-25, 31-33—KJV**

17 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 18 Speak unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them, Whatsoever he be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers in Israel, that will offer his oblation for all his vows, and for all his freewill offerings, which they will offer unto the Lord for a burnt offering; 19 Ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of the beeves, of the sheep, or of the goats. 20 But whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you. 21 And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein. 22 Blind, or broken, or maimed, or having a wen, or scurvy, or scabbed, ye shall not offer these unto the Lord, nor make an offering by fire of them upon the altar unto the Lord. 23 Either a bullock or a lamb that hath any thing superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer for a freewill offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted. 24 Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut; neither shall ye make any offering thereof in your land. 25 Neither from a stranger’s hand shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them: they shall not be accepted for you.

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**Leviticus 22:17-25, 31-33—NIV**

17 The Lord said to Moses, 18 “Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: ‘If any of you—either an Israelite or an alien living in Israel—presents a gift for a burnt offering to the Lord, either to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering, 19 you must present a male without defect from the cattle, sheep or goats in order that it may be accepted on your behalf. 20 “Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf. 21 “When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the Lord to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. 22 “Do not offer to the Lord the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the Lord by fire. 23 “You may, however, present as a freewill offering an ox or a sheep that is deformed or stunted, but it will not be accepted in fulfillment of a vow. 24 “You must not offer to the Lord an animal whose testicles are bruised, crushed, torn or cut. You must not do this in your own land, 25 “and you must not accept such animals from the hand of a foreigner and offer them as the food of your God. They will not be accepted on your behalf, because they are deformed and have defects.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Enticing ads and commercials convince people that sacrificial material gifts are evidence of their love toward others. What gifts are better than those things that can be purchased? The book of Leviticus informs God’s people that the best gift one can give is obedience to God’s commandments.

31 Therefore shall ye keep my commandments, and do them: I am the LORD.
32 Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the LORD which hallow you,
33 That brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD.

31 “Keep my commands and follow them. I am the LORD.
32 “Do not profane my holy name. I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.
33 “and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD.”

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Anatomy of Giving to God
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Perfect Gift
      (Leviticus 22:17-21)
   B. An Unacceptable Gift
      (Leviticus 22:22-25)
   C. I Am Yahweh
      (Leviticus 22:31-33)

III. Concluding Reflection

LEARN OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review what the book of Leviticus says about God’s requirement for acceptable sacrifices that bring honor to God’s holy name;
2. Examine the connection between obedience to God and sacrificial giving of self and possessions; and,
3. Pledge to make a self-sacrifice to God and make ourselves acceptable to God.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/ YOUTH
Adult Topic: Choosing the Right Gift
Youth Topic: The Best Gift We Can Give
Adult Key Verse: Romans 12:1
Youth Key Verse: Leviticus 22:31
Print Passage: Leviticus 22:17-25, 31-33
—The book of Leviticus informed God’s people that God requires sacrifices that bring honor to His holy name.
—The emphasis in Leviticus 22 on sacrificing animals without blemish parallels a similar prohibition of blemishes (considered unholy or incomplete) in the priests presenting the sacrifices in chapter 21. The point is not to devalue certain people or animals but to honor the holiness of God.
—According to the book of Leviticus, the best gift one can give to God is obedience to God’s commandments.
—Paul in Romans 12:1-2 reminded the believers of the necessary sacrifice of themselves to God in loving worship and service and adherence to God’s will.
—Passages from the books of Isaiah, Micah, Romans, and 1 Corinthians demonstrate the expansion of the idea of acceptable gifts from animal sacrifices to working for justice, removing evil, and transformation of life.
—Jesus is the supreme example of the sacrifice of oneself in the service of God “like that of a lamb without defect or blemish” (1 Peter 1:19; cf. Hebrews 9:14).

CHILDREN
Children Topic: What Shall I Give?
Key Verse: Leviticus 22:31
Print Passage: Leviticus 22:17-21, 31-33

I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Anatomy of Giving to God

The character of God does not change; He is the same today as He was yesterday. Therefore, the underlying assumption for the people of God, from Genesis to Revelation (see 1 Samuel 12:14, 15:22; Romans 6:16), is that God speaks and the people hear and obey. Thus, gift giving and sacrificial offerings are an essential part of the Judeo-Christian tradition and cannot be done capriciously, but they must be done according to divine standards. It is Yahweh who has established the standards of the acceptability of the gift, and it is only those gifts offered according to those standards that are acceptable and pleasing to God.

In this lesson, Israel was admonished not to bring anything mundane or profane to God; such gifts are displeasing and unacceptable to God. Although there have been many attempts to draw a distinction between Old Testament theology and the New Testament, who God is has not changed, and He still mandates obedience from the hearers of His words. Hence, giving to God is never a question of faith, but of obedience. And the best gift we have to offer God is our obedience: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22).

B. Biblical Background

The book of Leviticus can be divided into two divisions: chapters 1–16 and chapters 17–27. The latter has been termed by many scholars to be the holiness codes pertaining to marriage, sexuality, mourning rites, priests’ attire and functions, justice and social
laws, holy and feast days and sacrifices, and so forth. The aim of the book seems to have been to create a holy nation and a holy people who were pleasing to God. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. (*The New Interpreter’s Bible “Leviticus”*) says, “The purpose of the Levitical laws is to train, teach, and prepare the people to be God’s instruments of grace to others [in the world].” True to God’s original promise to Abraham, Abraham’s descendants were to serve as the magnet to draw other nations of the Earth to God (see Genesis 12:1ff). Thus, Yahweh gave to Moses on Mount Sinai hundreds of laws to regulate life within the covenant community of Israel; and if they obeyed them, Yahweh promised to bless them to be a peculiar people of all the Earth (see Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2).

As one reads the book of Leviticus, he or she will notice that one of the operative words in Yahweh’s covenant with the people of Israel is sacrifice. The sacrifice was never to be capricious; rather, it was determined by divine standards. These standards were to determine the quality of the people’s commitment and devotion to Yahweh. Yahweh was clear that only an unblemished sacrifice would be sacred and acceptable (Leviticus 22:2, 20-21). So the failure to observe these laws would profane both the name of the Lord and the holy things of the Lord. The Israelites, as are all people, were subject to the yearnings of their humanity. They had the propensity to be selfish and self-serving. Nevertheless, in His infinite wisdom, Yahweh knew that if they were left to their own wisdom, they would not offer Him their best. We will offer God leftovers and the scraps of our unwanted resources (see Malachi 1:6-14).

The foundation for all that Yahweh says and does to give shape to Israel is based on the Exodus experience. As we study these lessons in the book of Leviticus, we must review the Exodus narrative in order to follow Yahweh’s relationship with, and demands and expectations of, Israel.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Perfect Gift

(Leviticus 22:17-21)

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron, and to his sons, and unto all the children of Israel, and say unto them, Whatsoever he be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers in Israel, that will offer his oblation for all his vows, and for all his freewill offerings, which they will offer unto the Lord for a burnt offering; Ye shall offer at your own will a male without blemish, of the beeves, of the sheep, or of the goats. But whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you. And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord to accomplish his vow, or a freewill offering in beeves or sheep, it shall be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no blemish therein.

Yahweh commanded Moses to speak to the people of Israel and to Aaron and his sons, the priests of the nation of Israel. In Exodus 28, Aaron and his sons were consecrated as priests. As with the sacrifices offered, the priests also had to be without fault or impurities. Therefore, in verse 19 the Lord says, “in order for you to be accepted,” the offering must be without blemish (emphasis added, also in verse 20). Then in verse 20, He says, “You are not to present anything that has a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf.” The implication is that there is an undeniable bond and correlation between the gift and the giver.
Perhaps too often we take the act of giving for granted, but we must not do this, because in the kingdom of God the quality of the gift is a reflection of the sincerity and the heart of the giver. Giving is never an end in and of itself; God is not a desperate and needy deity who must take whatever we offer Him. He wants the absolute loyalty of the givers—you and me.

Finally, there were multiple offerings required in the book of Leviticus, but only three are mentioned in this chapter—burnt, freewill, and fellowship offerings. A burnt offering literally means “what is brought up.” The sweet-smelling savor of the burnt offering would ascend before the throne of God, and the substance of the smell would determine the acceptability of the sacrifice. The freewill offering was not to be made in fulfillment of an obligation or vow; rather, it was to be offered out of sheer benevolence (see Exodus 36:1-7). Then there was the fellowship or peace offering, made in response to divine grace. Each offering was governed by a set of divine standards that made it acceptable to Yahweh. While all humans are imperfect beings, God still expects us to strive for perfection by giving Him our best.

The lesson is that our gift to God cannot be capricious; it must be thoughtful, given out of a sincere heart and in the spirit of love for God (see Malachi 1:6-8; 2 Corinthians 9:1-9). Yes, God changes not (immutable) and expects our best; He gave His best to redeem us from the penalty of sin. So why should He expect any less from us?

B. An Unacceptable Gift
(Leviticus 22:22-25)

Either a bullock or a lamb that hath any thing superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer for a freewill offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted. Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut; neither shall ye make any offering thereof in your land. Neither from a stranger’s hand shall ye offer the bread of your God of any of these; because their corruption is in them, and blemishes be in them: they shall not be accepted for you.

Perhaps one of the tragedies in our society today is that we have very little true accountability. It appears that there has been a gross misunderstanding and misuse of what the framers of the U.S. Constitution meant by freedom of speech and the right to bear arms. We have misused both our tongues and our weaponry to the destruction of others and have elevated individual rights above the good of a civil society. The practice of accountability in a covenant community cannot only be brought to bear as a result of individual actions. What happened at Sandy Hook Elementary School is the collective responsibility of the entire nation; it is called accountability. In reality, not only did the parents and families of the victims lose something that day, but also the entire nation did!

What does accountability have to do with this lesson? Accountability is a significant theological principle resident throughout the book of Leviticus. The laws of the book of Leviticus were given by Yahweh to the covenant community of Israel to hold them accountable for their collective behavior. These laws had individual implications but were designed to advance the covenant community of Israel as a holy nation, and not just individuals. Thus, we read that Yahweh in Deuteronomy 6 declared, “Hear, O Israel, and be careful to follow them, so that you may prosper and multiply greatly” (see verse 3). In observing these laws, Yahweh
promised to bless Israel for their obedience and curse Israel for her disobedience. All of Israel was held accountable for individual behavior. So it was incumbent upon the individual to obey for the good of the society. Verse 18b says, “When any one of the house of Israel or sojourners in Israel present a burnt offering as his offering, if it is to be accepted it shall be a male without blemish.” The operative term was “any one”; yet, the command was given to the nation of Israel.

Finally, the offering was brought to the priest, who offered the sacrifice on behalf of the person and the nation. If the gift was unacceptable, the whole nation was held accountable for the behavior of the few. There are those who proclaim that we are the New Testament church and are no longer under the sacrificial system of atonement—but we are. However, there are those who still offer unacceptable gifts to God; the quality of their gifts reverberates throughout the New Testament church. Too many churches suffer from the dreaded 20-80 dynamic—20 percent of the people who support 80 percent of the church budget, and 80 percent of the people who give 20 percent of the tithes and offerings. It is obvious that many are offering unacceptable gifts to God. The proof of the pudding is in the tasting; too many believers give to God out of their overflow, and in doing so are presenting to God flawed gifts that are unacceptable.

C. I Am Yahweh (Leviticus 22:31-33)

Therefore shall ye keep my commandments, and do them: I am the Lord. Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the Lord which hallow you, That brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord.

Throughout the book of Leviticus we see that Yahweh reminded Israel who He is and what He had done for them. They had to be reminded because they were prone to get sidetracked into selfish behavior, thinking themselves to be self-sufficient. “So you shall keep my commandments and do them: I am the Lord. I am the Lord who sanctifies you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord.” The biblical concept of Lord (Adonai) casts Him as the ruler or the one in charge. Yahweh, sovereign ruler of the universe, was their Lord; thus, He had the authority to command His will of them. It was Yahweh who redeemed them from the land of bondage and sanctified them as His holy nation.

So when the people brought acceptable gifts to the Lord, they blessed His name; concomitantly, when they brought unacceptable gifts, they profaned His name. In essence, to profane His name was saying that Yahweh was ordinary and no one exceptional. Nonetheless, Yahweh reminded Israel (verse 33) that they were emancipated by His acts and wonders. The same must be said of the believer’s relationship with God. These statutes of giving were established on the basis of Yahweh’s covenant relationship with the people, “I am Lord.” We cannot read these Scriptures and properly appropriate this lesson without reflecting on our experiences as people of color in America. Our history affirms and reminds us that we have become who we are by the acts and wonders of God. It was God who made a way out of no way when political and social structures were stacked against us. It was God who brought our people out of the land of slavery and from under an oppressive system of Jim Crow. We are appreciating the land of milk and honey...
because God made it happen for us. We have been redeemed by God in Jesus Christ; hence, we are connected to God by covenant. Gary Demarest, in *Mastering the Old Testament, Leviticus*, says, “We are called to be holy because God is the Lord, no other reason need be given.” Indeed, no other reason is warranted. He is Lord!

**III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

The apostle Paul wrote to the New Testament church in Romans 12:1, “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice which is your spiritual act of worship.” He uses the sacrificial system of the Old Testament as a metaphor to characterize the believer’s life. Just as Israel’s sacrifice was complete and unblemished, the believer’s commitment must also be complete. Our commitment to God cannot be partial, and our giving cannot be capricious and whimsical if it is acceptable to God. So the relevant question for every believer is this: Can our worship be reverent when our commitment is irreverent? Absolutely not! Unfortunately, we are living in a society that has been characterized by Robert Bellah in *Habits of the Heart* as upholding “excessive individualism,” in which excessive focus is on the privileges of the individual. The sum total of the faith community cannot be any stronger than its individual parts.

If we are to be instruments of God’s grace, our gifts of worship must be acceptable. Thus, choosing the right gift to bring to God cannot be left only to individual inclination or predilection; rather, it must be according to divine expectations and standards.

**PRAYER**

*O Lord our Lord, You are God, it is You who have made us; and not we ourselves. Therefore, we open ourselves before You this day as Your servants, and as we present ourselves to You this day we hope to be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

Freewill Offering—an offering given out of sheer benevolence.

Peace Offering—an offering given in response to divine grace.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(December 7-13, 2015)*

**Acceptable Offerings**

**MONDAY,** December 7: “Living Sacrifice” (Psalm 40:1-8)

**TUESDAY,** December 8: “Contrite Sacrifice” (Psalm 51:15-19)

**WEDNESDAY,** December 9: “Loving Sacrifice” (Mark 12:28-34a)

**THURSDAY,** December 10: “Complete Sacrifice” (Romans 12:1-8)

**FRIDAY,** December 11: “Faithful Sacrifice” (Hebrews 11:4-16)

**SATURDAY,** December 12: “Perfect Sacrifice” (1 John 4:9-16)

**SUNDAY,** December 13: “Acceptable Offerings” (Leviticus 22:17-25, 31-33)
DEDICATION OF FIRSTBORN

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Excitement of Celebration

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Chronicles 30:5-12
KEY VERSE: Luke 2:22

13 And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem.
14 And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage:
15 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.

13 “Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.
14 “In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
15 “When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.”

22 When the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord;
23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”),
24 and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”
25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.
26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People today celebrate holidays and special occasions as if they are routine and ordinary. Are there still times for great excitement and celebration? Luke captured the overflowing joy that the priest, Simeon, experienced as he dedicated Jesus according to the Law of Moses.

27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,
28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,
29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:
30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Celebrative Rituals
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Institution of Celebration (Exodus 13:13-15)
   B. Presentation of the Baby Jesus (Luke 2:22-24)
   C. Celebration of Consummation (Luke 2:25-32)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the story of Simeon at the presentation of Jesus at the Temple;
2. Feel the immenseness of joy that Simeon felt when centuries of waiting finally culminated with the birth of the Messiah; and,
3. Commit to make Jesus the center of attention during the secular busyness of the season.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Excitement of Celebration
Youth Topic: Let’s Celebrate!
Adult Key Verse: Luke 2:22
Youth Key Verse: Luke 2:28
—Jesus’ family kept strictly to the laws of Moses in observing the sacrifices of the firstborn (see Leviticus 12).
—The mention of an offering of doves or pigeons is a strong indication of the relative modesty of Joseph and Mary’s financial situation, as those more well-to-do would bring a lamb instead (see Leviticus 12:8).
—The importance of dedicating the firstborn to the Lord was
tied to the historical context of God delivering the Israelites from Egypt.

—Mary and Joseph demonstrated their respect and adherence to God’s laws by presenting Jesus, the firstborn, in the Temple and offering a sacrifice.

—Simeon was familiar with the prophecies and promises concerning the coming Messiah and recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Israelites.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Let’s Celebrate!
Key Verse: Luke 2:28
Print Passage: Luke 2:22-32
—Mary’s firstborn male child, Jesus, was brought to the Temple to be dedicated to the Lord as provided in the Law.
—As provided in the Law, Mary and Joseph dedicated Jesus after sacrificing two birds because this was all they could afford.
—The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon, a priest in the Temple, that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the deliverer of Israel.
—Simeon was familiar with the prophecies and promises concerning the coming Messiah and recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Israelites.
—Simeon introduced the idea that salvation was not exclusive to the Jews but was inclusive of the Gentiles.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Celebrative Rituals

One of the more exciting rituals in the life of the Protestant faith is infant dedication. It is appropriate to note the distinction between infant dedication in the Protestant tradition and infant baptism practiced by Catholics and others. In Catholicism, infants are baptized, and at the age of accountability they will confirm their baptism. On the other hand, Protestants dedicate infants by offering them to the Lord for His continuous anointing, protection, and blessing. Although infant dedication is not considered to be an ordinance in the Protestant faith, it is an important ritual. At one prominent Baptist church, it is a liturgical moment in the life of worship. The dedication is scheduled in consultation with the parents to ensure that all significant family members and godparents can be present. During the celebration, family members, godparents, and persons within the congregation are given the opportunity to take a visible role in the celebration. As a ritual, infant dedication predates all other rituals in the Christian church. “Therefore, also I have lent him (Samuel) to the Lord; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:28a). Infant dedication is more than just another church ritual; it highlights the spiritual significance of the family’s Christian responsibility to shape the new life that God has given and presents the infant to God for His anointing, protection, and blessings at the hands of the parents, godparents, and family.

Finally, ritual celebration has been a part of the human family from the very beginning: Adam and Eve had covenants with the Lord; Cain and Abel brought sacrifices; Moses and Aaron instituted and administered the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread), and
Hannah and Samuel saw the ritual of infant dedication (see Genesis 2:15-17; 4:3-5; Exodus 12:14; 13:13-14; 1 Samuel 1:19ff and Luke 2:22). Parallel to many religious and ritual celebrations are family and community celebrations such as family reunions, Sundays at “Big Mama’s” house, Thanksgiving dinners, and marriage ceremonies. Every family has its share of family celebrations that contribute to family bonding. Anthropologist Harvey Whitehouse said, “Rituals are a human universal, the glue that holds social groups together...which arguably makes them central to how civilization itself began.” However, not all rituals are the same; there is a difference between an infant dedication, Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma’s house, and tailgating at a football game. Rituals that are God- and family-centered are much more endearing and solidifying.

When our rituals are God-centered—public prayer, communion, baptism, foot washing, and so forth—they are more significant and can move us beyond the functionaries of mere human activities and busyness. God-centered rituals have a transcendent quality about them. When the baby Jesus was presented in the Temple, Mary and Joseph could not have known all that would transpire in that moment—the fulfillment of Simeon’s dream and the blessing and consolation of a nation (see Luke 2:25). Therefore, the dedication of our children is much more than just mere human activity. It is a moment of divine affirmation of the child as God’s gift to that family, church family, and to humanity in general. Likewise, as we carry out the sacred rituals of our faith and family traditions, we must remember that these are opportunities for God to transform our mundane into something more spiritually significant in the world. We must never assume that we will always know when God is at work in human activities.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Exodus is part of the Old Testament literature known as the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible also known as the books of Moses. According to church tradition, Moses was the author of these books; however, such authorship cannot be certified without debate. Some of the material recorded in these books occurred after the death of Moses (see Deuteronomy 34:1ff). Regardless of the authorship, the value of these books has been established, and they are an influence in Judeo-Christian traditions. The book of Exodus, known as the Book of the Law, consists of three significant theological themes that order the book: Liberation, Law, and Covenant. The first fifteen chapters constitute the liberation narrative in which Yahweh liberated the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from bondage in Egypt. The book opens with the words, “Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country. So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor” (Exodus 1:8, 10-11a, NIV). The children of Israel were held in bondage for over four hundred years until finally Yahweh saw their misery and heard their cries and sent Moses to lead them to freedom (see Exodus 3:7). Yahweh equipped Moses for the task of liberation and through numerous miracles persuaded Pharaoh to set the captives free (see Exodus 3–12).
Prior to their exodus and wandering in the wilderness of Sinai, the people were commanded to remember the day of their deliverance and departure. Yahweh gave them statutes connected to eating unleavened bread and dedicating their firstborn to observe as a sign for future generations so that they would remember and acknowledge that it was Yahweh who set them free (see Exodus 13:1-16). Its significance is derived from the final plague on the Egyptians. In Exodus 11, the Lord announced that He would destroy the firstborn in every household of the Egyptians, but would pass over the homes of the Israelites, whose doorposts were to be marked with the blood of a sacrificed lamb. The rhetorical question in verse 14 (“In the future when your son asks you, “What does this mean?”) is irrefutably answered “By the strength of His hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt” (verse 14b). Thus, to ensure that the children of Israel would not forget the days of their liberation, Yahweh instituted the ritual of dedicating the firstborn. This ritual was to be observed for generations afterward (see Exodus 13:9-10). However, as we study this lesson, it is noteworthy that the command of firstborn dedication is a statute that predates the Commandments. Dedicating the firstborn of human and domestic animals remained an integral part of Hebrew culture until the time of Christ (see Exodus 13:1). Summarily, the divine idea behind the firstborn presentation was a way for Israel to acknowledge the true ownership and sovereignty of Yahweh. Thus, future generations were to celebrate their heritage of liberation (see verses 8-10).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Institution of Celebration
(Exodus 13:13-15)

And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.

Some have referred to the Passover plague as infanticide or genocide. But the deaths of the firstborn in Egypt were not exclusively infanticide in that many of the firstborn males likely were not infants. And the event was not genocide because the target was not all Egyptian males. So while the plague of the firstborn was neither infanticide nor genocide in the classical sense, it was clearly the sudden death of a significant number of Egyptians. These verses are understood in light of their direct inference to this plague that led to Israel’s liberation. Although the world reacts negatively to such acts, the Israelites were commanded to remember this sovereign act of judgment as a memory of the power and the sovereignty of Yahweh.

As a result, the people were commanded to abide by the command to dedicate their firstborn to the Lord, remembering His deliverance when they entered the land promised to their forefathers. This statute can only be understood in light of the exodus experience in which the death angel struck dead the firstborn of the
Egyptians (see Exodus 11:1-7). However, two distinctions are made in this statute: Yahweh was not asking for the death of the firstborn males; rather, He was asking for them to be assigned to Him. The firstborn in Israel were to be presented to the Lord.

Second, the concept of redemption (pada) is introduced as a viable option whereby a substitute or trade-off can be made to satisfy Yahweh’s demand for the firstborn. Yahweh gave Pharaoh no such option in Egypt; thus, the term used to describe the divine transaction in Egypt was “sacrificed” (see verse 15b). Therefore, Yahweh was not asking for a repeat of what happened in Egypt; rather, it was to be a memorial to remind Israel of Yahweh’s mercy to them in Egypt by sparing their firstborn. Also, this statute serves to affirm life and not death. “Consecrate (set apart) every firstborn male...it is mine” (13:2). And, “You are to present to the Lord, every firstborn male of the womb” (13:12).

Walter Brueggemann said, “The biblical community of faith is a community of memory in a culture of amnesia.” But even for this community it was only a matter of time before the children of Israel complained and forgot what Yahweh had done to set them free (see Exodus 16:6-10). Nevertheless, Yahweh, in His infinite wisdom, gave them ordinances and statutes to celebrate so that they would not forget how they made it over. Concomitantly, the rituals of firstborn dedication and eating unleavened bread were dramatic affirmations that freedom is not free or cheap, but costs dearly. Finally, they must not forget that it was Yahweh who liberated them from the hand of Pharaoh; yet, in like manner, the lesson of Israel’s heritage is also the lesson of the heritage of African Americans in America. Our history also attests to the reality that equity and justice in America were achieved through divine intervention and at a great cost of life and resources. As a people we must be reminded and remind subsequent generations not to take freedom for granted and to be intentional to celebrate those rituals that acknowledge our heritage of liberation.

B. Presentation of the Baby Jesus
(Luke 2:22-24)

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

In recent decades church tradition has been under attack in many ecclesiastical circles, but this text highlights the value of good traditions. Tradition is the recognition of aspects from the past of a particular people, but there is a difference between tradition and traditionalism. Jaroslav Polikan said, of the difference between the two, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living and I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition a bad name. “Every community has many good traditions. Joseph and Mary were faithful to the traditions of their faith of Judaism and obeyed the Lord” (see Luke 1:31). Consequently, a hidden and unexpected significance emerged in the presentation of the baby Jesus in the temple. Simeon, a righteous and devout man, under the unction of the Holy Spirit, affirmed the baby Jesus as the Messiah. What happened in this moment of presentation is forever etched in salvation lore; “For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all people” (Luke 2:30).

Also, Exodus 13 and Luke 2 are connected by the theological language of redemption. In order for Jesus to ultimately fulfill the Law and to be accepted by God according to the Law, His life had to affirm all of the sacred laws of God. It is to this end that it is rightly said that Jesus was born a Jew and died a Jew. So on the eighth day after the birth of Jesus, His parents brought Him into the temple for purification according to the Law of Moses (see Exodus 13:2, 12). Likewise, the Leviticus law required them to offer a substitute according to their financial ability: “a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons” (see Leviticus 5:11; 12:8). Although there are some in the era of prosperity preaching who claim that Jesus was wealthy, Luke 2:24 certainly confirms that He came from a poor family. Only poor families offered birds as a sacrifice instead of a lamb. Rich or poor, Joseph and Mary presented their firstborn son in conformity to the Law of Moses because of their devotion as God’s chosen people.

C. Celebration of Consummation

(Acts 2:25-32)

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

As Joseph and Mary presented the baby Jesus in the Temple according to the rituals of their faith tradition, the Holy Spirit interceded and turned the mundane into something extraordinary! Simeon, a righteous and devout man, was waiting for the consolation of Israel, which in essence was the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. When he saw the Christ child, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he took the baby Jesus in his arms, and prayed a prayer of thanksgiving for having seen the Messiah. What a moment of celebration this must have been, to not only see the Christ child, but to also hold Him in his arms. Also, what irony this is that Simeon called himself a slave (doulos) of the Most High God. This term doulos is an interesting concept in the New Testament; it refers to one who voluntarily offers himself in absolute service to another—in this case to the Lord. Simeon saw himself as a slave (servant), which in essence is the concept of the firstborn; the parents’ presenting the firstborn son to God meant relinquishing all rights and authority over that child’s life. Perhaps Simeon saw himself as a kind of firstborn that belonged to the Lord. So on this occasion as they presented Jesus in the Temple, the transaction was celebrated by Simeon, a devout man who saw himself as God’s possession.

Finally, as believers we should never underestimate the possibilities and the efficacy of sacred traditions. God does work in mysterious ways through rituals and cannot be controlled by human will, activities, or in activities. To Joseph and Mary’s amazement their baby Jesus was affirmed as the Messiah of the world. Of course there is only one Messiah; yet, we never know when God is doing something fresh in
the world and in whom God is doing that new thing. We can be certain, however, that God continues to be active and to participate in human history, and we can never know which moment will be of divine affirmation.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The biblical community of faith is a community of memory. The foundation of Israel as a covenant community was remembering the past activities of Yahweh with a look toward His future acts on their behalf. He said to the children of Israel, “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance” (Exodus 12:14, NIV). When Jesus was instituting the Lord’s Supper, He said, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19b). However, the biblical community of faith is not the only community of memory; memory is an important and essential part of human communities in general.

In conclusion, the book of Exodus is full of theological types (an event or a person that pre-figures something to come). The offering of the firstborn not only pointed backward to a historical moment, but it also was a type of God’s Son being offered as a sacrifice for the many in the New Testament! Therefore, the liturgical calendar of the Christian church designates seasons of celebration in which we celebrate historical events in Christian salvation history. Each Christmas we celebrate afresh the birth of Jesus the Christ, and every Resurrection Sunday we celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. These are important celebrations for the believer because we renew our faith. Hence, as the Christian church we must not allow the memories of Jesus to be besmirched by commercialism!

PRAYER
O, Lord, our Lord, we give You thanks for modeling for us what true giving is, in that You gave Your firstborn Son to redeem us. Now, may we imitate You so that You may be glorified and honored in the world! In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(December 14-20, 2015)

Dedication of Firstborn
MONDAY, December 14: “Separate for a Purpose” (Leviticus 20:7-8, 22-24)
TUESDAY, December 15: “God’s Heart and Dedication” (2 Chronicles 30:5-12)
WEDNESDAY, December 16: “Dedication of Samson” (Judges 13:2-5, 24-25)
THURSDAY, December 17: “Dedication of Samuel” (1 Samuel 1:11, 20, 24-28)
FRIDAY, December 18: “Dedication of David” (1 Samuel 16:10-13)
SATURDAY, December 19: “Dedication of Saul/Paul” (Acts 9:1-6)

WORD POWER
Bekirah/Bekowr—firstborn eldest child. The plague of the firstborn in Egypt mandated that the Egyptians unwillingly sacrifice their firstborn of humans and domestic animals. The Israelites, though, were called upon to consecrate or dedicate their firstborn to the Lord.
Matthew 23:2-12; Mark 12:38-44—KJV

2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat:
3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.
4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.
5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,
6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,
7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.
8 But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.
9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.
10 Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.
11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.
12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

Matthew 23:2-12; Mark 12:38-44—NIV

2 “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.
3 “So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.
4 “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.
5 “Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long;
6 “they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues;
7 “they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’
8 “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.
9 “And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.
10 “Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ.
11 “The greatest among you will be your servant.
12 “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

38 As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces,
39 “and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Integral to the human condition is that deep-seated craving to be recognized and held in high esteem by others. Will the adulation of others bring confirmation of a person’s real importance? While Jesus denounced the scribes’ and Pharisees’ obsession with receiving recognition, He affirmed the acts of selfless compassion and humility as exhibited by the poor widow, who gave all she had.

40 Which devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.
41 And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.
42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.
43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:
44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. True Giving
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Warning against Hypocrisy
      (Matthew 23:2-7)
   B. True Greatness
      (Matthew 23:8-12)
   C. Charity Unmasked
      (Mark 12:38-44)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Observe the contrast that Jesus made between the arrogance of the religious leaders and piety of the humble, poor woman;
2. Reflect on the tension between wanting recognition and selfless giving that often receives no recognition; and,
3. Resolve to become more selfless in giving.

POUNTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Giving from the Heart
Youth Topic: Genuine Generosity
Adult Key Verse: Matthew 23:12
Youth Key Verse: Mark 12:43
Print Passage: Matthew 23:2-12; Mark 12:38-44
—The “heavy burdens” (Matthew 23:4) refers to traditions and extra-biblical laws these religious experts had added in an attempt to help people to keep the Law. The Pharisees were infamous for these high expectations while many times they themselves would find ways to circumvent these laws.

—Phylacteries were leather cubes worn on the left arm or forehead that held Scripture passages. Wearing these was a literal obedience to Deuteronomy 11:18.

—The “fringes” of Matthew 23:5 are the blue-corded tassels described in Numbers 15:37-41. They were placed on the four corners of a man’s garment as a reminder of the importance of keeping the commands of God.

—The coins the widow placed in the offering were most likely the Jewish lepton, worth 1/128th of a denarius (a coin the equivalent of an average day’s wages). If this was “all she had to live on” (Mark 12:44), her extreme poverty was apparent.

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Giving with Sincerity
Key Verse: Mark 12:43
Print Passage: Mark 12:41-44

—Jesus used the widow’s offering to illustrate the spiritual principle he had taught in the preceding passage (12:38-40).

—The coins that the widow gave were the least valuable coin circulated in Palestine at the time.

—Jesus’ teaching about the widow’s offering is an illustration of how Christian values are sometimes the opposite of the secular world’s values.

—Jesus praised the poor widow’s motives in giving in contrast to the scribes’ motives.

—The exposure of the intent and motives behind the widow’s gift serves as the model for generosity and compassion that others should follow.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. True Giving

In chapter 12 of Mark’s gospel, the writer juxtaposed two contrasting images of selflessness and selfishness: the poor widow, who gave out of her poverty to help others (selflessness), and the Pharisees, who prided themselves and flaunted their selfishness and were only concerned with their public image. The Pharisees were motivated by self-significance and self-importance; moreover, they used their understanding of the Torah (Jewish Old Testament) to place a burden on the people while they themselves twisted Scripture for their own benefit. They sought the accolades of the public, and because they did not practice what they preached Jesus called them hypocrites.

Such was the case when Jesus was in the Temple and called attention to the wealthy, who threw large amounts of money into the Temple treasury as a public spectacle. On the other hand, the poor widow inconspicuously put in two mites (KJV). These mites or coins (leptos) were of insignificant value; yet, Jesus commended her for her gift! Her disposition gave Jesus pause. For her small, selfless gift she has been remembered for over two thousand years, and her offering is now referred to as “The Widow’s Mite.”
B. Biblical Background

The antecedent for what happens in Matthew 23 is the dialogue between Jesus and the Sadducees, one of three Jewish religious sects (the Essenes and Pharisees being the others) in Israel (see Matthew 22:23-33). The Sadducees were of the priestly sect and did not believe in the oral tradition passed on by the Pharisees. They only held to the written Torah. They, along with the Pharisees, constituted the Sanhedrin Council, the ruling council in Israel. These two religious groups had little in common and for the most part did not get along. Yet, from time to time they would set aside their differences in an attempt to embarrass Jesus. Such was the case in Matthew 23.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Warning against Hypocrisy

(Matthew 23:2-7)

Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

The Pharisees and the scribes were the teachers of the laws of Moses; however, they were pretentious and did what they did for public show. They loved the places of honor at festivals and in the synagogues, and yearned for public recognition and praise. Jesus used His confrontation with these groups to teach His followers what not to do and how not to behave in the kingdom of God. It is amazing how often we perceive the standards of the world and those of the kingdom of heaven to be consistent and synonymous, when they are not. The strong language of Jesus is, “All that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds” (verse 3, NASB). When I was a boy, the expression I often heard from smokers and drinkers who chastised us against smoking and drinking was, “Do as I say, not as I do.” Unfortunately, such was the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees when Jesus condemned them. These adherents came across as insincere and unsympathetic. In like manner, they took great pride in being called “Rabbi,” or master teacher, which was a term of highest respect. The scribes loved the praise it garnered in the marketplace.

Today, some people may not grasp the gravity of the problem of an individual quest for public recognition and exaltation. Perhaps
this exists because such behavior is commonplace, if not normative, in our society; people are obsessed with personal recognition and public praise. However, in the kingdom of God, such behavior is antithetical to the will of God for the followers of Jesus the Christ. The believer has to be credible in the marketplaces of this world and cannot be seen as hypocritical. In conclusion, hypocrisy is not only a spiritual matter but is also a practical matter. We have seen the danger of religious hypocrisy in America as African Americans struggle for equality and justice, especially in the South. While many believers from the dominant culture were adamant about Bible doctrines like the Virgin Birth, mode of baptism, inerrancy of Scripture, religious piety, and so forth, the Bible for them said nothing about the evil practices of de facto segregation and racism. It was easy to teach aspects of the Gospel and ignore others that did not accommodate their lifestyle. The majority of the Christian community in the South was silent on issues of equity and justice for people of color. But Jesus is clear: His followers must be more than Christian actors on the stage of life; humility, integrity, and sincerity must be obvious and transparent to all.

**B. True Greatness**

*Matthew 23:8-12*

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

In these verses, Jesus defined what true greatness is. As believers, we are to assume the disposition of Jesus and not seek to glorify ourselves, but rather to glorify God our heavenly Father. It is in Matthew’s gospel that Jesus also said, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33, NIV). However, it appears that the religious leaders, who heckled and tried to find fault in Him, were seekers of greatness in the public square. Jesus rebuked their love of titles and public accolades. He told the crowd not to let others call them Rabbi (Master Teacher) or seek the endearing title of “Father.” However, Jesus was not saying literally that we ought not to use titles such as Rabbi or Father or allow others to reference us by these titles. Rather, our sense of worth and esteem should not be determined by how we are addressed in the public square. In verses 6 and 7, Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees, “They love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’”

The operative word is “love.” They love seats of honor and public accolades. In response to their quest for public praise, Jesus issued three admonitions against yearning to be called “master,” “father,” and “teacher.” This story is a study in contrasts between what the people called the scribes and whom Jesus said the true Master and teacher is. The only Master Teacher is God, in Jesus the Christ. Hence, Jesus was condemning vainglory through titles!

Finally, these titles connote authority and earthly ties that can give a person a false sense of importance and significance. As citizens of the kingdom of heaven who live in the kingdoms of this world, we must accept the reality that all authority belongs to God. In the final analysis, Jesus could not have been more certain...
about the proper perspective for the believer. The believer must exemplify humility: “The greatest among you shall be your servant.” It is the one who serves that is great and not the one who is being served.

C. Charity Unmasked
(Mark 12:38-44)

And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

The marriage of these two passages (Matthew 23 and Mark 12) is interesting because they provide a wonderful visual example of true greatness and liberality in the kingdom of heaven as opposed to the praise seeking of the religious leaders. These stories create a contrast between the greed of the scribes and the wealthy and the humility and sincerity of a widow woman. The setting is in the Temple court, where both men and women were allowed to enter. In this court sat the Temple treasury. There were thirteen trumpet-shaped containers called treasuries where offerings were placed for the operation and the maintenance of the Temple and charity for the poor and widows. We cannot be certain which treasury the widow in the passage placed her coins; nevertheless, she gave unselfishly for the work of the Temple—the work of God. According to verse 41, Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and observed the demonstration of both self-interest and self-sacrifice in the same space. The wealthy were throwing in their large sums of money, out of the overflow of their wealth, while the poor widow gave out of her base need. The gospel of Luke, in its parallel account of this story, is more specific about Jesus’ reaction to what He saw: “Truly I tell you,” He said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on” (21:3-4, NIV). The Greek word translated “penury” in the KJV means “poverty, lack, or shortcoming.” She gave two mites, the smallest denomination of currency in that day. She gave of that which she needed for herself.

Unfortunately, we live in a society that makes determination and judgment of a gift based on the monetary value of the gift. But Jesus brought a new valuation to His followers. Does He expect us to give our last for the good of others? We may or may not face such a challenge, but He does expect His followers to sacrifice as He sacrificed when necessary to advance the kingdom of heaven on Earth.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) series entitled, “God in America—the Soul of a Nation,” famed evangelist Billy Graham, in a revival in the 1940s in Los Angeles, declared that “Communism is the great moral challenge facing America, today.” Subsequently, President Dwight D. Eisenhower was influenced by Graham’s rhetoric and was baptized at the urging of Billy Graham. Eisenhower
made Graham’s rhetoric a part of his campaign. Yet, in this same era the Civil Rights Movement began to gain traction and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called America’s system of injustice and racism the greatest moral challenge facing America. It is ironic that both religious leaders, Billy Graham and Martin Luther King Jr., preached from the same Bible and prayed to the same God but did not see the same moral challenge facing America.

America had a long history of injustice and racism and had grown comfortable with the status quo—whereas communism was a threat to disrupt the long-held political and social assumptions in America, not to mention her lifestyle. The cessation of these social arrangements was the real threat to life for the majority of Americans. Billy Graham never saw the system’s racism as a moral challenge to America. Perhaps this is what Jesus had in mind when He taught the multitude and His disciples about the mote and the beam in their eyes (see Matthew 7:3-4). Is there a worse hypocrisy than seeing the errors and faults of another nation while being blinded by one’s own sense of self-righteousness? Of course not! Hypocrisy is an awful thing because it blinds one to one’s own faults and shortcomings. This is the danger of hypocrisy: it blinds us to our own faults and biases and gives us a false sense of importance and significance.

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, You have searched us and know us. We cannot hide anything from You, so we pray that our resolve will strengthen our hearts and we will be quickened by Your Spirit to give our best in all that we give to and do for You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**WORD POWER**

Hypocrisy (Greek: *hupokrisis*)—“insincerity” or literally, “someone acting under a mask.” The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were called out for having two faces, one that the public saw and the other true face that only showed behind closed doors. Jesus warned His disciples not to follow their example.

Mites (Greek: *leptos*)—the smallest piece of money; valued at 1/2 of a penny. Jesus articulated what this woman demonstrated: it is the heart of the giver, not the size of the gift, that matters.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(December 21-27, 2015)*

**A Generous Gift**

**MONDAY,** December 21: “Modeled Generosity” (John 1:10-18)

**TUESDAY,** December 22: “Gracious Generosity” (Ephesians 2:1-10)

**WEDNESDAY,** December 23: “Excellent Generosity” (2 Corinthians 8:3-9)

**THURSDAY,** December 24: “Wise Generosity” (Colossians 3:12-17)

**FRIDAY,** December 25: “Loving Generosity” (Romans 12:6-13)

**SATURDAY,** December 26: “Humble Generosity” (Matthew 6:1-6)

**SUNDAY,** December 27: “A Generous Gift” (Matthew 23:2-12; Mark 12:38-44)
Genesis 29:15-30—KJV
15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?
16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.
17 Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.
18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.
19 And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me.
20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.
21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, and I may go in unto her.
22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast.
23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her.
24 And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid.
25 And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?
26 And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.
27 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for

Genesis 29:15-30—NIV
15 Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."
16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.
17 Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.
18 Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."
19 Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me."
20 So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.
21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her."
22 So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast.
23 But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her.
24 And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant.
25 When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"
26 Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one.
27 "Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Marriages can be marred by unforeseen circumstances. How might husbands and wives patiently work through tradition and undesirable circumstances to reach their personal goals? After Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his older daughter, Leah, Jacob willingly agreed to work for seven additional years in order to marry his beloved Rachel.

the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.
28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.
29 And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.
30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

28 And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.
29 Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant.
30 Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

TOPOICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Price of Deception
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Sleight of Hand
      (Genesis 29:15-27)
   B. Living beyond Disappointment
      (Genesis 29:28-30)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall the study of Jacob’s love for and commitment to Rachel to marry her;
2. Reflect on marital relationships and the ways unforeseen circumstances may or may not affect the strength of the relationship; and,
3. Commit to finding faith-based resolution to difficulties before abandoning relationships.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Bait and Switch
Youth Topic: Expression of True Love
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Genesis 29:30
Print Passage: Genesis 29:15-30

—Laban is characterized as a selfish deceiver who clothed his sly tricks in a cloak of honesty. He wanted to benefit from Jacob’s labor, but a long-term relationship with his son-in-law was clearly not his first priority.

—Leah’s substitution for Rachel on the wedding night should remind the reader of how Jacob once substituted himself for Esau to get his father’s blessing (see 27:18-29). He then got from Laban exactly what he gave to his father.

—The text suggests that Laban valued Jacob’s work highly enough that he risked losing both of his daughters to keep Jacob in his employ.

—Laban used Jewish law concerning marriage to rationalize his unethical behavior regarding Jacob’s marriage to Leah.

—The description of Leah’s eyes could mean either a certain unique beauty or a deformity in physical appearance.
The longevity of the fourteen years Jacob worked for his father-in-law indicated the great amount of commitment, sacrifice, and dedication he had in marrying Rachel.

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Love and Marriage Go Together
Key Verse: Genesis 29:30
Print Passage: Genesis 29:15-30
—Jacob lived with his uncle Laban’s family and worked for Laban.
—Jacob was attracted to Laban’s younger daughter, Rachel.
—Laban appreciated Jacob’s faithful work and promised him his daughter in marriage.
—Jacob was disappointed when his bride turned out to be Leah and not Rachel.
—The custom in Laban’s community was for the older daughter to marry before the younger.
—Jacob also received Rachel in marriage after promising to work for Laban another seven years.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Price of Deception

Deception is a powerful force, but not the most powerful force. Love is. Jacob’s love for Rachel enabled him to deal with and overcome the power of deception. Because he loved Rachel he was willing to bargain with Laban for her hand in marriage, but he did not count on Laban’s lacking integrity like his mother, Rebekah (Laban’s sister)—and much like himself as well. Nor did Jacob consider the role that ritual and custom would play in the bait-and-switch scheme Laban would use against him. Laban deceived his future son-in-law, Jacob, and rather than delivering Rachel to Jacob in marriage, under the cloak of darkness he sent in the older daughter, Leah. If Laban and Jacob lived in today’s America, Jacob could have charged Laban with bait and switch, which is a violation of consumer protection laws. Bait and switch occurs when a product or service is advertised at one price, yet when the customer shows up to purchase the product, the product is not in inventory and the merchant switches the customer to a more expensive product. Courts in the United States have ruled that the consumer has protection from such market strategies.

Unfortunately for Jacob, Laban used a bait-and-switch strategy against Jacob with impunity. What Laban did to Jacob was a gross act of deception and in the final analysis, was an act of violence, but with consequences that would affect Laban’s life. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it.” Thus, in the story of Jacob and Rachel, one evil deed of deception caused another evil deed of deception. And it would be deception that would ultimately fragment and bring hurt and pain to Laban’s family. Yet, in spite of all of the family dysfunction, Jacob illustrated the power of unconditional love to transcend struggle and a multitude of ills. Jacob loved Rachel, and Laban’s deceit was little more than an inconvenience that made Jacob’s wait for Rachel worth the sacrifice.
B. Biblical Background

The narrative of Jacob’s stay with Laban in most commentaries covers three chapters and is treated as a short story. The story is filled with drama, intrigue, family customs and ritual, and deception. Concomitantly, the genesis of the story itself is one of deception and trickery. It was his own deception and trickery that caused Jacob to have to leave his family home in Canaan and exile himself in Paddan Aram. He victimized his father and stole his twin brother Esau’s birthright. Thus, his mother, Rebekah, in order to protect Jacob from his brother, sent him to Paddan Aram to stay with his uncle, Laban. It was sometime later that Jacob arrived in Paddan Aram and first met Rachel at a well of water in the open country (see Genesis 29:2). There were some other shepherds at the well, and as Jacob conversed with them, he asked about his Uncle Laban. They assured him that Laban was doing fine, and in the process of their conversing, Rachel approached the well with her father’s sheep. In antiquity, wells of water were covered with large stones for protection and sanitation; usually one needed brute strength to roll the stone away. Jacob’s presence at the well was fortuitous, if not providential. He assisted Rachel and rolled the stone away so she could water her father’s sheep. After Jacob announced himself to Rachel as her father’s relative (verse 12), she ran to get her father, Laban. When Laban returned and saw Jacob his nephew, he kissed him and declared, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” (verse 14, ESV).

Jacob’s dysfunctional past would reemerge as he dealt with his father-in-law, Laban, who also lacked integrity and was as selfish as Jacob was. In addition to deceiving Jacob, his daughters Leah and Rachel accused their father of being abusive and exploitative; “Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father’s estate? Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us” (31:14-15, NIV). Therefore, unbeknownst to Jacob he was stepping into family dynamics and dysfunction not unlike those he left behind in Canaan. But this time, rather than packing his bags and running from the situation, Jacob resolved to stick it out in spite of the disappointments that he would endure. He loved Rachel, and no amount of conflict or deception could make him give up on the apple of his eye.

Jacob was welcomed into the family and worked for a month for Laban before he was offered compensation for his services. Instead of negotiating a fair wage, Jacob offered to work seven years for the privilege of marrying the younger daughter, Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel and he worked seven years for her. However, at the end of the seven years, and at the wedding feast, Laban pulled a bait and switch on Jacob. Rather than delivering Rachel into Jacob’s tent, he sent in the oldest daughter Leah. In antiquity, wedding celebration feasts would last all day until the evening. The bride and the groom would remain separate until the evening when she would be brought into the bridegroom’s tent under the cloak of darkness. A veiled Leah lay next to Jacob, and the marriage was consummated. Jacob was none the wiser until the next day when the sun came up; when morning came, to Jacob’s amazement, it was Leah with him in his tent (see verse 25). Jacob had been duped! We cannot begin to imagine what went through his mind.

Nevertheless, he resolved that his love for Rachel was worth working another seven years, which he did. He modeled in an excellent
way the power of love and commitment in overcoming serious disappointments and misfortune. When we observe the landscape of marriages today, the Jacob kind of spirit seems to be missing in many marriages and relationships. Today, marriages can end in so-called no-fault divorce, and couples can seek divorce for the slightest or smallest of marital infractions or for no reason at all. But Jacob’s love for Rachel is the foundation upon which Jacob was able to live with and endure both disappointment and setback.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Sleight of Hand   
(Genesis 29:15-27)

And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.

After settling into his new family, Jacob had worked for his uncle for a month when Laban came to him and offered to barter for his continued service. Although he offered wages, Jacob requested his daughter Rachel’s hand in marriage in exchange for his labor (verse 18). A deal was reached and they agreed that seven years would suffice for the honor of having her in marriage. It is often said in legal circles that “ignorance of the law is no excuse.” Perhaps the same could have been said of Jacob; ignorance of the customs was no excuse. Rachel was the younger of Laban’s two daughters, and it was the custom of the time for the oldest daughter to be married first. However, when Jacob asked to marry Rachel, Laban consented, knowing that this was not the custom and he obviously was not willing to break it. Laban either immediately had or eventually developed an ulterior motive. Nevertheless, Jacob fulfilled his end of the bargain and worked seven years for Rachel.

Accordingly, ancient marriage rituals were all-day affairs with the celebration preceding the consummation of the marriage. Laban would have invited the men of the village to imbibe and feast with him until evening. When evening came, Jacob went into his tent to receive his bride. However, under the cloak of darkness, Laban had delivered Leah and not Rachel into his tent (verse 23). Because Jacob would not discover the bait and switch until morning, his marriage to Leah was consummated and now a binding covenant. However, when morning came, Jacob discovered that he had been duped (verse 25) and it was then that Laban explained to Jacob the marriage custom of his country. After Jacob’s protest, Laban broke another agreement, this time to give
Jacob Rachel in return for seven more years of service. How do you trust a trickster who has already victimized you? Nevertheless, Jacob accepted his offer and entered into another covenant with Laban to work seven more years for Rachel’s hand in marriage. However, this time Jacob married Rachel after he and Leah had fulfilled their wedding week. In spite of being victimized, Jacob demonstrated that one can successfully navigate the disappointments of life even when they come when we least expect them. Those things do not have to define us or shape our future.

B. Living beyond Disappointment (Genesis 29:28-30)

And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid. And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

Like it or not, Jacob had married Leah according to the customs of the country. His father-in-law had taken advantage of him just as Jacob had done to his own father and brother. However, this time, rather than running away, Jacob resolved to stay the course and work another seven years for Rachel, the one he loved. He demonstrated the power of love, and it was his love for her that enabled him to live beyond the disappointment of being victimized by the bait-and-switch tactics of Laban. Yet, how often is it the case that persons allow disappointment to completely disrupt their future and are never able to overcome the effects of disappointment and move on? The late Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, past president of Morehouse College, used to remind the student body, “It is not your environment. It is you, the quality of your mind, the integrity of your words, and the determination of your will that will decide your future and shape your life.” But how often have many allowed their environment and others to determine and shape their future? Some years ago a couple came to my office for marriage counseling to resolve a family matter. The sticking point was a decision the wife had made without the approval of the husband. It was not an egregious decision, yet the husband was disappointed that she did not get his permission first. His disappointment was the catalyst that led to separation and eventually the dissolution of their marriage. But Jacob’s actions taught us that we can live with and beyond disappointment if the countervailing positive force of unconditional love is at work in our lives. None of us can deny that disappointment can leave a bitter taste in one’s mouth, but it does not have to have the final word in his or her relationships.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There are several points of potential engagement in the story of Jacob and Rachel, but none are more impactful in giving shape to the family dynamics between Jacob, Leah, and Rachel than the issue of deception. Their family life was scarred—and even created—by the practice of deception. Jacob was a good herdsman, and because of him, Laban’s flock had multiplied to the point that Laban became a wealthy man (see 30:30). But what Laban did to Jacob in the beginning, Jacob did to him in the end (see 30:25-43). Jacob in time would reciprocate and use deception to trick Laban.
out of the riches of his flock. When the time came for Jacob to leave Laban, Jacob’s trickery was discovered. Laban pursued him, and it all could have ended violently had the Lord not intervened.

So ultimately it was the Lord’s great love and mercy for Jacob that overlooked Jacob’s deception and saved him from Laban. But Jacob’s rescue was not for him alone. One of the sons that Leah bore him was Judah. It was through Judah’s bloodline that a Lion would be born in a manger in Bethlehem many generations later. Jacob’s love for his bride Rachel only foreshadowed Christ’s love for His bride the church.

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, who keeps promises to a thousand generations, we give You thanks for Your unwavering faithfulness. Your faithfulness is unquestionable, even as You gave Your Son to die for our sins. Therefore, we pray that as we grow closer to You, we will grow in our faithfulness to one another. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**WORD POWER**

Wages (Hebrew: maskoreth)—reward of faithfulness. Both Jacob and Laban used this word when negotiating Jacob’s pay for Laban’s flock’s growth under Jacob’s hand. Laban knew that he had become wealthy because of Jacob, so it was only proper that Jacob be rewarded accordingly. This word implies that Laban’s action was that of one settling a debt to someone in one’s employ, and not an act of grace or benevolence.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(December 28, 2015–January 3, 2016)*

**A Bride worth Waiting For**

**MONDAY,** December 28: “Trustworthy Lives” (Proverbs 11:9-13)

**TUESDAY,** December 29: “Honesty: The Best Policy” (Proverbs 12:19-26)

**WEDNESDAY,** December 30: “Wisdom More than Strength” (Proverbs 24:3-7, 13-14)

**THURSDAY,** December 31: “Judged Faithful” (1 Timothy 1:12-17)

**FRIDAY,** January 1: “The Lord Is Present” (Genesis 28:15-22)

**SATURDAY,** January 2: “Welcome Home” (Genesis 29:9-14)

**SUNDAY,** January 3: “A Bride worth Waiting For” (Genesis 29:15-30)
THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BRIDE

Adult/Young Adult Topic: The Eye of the Beholder

Devotional Reading: John 10:7-15
Print Passage: Song of Solomon 6:4-12
Key Verse: Song of Solomon 6:9

Song of Solomon 6:4-12—KJV
4 Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.
5 Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me; thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead.
6 Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them.
7 As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.
8 There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number.
9 My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.
10 Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?
11 I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded.
12 Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.

Song of Solomon 6:4-12—NIV
4 You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, majestic as troops with banners.
5 Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Gilead.
6 Your teeth are like a flock of sheep coming up from the washing. Each has its twin, not one of them is alone.
7 Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate.
8 Sixty queens there may be, and eighty concubines, and virgins beyond number;
9 but my dove, my perfect one, is unique, the only daughter of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines praised her.
10 Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?
11 I went down to the grove of nut trees to look at the new growth in the valley, to see if the vines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom.
12 Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
When marriages are grounded in love, adoration can become the lens through which a couple perceives one another. How does one adequately describe what is most likely in the eye of the beholder? The writer of the book of Song of Solomon eloquently described mutual adoration for the matchless inner and physical beauty of one another.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Anatomy of True Beauty
   B. Biblical Background
II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Physical Beauty
      (Song of Solomon 6:4-7)
   B. Unique Qualities
      (Song of Solomon 6:8-10)
   C. A Visit to a Garden
      (Song of Solomon 6:11-12)
III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore love and adoration as pictured in the book of Song of Solomon;
2. Reflect on romantic relationships and the ways to nature them; and,
3. Seek ways to recognize and express appreciation, in appropriate ways, for inner and physical beauty in others.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: The Eye of the Beholder
Youth Topic: Appreciating Beauty
Adult Key Verse: Song of Solomon 6:9
Youth Key Verse: Song of Solomon 6:3
Print Passage: Song of Solomon 6:4-12
—There are three common interpretations of the book of Song of Solomon: (a) as an allegory of God’s love for Israel or the church, (b) as a unified drama with a discernible narrative, and (c) as a compilation of diverse ancient Hebrew love songs, such as might have been sung at a wedding in ancient times.
—In praising the woman’s beauty, this passage used many of the agricultural comparisons of Song of Solomon 4:1-3. However, it also introduces royal imagery.
—Tirzah and Jerusalem (verse 4) were the capitals of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, respectively, after the breakup of Solomon’s empire.
—Solomon was noted to have an immense harem of concubines, and yet the poet described his beloved as more beautiful than all of these.
—Many modern scholars find the meaning of 6:11-12 to be inscrutable, perhaps from lack of clarity in the Hebrew or from a possible corruption of the text.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Love Is Self-giving
Key Verse: Song of Solomon 6:3a
Print Passage: John 10:11; Song of Solomon 1:2-8
—The bridegroom in the book of Song of Solomon can be understood as an analogy of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.
—The bride in the book of Song of Solomon described her lover as a shepherd who loved her as he loved his sheep, in the same way that Jesus loves the church.
—The bride described herself as unworthy of her lover yet grateful that he had chosen her.
—The bride was eager to be with her lover and to give herself to him.
—The shepherd invited the bride to come to his tent and make her home with him.
—The shepherd would protect his beloved and welcome her and her flock into his care.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Anatomy of True Beauty

The adage, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” is attributed to Plato and literally means that beauty is a subjective value and each person has his or her own sense of what beauty is and what it looks like. What is beauty for one may not be beauty to another; because, in reality, individual preference of beauty can be multifaceted and not limited to the physical appearance only. True beauty includes the inner quality and virtue of an individual. Some of the most beautiful persons we can ever meet are beautiful because they have a rich inner beauty that transcends their outward appearance. We have all heard the expression spoken of women with ordinary physical attractiveness, “she is such a beautiful person,” which most often referred to the inward qualities of the person, i.e., kindness, winsomeness, cheerfulness, giving, etc. Conversely, most of us have known persons who had great physical beauty, but their attitude and disposition made it painful for people to be around them, and so it was said of them, “beauty is only skin deep.”

The poet who wrote the book of Song of Solomon saw an unusual beauty in his beloved. The reading of the book of Song of Solomon is most interesting because the poet used animal similes to describe the beauty he saw in his beloved. Today, if one used such similes to describe a woman’s beauty, it would be laughable, if not insulting. To compare a woman’s beauty today to a city—Tirzah (verse 4), her hair to a flock of goats (verse 5), her teeth to a flock of lambs (verse 6), and her cheeks to halved pomegranates (verse 7) would not stir appreciation. Rather, such language might even be considered insulting. Yet, it must not be lost on today’s reader that his or her description of beauty is as much cultural, generational, geographical, and vocational as it is actual. This poet compared the beauty he saw in his lover with the things in his surroundings that gave him pleasure and reminded him of her beauty. Herein was the profundity of language: it is relative to cultural and individual bias and prejudice. The poet in the book of Song of Solomon was a herdsman who saw beauty in the hair of goats and in the teeth of lambs; thus, he used these images of beauty to describe his beloved.

In her reflections on the book of Song of Solomon, Dr. Renita J. Weems says, “The shepherd gushes with hyperbole and rattles on indecipherably when he talks about his love. There is no exact translation; the sense in Song of Solomon is that the woman’s beauty is captivating and arresting.” What might seem unflattering to the contemporary reader
is intended to be romantic and seductive for the herdsman as he fantasized about his lover. In his eyes, her beauty was without question. Nevertheless, in the end, these two lovers asserted that they belonged to each other and yearned for each other (see 2:16; 6:3).

B. Biblical Background

The book of Song of Solomon, sometimes referred to as Song of Songs, is filled with language of sensuality, intimacy, playfulness, and human affection. Some biblical scholars believe that King Solomon was the author of the book of Song of Solomon. It is asserted because of the superscription (1:1) and because he was considered the wisest and most noted king in Israel’s history. The book is unique in that Yahweh or Jehovah (God’s name) is not mentioned or alluded to in its eight chapters; and it was one of the last books accepted to be a part of the Holy Writ. Accordingly, the book of Song of Solomon consists of poetic utterances between two lovers engaging in an intimate conversation about each other; therefore, to read each chapter in isolation from the other chapters is problematic because the entire book is a unit of poems. The lovers used poetic language to express their yearning. Yet, the question we cannot answer is whether the drama is intended to be dream or fantasy of what they hoped to realize.

It is noteworthy that chapter 6 is part of the poetic unit that begins in chapter 5, in which we can hear the voices of both lovers, male and female, who exchange adulations and express their unwavering desire to share their love and presence. We hear her voice as she looks for him and cannot find him: “I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he had gone. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer. O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you—if you find my lover, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love” (5:6, 8, NIV). Then, chapter 6 opens with a third person asking her, “Where has your lover gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your lover turn, that we may look for him with you?” (6:1, NIV). Finally, in verse 4, the lover responded with his own adulations. He declared how unique and beautiful she was—perfect, unique, and flawless (see verse 9)—and he voiced the reaction of other women (“maidens, queens, and concubines”) to her beauty—all of which are expressed in an attempt to describe what makes her so unique.

Dr. Renita J. Weems called what he said, “The romantic gush of a love-struck paramour.”

Most grandparents gush with exuberance over their grandchild; the child is always the most beautiful or cutest they have ever seen. But isn’t this the prerogative of every lover, whether grandparent or significant other, to express love in the way and words that excite him or her? These lovers leave little doubt about the depth and the sincerity of their love and yearning for each other and in their romantic expressions note that beauty, indeed, is in the eye of the beholder.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Physical Beauty
(Song of Solomon 6:4-7)

Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks.

“You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem.” Tirzah was the capital city of the Northern Kingdom of Israel from the time of Jeroboam to the time of Omri, just after the division of the united kingdom of Israel (see 1 Kings 14:17; 15:21, 33). In the Old Testament, the capital city of Jerusalem is repeatedly referred to by the female gender (see Ezekiel 16; 23). However, this practice was influenced by Near Eastern mythology, in which capital cities were considered the Patron City of the deity. Hence, it was believed by the ancient Hebrew people that Jerusalem was the city of their God and the Temple was His earthly throne. In like manner, many of the prophets believed that God dwelled in and around the city (see Ezra 6:12; 2 Chronicles 33:7; Hebrews 12:22).

So, her beauty was not likened to just any old city, but to the city of God, of which the psalmist said, “Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King” (Psalm 48:2, NIV). So, in verse 4 the writer compared the object of his affections to two capital cities—Tirzah and Jerusalem. Obviously, the poet had a great affinity for these beloved cities because he believed in their inner virtues, that the spirit of God dwelled in them. But then he shifted from comparing her beauty to that of two cities, to alluding to her physical beauty to the things he saw in his surroundings that reminded him of her outward beauty. Her eyes were seductive; her hair was like a flock of goats; and when she smiled her teeth reminded him of the young lambs that were coming from the watering hole. For him, his lover was of unquestionable beauty; her poise and modesty were unparalleled and he wanted her to know it.

Unfortunately, in a culture such as ours, a disproportionately weighted emphasis is placed on physical beauty as an end-all and be-all. Likewise, our society proliferates with broken and estranged relationships that perhaps could benefit from the kind of nurturing of each other that is found in this text. As human beings, regardless of our physical appearances, we all need love and affection to feel good about ourselves; this is the nature of our creation—who God made us to be. Verizon has a commercial in which the parents are criticizing their little girl as she grows up at every turn. What she found joy and interest in, her parents stopped her and criticized her. All she heard growing up was the voice of criticism from those who said they loved her. Upon seeing a bulletin board announcement concerning her desired career, the teenager contemplated signing up for the special seminar, but she walked away sad, because the voice she heard in her head told her she was not good enough. The commercial ends with these words: “Our words can have a huge impact. Isn’t it time to tell her she is beautiful and brilliant, too? Encourage her to love science and technology and inspire her to change the world.” Perhaps we do tend to
underestimate the value of our words, especially terms of endearment and affection. Who knows whether the ones whom we love might need to hear them, and our words might make all the difference in the world?

B. Unique Qualities
(Song of Solomon 6:8-10)

There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her. The daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?

The lover praised her for her unique qualities, but he was not alone in recognizing her exquisite qualities; she was the envy of countless other women—sixty queens, eighty concubines, and an unlimited number of virgins—all proclaimed her beauty. The catalog of these women perhaps is a reference to King Solomon’s harem, although he had 300 wives and 700 concubines, the point is well made: these selected and hand-picked women had nothing on his beloved. She was more unique than them all, because in addition to her being all she was to him, she was her mother’s only daughter and was the apple of both her mother’s and father’s eyes (verse 9). This lover was really smitten by love as he compared her to one of the most gentle and lovely creatures in all of creation: he called her his dove.

The dove appeared as a symbol of love and peace in both Judaic and Christian history. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist (Luke 3:22). Also, the dove appeared as a symbol in Greek mythology. The Greek goddesses, Astarte and Aphrodite, were depicted to have dove-like qualities. Therefore, for the poet his lover had transcendent beauty. Finally, he declared that the peasant women called her blessed and royalty praised her for her beauty (verse 9). She was so fair and lovely that she captured the attention of onlookers wherever she went. In essence, her beauty spoke for itself. Yet, the wisdom of these verses begs the question, “How much stronger could many marital relationships be today, if lovers were as diligent as this lover in looking for the unique qualities in each other? When a beloved concentrates on the negative, it pulls down and destroys the esteem and the intimacy of the relationship.

C. A Visit to a Garden
(Song of Solomon 6:11-12)

I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.

These concluding verses are most difficult to interpret, in part because of the transition from and the detachment from the previous verses. There appears to be no connection at all between these verses and the previous verses. The book of Song of Solomon makes three references to gardens: the spring garden, full of flowers and tender grapes with nothing mature (see 4:12-15); the autumn garden, full of spices and ripe fruits with nothing imperfect (5:13ff); and the winter garden, full of nuts (see 6:1, 13-16). Each season brings a different passion. However, in these verses it appears to have been in the spring of the year. The poet descended into the lush valley and further fantasized about his beloved. Using allegory, he described his passion for and desire to make love to her. He saw his passion in the
fresh blossoms and budding fruit in the valley. The book of Song of Solomon illuminates what true intimacy and sexuality are; they are communion between two covenant partners, though physically separated from each other, passionately yearning for and fantasizing about the very presence and sight of each other.

One writer stated that we must educate ourselves and our children on the difference between sex and sexuality.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In conclusion, this question remains: “What is beauty and who decides what beauty is?” If beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder, then it is a personal subjectivity that is irrefutable. What beauty is to one just might not be beauty to another. Jean-Pierre Dutilleux, a Belgian filmmaker and photographer, produced an award-winning documentary, Raoni, about an ancient tribe in southwest Ethiopia, Africa, known as the Mursi. The Mursi women are known for wearing huge lip dishes. As a young girl, a dish is placed in the lower lip and every so often the dish is enlarged until it increases in size up to ten inches in diameter. When the dish gets so large, the lower teeth are pulled to allow saliva to flow, moisturizing the lower lip to prevent tearing. The lip dish is only worn by the women and is a tribal sign of beauty. The larger the dish, the more valuable the woman is to her family in marriage and the more beautiful she is considered to be among the men. The Mursi people have not been contaminated by the outside world that views beauty from the perspective of its marketability. But perhaps, there is much in America that we can learn from the Mursi people that can strengthen the family bond in this country: beauty, indeed, is in the eye of the beholder and cannot and should not be determined by outside influences.

PRAYER

Most gracious God, who made us male and female, we give You thanks for creating in us a passion for life and the need for intimacy—for without Eve, Adam was lonely still. Now, it is our prayer that we will not be abusers of these sacred gifts. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Beauty (yapheh)—the state of being comely or fair.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(December 14-20, 2015)

The Most Beautiful Bride

MONDAY, January 4: “A Perfect Woman” (Proverbs 31:10-11, 20, 25-26)
TUESDAY, January 5: “The Perfect Shepherd” (John 10:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, January 6: “The Good Shepherd” (John 10:7-15)
THURSDAY, January 7: “The Eternal Shepherd” (John 10:22-30)
FRIDAY, January 8: “The Most Perfect Love” (Song of Solomon 4:9-15)
SATURDAY, January 9: “The Most Handsome Groom” (Song of Solomon 5:9-16)
SUNDAY, January 10: “The Most Beautiful Bride” (Song of Solomon 6:4-12)
AN UNFAITHFUL BRIDE

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Broken Relationships

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 89:24-29
PRINT PASSAGE: Hosea 1:1-11

Hosea 1:1-11—KJV
THE WORD of the LORD that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.
2 The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD.
3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son.
4 And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.
5 And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel.
6 And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away.
7 But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.
8 Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son.
9 Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.
10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people,
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Unfaithfulness in covenant relationships leads to brokenness and alienation. How can brokenness and alienation be remedied? God used Hosea and Gomer’s marriage and the naming of their children as symbolic of Israel’s alienation from God and God’s plan for restoration.

there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God.
then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

11 Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel. for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Anatomy of Infidelity
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Broken Covenant
      (Hosea 1:1-2)
   B. Symbols of Infidelity
      (Hosea 1:3-9)
   C. Restored by Unconditional Love
      (Hosea 1:10-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Learn how God commanded Hosea to marry an unfaithful Gomer as a model for God’s love for Israel’s unfaithfulness;

2. Reflect on the meaning of marriage and unfaithfulness and God’s desire for the restoration of broken relationships; and,
3. Demonstrate faithfulness to God through a commitment to maintain faithful friendships, relationships, and/or marriages.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Broken Relationships
Youth Topic: Faithful Friendships and Relationships
Adult Key Verse: Hosea 1:2
Youth Key Verses: Hosea 1:2-3
Print Passage: Hosea 1:1-11
—Throughout the book, Hosea compared devotion to gods other than (or alongside) Yahweh to a woman who was unfaithful to her husband.
—There are four commands in this passage (verses 2, 4, 6, 9). These commands, related to Hosea’s marriage and the names of his children, symbolize God’s rejection of Israel for its unfaithfulness.
—Verses 10-11 shift Hosea’s message from judgment to hope for future salvation.
—Several other passages describe God’s relationship with God’s people in the language of romance and marriage. This was a common early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the book of Song of Solomon. The relationship between
Christ and the church is compared to marriage in Ephesians 5:25-33.
—Hosea provided a spiritual depiction to the competing and complementary narratives of God’s judgment and salvation regarding the Israelites.
—Gomer may have been a prostitute at the time Hosea was commanded to marry her, or she would eventually become unfaithful after her marriage to Hosea.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: An Unhappy Family
Key Verses: Hosea 1:2, 3

Print Passage: Hosea 1:1-11
—God urged the prophet Hosea to seek a wife whose moral past was less than virtuous.
—Hosea married Gomer and together they had two sons and a daughter.
—The names God gave the children were symbolic of Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant.
—Israel would suffer for the unfaithfulness of the people, and God would disown them.
—Eventually, God would forgive the people and restore them to the land.
—God is faithful to His promises, even when the covenant people are unfaithful.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Anatomy of Infidelity

In judgment, Yahweh, who is pure and righteous, commanded Hosea to model His love and fidelity toward Israel, which had exchanged fidelity to Him for whoring after other gods (see Hosea 4:1-2).

One of the most effective teaching strategies used in academia is called “explicit teacher modeling,” whereby the teacher embodies or demonstrates for the student the academic concept to be learned. This is what Yahweh commanded Hosea to do: model for Israel the depth of her infidelity to God. “There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land” (Hosea 4:1, NIV). Years ago I heard a minister summarize the message of the book of Hosea by using colloquialism to personalize the text: God was saying to Israel, “Inasmuch as Hosea has been a fool for Gomer, I too am a fool because you, too, have been unfaithful and have been whoring after other gods.” Therefore, Israel’s straying after the Canaanites’ gods grieved Yahweh, because He had chosen them to be His bride and decreed that she should have no other gods before Him.

Furthermore, this text is as relevant today as it was in antiquity. Idolatry is alive and well today, even among persons who have declared themselves to be disciples of the Christ; yet, they are more faithful to themselves or the things of this world than they are to Christ. Infidelity is still offensive and repulsive to God. God still honors faithfulness!

B. Biblical Background

The book of Hosea was written by the prophet Hosea, a contemporary of the prophet Amos. Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel because the people had forsaken Yahweh and were practicing idolatry. They had fallen under the influence of the
Canaanite god Baal. From the days of Moses on Mount Sinai, God had chosen Israel to be His bride, but Israel, like Gomer, abandoned her true love time and again. In his commentary on the minor prophets, Lloyd J. Ogilvie writes, “In his own marriage to Gomer, Hosea was put through an existential experience of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel, His bride of Sinai.” It was on Mount Sinai that God entered into a binding covenant with His people, and it was there that Yahweh chose Israel to be His bride.

However, over time all of Israel as a people violated her covenant with Yahweh and became an adulterous and an unfaithful bride when she yielded her worship and devotion to false gods. Hosea’s own life and marriage would be the mirror through which he would reflect the people’s infidelity and Yahweh’s unconditional love and loyalty to the covenant people of Israel. Therefore, God called Hosea to dramatize the infidelity of the people by marrying Gomer, a prostitute. In this union three children would be fathered by other men, and each child’s name would become a powerful symbol of Israel’s broken covenant with Yahweh.

However, the book of Hosea in reality is not about the infidelity of Gomer; rather, it is about the fidelity of God. God had unconditional love for His covenant people Israel. Therefore, this is not just an ancient story from the Bible; it has relevance for us today. As New Testament people, we have been called and set apart; yet, we find ourselves guilty of forsaking our first love, Jesus the Christ, for our own petty gods. Thus, this text calls us to identify with Israel and to be led into a deeper understanding of our own need to repent of our unfaithfulness to the God who redeemed us by the blood of the Lamb on the Cross.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Broken Covenant
(Hosea 1:1-2)

THE WORD of the Lord that came unto Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord.

Marriage is the first, the highest, and the noblest institution known to humanity. It was first established by Yahweh in the Garden of Eden when He said that the man should have a suitable helper and that the man would leave his family of origin to be joined to her (see Genesis 2:18, 24). From this first union, Adam and Eve, Yahweh has subsequently modeled His covenant partnership first with Israel, then with the church. The prophets frequently referred to Israel in nuptial language: she was the bride of Yahweh (see Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 2:2, 32; 7:34; 16:9). Accordingly, the apostle Paul said that the bond of husband and wife is a model of the church’s union with Christ (see Ephesians 5:32). Therefore, God had something deeper and more profound in mind when He commanded the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute, in that His beloved Israel was also unfaithful and He wanted Hosea to
be the mirror through which Israel could see herself for who she had become.

Accordingly, the command in verse 2 captures the horrific reality of Israel’s unfaithfulness. Israel was a whore, and God was married to her. And now God was commanding that His prophet Hosea utilize “explicit teacher modeling” to teach Israel this harsh truth. Hosea must marry a prostitute. This command seemingly violated Yahweh’s standards of morality. Prostitution was condemned under the Law. “Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness” (Leviticus 19:29; see Deuteronomy 23:17-18; Psalm 106:39, and Hosea 4:12-14). Nevertheless, Yahweh directed the prophet to marry and be faithful to a prostitute, in spite of her infidelity.

However, in a world such as ours in which spouses seek divorce over the least of matters—so-called “no fault divorce”—it may be hard to fathom that a spouse could commit such a violation of the marriage covenant and not be divorced very quickly. Yet, in a great demonstration of the faithfulness and fidelity of Yahweh, Hosea does the unfathomable: he marries a prostitute who will leave him time and time again, returning to her former lifestyle and each time returning to Hosea with another child.

God told him to take a wife of whoredom (harlotry, prostitution), and she would have children of her whoredom. The King James Version uses the word harlotry which is a translation that refers to “sexual misconduct” in general. Also, its use suggests a possibility of another symbolism in this marriage drama. Israel’s infraction was that she worshipped Baal, the fertility god of the Canaanites, whose temple was known for its prostitutes. The prophet would marry a woman from, of all places, the temple of Baal. This, too, was to remind Israel of her broken covenant partnership with Yahweh; she was an adulterer. For Yahweh, their behavior was egregious and must not be tolerated. But in the final analysis, Hosea proved to them (and to us in the twenty-first century) that God’s grace and mercy overpowers our failings and His judgment.

B. Symbols of Infidelity (Hosea 1:3-9)

So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son. And the Lord said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it shall come to pass at that day, that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, Call her name Lo-ruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away. But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen. Now when she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.

Many of us have known some good men who have married women with children, adopted those children, and treated them as their own. But most of us do not know a man who would marry a whore and adopt the children of her whoredom, time and time again. Yet this was what Hosea did, and to complicate the matter, Yahweh gave him the
character name for each child. Yahweh had changed persons’ names in the Old Testament (i.e., Abram to Abraham, Jacob to Israel), but this was the first time in recorded history that Yahweh named children from birth. Later God named Jesus before His birth, and angels gave parents names for special children, but God had not. The first child born to Gomer was a son, and Yahweh took Hosea to name him Jezreel, “because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel” (verse 4, NIV). According to some scholars, this is a reference to the bloodshed of Naboth by Ahab and Jezebel (see 1 Kings 12). Naboth’s vineyard was in Jezreel and adjoined the palace of Ahab and Jezebel; Jezebel desired Naboth’s vineyard and had Naboth stoned to death and took his vineyard. Several blood atrocities also took place in Jezreel under the kingships of Ahab and Jehu. Therefore, the name Jezreel became synonymous with a period of great bloodshed in Israel’s history.

The name given to the second child, a daughter, was Lo-Ruhamah, which means “not pitied” or “not loved.” Mays says, “Her name was a living symbol of the reality of God’s judgment.” It is hard to imagine giving a child a name that means “not loved.” She would be cursed from the beginning with a name that meant “not loved.” The last child was a son, and Hosea named him Lo-Ammi, “for you are not My people, and I will not be your God” (verse 9). This should have been the final blow necessary to awaken Israel out of her stupor of infidelity because Yahweh had assured their ancestors that He would walk among them and would be their God and they His people (see Leviticus 26:12). Yet, the day came when Israel’s infidelity caused God to disown her. To be disowned by God is to be separated from the love and mercy of God.

C. Restored by Unconditional Love
(Hosea 1:10-11)

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Chapter 1 closes with Yahweh’s change of heart. Perhaps there is not a chapter in the Bible that is so full of drama and sudden change of direction. Chapter 1 opens with bad news and ends with good news. Verse 10 opens with a promise of recapitulation: “the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore” (verse 10, NIV). This is the same promise God made to Abraham (see Genesis 15:5). However, this is not a contradiction of the earlier condemnation, but rather a vision for a future hope. The people would go through a period of suffering for rejecting Yahweh, but He would not give up on them and in the end they would be His people again. They would go from “not my people” to “my people” (verse 11). Well, this is all of our hope. It does not matter how dim or dead life has become for any of us; there is always hope when God is involved. He is the life-giver who can restore an interrupted life.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The book of Hosea not only highlighted Judah’s need to change her adulterous ways,
but it also assured her of the unconditional love and mercy of Yahweh. Just as Hosea was there to receive Gomer when she returned, Yahweh was faithful and extended Himself beyond judgment, giving unmerited favor to a covenant-breaking people. God’s love is loyal and is from everlasting to everlasting. Unfortunately, we as a people comprehend best when we can measure or quantify the information. But how does one measure or quantify a love like this, from everlasting to everlasting—a love that is so indefatigable and unconditional that nothing can hinder its expression?

In summary, the book of Hosea ought to temper any disdain we might have for persons who violate us because, like Gomer, we are unfaithful in our own rights and have all experienced the unmerited grace and mercy of God, who has loved us when we have not returned love, who also has forgiven us when we could not even forgive ourselves. The story of Hosea and Gomer is not just a mirror for Israel. There is a lesson for the believer also. Once we have experienced the love of God, we ought to want to pass it on, and like Hosea, model authentic and unconditional love for others.

**PRAYER**

_Oh God, lover of our souls, thank You for modeling true love for us. We know that You love us because Your Son died for us while we were in sin. Lord, it is our prayer that we can love others as You have loved us. In Jesus’s name we pray. Amen._

**WORD POWER**

**Love (ahéb)**—to divinely love an individual. This is God’s love to us, as modeled by Hosea’s love for unfaithful Gomer.

**Marry (ownah)**—cohabitation or to dwell together. Marriage is not just a civil contract; it is the conjoining of one’s life with that of another. When that marriage union is broken, it literally breaks up a home.

**Prostitute (zanah)**—sexual engagement. Prostitution happens any time someone chooses money over intimacy; God designed the sex act to be intimate and loving, and not to be traded for money, power, or any other worldly lust.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

_(January 11-17, 2016)_

**An Unfaithful Bride**

**MONDAY,** January 11: “A Clean and Faithful Heart” (Psalm 51:6-12)

**TUESDAY,** January 12: “The Faithful God” (Psalm 89:24-29)

**WEDNESDAY,** January 13: “Faithful to Truth” (Psalm 119:25-32)

**THURSDAY,** January 14: “Free in the Spirit” (Galatians 4:16-25)

**FRIDAY,** January 15: “Unfaithful Israel” (Hosea 4:1-6)

**SATURDAY,** January 16: “Faithful God” (Hosea 2:18-23)

**SUNDAY,** January 17: “An Unfaithful Bride” (Hosea 1)
A WEDDING IN CANA

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Saving the Best for Last

Devotional Reading: Matthew 5:12-16
Print Passage: John 2:1-12

John 2:1-12—KJV
AND THE third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:
2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.
3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.
4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.
5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.
6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.
7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.
8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.
9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,
10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.
11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.
12 After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.

John 2:1-12—NIV
ON THE third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there,
2 and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.
3 When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”
4 “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”
5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”
6 Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.
7 Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim.
8 Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so,
9 and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside
10 and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”
11 This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.
12 After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
A hospitality tradition required the bride and groom to ensure adequate food and beverage for invited wedding guests. How could the bride and groom accommodate their guests when there was a shortage? When the wine ran out, as an invited guest at the wedding in Cana, Jesus performed His first miracle by turning ordinary water into a wine unsurpassed in its quality, revealing His glory and causing His disciples to believe.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Anatomy of Hospitality
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Human Problem (John 2:1-5)
   B. The Divine Solution (John 2:6-8)
   C. The Spectacular Results (John 2:9-12)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand that Jesus performed His first miracle in the lives of ordinary people when He met an important hospitality need at a wedding;
2. Reflect on the meaning and practice of hospitality; and,
3. Practice ways in which the learners can demonstrate hospitality at weddings and other occasions.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Saving the Best for Last
Youth Topic: Practicing Hospitality
Adult Key Verse: John 2:10
Youth Key Verse: John 2:11
Print Passage: John 2:1-12

—Hospitality was an important cultural value in the ancient world. Failure to provide for one’s guests would mean a serious loss of honor or reputation.
—Jesus seemed to brush off His mother’s concern that the host had run out of wine, then immediately acted to solve the problem. Jesus acted, but of His own accord and not because anyone “made” Him do so. (See also John 7:3-10; 11:1-7.)
—Although everyone benefited from the wine, only the disciples are said to have believed in Jesus because of this “sign” (2:11).
—Weddings within the Jewish culture normally lasted for an entire week.
—Jesus’ response to His mother was not a sign of disrespect, but instead was an awareness that the time to reveal Himself as the Messiah had not arrived.
—The reason why the better wine was served first was so that the guests’ tastebuds would be dulled to the taste of the lesser wine.
—The transformation of the water into wine demonstrated Jesus’ power, which affirmed His deity.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Celebrating a Wedding
Key Verses: John 2:1-2
Print Passage: John 2:1-12
—Jesus and His disciples joined Jesus’ mother in attending a wedding feast, during which the wine unexpectedly ran out.
—Since hospitality was important in Jewish culture, the lack of either wine or food would have been a disgrace to the bridegroom and his family.
—Jesus’ mother called His attention to the shortage, but He was reluctant to act because it was not the right time to reveal His divinity.
—Jesus acted to alleviate the hospitality crisis, but most of the people present were unaware of what He had done.
—The disciples took a new step of faith in Jesus when they became aware of this miracle.
—Jesus did not want anyone to know Him primarily as a miracle worker, yet He did not shun the opportunity to help people in need.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Anatomy of Hospitality
   Aside from the hotel and restaurant industries, hospitality is becoming a lost virtue in our society. Unfortunately, hospitality appears to have become more of a vocation than a lifestyle.

   An awesome example of hospitality is exemplified in this story told by a Jewish man: “A hippie-type college student was traveling across Spain in the late 1960s. One night he got off a train in a village that was already asleep. A little frightened, he approached the only lighted place. It turned out to be a monastery, and the monks received him gladly. After his departure, he discovered that they had quietly slipped some coins into his pocket as he slept.” This is the difference in the treatment of a guest and a visitor. These monks practiced a lifestyle of hospitality. They were more than just being friendly; they reached beyond themselves and touched the life of the stranger in ways that were transformative.

   This was an act of biblical hospitality. Likewise, in the story of the sinful woman, she did for Jesus what Simon the host did not do; she washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Jesus singled her out as being more hospitable to Him than the host, Simon (see Luke 7:36-48). So in the lesson today, Jesus was in attendance at a wedding in Cana of Galilee when the wine ran out. Jesus’ “hour [had] not yet come” (verse 4), but He reached beyond Himself and reciprocated hospitality for hospitality, turning water into wine, saving the host great embarrassment.

B. Biblical Background
   According to John’s gospel, the first miracle Jesus performed was at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It is indeed interesting that for John, the first miracle was not the saving of or the enhancement of human life but turning water into wine at a party (of all places). It may be that the wedding had been going on for some days, as was the custom of the time. Jesus was there with His disciples, and amidst the celebration Jesus was approached
by His mother Mary because the wine had run out. What a potential embarrassment for the hosts to run out of wine in the middle of their festival and special occasion! This was their wedding feast! If the wine ran out today at a feast or festival, we could send a courier to the closest liquor store or order more wine from the lounge or the restaurant, but this was not an option in first-century Galilee. Wedding festivals were often week-long celebrations and the wine was supplied from the family’s wine supply; there were no liquor stores. In the Middle East, wine, even to this day, is a staple beverage, especially at such social events as weddings.

Thus, when Mary the mother of Jesus was made aware that the wine had run out, she found Jesus and His disciples at the party and told Jesus that the wine had run out. Jesus turned gallons of water into wine, and after the miracle the master at the party was served a cup of the new wine. He then commended the bridegroom for serving the best wine last. Perhaps someone inquired about the source of the water in the jars.

In many of the regions of Palestine, water is a luxury because they have such low rainfall annually, so we saw water catchments or cisterns throughout the landscape. These containers were for gathering rainwater. More than likely the jars to which Jesus referred contained collected rainwater or water imported for family use. Nonetheless, Jesus turned the six containers of water into wine, in spite of His protest that His hour had not yet come. Jesus modeled for the world the essence of hospitality—involving oneself in the affairs of another for that person’s good and enhancement.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Human Problem
(John 2:1-5)

AND THE third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

The gospel of John, unlike the other gospels, takes a different approach to launching the ministry of Jesus by first presenting Him as being preeminent with God the Father from the beginning of Creation (see John 1:1-2). John the disciple, the writer of this gospel (also known as John the Evangelist and John the beloved disciple), did not give his readers birth narratives, a baptismal scene, or wilderness temptations of Jesus (see Matthew 2–4; Luke 1–4). Jesus showed up in Galilee while John the Baptist was in the wilderness preaching and testifying that the One who would come after him would be greater than he was. Thus, John the Baptist saw Jesus and proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). It was after John the Baptist announced Jesus as the Lamb of God that Jesus went to Galilee, called His disciples, and sometime later showed up at a wedding in Cana.

The difficulty in reading and interpreting a text such as John 2 is that it is so familiar and that we have heard it preached so many times. As a result, we tend to read a number of historical assumptions into the text. How would His
mother know that Jesus could do something about the lack of wine? Had she seen something in His upbringing that suggested to her that He had this kind of supernatural power? John did not tell us; we can only assume that something had triggered her faith that Jesus was capable of performing the supernatural. So she brought this potential social disaster to her Son, Jesus, to fix. Accordingly, His response to her was in essence one of wondering how the incident had anything to do with Him. “Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come” (verse 4). Yet, she appeared not to be fazed by His questions and told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you” (verse 5). However, by His response Jesus set up the reader to better understand biblical hospitality, and that theme would become one of the cornerstones of His ministry. Neither Jesus nor His mother had any obligation in this matter because they were invited guests at the wedding. Yet, when Mary engaged Jesus in the matter He placed Himself in the affairs of another. Finally, we cannot be certain what other options the host had for replenishing the wine when it ran out; nevertheless, Jesus’ mother brought the problem to Him: “Do whatever he tells you” (verse 5). And He said unto them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” Then He told them to draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. Jesus gave two commands to the servants, and they obeyed both. We cannot be certain, though, exactly when the water became wine. Was it during the pouring of the water into the jars, or in the dipping of the water from the jars that the water turned to wine? All we can glean from these verses is that Jesus gave two instructions to the servants: fill the jars, and draw some out to take to the master.

The blessed phrase in these verses is what was said at the end of verse 8: “They did so.” How significant were these words? From the very beginning of this narrative, we see the need of the cooperation and the obedience of another—first Jesus, then the servants. This was not a slight matter. In biblical tradition, most miracles required human cooperation; the ten lepers had to show themselves to the priest (see Luke 17); the blind man had to go wash in the pool of Siloam (see John 9:7); the blind man had to say he wanted to see (see Mark 10:50ff); and the lame man at the gate called Beautiful had to take up his mat and walk (see Acts 3:1-7). Therefore, the obedience

B. The Divine Solution

(John 2:6-8)

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.

There were six water pots where the festivities were taking place; these were rather large pots, holding between twenty and thirty gallons of water each. According to the text, these jars were the kind used in Jewish ceremonial washings. These jars were too large to be carried about, so they were stationary and water would be poured into them. They were the equivalent of today’s wash stations for persons to sanitize their hands. However, according to verse 7, Jesus asked the servants to fill the jars with water. Then He told them to draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. Jesus gave two commands to the servants, and they obeyed both. We cannot be certain, though, exactly when the water became wine. Was it during the pouring of the water into the jars, or in the dipping of the water from the jars that the water turned to wine? All we can glean from these verses is that Jesus gave two instructions to the servants: fill the jars, and draw some out to take to the master.

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of the servants played a role in this miraculous sign, “They did so.” Perhaps herein is a lesson for us. Often we must participate in our own blessings. We must do what we can do and be confident that somewhere between the pouring and the dipping, a miracle can happen.

C. The Spectacular Results
(John 2:9-12)

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.

Jesus miraculously changed water into wine, and it was the best wine at the wedding. The servants drew some of the water out of the jars and carried it to the master of the banquet just as Jesus told the—and although the master of the banquet did not know where it came from, he tasted it and declared that it was the best wine thus far served at the wedding feast.

It was customary for the host to set out the best wine first and save the cheaper wine for later, after the guests had become inebriated. But the banquet master stated that the host had saved “the best till now” (verse 10). However, this was no ordinary fermented wine; it was of divine origin and such quality could not be hidden. Finally, John said in verse 11 that what Jesus did in Cana was His first sign, through which He revealed His glory. A biblical sign (σημεῖον) is something that points to something beyond the act itself and confirms or authenticates the one performing the sign.

The sign revealed that Jesus is the only begotten of the Father. The people saw His glory (δόξα), “the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father full of grace and truth” (1:14).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In Matthew 20:16 (NIV), Jesus said, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” The concept of the first becoming last and last becoming first is seen throughout the Bible—Jacob and Esau; David, the shepherd boy and youngest of Jesse’s sons; the Good Samaritan; and Jesus—the last and greatest sacrifice. When Jesus turned the water into wine, the master declared that the best was saved for last. In the human order of things, too often we do not see as God sees, nor do we value what God values. The master was correct, even to this day, that we bring the best first. But in this situation, bringing the best last was not mere human choice, but divine design and intervention. Jesus’ hour had not yet come but was then there, and what was water became wine and the best was served last. This sign of changing water to wine happened at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry; Jesus turned a potential embarrassment into a commendation. We can always ask, What if? What if Jesus had not responded affirmatively to His mother’s request? We cannot be certain, but what we know is that Jesus, though a guest at the wedding, came to the aid of the host and averted a social disaster. Weddings are important social events for most people, and there is nothing we want more on these special days than for our plans to go over without a glitch. The wedding in Cana went off without a glitch, because Jesus as guest became the host.
Jesus and His disciples were guests at a wedding in Cana, but Jesus did more than just turn water to wine; He turned from guest to host. Thus, as the people at the wedding in Cana discovered a unique gift in their midst, so can we the church discover new gifts in our midst when we dare to entertain the stranger who is among us, and perhaps the guest might become our host.

**PRAYER**

*God our Father, who graces us with the gift of Your hospitality, we were strangers, but You saw our needs and made the necessary provisions so that we may be redeemed. We give You thanks for what You are doing in the world, so that the world might know who You are. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

**Glory** (Greek: *doxa*)—splendor or the unspoken manifestation of God. Only the servants, Mary, and Jesus’ disciples knew the miracle that Jesus had worked. They saw firsthand the splendor and the manifest presence of God with them.

**Revealed** (Greek: *phaneroo*)—to make known or to make clear. By performing this miracle, Jesus made it clear who He was. It was important for the disciples to be the first ones to see this truth, for in three years it would be they who would carry forth His message to the world.

**Sign** (Greek: *semeion*)—an indication or something that points to something beyond the act itself. This word is also translated “miracle.” Miracles are designed to point—like street signs—to the one who performs them. Thus, throughout the Scriptures miracles were performed to ultimately point back to our heavenly Father.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(January 18-24, 2016)*

**A Wedding in Cana**

**MONDAY,** January 18: “The Mighty Deeds of God” (Psalm 77:11-15)


**THURSDAY,** January 21: “The Gift of Health” (Matthew 15:29-38)

**FRIDAY,** January 22: “The Clean Gift” (Matthew 5:22-26)


**SUNDAY,** January 24: “A Wedding in Cana” (John 2:1-12)
THE DEATH OF A FRIEND

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Matters of Life and Death

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10
Print Passage: John 11:38-44

John 11:38-44—KJV
38 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. 39 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. 40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? 41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. 42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. 43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. 44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

John 11:38-44—NIV
38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” 40 Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 “I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

BIBLE FACT

Death—In this lesson, Jesus showed in a decisive manner, His power over life and death. To Jesus, death, in reality, was like “sleep.” Jesus awakened Lazarus out of his sleep, proving that He (Jesus) is indeed the resurrection and the life.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Although some believe that science will be able to bring people back to life, the traditional rituals of burial recognize the common belief that physical death is final. Is physical death final? Jesus performed a miracle in which Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, was raised from the dead.

TOPOICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Anatomy of Death
   B. Biblical Background
II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Divine Confrontation with Death
      (John 11:38-40)
   B. The Divine Power over Death
      (John 11:41-44)
III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review the story about the incident in which Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead;
2. Reflect on why Lazarus’s resurrection may have been both a joyous and a sobering event; and,
3. Help remember and celebrate the lives of those who have died and affected their faith.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Matters of Life and Death
Youth Topic: Another Chance at Life
Adult Key Verse: John 11:43
Youth Key Verse: John 11:40
Print Passage: John 11:38-44
—This type of burial place was common in ancient Palestine, especially for the wealthy (see John 11:38).
—Jesus spoke in a loud voice to call Lazarus from the dead for one of two reasons: (a) because He was displaying strong emotion or (b) for the benefit of the people so they would believe.
—John signified the power of Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead as the ultimate sign to affirm His identity as the Messiah.
—Jesus was informed of Lazarus’s illness, but He chose to delay His arrival so that He could display His ultimate authority and power over death.
—According to Augustine, it was with reason that Jesus specifically called Lazarus’s name, because others would have been raised from the dead, which definitely illustrated His power and authority.
—The term glory in the Hebrew Scriptures refers to God’s divine presence. John’s use of the phrase “the glory of the Lord” when Jesus performed a miracle was to indicate that Jesus was the “Son of God”—fully man and fully human.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Celebrating Life
Key Verses: John 11:43-44a
Print Passage: John 11:38-44
—Jesus was not disturbed when he received word from Martha and Mary that their brother Lazarus was ill and later that Lazarus had died.
Because the dead were usually buried the next day, Lazarus was entombed before Jesus arrived in Bethany.

Compelled by his own sense of loss as well as the sorrow of the sisters, Jesus brought Lazarus back to life.

The death of Lazarus and his restoration to life foreshadowed the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In raising Lazarus, Jesus revealed God’s power over death in a bold new way—for Lazarus had been dead for four days.

John wrote about Jesus and Lazarus from a theological understanding, not a scientific approach.

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I. INTRODUCTION
A. The Anatomy of Death

Over the years as a pastoral counselor and pastor, the most difficult conversations I have had with congregants were those pertaining to matters of death, dying, and pre-needs arrangements. These are not easy conversations to have, yet death and dying are inescapable realities for all of us. We are all mortally wounded from our mother’s womb. Job said, “Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble. They spring up like flowers and wither away; like fleeting shadows, they do not endure. But a man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more. As the water of a lake dries up or a riverbed becomes parched and dry” (Job 14:1-2, 10-11, NIV). As we study this lesson we are reminded of winter, the season of cold barrenness in which we are reminded in so many ways of death and dying. We are a part of a cycle, and as we came from dust to dust we will return; death cannot be averted. Of course, we cannot control death but we do have a measure of control over life and the quality thereof. Howard Thurman said, “Life and death are identical twins.” Unfortunately, too often we die from the life we lived. In seminary, in the Psychology of Pastoral Education course, we were assigned to do field education in a hospital. Two days a week I was assigned to Clayton General Hospital to work in chaplaincy. There was a man in his fifties in ICU who was dying from chronic emphysema. During each visit, he asked me to pray that God would take his life because he did not want to live life in the condition he was in. He said he had been a chronic smoker since he was a teenager. He lived his latter days in excruciating pain just trying to breathe, and he hoped for death to take him.

So perhaps the best thing any of us can do is live our lives in such a way as to postpone death as long as we can by abstaining from habits like smoking and tobacco use, alcohol and drug abuse, poor eating habits, and other vices that harm our bodies and affect our health. Also, we must take advantage of medical technology and preventive health care available to us. Howard Thurman, in The Inward Journey, said, “A good death is made up of the same elements of a good life.” Therefore, as believers we must prepare ourselves for the inevitable. In conclusion, the story of Lazarus gives hope to all who believe in Jesus.
the Christ. Lazarus’s being raised from death also portended Jesus’ resurrection and ours. Jesus said to Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (John 11:25, NIV).

**B. Biblical Background**

The emphasis of John 11 is on faith (belief). The word *faith* is from the same root word (*pistis*) as “believe” in the New Testament Greek language. The word itself or some form of it appears eight times in this chapter (see verses 15, 25, 26, 40, 45, 48). John recorded, therefore, that when Jesus received news that His friend Lazarus was sick, He said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (verse 4). And then in verse 15, Jesus said, “I’m glad for you that I wasn’t there so that you may believe.” So Jesus stayed where He was two days longer so that His disciples might believe. When Jesus and His disciples finally arrived in Bethany to check on Lazarus, Lazarus was already dead. Jesus made one of the most interesting utterances attributed to Him by John. In dialogue with His disciples, Jesus said to them, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him” (11:14, NIV). Perhaps Jesus was glad He was not in Bethany so that the death of Lazarus could be a teachable moment of faith for his disciples. He knew what would happen in Jerusalem in a few days—what would happen on a Friday and then on a Sunday morning after that gloomy Friday. Jesus knew that His disciples would need something more to hang their faith on after His death. Therefore, the death and raising of Lazarus foreshadowed the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. What happened in Bethany would serve to demonstrate to His disciples that Jesus is the life-giving power of God and that He has power over life and death. They would gain first-hand knowledge and witness of the resurrection power of God.

Chapter 12 (see 12:12-50) narrates the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry as Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Thus, Lazarus’s death and resurrection (to stand again) portends the resurrection of Jesus, but of course it differs in several aspects—they were the same in word only. After Lazarus’s resurrection, Lazarus returned to his physical body as he was before, only this time without the former illness that caused his death. Also, Lazarus would die again. Finally, this narrative demonstrates not only the resurrection power of Jesus but also His compassion and sensitivity. In this and other passages we see Jesus showing emotion and action in response to a pitiable human condition. Thus, John made it clear that Jesus is as much with us in death as He is in life.

**II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE**

**A. A Divine Confrontation with Death**  
(John 11:38-40)

Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?

John made it clear that Lazarus was dead and, unlike other biblical resurrection narratives, he had been dead for four days (see
verses 17, 39) when Jesus finally showed up in Bethany. As a matter of fact, John was emphatic: Jesus announced that Lazarus was dead (verse 14) and when Jesus arrived in Bethany, Mary and Martha told Him that if He had been there their brother would not have died (verses 21, 32). Furthermore, John reiterated for the readers that Lazarus had already been dead and buried for four days (verses 17, 40) when Jesus arrived in Bethany. However, the antecedent to what happened in these verses is the question Jesus asked Mary in verse 34: “Where have you laid him?” They showed Jesus his tomb, and Jesus was troubled in His spirit. Lazarus had been buried in a cave—which was a common burial site for the time—and a stone covered the mouth of the cave. Stones were used to cover grave openings to protect the dead body from wild animals. However, unlike at Jesus’ resurrection, no angel appeared to roll away the stone. Jesus needed the bystanders to take away the stone. In spite of Jesus’ assurance that Lazarus could live again, Mary and Martha still did not grasp the full measure of what Jesus was saying. Instead, Martha reminded Jesus that their brother had been dead for four days and by now his body would have an odor (verse 39). But likewise Jesus reiterated His earlier declaration, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” The word believe (pisteuo) means “to have confidence in,” and in this context it carries the idea of being persuaded by the Lord. The assurance came from Jesus Himself: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live; even though he dies... Do you believe this?” (verse 25, NIV). Martha replied, “Yes.” But obviously she had not grasped the full scope of what Jesus was saying and asking her. So in verse 40 Jesus mildly rebuked her: “Did I not tell you if you believe you will see the glory of God?” Therefore, what happened next was predicated on their faith because of the “if” clause in this verse. They could only see the glory of God through faith, and just as John used the term glory in last week’s lesson, the glory or splendor of God was again being revealed to humanity.

Unfortunately, we have heard biblical faith recklessly thrown about by pulpit pundits, but in the Gospels, faith deals with revealing the glory of God or some accompanying mystery about the work of Jesus. According to W. H. Griffin Thomas, “Faith is a response to a divine revelation.” Therefore, it is not something we prove to one another; rather, it is one’s response to what God is doing in the world. Initially, Jesus asked them to take away the stone (verse 39), but rather than acting in faith, Martha mildly protested and told Jesus why they ought not remove the stone—his body had an odor by then. But Jesus challenged their faith in verse 40: “If you believe you will see the glory of God.”

B. The Divine Power over Death (John 11:41-44)

Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

After Jesus ordered them to take away the stone, they did. The people’s obedience to Jesus’ command activated what Jesus did next.
After the stone was removed, Jesus looked up to heaven and gave thanks to the Father for always hearing Him. His affirmation of God’s faithfulness in these communing words revealed to the people that He came from the Father (see John 1:1-16). Of course, Martha had already acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ (see verse 27), but John did not suggest that her confession was a public one but, rather, was a private one.

Therefore, Jesus made this pronouncement of His communion with the Father for the sake of the people standing around, “that they may believe that you sent me” (verse 42). In a few days, Jesus would make His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem (see 12:12ff). So the time was short—and if the people were to believe that He was the Son of God, time was of the essence. Then Jesus called Lazarus with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” (verse 43); and Lazarus, a dead man, got up wrapped from head to toe in grave clothes. Jesus gave one additional command to the people: “Take off the grave clothes and let him go” (verse 44).

The miracle was complete, and Lazarus was returned to life and family. However, his raising was not done just to restore and reunite family, (as great and grand as that was). Jesus was on a mission that was declared from the very beginning of this narrative, and that was to reveal Himself as the Son of God. When He received word that Lazarus was sick, He stayed two days longer where He was and declared to His disciples, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (verse 4). Furthermore, this miracle is for more than those who were present over two thousand years ago. It is for all who subsequently believe. Lazarus’s new life was symbolic of the gift of life that Jesus gives to the world (see John 3:16). According to Gerard Sloyan in his commentary on the gospel of John, “It is not simply physically being alive, but having as a gift from Jesus the life which he has from his Father” (Interpretation, Westminstor John Knox, 1988). A physical death is symbolic and is the foyer the believer must pass through in order to inherit eternal life. Finally, we can never know what Jesus the Christ can or will do for us until we will dare to do what He commands. We must dare to take away some stones that cover some issues in our lives if we want to experience a newness of life and see the glory of God.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

“Glory” is one of the sub-themes in John’s gospel. For John, the glory of God was revealed in Jesus. Thus, from the very beginning John told his readers that the “Word became flesh and dwelled among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father” (1:14). Then in chapter 2, the first sign of Jesus’ turning water to wine revealed Jesus’ glory, “and his disciples believed.” The word glory carries the idea that the splendor of God was manifested. When Jesus called forth Lazarus from the grave, the people saw His glory again. Also, as Martha lamented that had Jesus been present with them earlier, her brother would not have died, Jesus promised her that if she believed, she would see the glory of God revealed in Him. However, Martha failed to realize that Jesus’ power is not diminished in the face of death. In her conversation with Jesus, her grief interfered with her comprehension of what Jesus was saying to her. “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even
though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die” (verse 11, NIV). Jesus was telling Martha that He has power over life and death, and those who believe in Him will only die a physical death but will continue to live eternally with Jesus.

Finally, those who die in the Lord are never far from us. They only enter into another reality, hidden from sight. In some African tribal religions, ancestors who lived a gracious life are venerated. It is said that those who did not live a virtuous life were buried with their feet pointed away from the village. Correspondingly, in America we honor dead heroes with holidays, the naming of things, and the building of shrines to them. These practices are consistent with the biblical record of Hebrews 12:1, “We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses” (NIV). Thus, in the words of Jesus, “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.” The spirit of loved ones will never die. So as a faith community we must not only remember, but also find appropriate rituals to honor the dead who have added to our faith journey and have died in the Lord. We must remember and capture the good spirit of those who have transitioned from this life to life eternal, for they live even though they died the physical death.

**PRAYER**

*Oh Lord our God, how awesome You are, ruler over death and life. We are grateful that because of who You are, death will not have the final word over us. We are more than conquerors over death and the grave because of the work of Jesus the Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

*Believe or Faith (Greek: pisteuo)—to have confidence. Jesus encourages us who are in relationship with Him to have confidence in Him. If we do, we will see His glory revealed in our impossible situations.*

*Glory (Greek: doxa)—splendor or value. Through the tragedy of Lazarus’s death, Jesus again revealed His splendor and that He is worthy of praise and honor.*

*Resurrection (Greek: anastasis)—a rising again. The same word referring to Lazarus’s raising is used to describe Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus may have done this to show the ultimate powerlessness of physical death in the lives of those who trust in Him.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(January 25-31, 2016)*

**The Death of a Friend**

**MONDAY,** January 25: “Trust in Facing Death” (Psalm 56)

**TUESDAY,** January 26: “Life Eternal” (Isaiah 25:6-10)

**WEDNESDAY,** January 27: “Darkness Dispelled” (Matthew 4:12-17)

**THURSDAY,** January 28: “For God’s Glory” (John 11:1-6)

**FRIDAY,** January 29: “I Am Life” (John 11:17-27)

**SATURDAY,** January 30: “Jesus Wept” (John 11:28-37)

**SUNDAY,** January 31: “The Death of a Friend” (John 11:38-44)
PASSOVER

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** Free at Last!

**Devotional Reading:** Matthew 26:20-30
**Print Passage:** Exodus 12:1-14
**Key Verse:** Exodus 12:14

Exodus 12:1-14—KJV
AND THE LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,
2 This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.
3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:
4 And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.
5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:
6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.
7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.
8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.
9 Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof.
10 And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

Exodus 12:1-14—NIV
THE LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt,
2 “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.
3 “Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.
4 “If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat.
5 “The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats.
6 “Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.
7 “Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.
8 “That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.
9 “Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire—head, legs and inner parts.
10 “Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People love to commemorate historic events by creating traditional days of celebration. What makes these commemorations so important? God gave Moses and the people instructions for the first Passover, commemorating their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

11 And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’s passover. 12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. 13 And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. 14 And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

11 “This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover. 12 “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. 13 “The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. 14 “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.”

TOPOICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Commemorative Celebrations
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. A Divine Directive to Celebrate (Exodus 12:1-6)
   B. The Spiritual Significance of the Celebration (Exodus 12:7-11)
   C. The Celebration Became a Memorial (Exodus 12:12-14)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall events surrounding the institution of the Feast of Passover;
2. Reflect on the meaning of Passover and what it says about God; and,
3. Develop a festival of praise to God for salvation.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Free at Last!
Youth Topic: Celebrating Deliverance
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Exodus 12:14
Print Passage: Exodus 12:1-14
—The Passover meal was to be eaten in an attitude of preparedness: with loins girded, sandals on the feet, and staff in the hand. The use of unleavened bread also points to haste: there was not enough time to let dough rise.
—The Hebrew word for “Passover,” pesach, may imply either “passing over” or “hovering over”—that is, “guarding.” This second usage is probably to be preferred in light of how the word is used elsewhere in the Scriptures (see Isaiah 31:5).
—The ritualized Passover meal is also called a Seder, from a Hebrew word meaning “order” or “arrangement.”
—The first Passover Feast was initiated after the children of Israel were delivered from Pharaoh’s hand and is still celebrated today.
—The blood on the doorpost was a prophetic event that foretold the salvific sacrifice of Jesus.
—The lamb was eaten as a preview of the Lamb of God being given to humankind in the Christian Scriptures.

**CHILDREN**

**Children Topic: A Day of Remembrance**

**Key Verse:** Exodus 12:14a

**Print Passage:** Exodus 12:1-14

—The first Passover resulted from God’s instructions to the Israelites in their preparation for leaving slavery and going into freedom.
—The first Passover would be the beginning of an annual celebration.
—A year-old sheep or goat without defect was to be selected as the animal of sacrifice.
—The sheep or goat selected would be sacrificed on the fourteenth of the month and the blood from the animal put on the doorframes.
—The blood on the doorpost was a sign for the firstborn male of men or animal not to be killed as the Lord passed over the house that night.
—The ritualized Passover meal is also called a Seder, from a Hebrew word meaning “order” or “arrangement.”

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**A. Commemorative Celebrations**

It is interesting how often the children of Israel in the Old Testament were commanded to mark and remember historical moments of their liberation. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus commemorated the ancient occasion of Passover and used it to establish a new memorial for His followers. He asked them to also remember and celebrate the occasion of the Lord’s Supper. Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said, “We are never very free. We live within the constraints of our genetic heritage, our biological rhythms and needs, our social values and customs, our personal habits and mindset associated with all of these.” We may not like it, but we are the servants of our past!

**B. Biblical Background**

The book of Exodus is a narrative of the liberation of the Hebrew people, who were trapped in a system of oppression for 420 years. However, the beginning of their narrative in Egypt gives a glimpse of a successful people. Egypt had become home for millions of the Israelite people, the descendants of the sons and daughters of Jacob. According to Genesis 46, the patriarch Jacob followed his son Joseph to Egypt and settled there because there was a famine in his homeland, Canaan. However, one of the most pertinent phrases
in the Exodus is, “Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (1:8, NIV). This Pharaoh perceived the descendants of Joseph to be a threat; he answered the threat with oppression. He subjugated the people to brutality (see 1:11). The people cried out to Yahweh and in time He heard their cry. Chapter 12 comes after the long struggle between Yahweh and Pharaoh in which Yahweh sent a series of plagues upon the land of Egypt. The final plague was the death of all firstborn males in the land of Egypt, except of the households of the Israelites.

Therefore, on the tenth day of the first month, each Israelite household was to set aside a one-year-old sheep or goat. They were to keep the animal until the fourteenth day of the same month, after which they were to slaughter the animal and institute a sacred meal (Passover, pesah) to be observed for generations to come. Yahweh gave them very detailed instructions for the preparation and eating of the meal. Also, they were to take the blood of the animal and mark the doorposts of the households where the meal was eaten. At midnight the death angel would pass through Egypt, but would pass over (abar) all homes marked with the sign of blood (see 12:13). This was a signal moment in the life of a people, as they established an everlasting covenant with Yahweh.

In conclusion, Exodus is a narrative of hope for all who sit in the land of deep darkness. It makes clear that the God of the Exodus experience is the God of justice who in time will respond to the cry and weariness of God’s people. Freedom ultimately is the work of grace and ought always to be remembered and celebrated because it is God who sets us free.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. A Divine Directive to Celebrate
   (Exodus 12:1-6)

AND THE LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.

The Passover celebration was instituted in the shadow of God’s victory over the “gods of Egypt.” Yahweh exhibited His power over these false gods and instructed His people to institute the Passover ritual to commemorate their liberation. Yahweh is a God of deliberate intent (see verses 1-24). The people were to take an unblemished sheep or goat of one year old (verse 5) on the tenth of the month and set it aside until the fourteenth day. The animals were to be slaughtered in the evening all over the entire congregation, then roasted and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Accordingly, aside from the specificity of the instructions there were two noteworthy instructions associated with the sacred meal: God’s establishment of a new annual calendar
for the Israelite people and the beginning of a new social arrangement. They would no longer be governed by Pharaoh’s time and agenda. Therefore, verse 2 reads, “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year.” This was the month of Nisan on the Jewish calendar and March–April on our contemporary calendar. Yahweh created something new out of something old.

Perhaps this new beginning is comparable to an Emancipation Proclamation. It was more than just a historical event; it was a living memorial which the people were to remember and be inspired to hope beyond their existential realities of trouble. Therefore, this new beginning is the hope of all people whose backs are against the wall.

Second, this new order marked a new social arrangement. J. Gerald Janzen, in his commentary on Exodus, says, “Yahweh establishes a new social reality called ‘congregation.’ Heretofore, the people were known as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but now they are a community” (Exodus, Westminster John Knox, 1997). They became the community of the people of God (see verses 3-4). Furthermore, Janzen raises the question, “What might this mean in the lives of later generations who eat unleavened bread? …It signifies that God’s deliverance, which sometimes seems as though it will never come, can then come so quickly that there is no time to prepare for it.” They were to eat fully dressed and prepared for travel. Four hundred-plus years is a long time for anything, but when God says it is over, it is over.

B. The Spiritual Significance of the Celebration (Exodus 12:7-11)

And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord’s passover.

The details of their last night in Egypt—the image of blood on the doorposts—are of great significance. Yahweh established His covenant with Israel in blood. In Exodus 24, Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read from it and took some animal blood, threw it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” Likewise, we are told by the writer of the book of Hebrews, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin” (Hebrews 9:22, NIV). Blood symbolizes life giving! The people were to slaughter the animals and take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the homes where the meal was being served. It was declared to be the Lord’s Passover, so it was necessary for the people to obey the commands in order to be recipients of its grace. Fretheim further writes, “The deadly act that enables Israel’s deliverance is God’s work, but the people’s response prepares the way.” The obedience of the people was the condition of this covenant relationship with Yahweh.

As Christians, we must not underestimate the value and necessity of obedience in our relationship with our God. Samuel the seer said to King Saul, “Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in
obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22, NASB). Thus, this text was more than just a promise of redemption associated with the Passover; it needed the obedience of the people to mark their doorposts with blood.

C. The Celebration Became a Memorial

(Exodus 12:12-14)

For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.

The death angel would pass over (abar) the households with the blood signage on its doorposts. There were millions of Hebrew people living in Egypt at the time. Can we reasonably expect each household to have had a lamb or goat of one year old? No, not at all! But these were agrarian communities in which animal life was a staple; however, for those who did not have a sacrifice Yahweh made provision for them. This was in the spring of the year and animal mating and birthing had already begun. So if perchance a household did not have an animal of one year old, their neighbors were to share. This illustrated divine justice; no one was excluded from participating in the ritual because of economic limitations or social arrangements. Yahweh, in His wisdom, included all of the people, regardless of their economic standing in the community. After all, He was dismantling the old system that created economic disparities among the people in the first place. Finally, in verse 12, Yahweh said, “I will pass through the land of Egypt at night and strike all firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast . . . I am the LORD.” Cries of grief filled the air over Egypt that night. The Lord left little doubt that this was the work of His hand. He brought down Pharaoh’s arrogant and brutal rule over the Hebrew people. He introduced Himself to Moses in Exodus 3 as the sovereign Lord of the universe, “I AM THAT I AM,” or “I am who I will be” (see 3:14). Yahweh connected His sovereignty to this particular event in salvation history.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Today, if males were killed in Egypt or in any country, it would be called genocide or ethnic cleansing and would be met with worldwide outrage and pushback. Yet, the reading of this text does not fill us with rage. Why not? Perhaps what is an atrocity at human hands is sovereign justice at God’s hands. Or perhaps we have come to accept collateral damage as an act of war. Yahweh was engaged in a cosmic warfare against Pharaoh to secure justice for His people. Yahweh pushed the envelope to push Pharaoh into surrender. The tragedy of Egypt was redemptive and advanced the kingdom of God. Accordingly, this redemptive act is a type that points beyond itself to the Son of God’s suffering and death on the cross at Calvary. Thus, God does not do this for narrow political gain over Pharaoh, but to advance His kingdom in the world. So this Passover event serves to point us to the death and suffering of Jesus the Christ, the only begotten Son of God. According to the Gospels, the final act and night Jesus
spent with His disciples on Earth was in the observance of this Passover meal. Consistent with the redemptive work of Israel’s liberation from Egypt, Jesus instituted something new out of something old. He took both bread and wine and blessed them and told His disciples to commemorate that night each time they were together until He returned. As the people of God, we are to commemorate His suffering until He returns; this is the legacy of peace and justice that God gives the world. Concomitantly, we are invited—indeed, commanded—to remember our past. Equally important for the modern-day Christian is to remember all of the good things God has done for us. In times of despair and discouragement, we need to take stock of how God has provided for us in our individual pasts and trust Him to come through again and again. Maya Angelou said, “One generation plants the tree, and another one sits in the shade.” The believer has the privilege of sitting under the shade tree planted on Calvary by Jesus, the Son of God.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, it is with deep appreciation we come to You today. Thank You for all that You have done for us in salvation history through Jesus Christ our Lord. Each time we gather around the Lord’s Table to share in the ancient ritual of the Lord’s Supper, let us remember afresh the true meaning of our freedom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

*Passover (Hebrew: *pesah*)—a technical term referring to an offering. It is used in Exodus 12 in reference to the lamb sacrificed at the first Passover. Ultimately, it points to the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.*

*Pass Over (Hebrew: *abar*)—this phrase means “to spare.” The Israelite households whose doorposts were smeared with the sacrificed lamb’s blood were spared the grief of losing their firstborns. As such, all who are under Jesus’ blood are spared God’s judgment of the second death.*

*Sign (Hebrew: *oth*)—a pledge or witness. The blood of the lamb was a sign to the death angel to pass over that home. Our witness in Christ’s blood causes the consequences of sin to lose their grasp on us until we are forever free.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*February 1-7, 2016*

**Passover**

**MONDAY,** February 1: “Jesus and the Passover” (Luke 2:41-49)

**TUESDAY,** February 2: “The ‘Last’ Passover” (Matthew 26:20-30)

**WEDNESDAY,** February 3: “The Fourth Plague” (Exodus 8:20-29)

**THURSDAY,** February 4: “The Eighth Plague” (Exodus 10:12-20)

**FRIDAY,** February 5: “Detailed Instructions” (Numbers 9:1-4, 13)

**SATURDAY,** February 6: “When Your Children Ask” (Joshua 4:1-7)

**SUNDAY,** February 7: “Passover” (Exodus 12:1-14)
UNIT III: Holy Days

LESSON 11

February 14, 2016

UNIT III: Holy Days

CHILDREN’S UNIT: Special Celebrations

WINTER QUARTER

FEAST OF WEEKS

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: A Bountiful Harvest

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 7:14-25
PRINT PASSAGE: Leviticus 23:15-22
KEY VERSE: Leviticus 23:16

LEVITICUS 23:15-22—KJV
15 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: 16 Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.
17 Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baken with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD.
18 And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the LORD, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the LORD.
19 Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs, the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings.
20 And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest.
21 And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.
22 And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God.

LEVITICUS 23:15-22—NIV
15 “From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks.
16 “Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD.
17 “From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD.
18 “Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the LORD, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings—an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.
19 “Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering.
20 “The priest is to wave the two lambs before the LORD as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. They are a sacred offering to the LORD for the priest.
21 “On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.
22 “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People celebrate the harvest of their labors with thanksgiving and share the fruits with others. Why do they respond in this way? God commanded the Hebrews to offer God joyful praise and thanksgiving, as they shared their harvest with the needy.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. All Belongs to God
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Preparation for the Celebration (Leviticus 23:15-16)
   B. Details of the Celebration (Leviticus 23:17-22)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Examine the Feast of Weeks in the book of Leviticus;
2. Celebrate with joy and thanksgiving times of giving to God what belongs to God and to the needy; and,
3. Commit to a life plan of returning to God a portion of what has been received from God and of sharing with those in need.

POINTER TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: A Bountiful Harvest
Youth Topic: Joyful Praise and Thanksgiving
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Leviticus 23:16
Print Passage: Leviticus 23:15-22
—The “festival of first fruits” (see Leviticus 23:9-22) is made up of two parts: the first celebrating the barley harvest (see Leviticus 23:9-14); and the second, celebrating the wheat harvest, which was also called the Feast of Weeks (see Leviticus 23:15-22). This feast took place fifty days after Passover. It is also known in the Scriptures as the Feast of Pentecost (from the Greek word for “fifty”), “the festival of harvest” (see Exodus 23:16), and “the day of the first fruits” (see Numbers 28:26).
—Leviticus 23:22 repeats a theme also found in Leviticus 19:9-10: A person could not thank God for a bountiful harvest and simultaneously neglect the hungry and the landless.
—The festival was about returning thankfully to God what God had given and sharing with those in need.
—Since the Festival of Weeks was held fifty days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it came to be called Pentecost (based on the Greek word meaning “fifty”).
—Jewish law, as in Leviticus 23:22, codified concern for people without resources by mandating leaving food in the field for those who needed it. There were similar laws regarding olive trees and vineyards (compare with Ruth 2:2).

CHILDREN
Children Topic: A Grateful Heart
Key Verse: Leviticus 23:16b
Print Passage: Leviticus 23:15-22
—God provided a timeline for the Israelites of when sacrifices were to be offered to God.
—God provided specific directions on what was to be sacrificed and the way the sacrifices were to be made.
—The burnt offerings of the lambs, bull, and rams must not have any defects.
—The smell of the fire from all the burnt offerings was pleasing to God.
—The priest was the one who presented the offering to the Lord.
—God’s concern for the poor is shown in how He told the Israelites not to reap all of their harvest for the crops so that those in need could gather food.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. All Belongs to God

In the book of Leviticus, holiness is not just only confined to people or objects but also includes times and seasons. The term *holiness* (qodesh) means “to be set aside” or “something consecrated.” Thus, in the book of Leviticus, Yahweh prescribes for the people a series of festive celebrations to remind them that life and everything they have came from Him. The people’s offerings were from land and beast, and signaled the people’s covenant relationship with Yahweh.

In conclusion, the people of Israel were clear about their lives; they were a covenant people and their all in all belonged to God. Religious life touched every aspect of their lives; hence, these practices of worship were expressions of gratitude for the graciousness of their God in every area. He declared to the people why they had to do those things and live a certain way according to these statutes: “I am the LORD your God” (verse 22). Thus, the people were reminded over and over that they and all that they had were not theirs; rather, they were the Lord’s. Concomitantly, as Christians we also owe our being to God, who is Lord of our lives. We cannot expect to be exempted from the acknowledgment and practice of honoring God with all of life. The God of the old is also the God of the new, and the claim of the psalmist is still true: “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). Unfortunately, when we fast forward to today’s culture, we want to divide life into two categories: the sacred and the secular. By *secular* we mean that God is not in it or it is not religious, and we are not accountable to God for it but are only accountable to ourselves. By the term *sacred* we are referring to those things that belong to God or things that He is in. However, dividing life into the secular and the sacred is not a biblical concept to govern life in the kingdom of God. All of life belongs to God. So when we pause for festive celebrations or Sabbath rest, it does not mean that the rest of life does not belong to and is not a gift from God.

B. Biblical Background

The book of Leviticus provides an interesting read for the New Testament believer because
of all the holy codes, the patterns of worship, and the sacrificial offerings that are mandated. These detailed instructions might seem irrelevant to Christians today because they are not part of our faith tradition, but Gary Demarest in *Mastering the Old Testament: A Commentary on Leviticus* says, “Our understanding and experience of the full meaning of Christ’s resurrection can only be heightened and enhanced by growing in our knowledge of these beautiful celebrations in Israel’s annual worship cycle.” In the forming of the Hebrew community, these festivals were most relevant because they were the laws and statutes that would help establish and regulate life within their community.

After more than four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, the people had no political, social, or religious structure. Thus, as the children of Israel were preparing to settle and live life as a peculiar people in the land of Canaan, Yahweh gave them a series of holy codes—economic, religious, political, and social—to regulate life as a covenant community. In Hebrew theology, all of life fell under the sovereignty of Yahweh. Thus, Demarest says, “There were to be no distinctions between God’s presence in worship, in prayer or in personal hygiene, in spirituality or in relationships with neighbors. God’s visible presence in glory on special occasions in no way diminished the fact that to them God was always and ever present in reality.” All life is from God, and God is in all life!

Chapter 23 of the book of Leviticus deals with the “feasts of the Lord,” which is a recurring theme in this chapter: “These are the feasts of the Lord” (see verses 2, 4). These feasts belonged to the Lord and were ordered by the Lord. So the Feast of Weeks was preceded by the Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First-fruits (see Exodus 12:1–13:16 and Leviticus 23:1-14). Following the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread, they were to count off seven weeks after the First-fruits offering (verse 10) and set aside fifty days that would coincide with the end of the wheat harvest (during the month of May). This harvest would later be called Pentecost. Therefore, germane to this discussion is that the ancient Hebrew people were an agrarian people and lived off the bounty of the land, beasts, and vegetation. Thus, these festive offerings and sacred days were to acknowledge their dependency on Yahweh, and these reenactments were to be occasional reminders of the reality that it was Yahweh who set them free. Additionally, Yahweh commanded them to make these sacrificial offerings from the life-sustaining goods He provided for them. It was to this end that we see in chapter 23 that Yahweh required the people to include and honor harvest time and seasons as important parts of their cycle of life.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Preparation for the Celebration

(Leviticus 23:15-16)

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the Lord.

These verses are hard for one to sink his/her teeth into because they are primarily instructional. Perhaps for contemporary Christians or even non-Christian readers, they seem most
irrelevant. However, the book of Leviticus was a founding document for the children of Israel that would ultimately constitute them as a chosen nation. So as per divine instructions to Moses (see verse 1), the Hebrew people were to mark the beginning of the calendar year with their spring harvest of barley, which included the following feasts: Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First-fruits. After the First-fruits feast, they were to count fifty days from the end of First-fruits, or count seven full weeks or seven full Sabbaths, which is forty-nine days, and then on the next day (the fiftieth day) they were to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost on the first day of the week.

However, the First-fruits festival was more of a ritual than an offering. The first barley sheaves that were gathered from the first harvest were to be brought to the priest, who in turn was to wave them before the Lord. This ritual was known as a “wave offering” to the Lord and was to be offered in concert with an unblemished one-year-old male lamb and a grain offering of flour mixed with oil and burned on the altar of the Lord to create a sweet aroma (see verses 10-13). These rituals and statutes had eternal consequences, marking the work of Yahweh in their liberation or exodus from Egypt. Therefore, each subsequent generation was to be taught to remember and observe these rituals forever, “throughout your generations” (verse 14). As a good Jew, Jesus also observed these feasts.

The offerings and celebrations after Pentecost were slightly different from those for Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First-fruits. The farmers were to bring from their harvest two wave loaves made of fine flour, baked with yeast (leaven), then given to the priest to be offered with seven lambs one year old and unblemished, one bull, and two rams. There was to be a burnt offering, a grain offering, and a drink offering made by fire to create a sweet aroma to the Lord. These sacrifices were quite proper and fitting for the people as a time for thanksgiving to Yahweh for their new independence. Perhaps we might ask why these are important to us as believers. These celebrations were Old Testament types (examples) that pointed to Jesus the Christ in the New Testament. For the Christian, the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion is rooted in the Hebrew Passover meal. The apostle Paul said, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Also, Paul referred to Jesus as the first-fruits from the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:20). Therefore, the real meaning of Jesus’ death can only be fully understood in light of these ancient celebrations. Furthermore, we must note that these celebrations would not take place for some years hence when the Hebrew people would eventually conquer and settle in Canaan (verse 9). Hence, it is good and important to know that God cares for us not just in the here and now, but He cares about our future and will even help us plan our future if we let Him.

B. Details of the Celebration
(Leviticus 23:17-22)

Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord. And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the Lord, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the Lord. Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin
offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations. And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God.

One of the key expressions in these verses is, “it is a holy convocation” (NKJV) or “it is a sacred assembly” (see verses 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 21). Yahweh said to Moses, “you are to proclaim a sacred assembly” (verse 21). Yahweh called the people to assemble for worship, and He determined the liturgical order the people were to follow to honor Him and honor their legacy. What a novel idea for worship to be God-centered! Worship today, in too many instances, seems to be person- or personality-centered and not God (Christ)-centered. So perhaps we can learn much from this ancient text about worship. We are not to worship out of mere routine; neither should worship be personality-centered (length of service, who is singing or preaching, and so forth) because when it is, it ceases to be sacred. Neither should worship be scripted around our human likes and dislikes, because then it is about us, and it becomes profane.

Accordingly, the holy convocation consisted of two offerings: a sin offering (hilasterion) and a peace offering (shelem), also referred to as fellowship, praise, thanksgiving, or a sweet-smelling offering (see verses 19-20). The Jewish Encyclopedia says of the sin offering, “It is a sacrifice consisting of either a beast or a fowl and offered on the altar to atone for a sin committed unwittingly.” Whereas, “the peace offering indicated it had no sin in it and connoted friendship with God.” Likewise, during these particular holy convocations, no customary work was to be done. It was a time of Sabbath rest, and even the land rested (see verse 21). Finally, they were encouraged not to glean all of the produce from the fields, but to save the corners or edges of their fields in order to allow the poor and strangers to glean after the harvest was completed. Verse 22 deals with charity or compassion and is placed in the same context as these statutes for worship (see verses 1-21). Perhaps God was showing us the correlation between worship and charity. After all, what is worship without serving others? We cannot truly love God without truly loving our brothers and sisters. It does not matter how we frame it or shape it—the worship of our God is to prepare us for service in the world.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The Old Testament distinguishes between what is profane and what is holy versus what is sacred and what is secular. The profane is anything “not handled properly or not covered properly that is not for divine use.” Simply put, the profane was not set apart to God, and the holy was set apart to God. Therefore, life and things set apart to God were not to be handled for personal or communal use—that is, they are not to be made profane. In general, the concepts of holy and profane and the more recent concepts of sacred and secular are similar, but are by no means synonymous. Nevertheless, even as believers in modern life, we have attempted to divide life around concepts of
godly and worldly or sacred and secular. Life in the kingdom of God cannot be separated. To try to do so is a dangerous thing because of the emotional, social, and spiritual impact it has on how we live our lives and our impact on the world. We cannot live in two arenas; to do so is what Jesus labeled as hypocrisy.

There is no difference between belief (orthodoxy) and practice (orthopraxy) in the Christian faith. God expects us to practice what we say we believe at all times and in all situations. Thus, life in the kingdom of God cannot be segmented into the sacred and the secular because in the Hebrew Bible, holiness is an all-consuming concept and cannot be parsed into opposing forces or various life components.

**WORD POWER**

First-fruits (Hebrew: *reshith*)—first in time, order, or rank. Our offerings to God—whether money, time, study, and others—must be priority and not leftover. Such a gift to the Lord placed Him in the right position in the believer’s life—on the throne.

Peace offering (Hebrew: *shelem*)—also referred to as fellowship, praise, thanksgiving, or a sweet-smelling offering, an offering that had no sin in it, rather given out of friendship with God. It was given of one’s own free will apart from sin offerings.

Sin offering (Hebrew: *hilasterion*)—an offering made to atone for sin. Repentance is an essential element of true worship. It affirms God’s holiness and helps us to see our own sins.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**  
*(February 8-14, 2016)*

**Feast of Weeks**

**MONDAY,** February 8: “Praise the Lord” (Psalm 147:1-11)

**TUESDAY,** February 9: “Thanks Be to God” (1 Chronicles 17:16-27)

**WEDNESDAY,** February 10: “In All Things, Thanks” (Ephesians 5:15-20)

**THURSDAY,** February 11: “In Spite of Everything, Thanks” (Romans 7:14-25)

**FRIDAY,** February 12: “Increasing Thanks” (2 Corinthians 4:7-15)

**SATURDAY,** February 13: “In the End, Thanks” (Revelation 11:15-19)

**SUNDAY,** February 14: “Feast of Weeks” (Leviticus 23:15-22)

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, “all things come of thee and of thine own have we given thee.” It is our prayer this day that we will worship You not in words only, but rather with gifts of heart and hand so that Your kingdom will be manifest in the world. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
DAY OF ATONEMENT

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** A Clean Slate

**DEVOOTIONAL READING:** Hebrews 3:1-6
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Leviticus 16:11-19
**KEY VERSE:** Leviticus 16:16

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Leviticus 16; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11; Hebrews 7:26-28; 9:24; 10:4-18

**Leviticus 16:11-19—KJV**

11 And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself:

12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail:

13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:

14 And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

15 Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:

16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

17 And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel.

**Leviticus 16:11-19—NIV**

11 “Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering.

12 “He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain.

13 “He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die.

14 “He is to take some of the bull’s blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

15 “He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull’s blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it.

16 “In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

17 “No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Often people regret wrongful actions committed against another and because of their guilt seek to make amends. What are some ways that atonement can be made? In the book of Leviticus, God commanded the Israelites to set aside a day in which to sacrifice animals for payment of sin’s debt; the book of Hebrews says that the blood of animals is no longer sufficient and that God has provided Jesus as the supreme sacrifice for atonement.

18 And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. 19 And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

18 “Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the Lord and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull’s blood and some of the goat’s blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. 19 “He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.”

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. God Covers It All
   B. Biblical Background
II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Sacrifice for the Priest (Leviticus 16:11-14)
   B. The Sacrifice for the People (Leviticus 16:15-19)
III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Explore the Day of Atonement as found in the book of Leviticus;
2. Reflect on the meaning of atonement for their sins and its relevance today; and,
3. Identify those things in their lives needing repentance and to seek atonement.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: A Clean Slate
Youth Topic: Making Things Right
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Leviticus 16:16
Print Passage: Leviticus 16:11-19
—Leviticus 16 imagines sin not only as a transgression that must be forgiven but also as a defilement that must be cleansed. Perhaps subconsciously, the same mode of thinking might occur after hearing “filthy jokes” or seeing or participating in unsavory behaviors that make a person feel dirty.
—The Day of Atonement involved purgation of the sacred space not only from inadvertent ritual uncleanness but also from “transgressions” (Leviticus 16:16, 21), apparently meaning deliberate acts of rebellion against God.
—Atonement is a reversal of the alienation caused by sin in which the offending party is restored to spiritual right standing.
—Sins are atoned for by blood sacrifices, but these are seen in a different way in the book of Hebrews.
—The mercy seat was the top section or lid of the ark of the covenant, which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments.
—Blood sacrifices were used because it was thought that life was in the blood and that life (blood) would make atonement for the soul (Leviticus 17:11).
—The Day of Atonement is known as Yom Kippur.

CHILDREN

Children Topic: The Supreme Sacrifice
Key Verse: Hebrews 10:16b
Print Passage: Hebrews 10:4-6, 9-10, 15-18

I. INTRODUCTION
A. God Covers It All

Biblical atonement is the act of covering over something in order to appease or to pacify. The Braw-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon says of atonement, “God in His sovereignty may Himself provide atonement or covering for men and their sins which could not be provided by men.” The people’s sins were covered over by a substitute offering, usually an animal sacrifice.

Also, the sacred space of worship had to be atoned for because human sin contaminated the holy space, and it had to be set right with God before a sacrifice could be offered on the altar. Therefore, on the Day of Atonement, a young bull was to be slaughtered by Aaron the high priest, and blood of the bull was sprinkled on the atonement cover of the ark to purify himself (verse 6). Then he (the high priest) was to take a young goat (verse 9) and sacrifice it before the Lord for the sins of the people. These prescriptions were given by God in order for the people to get a clean slate from their sins each year. This was an opportunity for them to start life afresh without the stain of sin. However, like so many rituals in the Old Testament, this is a type that points to Jesus the Christ. It points to Jesus as our sacrificial Lamb, who was offered up on the Cross for the sins of many. Yet, the variance of the Cross is that the death of Jesus atoned for our sins by His blood, once and for all times. Jesus the Christ died once for all, unlike the Day of Atonement in which it had to be repeated annually.

B. Biblical Background

The Day of Atonement was an annual event celebrated sometime in the fall of the year according to the Jewish calendar. Also, this day held a central place in the sacred worship in the lives of the Hebrew people because it was the day when their sins were set aside.

—After Christ’s resurrection, sacrificing animals was no longer necessary to pay the price for the sin of the people.
—Christ gave complete submission and obedience to God by coming to Earth.
—God gave the world Christ as the supreme sacrifice.
—The new covenant through Christ is a reminder that sin is forgiven forever.
—The new covenant by God would be written on the hearts and minds of the people.
Walter C. Kaiser Jr. calls it “the single most important day and most characteristic ritual in all the legislation of the first five books of the Bible.” This day has survived in Jewish culture for thousands of years and today is called “Yom Kippur,” which is still practiced or observed by Jews all over the world, but without the blood sacrifices. The ritual today has five prohibitions: no eating or drinking, no wearing of leather shoes, no bathing or washing, no anointing of one with oils or perfumes, and no sexual relations. Yom Kippur falls between September 13 and October 12, and begins at sundown the day of and end of the next day at nightfall. Leviticus 16 is read by the Jewish people, except the Reformed Jews read Leviticus 19 instead. The basic ritual today has been symbolic since the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in the first century AD.

The essence of Leviticus 16 was to warn the children of Israel that coming before Yahweh was not a small matter and should not be taken lightly or for granted. God is holy and demanded that they stand in His presence in holiness. As a matter of fact, two of Aaron’s sons were put to death because they appeared in God’s sacred space profaned and without divine permission (see Leviticus 10:1-2 and 16:1-2). So the Lord made it clear through Moses that any approach to God must be done with extreme care and self-examination and on God’s terms, thus honoring God’s command to be holy. The word holy or most holy, in its English form, means “whole or complete.” God is complete and we are incomplete. Thus, God instructed Moses that not even the high priest Aaron could come before Him at will. “Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover” (Leviticus 16:2, NIV). Aaron was to enter into the presence of Yahweh in the Holy of Holies only after he had atoned for his sins and the sins of his household by the killing of a young bull and sprinkling its blood on the atonement cover which was on the ark.

Finally, although this lesson covers only nine verses, we must read all of the Background Scripture to get an enhanced understanding of the concept of atonement.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Sacrifice for the Priest
   (Leviticus 16:11-14)

   And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself: And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

   The scene in chapter 16 took place in the tabernacle (and later would be duplicated in the Temple) before and behind the Holy of Holies (see Exodus 25) at the ark of the covenant or mercy seat, which was considered the place where God dwelled. The Day of Atonement was a day of worship and sacrifice, but it was characterized by sorrow, repentance, and
humiliation over the sins committed before God. Special preparation was essential for this day before Aaron the high priest could enter into the Holy of Holies. Animal sacrifices were to be used to purify the atmosphere: a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering (see verses 3-5). These were offered for Aaron and his family to purify or to purify them. It is indeed interesting that only Aaron was to approach the mercy seat of God, although he had to atone for his family’s sins as well.

Perhaps this practice speaks to the connectivity, the solidarity, and the role of the patriarch in the family in the Old Testament. The patriarch was held accountable for the family; hence, before Aaron could represent the people before God as high priest, he first had to purify himself and his family as patriarch (see verses 6, 11). In verse 11, Aaron brought a bull for his and his family’s sin offering. After slaughtering the bull, he had to follow divine instructions as he entered the Holy of Holies. He entered with incense, burning coal, and the blood of the bull. He created smoke from the burning coal and the incense to conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony (ark), where God’s presence dwelled. Then he was to sprinkle the blood of the bull on the atonement cover once, then seven times before the atonement cover. It is clear that Aaron had to complete all these rituals just to prepare himself to come into the presence of the Lord almighty.

Hebrew theology is certain that the sanctity of the family fell to the family patriarch. Therefore, according to divine legislation in the books of Moses, it was the father’s responsibility to teach and train the family in the holiness codes. The Wisdom writer said, “Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching” (Proverbs 4:1-2, NIV). So God gave Moses instructions to give to the fathers for handling an incorrigible son: “If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death” (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Thus, the family patriarch (father) had a central role in the structure and spiritual discipline of the family.

Surely, the plight of the African-American family can be informed by this biblical truth. The reality is that a disproportionate number of African-American fathers are absent from the home, but they can still be involved positively in their children’s lives. As such, we need to re-teach and relearn something about patriarchal accountability and responsibility for the family. Statistics support that in a family that has both father and mother present, the children are less prone to get in trouble with the law and are more likely to experience success in life. Being a patriarch requires more of us fathers—to do more than just be involved in the fathering of children. Aaron was the high priest for all Israel, yet as patriarch he had to atone for the sins of his family before he was ready to go before God on behalf of the people. Aaron made atonement for himself and for his family.
B. The Sacrifice for the People
(Leviticus 16:15-19)

Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for
the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do
with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock,
and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy
seat: And he shall make an atonement for the holy place,
because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and
because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so
shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that
remaineth among them in the midst of their unclean-
ness. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the
congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement
in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an
atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all
the congregation of Israel. And he shall go out unto the
altar that is before the Lord, and make an atonement for
it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the
blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar
round about. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it
with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it
from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Aaron was ready to atone for the sins of
the people. He had two goats and cast lots
to determine which would be sacrificed and
which would be the scapegoat, or the goat of
removal (azazel). The scapegoat would bear the
sins of the people that would be sent from the
community. Aaron would slaughter the one
as a sin offering, on whom the lot did not fall.
He was to take some of the blood of the slain
goat into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle it on
and before the mercy seat. This was to be done
because of the uncleanness and the sins of the
people (see verse 17). However, Aaron was to
atone for the worship space, the tabernacle, as
well. The tabernacle was cleansed annually be-
cause, in the words of Demarest, “The worship
space was besmirched by the sins of the people;
this is the basic belief of the people that God
could not and would not dwell in an unclean

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

After studying Leviticus 16, one might ask
the question, why study these ancient Jewish
statutes and why are they relevant today? Well,
there are a few reasons: first, scholars have said
that the study of the book of Leviticus will
help the believer better understand the work
of Jesus the Christ. Second, Jesus the Christ is
mirrored in the book of Leviticus more than in

place.” Thus, the annual cleansing signaled a
clean slate for another year.

Finally, we cannot overestimate the im-
portance of symbolism; the act of releasing the
scapegoat into the wilderness was symbolic of
the removal of sin from the community. In
Christendom, we know the importance and
value of the symbolic; they provide us a men-
tal image of a higher spiritual truth and value
(think of the crucifix, the dove, the empty
tomb, and so forth). The scapegoat was such
a symbol for the people of Israel. Thus, after
Aaron had atoned for himself, his household,
the people, and the tabernacle, he took the
live goat, placed his hand on its head, and
symbolically transferred the sins of the com-
munity to it, as he confessed their sins. The
scapegoat was then taken by an appointed
man and released into the wilderness, bearing
the sins of the people (see verses 7-10, 20-22).
The scapegoat was never to be seen again. In
Christendom, we can relate to this ritual of the
scapegoat because this is what Christ did for
us. He removed our sins from us and from the
presence of God, never to be seen again. It has
been said that our sins have been thrown into
the sea of forgetfulness (see Micah 7:19).
any other book in the Old Testament. Finally, it is from the book Leviticus that we get the context for many of our New Testament theological concepts such as atonement, expiation, propitiation, and scapegoat.

The writer of the book of Hebrews drew a sharp contrast between Jesus the Christ, blood sacrifices, and Aaron as a high priest. He gave us our best understanding of the meaning of the suffering of Jesus the Christ. Also, it is in Jesus the Christ that every person who believes in Him is given the opportunity to start over with a clean slate, or a second chance.

Therefore, the Day of Atonement and the book of Leviticus are significant because they make a supreme statement about divine forgiveness of human sins. Forgiveness is costly, to be sure, but always at the initiative and expense of God. Our sins have been transferred to Jesus; yet, we have works of service to do in the world.

Kaiser says, “God remains the quintessence of holiness; and the deity’s creatures can hardly offer to be less in their aspiration and in their daily conduct.” Yes, we are finite creatures and like the children of Israel, are prone to sin and come short of His glory—but God still expects us to be accountable and holds us accountable for our behavior.

PRAYER
Eternal God, our Father, we thank You for the provisions for our sins. You have made the supreme sacrifice so that whosoever believes in Your Son, Jesus the Christ, will have a second lease on life. Now may our lives be pleasing and acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER
Atonement—to appease or pacify; cover over.
Propitiation—the process whereby someone’s wrath is either averted or satisfied, resulting in mercy being received.
Scapegoat—entire removal; the entire removal of sin and guilt from a sacred place.
Unclean—anything defiled and has been declared ceremonially unclean for divine use.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(February 15-21, 2016)

Day of Atonement
MONDAY, February 15: “Perfect Atonement” (Hebrews 2:10-17)
TUESDAY, February 16: “Appointed for Atonement” (Hebrews 3:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, February 17: “Completed Atonement” (Romans 3:21-26)
THURSDAY, February 18: “Preparation and Atonement” (Exodus 30:1-10)
FRIDAY, February 19: “Obedience and Atonement” (Leviticus 8:30-36)
SATURDAY, February 20: “Sin Offering for Atonement” (Leviticus 16:1-10)
SUNDAY, February 21: “Day of Atonement” (Leviticus 16:11-19)
THE FEAST OF BOOTHs

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Heritage and Hope

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 8:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: Leviticus 23:33-43
KEY VERSES: Leviticus 23:42-43

Leviticus 23:33-43—KJV
33 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,
34 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD.
35 On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein.
36 Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein.
37 These are the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day:
38 Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD.
39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.
40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.
41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations; ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

Leviticus 23:33-43—NIV
33 The LORD said to Moses,
34 “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days.
35 “The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work.
36 “For seven days present offerings made to the LORD by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no regular work.
37 (“These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to the LORD by fire—the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day.
38 (“These offerings are in addition to those for the LORD’s Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to the LORD.)
39 “So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest.
40 “On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.
41 “Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Families need rituals of celebration in order to remember their heritage and to pass it on to their children. How can their heritage be remembered and passed on to succeeding generations? The Israelites’ celebration of the Festival of Booths assisted them in renewing their commitment to their guiding and protecting God and in passing on their faith to their children.

42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:
43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

42 “Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths
43 “So your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Pass On What Lasts
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application
   of the Scripture
   A. Specifics of the Feast
      (Leviticus 23:33-38)
   B. So the Generations Will Know
      (Leviticus 23:39-43)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Understand all aspects of the Festival of Booths, a fall grain festival;
2. Appreciate a faith heritage in which a patient, forgiving, and merciful God guides and protects the faithful; and,
3. Decide to pass on to the next generation a legacy that God will always guide and protect.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Heritage and Hope
Youth Topic: Remembering Our Heritage
Adult/Youth Key Verses: Leviticus 23:42-43
Print Passage: Leviticus 23:33-43

—This holy day is called the Feast of Tabernacles in some English translations. It is also known as the “festival of harvest (or ingathering)” (see Exodus 23:16; 34:12), “festival of the LORD” (see Leviticus 23:39; Judges 21:19), or simply “the festival” (see 1 Kings 8:2, 65).

—Initially, the Feast of Booths appears to have been a celebration of the grape harvest. Since it involved sacrificial offerings at a sanctuary, it is designated as a “pilgrimage” festival (see Leviticus 23:34). It was also the occasion for the public reading of the book of Deuteronomy every seventh year (see Deuteronomy 31:10-11).

—This feast involved prayers for rain and an abundant harvest for the next year. In the postexilic age, it also was connected with the hope for national independence that the Davidic Messiah would bring about.

—The Festival of Booths or thanksgiving was held at the time of the autumn ingathering.
The Hebrew word for the festival was **Sukkoth**.

Sukkoth was a seven-day holiday, with the first day celebrated as a full festival with special prayer services and holiday meals.

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**CHILDREN**

**Children Topic:** Days of Celebration

**Key Verse:** Leviticus 23:37a

**Print Passage:** Leviticus 23:33-43

The Lord spoke to Moses about the various experiences that the people should have during their seven days celebrating the Lord.

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

   A. **Pass On What Lasts**

   One of the most valuable things we can give our children is a heritage and hope. The Wisdom writer declared, “A good man leaves an inheritance for his children’s children” (Proverbs 13:22a, NIV). The late Dr. Nelson Smith said of wealth, “It is a beautiful lamp, but gives off very poor light.”

   It was to this end that Yahweh commanded His covenant people to pass on to subsequent generations not wealth, but knowledge, and an appreciation of the significance of their heritage (history). God wanted them to know that their future was inextricably bound up in their exodus from slavery in Egypt. In like manner, as African Americans our past is inextricably bound to our heritage of oppression, suffering, and liberation in America.

   B. **Biblical Background**

   The final lesson in this quarter returns us to Leviticus 23, in which we will study the third of the four festivals established in the chapter. The Lord established four festivals in this chapter: Passover and First-fruits (verses 4-14), Feast of Weeks (verses 15-22), Day of Atonement (verses 26-32), and Feast of Tabernacles (verses 33-44). The Feast of Tabernacles is known also as the “Feast of Booths” or “Feast of Ingathering,” which took place at the end of the fall harvest season. For the Feast of Tabernacles the people were to count fifteen days from the beginning of the seventh month. The day of the celebration varied according to which day the first day of the month fell on. Yet, whatever day it fell on and ended on was to be a Sabbath (a day of rest and worship) for the people. They...
were to do no work. As with the other festivals, the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) began with a Sabbath and a sacred assembly (worship), and it ended with a Sabbath and a sacred assembly. This signaled the importance to the people of both rest and worship. It appears that in the mind of God, rest and worship are inextricably bound together. This may be because we worship God at our best when we are free from distractions and things that drain us physically and mentally.

In his commentary on the book of Leviticus, Gary Demarest says, “One of the discoveries for the believer in a journey through the book of Leviticus is the essence of public worship. If worship to the average Christian simply means a not-always-meaningful option for Sunday morning, the church is doomed to cultural captivity. Worship is the means by which the love and the mercy of God are reenacted and offered anew each day.” Yet, rituals in and of themselves cannot assure the integrity of worship. Worship must include the awareness of one’s needs. Our awareness of our insufficiency to come before God is what makes worship what it is. We are never adequate to stand in the presence of a holy God.

In conclusion, another value one gains from a journey through the book of Leviticus is the reality that God desires and is involved in every aspect and dimension of human life and existence. The details of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) and the statute to keep this ritual from generation to generation were to remind their generations that the hand of God was involved in their history. It was God who delivered their ancestors from the hard taskmaster Pharaoh in Egypt, and it was God who provided for and protected them in the wilderness for forty years. Likewise, it would be God who would order their steps and establish them in the Promised Land. Their journey from slaves in Egypt to a land “flowing with milk and honey” was divinely orchestrated. Their hope and our hope is that the God we serve can make possible what is not possible. So as we come to the end of our journey in the book of Leviticus, let us know and be assured that the content and substance of life belongs to God. Our worship is an expression of gratitude for His favor toward us.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Specifics of the Feast
(Leviticus 23:33-38)

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord.

God told the children of Israel to link their present realities to the wilderness wandering
narrative of their ancestors. It was out of this narrative of oppression, struggle, suffering, and deliverance that the Hebrew faith would be formed. Also, we cannot be certain of the sequence of the writing of these statutes, but we can be certain that they were futuristic because Moses is the narrator; he was not dead. Hence, these were commemorative statutes to be enacted by subsequent generations. The third feast (Tabernacles) was to last for seven days and was unique in that the people had to reenact an aspect of ancestral life in the wilderness by living in temporary huts (tabernacles, tents, or “booths”). They had to live in makeshift huts for seven days and make a burnt offering on the Sabbath and to offer a different offering on each of the other six days. Verse 37 commanded them “to offer an offering made to the Lord by fire; a burnt offering, a grain offering, and a drink offering required for each day, in addition to making of vows and giving a freewill offering unto the Lord.” Usually, the burnt offering referred to an animal sacrifice and was offered as atonement for the sins of the people (see Leviticus 16 and Numbers 28:10). Making these burnt offerings was unlike how the burnt offerings were made in chapter 16 in the Holy of Holies; the burnt offerings in this chapter were offered daily and could be offered by any of the Aaronic priests. Additionally, it culminated with the gathering of the fall harvest and was a time of joy and thanksgiving to God by the people.

Finally, the Feast of Tabernacles was to start on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (believed to be in October on the modern calendar) with a holy convocation and end with a holy convocation, both days of rest and worship. These ritual celebrations were more than ritual for ritual’s sake; they were creating moments to reflect on the favor of God in the history of their people. After all, it was God who formed them: “Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you? Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you” (Deuteronomy 32:6b-7, NIV). They were not to forget their sacred history. As African Americans, we have our own exodus experience that has helped to give shape to our identities. All peoples are the sum total of their collective communal experiences. In his essay, “Christian Hope and the Black Experience,” Noel L. Erskine states, “Black people understood that although God was not limited to history, he was present in history as savior, friend, and hope. This God is a helper in the time of trouble” (Hope for the Church, Abingdon Press, 1979). Thus, as a people we would be better served if we were more intentional about reclaiming and reenacting those positive messages of hope from our heritage of struggle from slavery to freedom, or as the psalmist suggested, we should allow those messages of hope to be “a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path” (see Psalm 119:105).

B. So the Generations Will Know
(Leviticus 23:39-43)

Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute
for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

As African Americans or any other group of people, we cannot separate racial or ethnic identity from those experiences that ultimately help constitute our being. We are the composition of our collective communal experiences. Thus, these verses deal with the perpetuation of the legacy of a liberated people whose very culture was birthed in an experience of oppression and struggle. In verse 39, Moses instructed the people to begin the celebration on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (believed to be October) at the end of the fall harvest. They were to keep the feast for seven days, during which they were to build and live in thatched huts to reenact the sojourn of their ancestors in the wilderness. He commanded the people to practice the statutes as set forth (verse 41) from generation to generation. Then in verse 43 (NIV), Yahweh gave the reason for the practice: “so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters when I brought them out of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” The operative phrase is “will know” (yada), which carries the notion of awareness or comprehension. What they were to know was not only the historical, but also the contextual, because they would have experienced it. That is in part how each generation will come to know for themselves that “I am the Lord your God.”

The phrase “I AM” as it pertains to God resonates in Hebrew history; it is the assurance and hope that would sustain the people once they were in Canaan: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt” (see Exodus 6:7). Walter Brueggemann says, “‘I AM’ is probably best understood as, ‘I am the one who will be present in faithful ways to make possible what is not otherwise possible, the very power of newness that will make available new life for Israel outside of the deadliness of Egypt.’” As the people lived in makeshift huts for seven days, they were reliving the hope that sustained their ancestors for forty years in the wilderness. Concomitantly, the experience of our ancestors through the horrible ordeals of slavery and the politically and socially orchestrated oppression for over 350 years, and their survival is a lesson in hope. The things they had to endure to get from slavery to freedom can be teachers of hope for us and subsequent generations to finally shake off the chains of oppression once and for all. As with Israel, we as people of God must look forward as well as backward to learn what we can from our history.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In Religion and Politics in America, Robert B. Fowler and Laura R. Olson say, “It would be difficult to understand either politics or religion without a sense of history, a sense of how the interplay among religion, politics, and culture has shaped the story of the United States.” This is a truism that also applies to any group or any people, or any faith formation—that there is a backstory. The interplay between who we are today and the journey of our ancestors and what they had to undertake to get us where we are cannot be devalued. As African Americans, as with Israel, our heritage (history) is one of hope: the power of life, the power of being, and the power of newness in our God. There was nothing permanent about life in the wilderness; they were sojourners bound
for the Promised Land, and by God’s power of life, being, and newness they made it. Once in the Promised Land, they were commanded to reenact certain aspects of their wilderness journey. Approximately five thousand years later, many Jews around the world still observe the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths).

In October of 2008, this writer visited Israel. As we travelled across the region, we noticed that the landscape was dotted with thatched huts made from palm leaves and other foliage. These were temporary huts located next to well-appointed homes. The Jewish families lived in these huts for the week without contemporary amenities to reenact this ancient festival, the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), and the hope of their ancestors. Finally, just as the Israelites commemorated their sojourn from slavery to freedom, and America commemorates its liberty on the Fourth of July, let us also commemorate our sojourn from slavery to freedom, especially during this and upcoming Black History months. We must not forget our heritage and that the God we serve has the power of life, the power of being, and the power of newness in His hand. As we reflect on the meaning of our sojourn, there is a line in the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing” that captures the essence and the spirit of our sojourn in America: “Out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.”

PRAYER

“God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, Thou who has brought us thus far on the way”: we pause to give You thanks for Your love and faithfulness over the years. We are who we are today because You have suffered it to be; therefore, our prayer is that we, too, will be faithful to You and keep alive those things from our pasts that have given shape to who we are as Your beloved people. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Feast (Hebrew: chag)—a festival gathering.
Freewill offering (Hebrew: nedabah)—an offering given freely and without command.
Sabbath (Hebrew: sabbat)—abstinence or a time of rest.
Vows (Hebrew: neder)—expressing a religious desire; it is also considered as an offering.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(February 22-28, 2016)

The Feast of Booths

MONDAY, February 22: “God of the Journey” (Psalm 68:5-10)
TUESDAY, February 23: “The Journey Begins” (Exodus 3:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, February 24: “The Journey Falters” (Deuteronomy 1:29-33)
THURSDAY, February 25: “Remember the Journey” (Deuteronomy 8:1-11)
FRIDAY, February 26: “Jesus and the Journey” (John 3:14-21)
SATURDAY, February 27: “Stephen and the Journey” (Acts 7:30-42a)
SUNDAY, February 28: “The Feast of Booths” (Leviticus 23:33-43)
The Gift of Faith

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This quarter has three units that use the gospels of Mark and Luke to consider themes of faith. Children’s units have different titles, but the same Scriptures and themes as youth and adults.

**Unit I**, “Tests of Faith,” is a four-lesson unit leading up to and including Palm Sunday and Easter. Based on passages in the book of Mark, four different incidents that tested the faith of Jesus’ followers—healing, wealth accumulation, denial of friendship, and resurrection—are presented for learning and discussion.

**Unit II**, titled “Restorative Faith,” follows Easter with four lessons in the book of Luke that look at incidents in which followers experienced healing, redemption, and restoration of their faith through inspiring actions and teachings of Jesus.

**Unit III**, “Fullness of Faith,” is a five-lesson study, also in the book of Luke, of numerous ways that Jesus’ followers expressed their faith through gratitude, humility, childlike acceptance, and repentance.
LESSON 1
March 6, 2016

POWERFUL FAITH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Flame and Flood

DEVOTIONAL READING: Genesis 50:15-21
PRINT PASSAGE: Mark 9:14-29

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:14-29
KEY VERSE: Mark 9:24

Mark 9:14-29—KJV
14 And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them.
15 And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him.
16 And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?
17 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;
18 And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.
19 He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.
20 And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.
21 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.
22 And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.
23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.
24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.
25 When Jesus saw that the people came running

Mark 9:14-29—NIV
14 When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them.
15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.
16 “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.
17 A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.
18 “Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”
19 “O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”
20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.
21 Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.
22 And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.
23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.
24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.
25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running

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together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.
26 And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.
27 But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.
28 And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out?
29 And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”
26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.”
27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.
28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”
29 He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

TOPOCAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Overcoming Self-doubt
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Wavering Faith
      (Mark 9:14-19)
   B. Willing Faith
      (Mark 9:20-24)
   C. Witnessing Faith
      (Mark 9:25-29)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall the details of the failure of the disciples to deliver the child from demon possession, even though Jesus was then able to do so;
2. Contemplate the faith that it takes to use the power of Jesus Christ to minister to others; and,
3. Believe that their prayers have real power and increase their prayer witness in the church.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
It is commonly accepted that people are able to accomplish great things only by shifting from self-doubt to believing in themselves. How can people believe they can accomplish great things? Jesus encouraged His disciples to believe that with His help, they could accomplish great things—and then He demonstrated that by casting out the boy’s evil spirit.

—Mark’s audience was the Christians in Rome who were suffering persecution for their beliefs and lifestyle.
—The exorcism of the evil spirit established Jesus’ power and had to be an encouragement to Mark’s readers.
—The father’s uncertainty about his faith in Jesus’ power was resolved when Jesus healed his son.
—In Mark 9:29, some manuscripts add “and fasting” to prayer.
—The father’s uncertain faith offered Jesus an opportunity to demonstrate how little faith is required for the power of God to work, as well as the importance of combining a little faith with action.

Print Passage: Mark 9:14-29
—Jesus inquired about an argument between the scribes and the disciples.
—A man brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples with the expectation of deliverance.
—The man’s expectation of his son’s healing exceeded the disciples’ faith to heal him.
—The father expressed belief in the power of Jesus to heal.
—The disciples did not understand why they could not exercise such power.
—Jesus declared the importance of prayer.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Yes, You Can!
Key Verse: Mark 9:23b

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Overcoming Self-doubt

One of the most difficult things for many people is overcoming self-doubt. It is commonly accepted that people are able to accomplish great things only by shifting from self-doubt to believing in themselves. As Christians we not only must believe in ourselves, but we also must believe that through Christ we can do all things. Jesus encouraged His disciples to believe that by His power they could accomplish great things, and then demonstrated that by casting out the evil spirit that controlled the boy discussed in today’s text. As you study today’s lesson, see if you can recall moments in your life when the Lord helped you through difficult times and circumstances.

B. Biblical Background

There are times in the work of ministry when we fail to achieve our vision or the goals we set for ourselves. Mark 9:14-29 is the account of when the disciples of Jesus failed in their attempts to cast a demon out of a young boy (see also Matthew 17:14-21 and Luke 9:37-43a). The episode highlights the anemic faith of the disciples who appeared powerless before a demon. In the passage they last saw Jesus with Peter, James, and John headed toward a high mountain (see verse 2). We have the account that while on that mountain, Jesus was transfigured in the presence of those three disciples. While Jesus was away, the other disciples were facing a situation at the base of the mountain. Jesus came down the mountain with Peter, James, and John, who were still pondering the events they had just witnessed. When they arrived at the base of the mountain, the remaining disciples were engaged in a heated public dispute with some Jewish teachers (scribes) over the fact that the disciples could not cast out a demon from a young boy.
In the passage, Jesus not only performed an exorcism, but He also taught a lesson about faith, fasting, and prayer. The passage can be divided into three sections. In verses 14-19, we have a picture of the wavering faith of the disciples of Jesus who were powerless against the evil spirit. Verses 20–24 paint a picture of the father who desperately wanted Jesus to do whatever He could to help his beleaguered son. Finally, verses 25-29 describe Jesus’ conversation with His disciples and His teaching about fasting and prayer. The father’s ambivalent faith offered Jesus an opportunity to demonstrate how the most finite faith can make a difference in the life of a man or woman. The paragraph concludes with Jesus’ reminding His disciples that there are some things that can only come about through prayer and fasting.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Wavering Faith
(Mark 9:14-19)
And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.

Verse 14 pointed out that when Jesus arrived at the location of the other disciples, there was a large crowd around them. Jesus was used to large crowds following Him wherever He went or showed up, but this crowd had not gathered because of Him. The nine disciples who had been left at the base of the mountain were engaged in a heated debate with Jewish teachers. Who were these teachers? These were scribes who were highly trained teachers of Jewish religious law. They were usually found in Jerusalem, so their presence in Galilee pointed out the level of their concern regarding the ministry and teachings of Jesus (see also Mark 2:15-27). We are not told the exact content of the conversation. The disciples had failed to cast out the demon from the boy, so the teachers may have used this as an opportunity to try and discredit the teachings of Jesus. The Jewish scribes may have seen the absence of Jesus as the perfect time to confront the disciples and publicly show them up.

When the people saw Jesus, they were amazed and ran to meet Him. Some interpreters have suggested a variety of reasons for the people’s amazement. Some have suggested that Jesus was still aglow from His experience on the mountain, or that Peter, James, and John also were shining brilliantly. While this may be possible, there is no evidence for either position.

What is clear is that the disciples were in a situation they could not handle. Jesus walked up and took control of the situation. He asked, “What are you arguing with them about?” (verse 16, NIV). And before they could answer, the boy’s father spoke up and began to explain that he was the cause of all of the confusion.
He explained that while Jesus was away, the man brought his son to Him to cast out the demon, but His disciples could not do it.

Verses 17-18 graphically describe the son’s condition. The evil spirit had stolen the boy’s ability to speak. The evil spirit seized him, slammed him to the ground, caused foaming at the mouth, grinding of the teeth, and made his body stiff.

The disciples of Jesus should have been able to help this father, but they were powerless against the demon. Jesus had previously given them power to heal and cast out demons, and this they did (see Mark 6:12-13). Verse 19 reveals Jesus’ frustration and disappointment with the people around Him. To whom was Jesus referring as the “unbelieving generation”? When Jesus vented His frustration, it was at everyone present—the teachers of the Law, the crowd, the father of the possessed boy, and most of all, His disciples. Jesus ordered that the boy be brought to Him.

B. Willing Faith
(Mark 9:20-24)

And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

In verse 20, the boy was brought to Jesus. At that very moment the demon recognized Jesus and immediately threw the boy into a convulsion and onto the ground. The body of this boy shook violently and without ceasing. The reaction of the demon was to demonstrate his control and presence in the boy’s life. The demon made him roll around and foam at the mouth.

Verses 21-24 contain the conversation between Jesus and the father regarding the boy’s condition. This scene, though not unfamiliar to Jesus, moved His heart to compassion and caused Him to ask how long the boy had been in that condition. The father answered that the boy had been like that since he was a child (verse 21). This evil spirit was dangerous and had tried to destroy the boy through repeated attempts at drowning or causing him to throw himself into the flames. In an act of desperation the father pleaded with Jesus to take pity on them: “But if you can do anything” (see verse 22). One may glean that the man felt that Jesus was his last hope. Jesus’ own disciples had failed to cast out the demons, so if anybody could it would be Jesus. Jesus’ answer was one of near shock. He told the father, “If you can?” It was not a question of whether Jesus was able heal the man’s son; rather, it was a question of if the father believed that Jesus could heal him. Here Jesus put the power of faith front and center. All things are possible to the person who trusts the Lord (see also Hebrews 11 for a comprehensive explanation of faith).

The record of Jesus was proof. He could heal the boy and make him well. The father cried out that he did believe, but he needed and wanted Jesus to help his unbelief. The help that he wanted was in believing that his son could one day be free from this terrible affliction. After watching his son suffer over the years, this man may have grown discouraged.
that they would ever have a normal life. But Jesus was fully capable of doing what seemed to be beyond hope.

C. Witnessing Faith

(Mark 9:25-29)

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

In verse 25, the crowd that had gathered around the disciples and the teachers of the Law started coming toward Jesus. Not wanting to create a further spectacle, Jesus acted quickly. He rebuked the deaf and mute spirit and commanded him to come out of the boy and never return. Jesus made sure that the boy would never be troubled again by this evil spirit. There is a lesson in this act of mercy and healing: sometimes the healing that Jesus renders is permanent. He does not have to come back and give a touchup. It is done!

Verse 26 reports that before the evil spirit departed, it gave one last parting demonstration of his control; it threw the boy into another convulsion and the boy appeared to be dead. Verse 27 makes it clear that contrary to what the people thought, it was not the end. Jesus took the boy by the hand and raised him up. The language suggests a sort of resurrection.

In verses 28-29, according to the KJV, Jesus and the disciples went to a house (probably the one they were staying at in Capernaum). Since the Gospels were not intended to be chronological biographies of the life of Jesus, we do not know how much time passed between the miracle of the demon-possessed boy and the conversation in the house in Capernaum. During their private time, they asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon. After all, they had done it quite successfully before when they went out on their first apostolic mission. Jesus responded that what they were attempting to do could only be accomplished, according to the KJV, by prayer and fasting.

The disciples’ question reveals what may be the central most overlooked aspect of being a Christian. When all is said and done, the Christian life is really about living under the authority of the Holy Spirit. It is about acknowledging that without God we can do nothing, but through Him all things become possible.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The disciples had been with Jesus for more than two years by the time of the event in today’s passage. They had not only been witnesses to miracles of healing and exorcisms, but they had also performed some miracles and exorcisms themselves. What does this episode say about the disciples of Jesus? Without the physical presence of Jesus the disciples were pretty much powerless. There comes a point when each of us will have the opportunity to make a difference wherever we are. We should be the teachers and not have to be taught over and over again.
We can be with Jesus and still not be filled with His power. We can be members of a congregation and not have the slightest idea of who the Holy Spirit is and what He does and is doing in our midst. You can be with Jesus and still not fully grasp who He is. Church leaders will do well to take into account the fact that we cannot do the work of ministry under our own strength. When all is said and done, successful Christian living is done under the authority of the Holy Spirit.

We must recognize that unless the Holy Spirit empowers us for each ministry task, we minister under our own power. We must know that we can do nothing of our own accord.

**PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, we are powerless without Your presence in our lives. Grant that Your servants will be full of faith at all times. We bless You for the privilege of serving in the kingdom of Your Son. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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**WORD POWER**

Faithless (Greek: *apistos* [ap’-is-tos])—*Apistos* is a negative expression of the word *pistos* (faith). It is used just twice in the New Testament—once in this miracle story and in John 20:27 (during one of the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus). It denotes someone who is an unbeliever or who is without faith in God. The irony of this situation is that these were all the people of God.

Scribe (Greek: *grammateus*)—the literal meaning of this word is “to write, or writer.” In ancient Hebrew culture, scribes were highly trained religious teachers and doctors of the Law. They had a long historical presence in Israel (see 1 Chronicles 2:55; Jeremiah 8:8). The most famous scribe was Ezra, who was well learned in the Law (see Ezra 7:10-12). Jesus often clashed with the scribes over the interpretation of the Law, His preaching, and the practices of His disciples. There are more than sixty references to scribes in the Gospels (see Matthew 5:20; Mark 9:11, 14, 33; Luke 11:53; 15:2).

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**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(February 29–March 6, 2016)*

**Powerful Faith**

**MONDAY,** February 29: “Faithful God” (Genesis 15:1-6)

**TUESDAY,** March 1: “Saving God” (Genesis 50:15-21)

**WEDNESDAY,** March 2: “Powerful God” (Isaiah 43:5-13)

**THURSDAY,** March 3: “Healing God” (Matthew 9:27-33)

**FRIDAY,** March 4: “Forgiving God” (John 5:19-24)

**SATURDAY,** March 5: “Fulfilling God” (John 6:35-40)

**SUNDAY,** March 6: “Powerful Faith” (Mark 9:14-29)
SIMPLE FAITH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: A Generous Life

DEVOTIONAL READING: Galatians 5:1-13
PRINT PASSAGE: Mark 10:17-31

Background Scripture: Mark 10:17-31
Key Verse: Mark 10:21

Mark 10:17-31—KJV
17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?
18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.
19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother.
20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.
21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.
22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.
23 And Jesus looked round about, and said to his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!
24 And they were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!
25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.
26 And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?
27 And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.

Mark 10:17-31—NIV
17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”
18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone.
19 “You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”
20 “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”
21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”
22 At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.
23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”
24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!
25 “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”
26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”
27 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”
28 Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.
29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,
30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.
31 But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

28 Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”
29 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel
30 “will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.
31 “But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Sacrificial Faith
   B. Biblical Background
II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Question of the Rich Man (Mark 10:17)
   B. The Response of Jesus (Mark 10:18-25)
   C. The Amazement of the Disciples (Mark 10:26-31)
III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Know the facts of the encounter of the rich young man with Jesus;
2. Celebrate the direct link between making sacrifices and receiving God’s salvation; and,
3. Commit to making greater sacrifices for others in the name of Jesus Christ.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: A Generous Life
Youth Topic: Give It Your All
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Mark 10:21
Print Passage: Mark 10:17-31
—Jesus called the rich young man to change his relationship with the poor by giving his possessions away to them.
—The Ten Commandments referenced in Mark 10:19 are found in Exodus 20:12-16 and Deuteronomy 5:16-20.
—The advice given in Mark 10:21 echoes the message Jesus gave to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 6:19-21).
—Giving to the poor was very important in Jesus’ ministry
and a very important part of the proclamation of the kingdom of God.
—Ironically, the rich young man’s attachments kept him from keeping the first commandment.
—In Mark 10:24, some manuscripts add “for those who trust in riches.”

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Can You Do It?
Key Verse: Mark 10:27b
Print Passage: Mark 10:17-27

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Sacrificial Faith

How effective would the church be if she was committed to serving her Lord without regard to personal well-being? Discipleship is a calling for one not only to follow Jesus Christ, but also to be willing to forfeit her or his possessions. Jesus said that faith in God makes it possible for people to sacrifice all they have for the benefit of others. As you study today’s lesson look for ways that you can apply the teachings of Jesus to your life. Is there something that you are holding on to that you refuse to let go of? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how you can become a more generous disciple of Jesus Christ.

B. Biblical Background

In today’s lesson we meet a man who was very wealthy, yet he had a yearning to follow Jesus (see Matthew 19:16-30 and Luke 18:18-30 for parallel passages). This passage is referred to as Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler. Mark never used those words, but it reflects a composite sketch drawn from all three Gospel accounts of this story. The reference to his age is found in Matthew 19:20 and to his status as a ruler in Luke 18:18. According to the religious customs of that day, he would have been considered a righteous man. He had honored and kept the Ten Commandments since he was a child (see Exodus 20:1-17). But when he was presented with the demands associated with committed discipleship, he walked away with his head hung down and being deeply grieved by the words of Jesus. The statement of his being grieved is a very strong expression in the Greek language. He was not just sorry, but inwardly torn because Jesus asked him to make a decision between the things that he possessed and the kingdom of God (see Matthew 6:19-24). Jesus knew that the young man had everything that the world could offer, but only Christ had what the world could not offer. Jesus invited the young man to come and follow Him, but he must first divest himself of the wealth.
he possessed and give it to the poor. In the teachings of Jesus, the possession of wealth is not a sin; the sin is in allowing wealth to possess the risen. Jesus taught that there is no room for greedy people in heaven—not just people who feel entitled to wealth, but those who refuse to share their bounty with the poor (see Luke 12:13-21).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Question of the Rich Man
   (Mark 10:17)

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

Verse 17 continues detailing the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (see Mark 10:1). His work on Earth was drawing to a close as He approached His appointment with the Cross. As they travelled, a highly unusual incident occurred. A man ran up to Jesus and knelt before Him. According to the ancient Jewish customs, men did not run because it was considered undignified or shameful except in an emergency (see Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohhaugh, Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, p. 372). Conceivably, a man would have had to pull up his robe, expose his legs, and have his sandals flapping as he increased his pace. It was also unusual for a Jew to inquire about inheriting eternal life. The man wanted to know what he had to do in order to gain eternal life. It was as if some special deed was the key to gaining favor with God. His years of attendance at the synagogue would have taught him the requirements for gaining favor with God. James Brooks stated, “Although common in John’s gospel, the term eternal life is found only here and in verse 30 in Mark (and elsewhere in the Synoptics only in Matthew 19:29; 25:46; Luke 10:25; 18:18, 30)” (New American Commentary—Volume 23: Mark, p. 162). The importance of eternal life is not its length; rather, it is the quality of the life that lasts forever.

B. The Response of Jesus
   (Mark 10:18-25)

And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Verse 18 posed an interpretive challenge for the ancient expositors. Did the response of Jesus mean that He was a sinner, since He said that only God is good? The answer is no. Jesus’ response reflected what is a fundamental Jewish belief about the goodness of God. Throughout the Old Testament the ancient Hebrews declared that God is inherently good (see Psalms 36:7; 86:6; 118:1; 119:68; 145:9;
Nahum 1:7). So in asking such a question Jesus was actually asking the man if he was acknowledging that Jesus was God made flesh.

In verse 19, Jesus reminded the young man about keeping the commandments. The commandments listed are those that make up the second five found in Exodus 20:12-17 and Deuteronomy 5:16-21. These commands all deal with one’s relationship to others. Righteousness is being in right relationship with God, and that is reflected in how one has treated others (see Matthew 25:31-46). By getting these relationships right, it affirmed that one was in right relationship with God.

Verse 20 contains the man’s self-congratulatory response. He had done all of these things since he was a child. He informed Jesus that all of his adult life he had been faithful to the Law.

In verse 21, we have a recorded instance in the New Testament where Jesus looked at someone and loved him or her. There was more to being one of His disciples than just keeping some rules and following a plan of action. One must divest oneself of any and all personal claims to oneself. Jesus said to the man, “There is still one thing you lack. Go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

The words go, sell, give, come, and follow are verbs that are all written in the present active imperative tense. This means that Jesus did not give the man any alternatives to achieving entry into the kingdom of God. The man was told to divest himself of everything. Jesus said to the man that there were some hindrances in his life that he needed to clear up. It would involve the realignment of priorities, and then he could follow Christ. Jesus knew the young man had something missing in his life, although he seemed to have everything. In fact, it was the man’s fondness for his possessions that was in the way of what he really needed. The man wanted to glory in his past; Jesus was more interested in his present and future. The man was proud to remind Jesus of what he had already done; Jesus was more interested in what he was prepared to do. The man had a religious self-concept that was rooted in the traditions of Judaism; Jesus was more interested in what God was doing at that moment and what God wanted for the man’s life. The man’s response is recorded in verse 22. Jesus did not give him the answer that he wanted. He went away deeply disturbed and saddened because he did not want to divest himself of his great wealth.

Verses 23-25 contain some of the most poignant sayings by Jesus on the perils of wealth and how possessions can prevent full surrender to God. Jesus said that it was hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. It was not impossible to inherit eternal life, but it was difficult.

The same demands placed upon the rich are also placed upon the poor. One must surrender self and the claims we lay on all we possess. The requirements of discipleship are demands that all social classes must meet.

Verse 25 is a hard statement for many people to swallow. Jesus did not sugarcoat the absolute demands of discipleship. Just as the Cross was not an easy undertaking for Him, neither should believers expect that one can be consumed by gaining or keeping wealth and serve the kingdom of God at the same time. The phrase “the eye of a needle” has been an
enigma to interpreters for centuries. We must understand these words as hyperbole, which is exaggerated speech that was used to make a point. What exactly did Jesus mean? Some people have thought that Jesus was referring to a small opening in the gate in the city walls of Jerusalem. In order to enter the city at night, a camel would have to be dismounted, all of the baggage removed, and the camel would have to literally crawl through the opening in the gate. There is no mention of this opening in any gate in the book of Nehemiah (who rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem). Nowhere in the Old or New Testament or extra-biblical writings is such a practice supported. What, then, did Jesus mean by this statement? He meant that there are no easy roads or cheap ways to becoming a disciple. One cannot dilute the Master’s demand for being one of His disciples.

C. The Amazement of the Disciples
(Mark 10:26-31)

And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

This was the second time that the disciples of Jesus showed signs of amazement, only this time more so. They were astounded by Jesus’ words, and Jesus did not pull any punches regarding what it would take to be a disciple. The disciples wanted to know who could be saved. If the rich and powerful could not meet the requirements to be saved, then what chance did they have?

Jesus continued by reaffirming the teachings of the Law and the prophets that nothing is impossible with God (see Genesis 18:14; Job 42:2; Jeremiah 37:17, 27; Luke 1:37).

In verse 28, Peter spoke for the group and reminded Jesus of the huge personal sacrifice that they had made. “We” is emphatic and stresses the point that the disciples had given up more than they currently saw themselves gaining. In Peter’s statement there is still the hint and belief that the coming of the kingdom would usher them into positions of prominence and power. The belief is that God is to be followed for what He gives in tangible blessings.

In verses 29-30, Jesus responded to Peter’s plea that God was neither unrighteous nor oblivious to their sacrifice and labors of love on His behalf. Home, family (brothers, sister, mother, father), and fields are all three different types of personal sacrifices that disciples are called to make. The service and sacrifice of believers will be rewarded, both in this life and in the world to come. Jesus acknowledged their sacrifice on His behalf. Each of them had left some things of value and people of endearment to follow Jesus throughout Galilee. They all left something for the uncertainty of preaching the Gospel of God’s redemptive love.

Jesus did not correct the thinking of Peter. Rather, He sought to offer words of reassurance and promise. It is only natural to want to know what will become of us when we take the leap of faith to serve full-time in ministry. Jesus declared that they would be
blessed by the gracious provision of God to receive up to one hundred times what they had given up.

Verse 31 concludes the lesson with a statement of reversal. Those who had been first would ultimately end up last in the world to come. They enjoyed all of the best that this world offers, and there would come a day when God would reverse the status quo. The last will be first and will receive the blessings of eternal communion with the Father.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the crucial questions that believers face today and that the church has faced in every generation is, “What does it mean to be a Christian?” Jesus wants a relationship with us first. Our relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ is a statement of our faith in Him. It all begins with repentance and asking the Lord to forgive us of our sins. Commitment to Jesus Christ begins with being born again; joining the church and becoming a member are outward displays that something radically new is taking place in a person’s life and that person, therefore, wants to affiliate with the movement of God in the Earth. When a person is born again the Holy Spirit works in the heart of that believer to create a new person. Being born again is not an option or goal; it is the starting point.

PRAYER

Lord, teach us to follow You without regard for what personally benefits us. May we walk in the shadow of Your grace, always knowing that You will provide for our every need. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Eternal Life (Greek: aionios zoe)—the combination of two Greek words: aionios means “perpetual or endless,” and zoe is the word for “life.” Eternal life is the opposite of existence in this world, and will be a time of peace, rest, and everlasting bliss.

Kingdom of God (Greek: he basileia tou theou)—In the language of Jesus, the kingdom of God referred to God’s absolute control and sovereignty in the world and over the affairs of the world. Believers enter the kingdom when Jesus Christ is truly Lord and King in our lives.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(March 7-13, 2016)

Simple Faith

MONDAY, March 7: “Faith in Riches?” (Psalm 49:1-6, 16-19)
TUESDAY, March 8: “Practical Faith” (Proverbs 22:1-4; 23:3-5)
WEDNESDAY, March 9: “Abundant Faith” (Isaiah 55:1-6a)
THURSDAY, March 10: “Authoritative Faith” (Matthew 7:24-29)
FRIDAY, March 11: “Faith and Freedom” (Galatians 5:1-13)
SATURDAY, March 12: “Priorities of Faith” (Luke 16:10-14)
SUNDAY, March 13: “Simple Faith” (Mark 10:17-31)
STRUGGLING FAITH

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Supreme Fail!

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 3:12-18
Print Passage: Mark 14:26-31, 66-72
Background Scripture: Mark 14:26-31, 66-72
Key Verse: Mark 14:30

Mark 14:26-31, 66-72—KJV
26 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.
27 And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.
28 But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.
29 But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.
30 And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.
31 But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.

66 And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest:
67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.
68 But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.
69 And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them.
70 And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeeth thereto.
71 But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.

Mark 14:26-31, 66-72—NIV
26 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
27 “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’
28 “But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”
29 Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”
30 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”
31 But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by.
67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said.
68 But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway.
69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.”
70 Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.”
71 He began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.”
72 And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People often overestimate their ability to remain loyal to a cause and bear witness to it. What happens when they discover they cannot do something they truly believed they could do? Peter was convinced of his faith, but he grieved mightily when he understood that his failure to stand up publicly as a follower of Jesus Christ was evidence of the weakness of his faith.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. When People Disappoint
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection (Mark 14:26-28)
   B. Peter’s Declaration of Loyalty to Jesus (Mark 14:29-31)
   C. Peter’s Denial of Jesus (Mark 14:66-72)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Remember all that happened when Jesus foretold Peter’s denial and when Peter acted as Jesus said;
2. Explore feelings and reactions when one fails to meet the expectations of those who are loved and respected; and,
3. Practice spiritual discipline in order to build a stronger relationship with God.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Supreme Fail!
Youth Topic: Loyal to the End?
Adult Key Verse: Mark 14:30
Youth Key Verse: Mark 14:72
Print Passage: Mark 14:26-31, 66-72
—A Passover meal ended with the singing of Psalms 115–118, the second part of the Hallel psalms.
—Mark 14:72 says, “The cock crowed for the second time,” or before dawn.
—Mark 14:28 points forward to Jesus’ post-Resurrection appearances. The “young man” (see 16:5) at the tomb said, “But go, tell his disciples and Peter, that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (16:7).
—Peter’s words of denial, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about” (14:68), was common in Jewish law for a formal, legal denial.
—Peter was a Galilean, and his speech in the courtyard informed his accusers that he was a follower of Jesus.
—Peter’s vehement curse and oath (verse 71) heightened the degree of his denial and betrayal.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. When People Disappoint

Barry Bonds was, hands down, one of the best professional baseball players to have played the game. Between 1986 and 1992 he played for the Pittsburgh Pirates. After the 1992 season ended, he signed a new multiyear, multimillion-dollar contract to play for the San Francisco Giants. In 2007, his career ended after more than twenty years of playing professional baseball. His exploits on the baseball field all but assured him that one day he would be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Among his lofty achievements, he holds baseball’s most coveted prize and record for home runs hit in a season (73), and home runs hit during one’s career (762). In the history of baseball, no one had ever achieved such lofty statistics. Then, in March of 2003, everything changed. Two investigative reporters with the San Francisco Chronicle wrote a series of articles detailing the use of performance-enhancing drugs and their impact upon athletics in baseball and American sports in general. Among the players connected to the scandal was Barry Bonds, who was accused of using steroids and other prohibited performance-enhancing drugs. He was indicted by a grand jury but denied ever using anything to improve his performance. In 2007, he was tried and convicted of perjury and obstruction of justice in a case brought by the federal government against the Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative, which came to be known as the BALCO case. Fans of all ages were highly disappointed that one of baseball’s elite players had been accused of using drugs to improve his performance. Bonds has not been able to escape the cloud of suspicion that hangs over his head. Did he betray a trust? He says he did not, but the evidence seems to point in a different direction. Sometimes in life the people to whom we looked up to as our heroes prove not to be who we thought they were.

B. Biblical Background

The earthly ministry of Jesus was just a few hours away from coming to a crushing conclusion. In a matter of hours He would be arrested, tried, and viciously crucified between two thieves at a prominent location just outside the city walls of Jerusalem.
In the biblical text, Jesus and His disciples had just concluded the celebration of the traditional Jewish Passover meal. During the evening meal, Jesus instituted what has come to be known as the Lord’s Supper. The Passover meal usually ended with the singing of Psalms 115–118, the second part of the Hallel psalms.

The lesson consists of two passages—the first dealing with Jesus’ prediction of His death and resurrection, and the second with Peter’s denial of Jesus. The first passage, verses 26-31, contains the prediction by Jesus that His disciples would fall away, deserting Him during the darkest moments of His earthly pilgrimage. In these verses we have Peter’s insistence that though everyone else might desert Jesus, he would rather die first than be considered a traitor and deserter. Jesus responded to Peter’s pledge that before the rooster crowed twice, at daybreak Peter would deny Him three times.

The second passage (verses 66-72) is the conclusion to the lesson and contains the fulfillment of Jesus’ prediction concerning Peter’s denial. In the passage, Peter not only denied Jesus, but also stood in the streets and cursed the very name and person to whom he had sworn allegiance just a few hours earlier.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Jesus Predicts His Death and Resurrection
   (Mark 14:26-28)

   And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.

   In verse 26, Jesus and His disciples concluded their celebration of the Passover meal in the traditional way—by singing a hymn. As previously noted in the introduction, the hymns were from the Hallel psalms (115–118). Jesus and His disciples departed the city of Jerusalem, headed across the Kidron Valley, and went east toward the Mount of Olives. Jesus and the disciples were headed to Gethsemane, a place very familiar to them.

   Verse 27 contains the first statement by Jesus that the disciples were not going to be with Him during His moment of testing. The phrase “fall away” meant that during Jesus’ hour of testing, the disciples would lose courage and run away in fear. They would leave Jesus alone to face the tyranny of the Roman authorities unleashed by the conspiratorial hatred of the Jewish religious leaders. Jesus quoted a portion of Zechariah 13:7, indicating that Zechariah’s prophecy of the Shepherd being struck down by the sword was about to come to pass. The violence perpetrated against the Shepherd would lead to the sheep being scattered. Here, the reference to the sheep is not to the whole house of Israel, but rather to His disciples. In ancient Hebrew religion, Israel’s relationship with God was often represented by the shepherd-sheep metaphor.

   Verse 28 is introduced with the contrasting conjunction but, which indicated that the striking of the Shepherd and the scattering of the flock would not be permanent. Implied in the prediction of being raised is Jesus’
pronouncement about His death. Whether or not the disciples clearly understood is not clear. On previous occasions they did not comprehend Jesus’ predictions of His passion (see Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-34). After He had been raised, Jesus would meet them in Galilee, the place where the ministry and mission began.

B. Peter’s Declaration of Loyalty to Jesus
(Mark 14:29-31)

But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will I not. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.

Verse 29 begins the conversation between Jesus and Peter. In the conversation, there is a back-and-forth discussion regarding the loyalty of the disciples and Peter’s personal statement of commitment to Jesus. In some ways, Peter appeared to be the one disciple who had to correct Jesus and remind Him of his loyalty and devotion to his Master.

Peter stepped forward as only Peter could and vehemently stated that even if all of the other disciples deserted Jesus, he would not even think of doing such a thing. In one swift assertion of his intentions, Peter created distance between himself and the other disciples. He declared that he was a much stronger man than they. Verse 30 contains Jesus’ reply to Peter. It was not a rebuke of Peter, but a loving statement of fact. The tone of Jesus’ words suggests that He was speaking with passion and concern for His disciples. Peter may have been well-intentioned, but Jesus predicted that before the morning came and a rooster had a chance to crow twice, Peter would deny Jesus three times. Peter’s denial was predicted to be confirmed in two different ways: “today—yes, tonight” and “before the rooster crows twice.” Together they established the reality of Peter’s failure and time at which these things would occur.

Again in verse 30, Peter put himself out front. By saying he would never leave Jesus, Peter placed himself above all of the other disciples and thus implied that he would do so regardless of the stand of the other eleven. He proclaimed that he was prepared to become a martyr on behalf of Jesus. Did the other disciples feel pressured to respond? It seems likely, since they all presumably were privy to the conversation. They all responded that they would die with Jesus as well.

C. Peter’s Denial of Jesus
(Mark 14:66-72)

And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

Verses 32-65 contain all of the events that led up to the present moment. Jesus had been betrayed and arrested. According to verse 53, Jesus was led away to the home of Caiaphas
the high priest. It was here that the initial trial took place. Peter had followed from a distance because he wanted to see what would become of his leader.

The word *below* in verse 66 suggests that Jesus was being tried in an upstairs room in the house of Caiaphas. In the ancient Mediterranean world, the homes of aristocrats and wealthy elites usually had a courtyard in the center of the residence. These were places where social gatherings were held. The presence of a fire suggests that the events may have taken place sometime during the month of March or April. The elevation of Jerusalem makes it highly probable that the night air was filled with a brisk chill. While he was standing and warming himself among those who had gathered there, a young girl who worked for the high priest came up and identified Peter as one of Jesus’ companions. We are not told how she knew who Peter was or where she had met him before that moment.

In verse 68, we see the first denial of Peter. In this denial, Peter stated that he had neither knowledge nor understanding of what this young girl was talking about. Peter completely dismissed her claims that he knew Jesus. The young girl would not let Peter off the hook. In her second charge she spoke to the bystanders who had gathered in the courtyard and said, “This is one of them” (verse 69).

The tension continued to build, and maybe sweat filled Peter’s nervous palms as his heart began to rapidly race. Peter denied her allegation a second time, as the bystanders began to connect Peter to Jesus (verse 70). More than likely Peter’s Galilean accent and his clothing indicated where he was from in Israel.

Verse 71 paints a picture of a desperate man. Peter not only denied Jesus for the third time, but he also began to curse and angrily denounce any association with Jesus. He distanced himself so far from Jesus that he would not even call His name, referring to Jesus as “this man.”

At that very moment the rooster crowed a second time and the words of Jesus came rushing back to Peter. He had earlier declared his unwavering loyalty to Jesus and at the moment Jesus needed him most, he failed. All of the other disciples had long fled, but we do not know where they had scattered. Heartbroken and ashamed, Peter wept bitterly.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

One of the easiest things to do is criticize Peter and denounce him as a coward. He had bravely and defiantly announced that he would never forsake Jesus, but when it came time to show his love and loyalty, he failed. There are times when we all make commitments to do certain things or support certain causes, or even to love and cherish someone until death parts us—but then life happens, and circumstances come along that cause us to rethink and realign our commitments. We may have meant to be strong, but when we thought about the consequences, the price was more than we were willing to pay.

Was Peter afraid? Most likely he was. Fear is a prevalent emotion in the Bible. Fear can cripple the strongest of men or women, leaving them emotionally and psychologically paralyzed. Over the course of a few hours, Peter saw his whole world shattered by a
chain of events that he never imagined. Jesus was betrayed by one of their close friends. He was arrested by soldiers. He was then led off to the house of the high priest, where He was tried and convicted on false charges. Then Jesus was brutally beaten and crucified on a Roman cross. All these things occurred in the span of a few hours.

Only when he was filled with the Holy Spirit did Peter have the kind of courage and boldness about which Jesus had spoken.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we never be guilty of disowning You. Grant Your servants the courage of Your truth and the strength to persevere in the midst of every trial. May we be the instruments through which other believers are encouraged. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Deny (Greek: apareeomai)—to affirm strongly that one has no connection to a place or person. The word is used negatively to refer to persons who denounce their relationship with Jesus Christ. They, too, will be denied by the Son of Man in the final judgement (see Matthew 10:33; Luke 12:9; John 13:38). On the positive side, it denotes the man or woman who disavows personal ownership of his or her possessions and themselves to follow Christ (see Luke 9:23). Peter’s denial was a complete disavowal of any connection with Jesus.

Fall Away (Greek: skandalizo)—to stumble or become a stumbling block. In the lesson text, Jesus said that the disciples would stumble in their faith when He was arrested and Peter would do so spectacularly.

Remembered (Greek: anamimnesko)—a compound word. The prefix ana means “to call,” and the root word mimnesko means “remember.” Combined, the word means “to call to mind.”

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(March 14-20, 2016)

Struggling Faith
MONDAY, March 14: “Uniting Faith” (Jeremiah 3:12-18)
TUESDAY, March 15: “Enlightening Faith” (Isaiah 2:1-6)
WEDNESDAY, March 16: “Suffering Faith” (1 Peter 4:10-19)
THURSDAY, March 17: “Restored Faith” (Psalm 85:4-13)
FRIDAY, March 18: “Overcoming Faith” (Romans 12:14-21)
SATURDAY, March 19: “Marks of Faith” (Galatians 5:22-26)
SUNDAY, March 20: “Struggling Faith” (Mark 14:26-31, 66-72)
RESURRECTION FAITH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Holding Strong to Beliefs

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 23
PRINT PASSAGE: Mark 16:1-8

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 16:1-8
KEY VERSE: Mark 16:6

Mark 16:1-8—KJV
AND WHEN the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

Mark 16:1-8—NIV
WHEN THE Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus’ body.

2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb

3 and they asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?”

4 But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

6 “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him.

7 “But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

BIBLE FACT
Faith, according to the Dictionary of the Bible and Religion by William H. Gertz, is a basic concept of theology and religion, used to designate the attitude of the believer toward God.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People hold strong beliefs that may be severely tested and then come to an outstanding vindication. What can confirm strong beliefs? Jesus’ closest followers were devastated when He was crucified, but their faith was validated when Jesus was raised from the tomb.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Assurance of One’s Faith
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Grief-stricken Women (Mark 16:1-3)
   B. Surprising Developments (Mark 16:4)
   C. The Message of the Angel (Mark 16:5-7)
   D. The Women Depart the Tomb (Mark 16:8)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Remember details of the discovery by Jesus’ followers of His resurrection and the promise for the future;
2. Feel the devastating loss experienced by the women as well as the relief that comes from understanding how faith in God helps Christians survive their loss; and,
3. Tell one another stories of grief and encourage and strengthen one another with assurance of good things to come through Jesus Christ.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Holding Strong to Beliefs
Youth Topic: Alarmed and Amazed
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Mark 16:6
Print Passage: Mark 16:1-8
—The women visiting the empty tomb were the same women who witnessed Jesus’ death (15:40).
—Embalming was not practiced by the Jews of the day and the women’s bringing of the spices was an act of devotion.
—The young man the women met at the tomb is identified in the gospel of Matthew as an angel.
—The women came to the tomb as early as it was possible for them to do so under Jewish law.
—In Mark 16:7, Peter possibly was not included among the disciples because he had forfeited his discipleship, and all right to the honor and privileges of an apostle, by denying his Lord and Master. However, he was penitent at this time.
—The most reliable early manuscripts conclude the gospel of Mark at verse 8. Other manuscripts include various endings to the Gospel.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Not Dead, but Alive!
Key Verse: Mark 16:6a
Print Passage: Mark 16:1-8
—The women expressed their love for Jesus by going to the tomb to anoint His body with perfumes and spices.
—Anointing the dead was customary during first-century Palestine.
—The women’s mission to anoint Jesus was challenged with worries about removing the heavy stone.
—An angel provided the women at the tomb with news that Jesus had been raised.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Assurance of One’s Faith

Believers must view life and death through the lens of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The faith of Jesus’ first followers was severely tested when they watched Him die on the cross. However, three days later their faith was validated when Jesus was raised from the dead. As you study today’s lesson, take a few moments to reflect over your own thoughts regarding death and the assurance that believers have through the promise of eternal life. Make a few notes on why the celebration of Easter is special in your life and in the life of your church.

B. Biblical Background

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the central message and foundational belief of the early Christian church (see Acts 2:22-24; 4:10; 5:30-31; 10:40; 13:30; Romans 6:9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The resurrection is also the central theme of each of the New Testament writers. Each of the Gospels records some details of the resurrection of Jesus and how the women who went to Jesus’ gravesite found an empty tomb (see Matthew 28:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18).

The women rose very early and made their way to the burial site of Jesus. They had intended to ensure that He had a decent burial, one befitting someone who had meant so much to them. They discussed how they would manage to get into the tomb, given the size of the stone that covered the entrance. But before they could finish their discussion they had arrived at the site of the burial of Jesus. They found that the stone had been rolled away. When they went inside to satisfy their curiosity about what could possibly be going on, they found a young man dressed in a white robe. God had sent an angel to give the women the Good News that Jesus had been raised from the dead (see Luke 2:9-10). The women left the site of the tomb, amazed and full of fear that the impossible had truly happened.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Grief-stricken Women

(Mark 16:1-3)

AND WHEN the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?
Mark reported that it was at the end of the Sabbath that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome arrived at the burial site of Jesus. Each of the Gospel writers mentioned the names of persons who went to the tomb. Their lists vary and may be a reflection of their own theological purposes. What is clear is that each of them mentioned the name of Mary Magdalene, one of Jesus’ most prominent supporters and followers.

In verse 2, Mark further stated that it was early in the morning, after the sun had risen, which would put the time after 6:00 a.m. on Sunday morning. Here is the picture the Gospels present: it was very early Sunday morning; and a small group of women, including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices so that they might anoint the body of Jesus. The burial site would have been just outside the city walls of Jerusalem, since there were no cemeteries within the city limits.

The use of precious oils and spices to anoint a body was a token of devotion and love for the deceased person. Jews did not practice embalming, unlike the Egyptians who embalmed their deceased loved ones as a way of preserving the bodies.

As the women walked to the site of the tomb of Jesus, they discussed among themselves who would remove the large stone at the door. The stones used to seal tombs were extremely large and could weigh several tons.

B. Surprising Developments
(Mark 16:4)

And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

The word but introduces a surprising turn of developments in the situation facing the women. As they had been discussing among themselves who would remove the stone, they looked up and it had been removed from the opening. “Looked up” indicates that they may have been walking with their heads hung down, disappointed and despairing over what they were about to do. We have no way of knowing how far away they were from the actual tomb when they saw that the stone had been removed. Mark stated that the stone was very large, which made the discovery of the women even more surprising. Mark used the passive tense to denote that the stone had been removed at some unspecified point in the past.

C. The Message of the Angel
(Mark 16:5-7)

And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

When the women arrived at the site of the tomb of Jesus, they were greeted by an unexpected sight: the stone had been removed. They had just concluded discussing the challenge of removing the stone and where they would find the help to remove the stone. Upon entering the tomb, they expected to find the dead body of Jesus. Instead, there was a young man dressed in a white robe who greeted them. They were completely caught off-guard by his presence and were startled beyond belief (see Word Power for an
explanation of the term *alarmed*). He sat on the right side of the tomb, which is not to be taken as some significant sign. Mark did not say that the young man was an angel, but it is pretty obvious that this was no ordinary human being. The women did not have time to raise questions because the young man answered all of their questions and addressed each of their concerns.

In verse 6, the first thing that the angel did was arrest their fears that something more tragic had happened to the body of Jesus. The angel said that he knew who they were looking for—Jesus the Nazarene, the one who had been crucified. He made sure that they understood that He had risen. In the words of the angel we see the first recorded proclamation that Jesus had been raised from the dead. God had sent a messenger from heaven to declare that His Son had been raised. In the words of the angel we see the first recorded proclamation that Jesus had been raised from the dead. God had sent a messenger from heaven to declare that His Son had been raised from the dead. And to offer further proof that the One whom they saw buried was no longer dead, they were invited to see the place where He had been laid.

According to verse 7, rather than be paralyzed by fear, they had to quickly return to the location of the disciples and Peter, letting them know that Jesus was going to meet all of them in Galilee. This was a fulfillment of the words of Jesus in Mark 14:28. Two questions are key at this point. First, why would Jesus meet them in Galilee and not Jerusalem? It was Galilee where the redemptive mission to save the world began. It was in Galilee that Jesus first assembled His followers and empowered them to preach the Gospel. Galilee would be a fitting place to reassemble them for the greater work that was to come. Second, why was Peter singled out from the others? Peter was the unelected leader and the most outspoken regarding his loyalty to Jesus at all costs. And it was Peter who had the greatest stumble and fall from grace (see Mark 14:29, 67-70). Jesus wanted Peter to know that he was still loved and that he, too, had been forgiven of his failure.

**D. The Women Depart the Tomb**
*(Mark 16:8)*

*And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.*

The women hurried away from the tomb without saying a word to anyone. Mark said that it was out of fear that the women kept silent. We know from the history of the Christian faith that the women ultimately shared the news with others. Mark did not say when and where. Given the circumstances in which they found themselves, it is no wonder that they ran away in fear and kept to themselves for a brief period.

**III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

Today is Resurrection Sunday. It is one of the most holy days for Christians. On this day, Christians around the world celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The earliest Christian witnesses proclaimed without reservation or hesitation that God raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. He did not raise Himself, but God raised Him. The resurrection of Jesus was attested to in the preaching of the apostles. The witness of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ died so that we might be forgiven for our sins, and through faith in His resurrection we receive
God’s free gift of eternal life. This is called grace. In order to receive the forgiveness of God and His gift of eternal life, one must believe that God raised Christ from the dead, and repent of his or her sins. Then that person can be baptized in obedience to Christ’s command.

The central point that our lesson makes today is that faith in the Resurrection is the most important foundational belief of the believer’s life.

Faith is not difficult to understand. A very simple explanation of faith is that it is acting on, acting out, or doing what one believes to be true. If one believes something to be true, then it should make a difference in that person’s life. If you believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and you have become a Christian, it means that your life, beliefs, practices, conduct, and the things that you give to and invest your time in are driven by what you believe.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for raising Jesus Christ from the dead. In His resurrection we find eternal hope that we, too, will one day be raised to eternal life. Grant Your servants the will to witness and remind others of Your amazing grace. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

*Alarmed (Greek: *ekthambeo*)(amazed [NASB]; affrighted [KJV])—The word has in it the idea of throwing someone into a state of terror. *Ekthambeo* is used only in the book of Mark (9:15; 14:33; 16:5-6). The word gives a picture of women who were momentarily terrified by the presence of a heavenly being."

*Bewildered (Greek: *ekstasis*)—“A state of consternation or profound emotional experience to the point of being beside oneself” (W. Baur, W.F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed., p. 309). *Ekstasis* is sometimes translated as “astonishment or armament” (see Mark 5:42; Luke 5:26; Acts 3:19). We get the English word *ecstatic* from this ancient Greek word. It conveys the image of a person who is caught up into a high state of spiritual euphoria.*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(March 21-27, 2016)*

**Resurrection Faith**

*MONDAY, March 21: “Commandment Living” (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)*

*TUESDAY, March 22: “Fear and Serve the Lord” (1 Samuel 12:19-24)*

*WEDNESDAY, March 23: “Faithful and Fearless” (Psalm 23)*

*THURSDAY, March 24: “Grace-filled Living” (Romans 1:1-7)*

*FRIDAY, March 25: “Living Again” (1 Peter 1:21-25)*

*SATURDAY, March 26: “Resurrection Living” (1 Peter 3:14b-22)*

*SUNDAY, March 27: “Resurrection Faith” (Mark 16:1-8)*
RENEWED HEALTH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Good as New

DEVOTIONAL READING: Malachi 3:16–4:2
PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 7:1-10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:1-10
KEY VERSE: Luke 7:9

Luke 7:1-10—KJV
NOW WHEN he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. 2 And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. 3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: 5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. 6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: 7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. 8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. 9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. 10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

Luke 7:1-10—NIV
WHEN JESUS had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, 5 “because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” 6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. 7 “That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 “For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” 9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” 10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Everyone has desperate needs at times that cause her or him to wonder if any help is available. To whom can Christians turn for help that makes a difference? The centurion’s faith in Jesus Christ as the great healer made all the difference in meeting his need to see his servant healed.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Settling for the “Just-like-new”
   B. Biblical Background
II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Setting and the Situation (Luke 7:1-2)
   B. The Soldier (Luke 7:3-8)
   C. The Savior (Luke 7:9)
   D. The Sequel (Luke 7:10)
III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Know the facts of the story of the centurion’s faith and Jesus’ healing of the centurion’s servant;
2. Experience strong faith for deliverance from illness like the faith of the centurion in the story; and,
3. Commit (or recommit) to regularly visiting the sick in order to pray with them and to encourage them to believe that God will heal according to God’s will.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Good as New
Youth Topic: Surprising Faith?
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Luke 7:9
Print Passage: Luke 7:1-10
—Jesus had demonstrated His spiritual “authority” at the synagogue in Capernaum with the casting out of an unclean spirit (see Luke 4:33). According to Luke 4:37, word got around.
—That Jesus commended the approach or attitude (one of the few times in the Scriptures He did so) of one “not even in Israel” (not a Jew) foreshadowed the grafting in of the Gentiles into God’s kingdom. Jesus was more interested in the man’s faith than his heritage.
—The Jewish elders said that the centurion was “worthy” of Jesus’ help (7:4), but the centurion said that he was not “worthy” to have Jesus come under his roof (verse 6). Although the words are translated “worthy,” the original uses two different Greek words (axios in verse 4; hikanos in verse 6).
—While the Jews resented the presence of the Roman army in their land, centurions who are mentioned in the Gospels and in the book of Acts are always presented as men of virtue.
—This healing was the first time Jesus included a Gentile in His ministry, and it would have been of particular interest to Luke’s readers.
—Jesus was surprised by the faith of the centurion, who was probably a member of Herod Antipas’s forces and had a hundred men under him.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Help Will Come
Key Verse: Luke 7:7b
Print Passage: Luke 7:1-10

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Jesus had just finished speaking to the people and then went to Capernaum in Galilee.
The centurion heard that Jesus was nearby and, knowing Jesus’ reputation, sought Him to do something for his servant.
The centurion sent elders to speak on his behalf about what he needed, and when they found Jesus, they pleaded for Him to heal the centurion’s slave.
As Jesus headed toward the home of the centurion, friends dissuaded him.
Jesus was amazed at the belief of the centurion, saying He had never seen such faith demonstrated in all of Israel.
As the people returned to the centurion’s home, they found the servant healed.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Settling for the “Just-like-new”

Justin was filled with excitement. At long last his dream of becoming a college freshman would soon be realized. He had been preparing for the upcoming semester at State College with meticulous detail. The final task was to purchase a new laptop computer that he could take with him. The parents of many of his friends were able to give them the latest and most expensive machines. Justin’s family was not poor, but they were not at the upper end of the economic ladder, either. His parents had already made a huge financial sacrifice to help him get into college. It was unthinkable that he could ask for help with a new computer.

After pondering the options, he concluded that he would have to settle for a cheaper model or a higher-end refurbished machine. After doing some research and viewing several YouTube videos on buying computers, Justin settled on a refurbished high-end computer. The machine that Justin was able to buy was better than most of the newer computers that many of his friends had purchased. His was just as good as a new one.

This is what happens to the man or woman who comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—He makes them brand-new (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). In this lesson we meet a man who had run out of options to help his gravely ill servant. The centurion’s faith in Jesus Christ as the great healer made all the difference in meeting his need to see his servant healed. Everyone has desperate needs at times that cause her or him to wonder if any help is available. Christians can always turn to Jesus for help. He makes the difference!

B. Biblical Background

Today we begin the first of four lessons from the gospel of Luke. The overall theme is “Restorative Faith,” in which followers of Jesus experience healing, redemption, and restoration of their faith through inspiring actions and teachings of Jesus. In today’s lesson we meet a centurion who was a Roman commander. The story is significant because a Gentile demonstrated such amazing faith. Jesus said that He had not seen such a powerful demonstration of faith by anyone in Israel. While the miracle is a key element in the story, it
is really about the great faith of a man in whom one would least likely expect to find faith in God.

Like many of the passages in the Gospels, there is a parallel passage in Matthew 8:5-13. In Matthew’s account the centurion came face-to-face with Jesus to make his request, but in Luke’s account the centurion worked through emissaries. There is a similar event recorded in John 4:46-53, but this is more than likely a different event.

The meeting between Jesus and the centurion’s emissaries took place at the end of the Sermon on the Plains, just as Jesus entered the town of Capernaum (see Luke 6:20-49). The passage highlights the difference between human authority and divine authority. The centurion could command men to come and go, but only Jesus was able to command that which was beyond human control. Finally, the passage points out that the prerequisites for cultivating a great faith in God has nothing to do with one’s religious pedigree; rather, it is the absolute confidence that Jesus can help in our most dire moments of need.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Setting and the Situation

(Luke 7:1-2)

NOW WHEN he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

Luke reported, as did Matthew, that the scenes in the text took place shortly after the teachings of Jesus. Matthew indicated that the teachings, or sermon, took place on the side of a mountain, while Luke stated that it was on the plains (see Luke 6:49).

The primary character in the story is a centurion whose name we do not know. Nor do we have any information regarding his religious life, except that he had built a synagogue in Capernaum. New Testament scholars are certain that the man was not of Roman descent because it was not until AD 44 that Roman soldiers were stationed in Galilee.

In verse 2, we are told three things about the centurion’s situation. First, the centurion was a man of means; he had a servant, which is a translation of the word *doulos*, meaning “slave, or one who is a bondman of another.” Second, this slave was quite valuable to the centurion. This can either mean that the slave was valuable because of the price paid or he was valuable because of the service he rendered to his master. “Valued highly” is a translation of the Greek word *entimos* (en’-tee-mos) and it literally means “to hold in high esteem, prized, or precious” (see Philippians 2:29; 1 Peter 2:4, 6 for other uses of *entimos*). The centurion thought a great deal of the slave and wanted to see him well again. Third, the centurion’s slave was sick and about to die. Matthew noted that the man was paralyzed. We have no way of knowing the cause or nature of the man’s condition. Luke did not describe the man’s condition, except to say it was serious enough for him to die (Greek: *teleutao* [tel-yoo-tah’-o], literally “to bring to an end, or to finish”). The man was at the end of his life and could die at any moment.
B. The Soldier
(Luke 7:3-8)

And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

Verse 3 stated that the man heard of Jesus, which is entirely possible given the broad-based fame that Jesus enjoyed early in His Galilean ministry (see Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 4:31-37). The centurion did not feel comfortable approaching Jesus himself, so he sent some of the Jewish elders on his behalf. Who were the elders speaking on behalf of the centurion? Most likely they were from the synagogue. The elders requested that Jesus come and heal the servant of the centurion. In verse 4, the appeal of the elders was not in the form of a simple request. Their request was a passionate plea that Jesus come and help this man. They stated that He should come because the man deserved Jesus’ help. The reason for their bold statement is found in verse 5 (NIV): “He loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” In these words we have no description of the man’s religious relationship with the Jews. There is no way to know whether he was a convert to Judaism or was in the process of converting. He loved the people and he loved them enough to finance the construction of the synagogue in Capernaum.

Verse 6 states that Jesus honored the request and went with the elders. In this simple act of going, Jesus taught that God is not a respecter of persons. Jesus would not restrict Himself to just helping one ethnic group; all men and women are worthy of God’s grace. Jesus knew that by going to the home of a Gentile He would become ritually unclean, yet He was not deterred by this. Luke did not record any subsequent conversation that may have taken place between Jesus and the elders. As they were nearing the centurion’s home, the centurion sent his friends to tell Jesus that it was not necessary for Jesus to come to his home. In verses 6-7a, we get a different view of the centurion. The message is delivered in the first person, as though the centurion was speaking directly to Jesus Himself. His friends conveyed the message that the centurion felt that he was unworthy to have Jesus come to his home. The humble character of the centurion emerged in the sending of this second group of people to meet Jesus. Unlike the Jewish elders who considered this man worthy of Jesus’ attention and time, he felt just the opposite about himself. The friends of the centurion told Jesus that the reason he did not personally come to Jesus was because he felt unworthy. Here we see the very high esteem in which he held Jesus. As far as the centurion was concerned, all Jesus needed to do was speak and his slave would be healed.

In verse 8, he provided the rationale for his request. He understood authority and the power of the spoken word. Those with authority are able to command men and women to do anything just by speaking. To
one he said, “Go,” and he went; to another he said, “Come,” and he came; and to another, “Do this,” and it was done. The centurion reasoned that if he could command people with his words, then all the more Jesus would be able to heal his slave just by speaking. Here he demonstrated that he truly believed what he had heard about Jesus.

C. The Savior  
(Luke 7:9)

When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

Jesus responded to the message with complete amazement (Greek: θαυμάζω [thou-mad'-zo]). This is the picture of a person who receives the most astonishing news from an unlikely source. Jesus never expected to find this kind of faith being demonstrated by a Gentile, especially from someone who had never had personal contact with Him. Jesus turned around and spoke to the crowd following Him and said to them that He had not seen such great faith demonstrated by anyone among the Israelites. Among even God’s chosen nation there was no one with the kind of trust Jesus had just witnessed.

D. The Sequel  
(Luke 7:10)

And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

Luke did not report that Jesus spoke any words regarding the healing of the centurion’s slave (see Matthew 8:13). What was central was the unparalleled faith exhibited by the centurion. When the second group of friends returned to the house, they found that the very man who had been at the point of death was now well. Only Matthew provided the detail that the man was made well at the very point the centurion spoke to Jesus.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The story of the centurion’s faith opens the window for several significant principles for believers. First, we see a sterling example of compassion for those who are suffering. Once we get beyond the fact that the centurion was a slaveholder, it becomes clear that he was also a man of deep compassion who valued human life. Believers would do well to learn the lesson of having compassion for all people, especially those who may be of a different ethnic group than themselves. Second, we see a great example of liberality. The centurion not only supported the local synagogue, but also was the catalyst for its construction. Third, we see the deep appreciation of the people who were willing to intercede on behalf of a man who was not one of them. Under normal circumstances Jewish religious and civic leaders would have never approached Jesus about helping a Gentile. Finally, we have a picture of the compassionate Christ, who was willing to go to any extent to help someone in distress. Jesus recognizes people’s faith in His power to heal, save, and restore as an expression of trust in God. In the example of Jesus, we see firsthand the power of the spoken word to heal anyone regardless of where he/she is.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we learn to trust You
completely and without any reservations. speak words of life to those who are dying
Grant to Your servants the power to spiritually. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORLD POWER
Elders (Greek: presbuteros)—older members of the community. The word identified a wide
range of individuals in the New Testament. Jewish elders were usually wealthy lay members
of the Sanhedrin. There were elders in Jewish synagogues, and there were elders in later
Christian communities.

Servant (Greek: doulos)—The English word servant does not capture the Greek word doulos,
which denotes that such a person is a slave in every sense of the word. A doulos was not
someone who was captured and made a slave. Rather, this word denotes someone who had
been born into slavery. In the Ancient Near East, one out of every six persons was a slave. The
word appears frequently in the New Testament (see Matthew 8:9; 10:24-25; 13:28; 18:23;
note the word doulos is properly translated in the NASB). The word is used figuratively to
indicate that a person can be a slave of God or is a slave of fellow believers.

Well (Greek: hugiaino [hoog-ee-ah-no’])—literally, “whole or sound.” It is the picture of
a man or woman who is in perfect health, free of any disease or sickness (see Luke 5:31;
15:27 for others uses of the word). Hugiaino is also used figuratively to denote the spiritual
well-being of an individual who is free of theological error and is sound in doctrine (see 1
Timothy 1:10; 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1f).

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(March 28–April 3, 2016)

Renewed Health
MONDAY, March 28: “Rebuilding Health” (Isaiah 58:6-12)
TUESDAY, March 29: “Healing Wings” (Malachi 3:16–4:2)
THURSDAY, March 31: “Total Health” (Matthew 4:23-25; 5:3-11)
FRIDAY, April 1: “Emotional Health” (Matthew 6:16-27)
SATURDAY, April 2: “Eternal Health” (John 5:24-30)
SUNDAY, April 3: “Renewed Health” (Luke 7:1-10)
A REVERSAL OF SHAME

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: A Fresh Start

DEVOATIONAL READING: Psalm 13
PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 7:36-50

Background Scripture: Luke 7:36-50
Key Verse: Luke 7:47

Luke 7:36-50—KJV
36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat.
37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,
38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.
39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.
40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.
41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.
42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?
43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.
44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Luke 7:36-50—NIV
36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table.
37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,
38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.
39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”
40 Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.
41 “Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.
42 “Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him most?”
43 Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.
44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Sometimes in life, people are remorseful to the point of tears about something they did or said. Where can they turn for help? Jesus’ response to a sinful woman provided real forgiveness and peace because she loved Him so much.

45 “You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.
46 “You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.
47 “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”
48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”
49 The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”
50 Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Beginning over Again
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. An Act of Love
      (Luke 7:36-38)
   B. An Attitude of Criticism
      (Luke 7:39)
   C. An Illustration of Forgiveness
      (Luke 7:40-43)
   D. A Comparison of Actions
      (Luke 7:44-46)
   E. A Pronouncement of Forgiveness
      (Luke 7:47-50)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Know the story of Jesus’ tenderness toward the repentant woman and His forgiveness of her sins;
2. Express the great joy that comes from knowing that their sins have been forgiven; and,
3. Forgive others for their failure, shortcomings, and hurtful actions and to celebrate the joy of forgiving and of being forgiven.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: A Fresh Start
Youth Topic: Pardoned!
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Luke 7:47
Print Passage: Luke 7:36-50
—The woman in this account has often been identified as Mary Magdalene, but the text nowhere gives any indication that this is so.
—While there are some similarities, this event seems to be a different one from the anointing in Bethany recorded in
the other gospels (see Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8).
—The Pharisee’s reasons for inviting Jesus seem to have been less than genuine. As Jesus pointed out near the end of the account, while Jesus had been invited to the Pharisee’s home, He was not accorded the usual hospitalities given to guests at the time (verses 44-46).
—Jesus’ declaration that the woman’s sins were forgiven aroused a reaction similar to the same pronouncement Jesus made of the man with palsy (Luke 5:17-26; see also Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12).
—Simon the Pharisee discounted Jesus’ credentials as a prophet because He did not seem to know what, apparently, was common knowledge: the woman was a “sinner.” Jesus proved His credentials by showing Simon that he had divine knowledge: he could hear Simon’s thoughts.
—The woman must have let her hair down to dry Jesus’ feet with it. That would have been a social taboo in her day.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Beginning over Again

It had been fifteen years since Mary and Brenda had seen each other or had a conversation. When they were teenagers, they were nearly inseparable. People who did not know them thought that they were sisters. Upon graduation from high school, the two longtime friends enrolled in the same college and became college roommates. But as fate would have it, Brenda met new people who drove a wedge between the two friends. Throughout their freshman year, Brenda became more and more distant and soon stopped speaking to or spending any time with Mary. One day, Mary asked Brenda what had happened to their friendship. Brenda lashed out at Mary, using harsh and demeaning language that cut Mary’s heart deeply. The two young women separated and did not have any contact for fifteen years. At some point during those years, Brenda became a born-again Christian. One day as her pastor preached about forgiveness, she was convicted by the events of the past and knew that she needed to make things right with Mary. Through Facebook she located Mary and sent her a message requesting a meeting. Reluctant at
first, Mary consented. When the two women
made eye contact, they both began to weep
profusely because for years they had longed to
see each other and bring closure to the past.
Sometimes in life, people are remorseful to
the point of tears about something they had
done or said. Where can they turn for help?
Jesus’ response to a sinful woman provided
real forgiveness and peace because she loved
Him so much.

B. Biblical Background
The setting for this event in the life of
Jesus was most likely Capernaum, the major
town near the Sea of Galilee. Some people
have identified the woman in the story as
Mary Magdalene, but there is no mention of
the woman’s name or where she was from.
While there are some similarities between
this event and the anointing in Bethany, this
was an entirely different event (see Matthew
26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). The
anointing at Bethany took place near the city
of Jerusalem just prior to the beginning of
the passion of Jesus. In the present passage,
Simon was a Pharisee and not a leper.

Simon invited Jesus to his home to share
a meal, but his intentions appeared to be less
than genuine. During His visit, an unnamed
woman came in and anointed the feet of Jesus,
wetting His feet with her tears and wiping His
feet with her hair. Simon became incensed and
began to think of Jesus in a rather disparaging
way, insisting that He could not be a prophet.
Jesus proved His credentials as a prophet by
revealing to Simon his thoughts. Jesus pointed
out to Simon that He was not accorded any
of the common courtesies extended to guests
in one’s home. The woman went to Simon’s
home as a broken sinner, but she departed
forgiven, saved, and at peace with God and
herself.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. An Act of Love
(Luke 7:36-38)

And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat
with him. And he went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat
down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which
was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the
Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,
And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began
to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the
hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them
with the ointment.

We do not know how or when Jesus
received the invitation to have dinner in the
home of Simon the Pharisee. This Pharisee
is not to be confused with any other person
named Simon in the New Testament. The
fact that a Pharisee invited Jesus to join him
for dinner was unthinkable, considering
what many of the Pharisees thought of Jesus
(see Luke 7:34). Luke did not say why the
Pharisee invited Jesus to have dinner at his
home. It may have been to satisfy his curiosity
that Jesus was being proclaimed as a mighty
prophet (see Luke 7:16). In the passage, Jesus
revealed His universal love for all men and
women; He refused to exclude anyone from
the kingdom of God.

Verse 37 points out that while Jesus was
reclining at the dinner table, a well-known
woman in the town walked in with an alabaster
jar of perfume. Whenever Jesus was in town,
word would spread quickly and people would overwhelm the place where He was located. This woman heard that Jesus was at the home of a local Pharisee and felt compelled to show up. Houses in that day were rather open, and it was not uncommon for uninvited persons to show up if a large dinner party was being held. We are not told what type of perfume she brought. What we can be certain of is the fact that the jar was made of alabaster and that its contents were not cheap.

In verse 38 is a picture of uninhibited love and adoration for Jesus. Luke spared no detail regarding the affection heaped upon Jesus by the woman. The woman stood behind Jesus, weeping so much so that her tears wet the feet of Jesus. The woman let down her hair and began to wipe the feet of Jesus, kissing them and pouring out the perfume she had brought with her. In this act of love, the woman did something that was strictly forbidden in that culture: she touched a man in public. Luke did not offer any explanation for the woman’s emotional outpouring. There is little doubt that she had previously heard Jesus’ preaching and teaching about God’s grace. Quite possibly she was grateful and wanted to express said gratitude in a very tangible way.

B. An Attitude of Criticism
(Luke 7:39)

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

The Pharisee assumed that Jesus should have been able to recognize who this woman was. Simon was true to the belief and practices of the Pharisees. In his own self-righteous mind, Jesus could not possibly be what and who people had claimed Him to be. The use of the word if reveals the truth that doubt had crept into the mind of Simon. “If He was a real prophet, He would know” who this woman was. He would not dare speak publicly what he was thinking about Jesus and this woman. The Pharisee thought of the woman as a sinner, over against himself as being righteous.

C. An Illustration of Forgiveness
(Luke 7:40-43)

And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

In verse 40, Jesus revealed that He indeed was a prophet. He answered Simon’s thoughts by speaking directly to him. Simon responded respectfully, referring to Jesus as “Teacher” (didaskalos).

Verses 41-42 contain a parable about two men who were deep in debt. Parables are short, memorable stories that drive home a specific lesson. Jesus used them often in His teaching. This parable is unique to the book of Luke. In the parable one man owed five hundred denarii, which was an enormous amount of money. The denarii was the equivalent of a day’s wage; hence, the man would need to work for nearly a year and a half just to pay the debt. Given the size of the debt, he would never have been able to pay it off. The other man owed fifty denarii, a smaller debt that could possibly be paid off.
Jesus stated that neither of the men had the money needed to settle their debt, so the lender simply cancelled the debts. Continuing to look at Simon, Jesus drove home the point by asking Simon a question. “Now which of them will love him more?” (verse 42, NIV).

Simon’s answer revealed a tone of reluctance to respond. The answer to the question is obvious: the man who owed the five hundred denarii would be the most grateful. He had a debt that he could never repay (short of a miracle). Jesus told Simon that he had answered correctly.

D. A Comparison of Actions
(Luke 7:44-46)

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

After receiving Simon’s answer, Jesus turned toward the woman, still facing Simon. There is a bit of irony in the words of Jesus: “Do you see this woman?” She behaved and responded to Jesus in ways that the highly religious man did not. Jesus recounted His host’s lack of hospitality. When He arrived at the home of Simon, there were no customary acts of kindness or common courtesies extended that were normally afforded to one’s guests. Jesus pointed out that Simon did not even give Him any water to wash His feet, yet this woman used her tears and wiped them with her hair.

Verse 45 pointed out the custom of greeting guests with a kiss. Simon did not even offer to kiss Jesus. The woman, however, continually kissed the very feet of Jesus. She poured expensive perfume on His feet, while Simon did not even offer olive oil for anointing the head of Jesus (verse 46).

E. A Pronouncement of Forgiveness
(Luke 7:47-50)

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

Verse 47 begins the conclusion to the passage where Jesus drove home the point to Simon and those who had gathered in his home. Jesus spoke to Simon and all who were present, letting them know that He knew full well this woman’s story. Her many sins had been forgiven, and as a result of that she showered love and affection on Jesus. Simon, however, did not believe that he needed to be forgiven of much. After all, he was a Pharisee, respected as one of the most righteous men in the whole nation. Jesus stated that if you believe that you do not need to be forgiven of many sins, you will love in a way commensurate with your belief.

According to verse 48, Jesus spoke directly to the woman and told her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Jesus spoke of the forgiveness as a past event. She was not just forgiven at that moment but had already received the gift of grace. He announced that all of her sins had been forgiven. Just as the lender forgave his debtors, so Jesus had forgiven her.

The remaining guests were stunned at Jesus’ pronouncement. They had never heard any human being pronounce that he was
forgiving them of their sins. Implied in the comments of the guests is that they knew Jesus had miraculous powers and was a profound teacher, but they did not believe that He had power to forgive sins. “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

Jesus told the woman that she had been saved by her faith in Him (compare Luke 8:48; 18:42 with Matthew 9:22).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The lesson teaches an invaluable truth about how people respond to the grace of God. On the one hand there was a religious man, Simon the Pharisee, who by all accounts was more righteous than others—at least in his own eyes. On the other hand, in contrast to Simon we see a woman known throughout the community as a sinner. Yet, in her we see what it means to experience forgiveness and then show love and gratitude for what God has done in one’s life. In the passage, a woman who by all accounts would have been considered to be the scum of the Earth received the greatest gift that anyone could have given her—forgiveness and a second chance.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You that we have been forgiven of our sins. It is by and through Your abundant grace that we are released from our past sins. May we be forgiving of others in the way You have forgiven us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Cancelled (Greek: charizomai [kar–id’–zom–ahee])—is from the root word charis, which is sometimes translated as “grace, gift, or favor.” It literally refers to releasing a person from the obligation of repaying what is owed. In the King James Version, the word is translated as “forgave.”

Saved (Greek: sozo [sodz’–o])—means “to keep safe and sound, to make well.” As a theological term it means “to set free from the power and possession of sin and the penalty of death caused by sin” (see Romans 6:8-14).

Sinner (Greek: hamartolos [ham-ar-to-los])—denotes someone who is devoted to sin, preeminently sinful, or especially wicked. The woman had a notorious reputation of being corrupt and immoral.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(April 4-10, 2016)

A Reversal of Shame

MONDAY, April 4: “Israel’s Salvation” (Exodus 14:30–15:3)
TUESDAY, April 5: “David’s Deliverance” (2 Samuel 22:2-7, 17-20)
WEDNESDAY, April 6: “Prevailing Trust” (Psalm 13)
THURSDAY, April 7: “Fulfilled Trust” (2 Samuel 7:8-12)
FRIDAY, April 8: “Triumphant Trust” (Psalm 54)
SATURDAY, April 9: “Trust without Shame” (2 Timothy 1:8-14)
SUNDAY, April 10: “A Reversal of Shame” (Luke 7:36-50)
A SOUND MIND

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Thinking Clearly

DEVOOTIONAL READING: Philippians 2:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 8:26-36

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 8:26-39
KEY VERSE: Luke 8:35

Luke 8:26-36—KJV
26 And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee.
27 And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.
28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.
29 (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)
30 And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.
31 And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.
32 And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them.
33 Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.
34 When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country.
35 Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils

Luke 8:26-36—NIV
26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee.
27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs.
28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!”
29 For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.
30 Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him.
31 And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.
32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission.
33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.
34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside,
35 and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from
Sometimes when a person’s mind suffers from an emotional or physical disorder, he or she might behave abnormally and might even be a threat to himself/herself or others. Who can clear the person’s mind and give him/her something to shout about? Jesus once healed a man who was demon-possessed and then told him to go home and tell everyone how much God had done for him.

were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. 36 They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.

TOPICAL OUTLINE

I. Introduction
   A. Abnormal Behavior
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Jesus Meets the Demoniac
      (Luke 8:26-29)  
   B. The Demons’ Request
      (Luke 8:30-34)  
   C. The People’s Reaction to the Miracle
      (Luke 8:35-36)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Know the details of Jesus’ healing the Gerasene man from his demons;
2. Empathize with those who have great troubles and remember their times of trial; and,
3. Start, support, promote, or work in a church counseling program.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Thinking Clearly
Youth Topic: Demons Begone
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Luke 8:35
Print Passage: Luke 8:26-36
— The demons addressed Jesus as “Son of the Most High God” (verse 28; see also 4:41) and, thus, answered the question the disciples had raised in the boat just before landing (“Who then is this?” [verse 25]).
— Luke described the herd of pigs as “large”; Mark included the detail that there were two thousand pigs (see 5:13).
— Mark and Luke mentioned only one demon-possessed man, but Matthew indicated there were two (see 8:28).
— Mark and Luke called the place where this event happened “the country of the Gerasenes” (see Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26), but Matthew called it “the country of the Gadarenes” (see Matthew 8:28).
— The man’s dwelling in the tombs (among the dead) emphasized further his depraved state.
— Because the man could not be detained by guards or chains, he could have posed a threat to Jesus.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Healed!
Key Verse: Luke 8:36
Print Passage: Luke 8:26-36
—Jesus visited a city where a man lived who appeared to be seriously mentally ill and dangerous and who consistently frightened the people in the community.
—When the man saw Jesus, he ran and fell down before Him, at which time Jesus commanded the unclean spirit to leave the man.
—When asked his name, the man said, “Legion,” accounting for multiple demons.

—Jesus allowed the demons to go into a herd of pigs that ran into the lake and drowned.
—When the word of the healing spread, people saw the man clothed and in his right mind.
—The man begged Jesus to allow him to go with Him, but Jesus encouraged him to go to his own community and proclaim what God had done for him.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Abnormal Behavior

On December 14, 2012, at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, one of the deadliest school shootings in American history took place. Twenty-year-old Adam Lanza shot and killed twenty children and six teachers and staff. No one knows exactly why he committed this senseless atrocity. Although he had a developmental disorder he had not been diagnosed as emotionally ill and capable of committing this sort of violent act. Prior to going to the Sandy Hook Elementary School, Adam shot and killed his mother. As the police arrived on the Sandy Hook scene, Adam committed suicide, leaving the families of the victims without answers as to why he committed this act. One cannot imagine the pain, emotional trauma, and endless suffering that these families face. For some they will never move beyond that day. For others whose faith is grounded in the Lord Jesus, only He will be able to assuage the grief and soothe the anger.

We share this world with people like Adam Lanza. Their lives are tormented by evil thoughts. And in some instances, they will act on their evil impulses. Sometimes when a person suffers from a mental or physical disorder, he or she might behave abnormally and might even be a threat to himself, herself, or others. Who can clear their minds and give them something to shout about? Jesus once healed a man who was demon-possessed and then told him to go home and tell everyone how much God had done for him.

B. Biblical Background

This is the third lesson from the gospel of Luke exploring the theme of “Restorative Faith.” In the previous lesson, we learned that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins and give eternal life. The current passage is part of a larger section of the book of Luke that begins at 8:22 and concludes at 9:17. In this passage, Jesus performed several miracles...
that demonstrated who He was and His power over the conditions that cause humans to suffer. There is the stilling of the storm (8:22-25); casting out of the demons (8:26-36); healing of the woman with the blood disorder (8:42b-48); raising of Jairus’s daughter (8:40-42a, 49-56); and the feeding of the five thousand (9:10-17).

The events in this miracle took place in a region occupied by Gentiles. There has been some question about the exact location, but it is generally regarded to be near present-day Kursi, on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus and the disciples arrived in the region of the Gerasenes, they were immediately met by a demon-possessed man who addressed Jesus as the “Son of the Most High God” (verse 28), which answered the question that the disciples had just recently asked: “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water and they obey Him” (8:25, NIV). In the healing of the demoniac of Gerasene, Jesus faced a man possessed by a legion of demons, all of whom had taken residence in the body of this man for some time.

Throughout the encounter there was no conversation or reaction on the part of the disciples of Jesus. Why? They may have been completely stunned by the nature of the encounter, and, like in the previous incident with the storm, they kept their thoughts to themselves. Jesus continued to defy their ability to comprehend His amazing powers.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Jesus Meets the Demoniac

(Luke 8:26-29)

And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)

Jesus and the disciples headed to the region of the Gerasenes, an area on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (verse 26) and apparently populated with Gentiles. There was no explanation given for this decision. The answer is more than likely found in the divine appointment to cast the demons out of the demon-possessed man. Jesus also may have gone to this region to teach His disciples a lesson that their future mission would be to all people in every nation.

The disciples had just come through one harrowing experience at sea only to be confronted by another on land. In the book of Matthew, the location is referred to as the region of the Gadarenes, which more than likely reflects a different rendering of the Greek text.

Verse 27 states that when Jesus stepped out of the boat He was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. The demoniac had possibly seen the boat from a distance sailing in his direction. We are told several things about this man. First, he was demon-possessed. Second, he had been a resident of
the nearby town. Third, he was naked and it had been a long time since he had worn any clothes. Fourth, he lived in the tombs, which were caves in the side of the mountains. The man’s condition was pathetic, and obviously the people in the nearby town had all but given up on him.

In verse 28, he saw Jesus not as a religious teacher or miracle worker but as the Son of the Most High God. We must be careful to distinguish the actions of the man and those of the demon who drove the man to do the things he did. The demons recognized Jesus and began to cry with a very loud, deafening sound, shouting at the top of the man’s voice. These actions would probably strike fear in the hearts of others, but not Jesus. This was a spiritual conflict pitting the power of darkness against the authority of God the Creator. When the demons fell down at the feet of Jesus, it was not an act of worship, but one of submission because they knew that Jesus had the power to destroy them. The demons pleaded with Jesus not to torture them.

Verse 29 contains a parenthetic statement regarding the past actions of the demons in the life of this poor man. The verse begins with Jesus having commanded the demons to come out of the man. Luke made it clear that the man was possessed by an evil spirit that had relentlessly tormented his life.

**B. The Demons’ Request**
*(Luke 8:30-34)*

And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country.

Verse 30 continued the conversation between Jesus and the demons. Jesus asked the demons for a name. This is not to be taken to mean that Jesus had no knowledge of whom or what He was facing in the presence of this demon-possessed man. The demons had taken over the man’s life and filled his body and mind. The demons replied that his name was “Legion,” which was a military term used to refer to a large unit of Roman soldiers, usually comprised of about six thousand. It is inconsequential whether we understand this language literally or figuratively. Most likely we can understand the reference to “legion” to be figurative. It did not necessarily indicate that the man was possessed by six thousand demons, but it does confirm that he was overrun with a vast multitude of demons.

Verse 31 revealed that the demons knew who had the ultimate power and authority. The context suggests that there was a constant pleading that Jesus not send them into the Abyss. Darrell Bock pointed out that the Abyss refers to the abode of the dead in the Old Testament (see Psalm 107:26; compare with Psalm 106:26 in the Septuagint). He noted that in Luke’s gospel the Abyss is the place where disobedient spirits are kept (*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke 1:1–9:50*, p. 775). Rather than be sent to the Abyss, the demons requested that they be permitted to enter a large herd of pigs that were feeding on the hillside. Upon leaving the
man, the demons went into the pigs, which went rushing down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. The demons and the pigs were both destroyed. Jesus would not have permitted the forces of evil to remain free to attack someone else and torment them as they had done the man in the passage.

Verse 34 introduces a new group of spectators to this miraculous event. There were men tending the pigs who were just as bewildered by this as the disciples of Jesus. They ran back to the town and throughout the countryside, reporting everything that had just happened. They were probably shocked, stunned, and totally caught off guard by the events that had just unfolded in their midst. Who would believe them? Yet, this is exactly what Jesus does in the lives of people—things that are so unbelievable that they become hard to fathom and comprehend.

C. The People’s Reaction to the Miracle
   (Luke 8:35-36)

Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.

Verse 35 states that the people in the town and throughout the countryside went out to the site to see what had happened. We are not told whether this was a large crowd or not, but certainly the business owners were included in this group. Did they know who Jesus was? We are not sure; it is possible that they had previously heard about all of the miracles of healing and the exorcisms that were taking place throughout the region. Luke recorded that they came to Jesus and found the man who had been demon-possessed. Instead of violent actions and loud shouting, the man was no longer possessed by the demons. They saw someone in a calm state of mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus, dressed and in his right mind. They had never seen such a transformation, and it sent shock waves of fear through them.

The people who witnessed the confrontation between Jesus and the demons continued to tell the people of the town and countryside what had happened. We do not know how much they heard, but they certainly saw the outcome of the exorcism. The man was in a different emotional and physical state, unlike in times past when he might have had a few moments or days of freedom. He was completely cured (Greek: *esothe*—from the word *sozo*, “to save”). Jesus had saved the life of the demon-possessed man. It would have been just a matter of time before the man would be led to take his own life; instead, Jesus gave him back his life.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There are people living in this age who would raise all kinds of questions about the content of today’s lesson. They would insist that such an event could not have possibly happened. They would further insist that people who lived during the first century were filled with superstitions and weird beliefs, attributing everything they did not understand to some demon or god. Yet, we know that there are men and women of all ages, ethnic groups, and nationalities who experience emotional and mental turmoil every day. We understand mental illnesses much differently today than they did during the time of Jesus. Yet, the
reality is that God is still the one who can bring peace, tranquility, and rest to the lives of the tormented.

There is another thought that is couched in the passage, and that is the need for the church to become fully engaged in reaching out to people who may be different from ourselves. This is especially a challenge for many congregations that are locked into their communities and their own people. The work of Jesus in the region of the Gerasenes challenges us to reach outside of our normal ethnic and cultural settings and minister to others.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, grant to Your servants the mind and the will to seek out those who are hurting emotionally and mentally. Fill us with the compassion we need to minister to the broken in our midst. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

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**WORD POWER**

_Demon_ (Greek: *daimonion* [dahee-mon-ee-on])—refers to an evil spirit or the messenger or minister of the devil. In the New Testament, demons are found only in those of whom they take possession, so much so that the one possessed is no longer in charge of his or her life, words, or actions. In the lesson, the man had a legion of demons, meaning many demons controlled him.

_Time_ (Greek: *chromos* [khron’–os])—refers to a span of time of unspecified length. In the passage, the reference to “long time” may mean a period of months or even years.

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**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(April 11-17, 2016)*

**A Sound Mind**

**MONDAY,** April 11: “Completeness in God” (Isaiah 61:1-7)

**TUESDAY,** April 12: “Renewed Relationship” (Jeremiah 31:21, 31-35)

**WEDNESDAY,** April 13: “Steadfast Love” (Psalm 119:41-48)

**THURSDAY,** April 14: “Disciplined Freedom” (1 Corinthians 9:19-27)

**FRIDAY,** April 15: “Freedom in the Spirit” (Romans 8:1-11)

**SATURDAY,** April 16: “Christian Freedom” (Philippians 2:1-11)

**SUNDAY,** April 17: “A Sound Mind” (Luke 8:26-36)
LESSON 8                           April 24, 2016

UNIT II: Restorative Faith

A FAMILY REUNION

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Back Home Again


Background Scripture: Luke 15:11-32
Key Verse: Luke 15:24

Luke 15:11-24—KJV
11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:
12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father,
give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And
he divided unto them his living.
13 And not many days after the younger son gathered
all together, and took his journey into a far country,
and there wasted his substance with riotous living.
14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty
famine in that land; and he began to be in want.
15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that
country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the
husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto
him.
17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many
hired servants of my father's have bread enough and
to spare, and I perish with hunger!
18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto
him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before
thee,
19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make
me as one of thy hired servants.
20 And he arose, and came to his father. But while he
was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and
had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and
kissed him.
21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned
against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more
worthy to be called thy son.
22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the
best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his
hand, and shoes on his feet:

Luke 15:11-24—NIV
11 Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two
sons.
12 “The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give
me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property
between them.
13 “Not long after that, the younger son got together
all he had, set off for a distant country and there
squandered his wealth in wild living.
14 “After he had spent everything, there was a severe
famine in that whole country, and he began to be in
need.
15 “So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of
that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.
16 “He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that
the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.
17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many
of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here
I am starving to death!
18 “I will set out and go back to my father and say
to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and
against you.
19 “I am no longer worthy to be called your son;
make me like one of your hired men.’
20 “So he got up and went to his father. But while he
was still a long way off, his father saw him and was
filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son,
threw his arms around him and kissed him.
21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned
against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy
to be called your son.’
22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring
the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his
finger and sandals on his feet.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Family relationships become too easily twisted and broken. What can be one ingredient that can keep families together? A godlike love and forgiveness, given and accepted like the experience that happened between the father and the lost son, can mend and make the difference.

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. 23 “Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Relationship Restored
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Wasting and Wanting (Luke 15:11-13)
   B. Feeding but Hungering (Luke 15:14-16)
   C. Arising and Returning (Luke 15:17-21)
   D. Rejoicing and Celebrating (Luke 15:22-24)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Retell the story of the father and two sons, focusing on the younger son who became profligate and returned home;
2. Feel the need for reunion and forgiveness in families and to connect that to their relationship with God; and,
3. Commit to helping broken families be restored by praying for them and giving any other assistance possible.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Back Home Again
Youth Topic: Welcome Home!
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Luke 15:24
Print Passage: Luke 15:11-24
—This parable goes by many names: “the prodigal son,” “the lost son,” “the waiting father,” and so on. Each name focuses on some particular aspect of the story and makes it central.
—While the parable can be viewed on a personal level, calling individual persons to repentance and to return to God, many see it on a larger scale. The latter see the younger son as the Gentiles and the older son as the Jews.
—The parable teaches that being restored to the father was a matter of grace and not of works.
—Luke’s is the only gospel that contains this parable. Luke’s emphasis on the social “outcasts” of the day may explain why he included it.
—This parable is the third story in Luke 15 of something becoming lost and then being found. In this parable, however, no one searches for the lost, and the rejoicing is not universal when the lost is found.
—The parables in Luke 15 were given in response to criticism from some of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law that
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Relationship Restored

The Jones family was very active in Fourth Baptist Church. Mr. Jones was the church’s treasurer and a very dedicated Sunday school teacher, while Mrs. Jones led one of the women’s classes. The two children, daughter Keisha and son Kaelib, were active in the church’s youth ministry. As Kaelib approached his teen years, however, his personality began to change, and his interest in the youth ministry started to fade. At first, Mr. Jones thought it was just a phase in his son’s life and did not pay too much attention to the early warning signs. Seething under the surface of Kaelib’s behavior was the slow emergence of a whole new person. He became more defiant, his grades dropped, he began to lie more, and it was not long before he started experimenting with drugs.

The Joneses consulted their pastor, who recommended for Kaelib a teen treatment program called Teen Challenge. It was a heartbreaking moment for the family when the time came to be separated. But this was the best solution to this growing family crisis. After ten weeks, Kaelib returned home. There had been a dramatic change in his life. He became more humble and respectful to his parents. The once-broken family had been healed, thanks to the intervention of their pastor and the program. Family relationships can be easily broken. What can be one ingredient that can keep families together? A godlike love and forgiveness can heal longstanding wounds. We see love and forgiveness on display in today’s lesson.

B. Biblical Background

The parable of the Prodigal Son is unique to the book of Luke. Luke 15 contains some of the most important teachings of Jesus regarding the love and grace of God. In the

Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2).

—According to Jewish custom, a father could dispose of his property by either a will or a gift, the elder (firstborn) son receiving two-thirds, and the younger son one-third of the property, which could have been converted into cash. Jewish law did not require the father to honor such a request (Luke 15:11-12).

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Lost and Found
Key Verse: Luke 15:24

Print Passage: Luke 15:11-24
—Jesus told a parable that helped the people understand forgiveness.
—One of a wealthy man’s sons requested his inheritance so he could go and live a life he chose.
—The son went out and squandered all of the money his father provided to him, and he ended up serving pigs for another master.
—Eventually, the son came to himself and decided to go back; his father received him with open arms and gifts.
—Pigs were considered unclean animals.
chapter, Jesus told three parables in response to the murmurs and disdain of both the Pharisees and scribes because of Jesus’ have received sinners and tax collectors (see verses 1-2). The first parable is about the lost sheep (verses 3-7); the second about a lost coin (verses 8-10); and the last and longest parable is about a lost son (verses 11-32). In the first two parables the owners of the lost items initiate the search for them, but that is not the case in the third story of the lost son.

The parable that comprises the lesson today has been labeled by Bible scholars as the “prince of the parables” or “the pearl and crown” of all the parables of the Bible. It has been referred to under several different names, among them being the Prodigal Son, the Lost Son, and the Waiting Father. The great writer Charles Dickens praised this story when he said that it was the finest short story ever written. The Bible is the greatest piece of literature ever put into the hands of humans. Why? It is the Word of God (see Mattoon’s Treasures—Treasures from Luke, Volume 4).

This parable of the Prodigal Son has been viewed from several different perspectives. One interpretation seeks to drive home the point of individual responsibility and the need to repent of one’s sins. This interpretation highlights the love and forgiveness of God when sinners acknowledge and confess their sins. A second interpretation takes a much broader view and sees the son as representing the Gentiles, and the waiting father representing God, who is open to all people of every race and nationality. The older son (discussed in the Background Scripture) has been viewed as representing the attitude of the Jews and their response to the inclusion of non-Jews in the ministry of Jesus. Each perspective has merit because the parable reinforces the lesson that God is loving and forgiving and that there is always a place for the worst sinner who repents.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Wasting and Wanting
(Luke 15:11-13)

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

Verse 11 begins the last of three lessons on possessions and people lost and found. In this story, Jesus told a parable about a man who had two sons. We have no knowledge of their ages nor are we given any other biographical information. One day the younger son went to his father and demanded that he receive the portion of his father’s estate immediately. He was not willing to wait until the appropriate time, which would have been upon the death of his father. George A. Buttrick noted that in the younger son’s actions we see “the assertion of self-will” (The Parables of Jesus, p. 189). There is an air of arrogance in the request of the younger son. The word give (Greek: didomi) is expressed as an imperative command. He wanted it and he wanted all of it immediately. According to the Law as detailed in Deuteronomy 21:17, the oldest son was entitled to two-thirds of his father’s possessions. Because of the rebelliousness of
the younger son, he could have been brought before the elders of the town and stoned to death (see Deuteronomy 21:18-21). The father willingly and graciously consented to the younger son’s desire and did what was necessary to give the boy his portion of his wealth.

Verse 13 described the actions of the son in a very terse manner. Within a few days he assembled all of his possessions. He may have had to sell some assets to convert everything to cash, which would be easily portable. He gathered together everything, leaving nothing behind. It was obvious that he did not intend to return. There is no mention of where the young man went; it was a distant country. This denotes that it was a great distance from home, quite possibly an entirely different nation. He had no intention of returning. It was not long before the young man began to live the high life. He wasted no time spending everything he acquired from his father. He squandered all of his money on wild living (see Proverbs 21:17; 23:21).

The younger son provides an example of how many young people throughout the ages have thought. Young people naturally want their way and can manipulate and act shrewdly to get it. Parents have always been challenged not to allow their children to grow up thinking that everything in the world is centered around them and meeting their needs. Many young people grow up with no training to be concerned about the poor. Nor to be concerned about the environment and clean air and clean water. They grow up thinking that they do not need to be concerned about voting rights and preservation of family values.

B. Feeding but Hungering
(Luke 15:14-16)

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

Verse 14 sets the stage for what would be a humiliating fall. We are told two things about this young man’s situation. First, he had no money because he had spent everything. As fate would have it, there arose a famine in the whole country. Not only was he completely destitute, but there was nowhere in the land to acquire any food. Second, the young man was in need of help. According to verse 15, he suffered the worst indignation that any Jewish male could endure. He was forced to feed pigs just to earn enough money to live. Jews considered pigs to be unclean animals, and they were forbidden to eat pork (see Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8; Isaiah 66:17). He was so desperate that, if it were possible, he would have eaten the pigs’ food. Here, he was a very long way from home. He was confronted by a severe famine, he had no money, and no one offered to help him.

C. Arising and Returning
(Luke 15:17-21)

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.
Dire circumstances forced the young man to evaluate all of his decisions. “He came to his senses” is a way of saying that after careful thought and reflection, he realized that he had made a horrible mistake. He reasoned that the servants who worked for his father were better off than he. They had adequate provisions and then some to spare.

Verse 18 introduces the idea of repentance. He was prepared to humble himself and return home and confess to his father that he made a mistake. Moreover, he had sinned against heaven and his father. Though the son did not spell out his sins, it is obvious that he was turning away from them all. This must include his arrogance, greed, abandonment, sinful living, and wastefulness.

Verse 19 conveys a sense of gravity and brokenness in the tone of the young man. He was ashamed of his life and spent some time rehearsing the apology he would give to his father. He was so ashamed that he did not even feel worthy of being called a son. He was prepared to become a hired servant, if his father would even permit him to return.

Verses 20 indicates that he got up. We have no way of knowing how long it took him to prepare to leave or how long it took him to travel back home. It probably did not take long, because he had few possessions. As he neared the home of his father, the father recognized that it was his son coming down the road. The man was not filled with anger, resentment, or bitterness. Rather, he ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and warmly greeted him.

Just as he had rehearsed it, the son began to recite his apology and confession in the ears of his father. He acknowledged his mistakes and that he had sinned before heaven and against his father. The young man admitted that he was not fit to be considered as part of the family.

Here we see what is at the heart of the message of the parable—the need for sinners to repent. The lost son was not arrogant, nor did he offer excuses for his actions. True repentance is not justification for our sins, but the full acknowledgment that our sins are always and ultimately against the Father (see Psalm 51).

D. Rejoicing and Celebrating
(Luke 15:22-24)

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it upon him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Verses 22-24 begin with the father ordering that the very best robe be brought out and placed on his son. Also, the servants were directed to put a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet. All of this was not just the action of a doting father, but it probably indicated the wretched condition in which the son returned. The father spared no expense for his lost son.

In addition to all the above, the father had the fattened calf, the one reserved for special occasions and guests, prepared for slaughter. The father ordered that a feast be prepared for the return of his son. The son that he had never expected to see again was back home. In his mind the lost son was dead, but he had come back to life. There was no greater reason for celebration.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The parable of the Prodigal Son reaches us on several levels. Jesus told the parable in response to the reaction of the Pharisees and
scribe who accused Him of receiving sinners and tax collectors. Jesus made it clear in the parable that the Father is loving and forgiving. In our worst conditions, having done the worst deeds, the Father is still gracious. When we are willing to acknowledge and repent of our sins, God will forgive us. On the other extreme of this we see what can happen in the lives of believers when we consider ourselves better than others. It is easy to contrast our lives to those who have wandered far away but who make their way back home. The elder son is not our example, but the father who spared no expense to restore his son.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, may we never be filled with the spirit of anger or jealousy over the return of one lost sheep. Grant that we will possess the Spirit of Your Son, who loved us with an everlasting love. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

*Compassion (Greek: *splagchnizomai*)—in classical Greek, this term referred to the inner organs of an animal or person. It came to be used to refer to the central location of human emotions. The word is used frequently in the Gospels to depict the response of Jesus to men and women who were hurting (see Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; Luke 10:33). Jesus used this same word to describe the feelings of the father at the return of his lost son (see 2 Corinthians 6:12; 7:15; Philippians 1:8 for other uses of the word where it is translated “affections”).*

*Wasted (Greek: *diaskorpizo*)—to separate, scatter, or winnow. In the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures), the word is used to speak of God’s gathering again His people who have been scattered (see Isaiah 43:5; Zechariah 13:7; compare with Luke 1:51; Acts 5:37). In the New Testament, the word refers to literally sowing or scattering seed (see Mark 4:1-10). Figuratively, it is used to refer to the wasting of one’s wealth, which is a major theme in the Wisdom writings (see Proverbs 21:17; 21:20; 27:8; 28:7).*

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(April 18-24, 2016)*

**A Family Reunion**

**MONDAY,** April 18: “The Father’s Gift” (Matthew 7:7-12)

**TUESDAY,** April 19: “Called into Family” (2 Timothy 1:3-10)

**WEDNESDAY,** April 20: “The Generosity of God” (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

**THURSDAY,** April 21: “Eternal Family” (Romans 5:12-21)

**FRIDAY,** April 22: “Journeying from Family” (Acts 20:17-24)


**SUNDAY,** April 24: “A Family Reunion” (Luke 15:11-24)
INCREASED FAITH

**ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC:** Facing Up to Failure

**DEVOOTIONAL READING:** Jeremiah 23:33–24:6  
**PRINT PASSAGE:** Luke 17:1-10

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE:** Luke 17:1-10  
**KEY VERSE:** Luke 17:3

**Luke 17:1-10—KJV**

THEN SAID he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!

2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat?

8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?

9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.

10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

**Luke 17:1-10—NIV**

JESUS SAID to his disciples: “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.

2 “It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.

3 “So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

4 “If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

6 He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.

7 “Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’?

8 “Would he not rather say unto him, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’?

9 “Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do?

10 “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Even though Christians may do their best, they may fail and require helpful correction from someone else. What kind of attitude would be appropriate as they seek to correct one another? Jesus taught His followers that even the smallest amount of genuine faith will cause them to rebuke sin, and if repentance occurs, then the fullness of faith leads to forgiveness and restoration; this is the very least of what God expects of His followers.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. When It Is Hard to Forgive
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Don’t Be a Stumbling Block (Luke 17:1-3a)
   B. Be Willing to Rebuke and Forgive (Luke 17:3b-4)
   C. Faith that Works (Luke 17:5-6)
   D. Do Your Duty (Luke 17:7-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review what Jesus said about causing another to stumble, correcting the offender, accepting the offender’s repentance, and forgiving;
2. Appreciate the importance of correcting and receiving correction in a loving and gentle Christian manner; and,
3. Study and improve their methods and styles of godly correcting of others when necessary.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Facing Up to Failure
Youth Topic: On Guard!
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Luke 17:3
Print Passage: Luke 17:1-10
—Jesus taught His followers to have deep compassion for the good of others and to help them overcome any shortcomings as best they could.
—In this Scripture passage, the offending person repents and asks for forgiveness and is forgiven, but in other passages of Scripture, the person may be forgiven even though he or she might not repent and seek forgiveness.
—Obedience to God is presented as a duty and an obligation with no concern for reward.
—“Seven times” is used to denote that the willingness to forgive must be boundless.
—Drowning a person with a stone tied about the neck was an ancient mode of punishment (see Matthew 18:6-7). “To have a millstone hanged about the neck” was a common proverb.
—“So you also” (verse 10) suggests that God expects more from those who serve Him than one would from a servant of one who serves a master.
—In his teachings, Jesus was always concerned about righteousness and just treatment of others. A good example is found in His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7. Jesus taught His followers to have deep compassion for the good of others and to help them overcome any shortcomings as best they could.
CHILDREN

Children Topic: It Helps to Say, “I’m Sorry”
Key Verse: Luke 17:3
Print Passage: Luke 17:1-10
—Jesus’ example of the mustard seed demonstrates the power of faith.
—Jesus explained the magnitude of leading others into sin.
—Jesus explained the importance of continued forgiveness.
—Jesus used an example to explain that His followers had a duty to forgive and to demonstrate faith.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. When It Is Hard to Forgive

Committed discipleship is a radical and fanatical commitment to living out the teachings of Jesus Christ. This can be and often is a huge challenge for many believers who find it easier to express their faith in words, compared to living out their beliefs through their deeds. There are times in life when our faith is challenged and we are called to live out who we claim to be. In 2003, Gary Leon Ridgway went on trial in King County, Washington, for kidnapping and murdering forty-eight women between 1982 and 1998. The murders came to be called the Green River Murders because the first five bodies were found in the Green River. Ridgway was considered one of the worst serial killers in American history. At his trial, family members of the murdered women and girls were permitted to address Ridgway. Many of them lashed out and wished that he would face the worst sort of punishment and wanted him to burn in hell. However, there was one man whose words of compassion brought tears to the eyes of the accused serial killer. It was not his anger, but his willingness to forgive Ridgway for killing his sixteen-year-old daughter.

When it came time for him to address the accused, Robert Rule, father of murdered sixteen-year-old Linda Jane Rule, looked at the accused killer and said, “Mr. Ridgway, there are people here who hate you; I’m not one of them.” He continued, “I forgive you for what you have done. You’ve made it difficult to live up to what I believe, and what God says to do, and that is to forgive. And he doesn’t say to forgive certain people; he says to forgive all. So you are forgiven, sir.”

Even though Christians may do their best, they may fail and require helpful correction from someone else. Believers are expected to express the kind of faith that leads to forgiveness and restoration; this is the very least of what God expects of His followers.

B. Biblical Background

In Luke 17:1-10, Jesus turned His attention to teaching the disciples. In His teachings, Jesus was always concerned about righteousness and just treatment of others.
Jesus never watered down the demands of discipleship and what it would take to enter the kingdom of God. In today’s lesson, there are four individual sayings of Jesus about some aspect of discipleship; verses 1-3a involve the need for believers not to cause others to sin or stumble. The second saying, verses 3b-4, has a twofold purpose with both leading to repentance and forgiveness. In the third saying, verses 5-6 address the matter of the disciples’ faith and their inability to believe God for the impossible. There is a parallel to this saying in Matthew 17:20 where Jesus spoke to His disciples about their inability to cast a demon out of a man. In that instance, Jesus made reference to faith that moves mountains. The final saying, in verses 7-10, is unique to the book of Luke and was intended to teach the disciples of Jesus that even when they had gone beyond what would be reasonable service, they had merely done their duty.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Don’t Be a Stumbling Block
   (Luke 17:1-3a)

THEN SAID he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him.

Verse 1 begins a series of lessons by Jesus directed to teaching just the disciples the challenging realities of following Him. He had been speaking to a larger crowd which consisted of the disciples and Pharisees (see Luke 16:14). In this instance, Jesus made it plain that there are things in life that will come that can and will cause believers to sin or go astray.

The use of the contrasting conjunction but is the suggestion by Jesus that the worst cause of another believer’s fall into sin can come through a person. Woe expresses deep pain and anguish (see Luke 6:24-26). Jesus stated that it would be far better to be drowned than face the judgment to be inflicted upon the man or woman who caused one of the little ones to sin. He stated that it would be far better to have a millstone hung around the neck and be cast into the sea. Millstones were very large circular stones used to grind wheat or grain into flour. They could weigh a few pounds or hundreds of pounds.

The use of the imperative phrase “So watch yourselves” (verse 3) can suggest one of two things. Either the disciples themselves could be the cause of someone’s fall into sin, or they could be the victims of false teaching (see 1 Corinthians 9:16; James 3:1-2). Jesus warned the disciples that they should be on guard for false teachers and the things that lead to sin (see Matthew 6:15-23).

B. Be Willing to Rebuke and Forgive
   (Luke 17:3b-4)

And if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

Verses 3b and 4 are what Darrell Bock calls “third class conditions” (Baker Exegetical
Commentary on the New Testament, Luke 9:51–24:53, p. 1387). What does this mean? It means that these are not absolute situations; they are hypothetical and could happen. When they do occur, Jesus stated that this is how believers should react: In the first situation, if a brother sins he is to be rebuked and corrected. He is not to be banished from the fellowship. If he is remorseful and repents then he is to be forgiven. How do believers maintain their relationships—through sincere love and the willingness to forgive each other—without setting limits? This can be challenging, but it is the mark of discipleship.

C. Faith that Works

(Luke 17:5-6)

And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

In verse 5, there is a change in how people referred to the disciples. They were called “apostles,” or those who are sent on a mission or with a message. Why Luke used this change in how he referred to the disciples is not stated. It is quite possibly because one day they would be required to go and preach the Gospel and they would need the grace to love, forgive, and restore fallen believers.

They requested that Jesus increase their faith. Increase (Greek: prostithemi [pros-tith’-ay-mee]) means “to add to or join with.” The apostles wanted Jesus to add to the faith they had so that they could do greater works or have the grace to love and forgive in the manner in which Jesus was teaching.

Jesus used hyperbole again to make the point that it is not the quantity of one’s faith that matters, but the quality of even a little faith that one possesses. He used two examples in the lesson. First, Jesus said that with faith the size of a mustard seed, which is a very small seed, one could command a mulberry tree to be uprooted. Not only could it be uprooted, but that same tree could be planted in the sea.

Some people have wanted to take the use of this analogy as a literal statement, but Jesus was not being literal. Rather, the intention was to make a point about the presence of faith in the life of the believer. Jesus wanted it understood that it was not the quantity of faith that empowered the greater works, but the quality of one’s faith (see Luke 7:13; 1 Timothy 1:5; Hebrews 11:1; 1 John 5:4). The capacity to believe God for the impossible and then do the kind of ministry and mission work that brings about great results is what Jesus was conveying here (see James 1:17-18; compare Ephesians 2:8-10).

All believers have a measure of faith. The question is this: do we serve or live in such a way that we are able to do the greater works that Jesus said we would do? Faith is not just a proposition; rather, it is a way of living and believing (see 2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

D. Do Your Duty

(Luke 17:7-10)

But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done
all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. 

Men and women who serve in the armed forces are often thanked for their heroic service, but many of them will say that they were only doing their duty. They are not looking for any special recognition because they were performing the service for which they signed up and are thus obligated by virtue of the oath they took.

This is what Jesus was teaching His disciples in this final lesson on discipleship. He put them in the position of a servant who went to work in the field of his master all day, plowing or tending sheep. At the end of the day he returned to the master’s residence. Jesus said that the servant could hardly expect that his master would ask his servant to come, sit down, eat, and rest.

In verse 8, Jesus said that it would be the servant’s duty to prepare his master’s supper and only after he had completed his tasks would he be able to eat and rest. As a servant or slave, one was not entitled to any rights or recognition for one’s service. Jesus said that the servant could not expect to receive any words of thanks for what he had done.

Verse 9 is a rhetorical question with an implied negative answer. The master would not thank his servant for doing what he was supposed to do. In verse 10, Jesus drove home the point by reminding His disciples that in doing their work of mission and ministry, they were only doing what they were told to do (see Matthew 25:31-42; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). They should count themselves as unworthy servants. Does Jesus discount service or imply that believers will not receive a heavenly reward? No! What is central to the message is that one does not serve with the intention of receiving recognition. If one reaches the goal of having his or her name called or receiving some reward or public recognition, then he or she has received the reward already (see Matthew 6:5-6, 16, 18).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This lesson speaks volumes to the individual believer and to the larger church community. At the heart of the teachings of Jesus is the question of our influence. Have we lived in such a way that others have seen Christ and glorified God? Or have we lived in such a manner that we have shut the door to the kingdom by our words and deeds? We can become stumbling blocks to those outside the community of faith; moreover, we can be just as big a hindrance to spiritual growth of new believers who are trying to find their way in the faith.

What then are we to do? First, every believer must reckon that the demands of discipleship are far greater than just church membership. God desires more than our token gestures of discipleship and our meager offerings. Second, congregations are social communities and social gatherings and it is critical that believers love, respect, and appreciate one another. We must strive to preserve the unity of the faith and fellowship of the local congregation by forgiving others and holding each other accountable. Third, believers must serve the interests of Jesus Christ without the need for personal
recognition. What can we give God for saving us from the bowels of eternal damnation? At a minimum, we should do our duty and serve without compulsion or the need for personal recognition.

**PRAYER**

"Lord, may we learn to serve You without the need for recognition and praise. May our lives be filled with the desire to relentlessly do Your will. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen."

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**WORD POWER**

Forgive (Greek: *aphiemi*)—to release or dismiss someone or something from a place or one’s presence (W. Baur, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed.*, p. 157). The word has a wide range of usages and meanings. However, in this instance it means “to let go of the obstacles that hinder relationships” (see Matthew 18:21, 22; Luke 11:4; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13).

Sin (Greek: *skandalon* [skan'-dal-on])—*Skandalon* has been translated using a variety of words—among them are offenses, stumbling block, hindrances, traps, and obstacles (see Matthew 18:17; Romans 14:13; 16:17; 1 Corinthians 8:9; 11:19; Revelation 2:14). The temptations that cause men and women to sin may come through places, things, and even people.

Watch (Greek: *prosecho*)—“to be in a state of alert” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed.*, p. 879). *Prosecho* is the picture of a watchman who stands faithfully upon the deck checking the horizon for danger. The word also means “beware, take heed, give heed to” (see Genesis 24:6; Exodus 10:8; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:12).

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**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(April 25–May 1, 2016)*

**Increased Faith**

**MONDAY**, April 25: “Kept by God’s Faithfulness” (Genesis 28:13-17)

**TUESDAY**, April 26: “Fed by God’s Faithfulness” (Deuteronomy 2:4-8)

**WEDNESDAY**, April 27: “Helped by God’s Faithfulness” (Psalm 121)


**FRIDAY**, April 29: “Living with Integrity” (Psalm 101:1-4, 6-7)


**SUNDAY**, May 1: “Increased Faith” (Luke 17:1-10)
GRATEFUL FAITH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Saying Thanks

Devotional Reading: Colossians 3:12-17
Print Passage: Luke 17:11-19

Luke 17:11-19—KJV
11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.
12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:
13 And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.
14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.
15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,
16 And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.
17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?
18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.
19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

Lane 17:11-19—NIV
11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee.
12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance
13 and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”
14 When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.
15 One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.
16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.
17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
18 “Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?”
19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

BIBLE FACT
Gratitude should be the basic human response to God’s grace. According to the Dictionary of Bible and Religion, gratitude should permeate the life and worship of the community of faith.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Some people express their gratitude with sincerity; others find it difficult to express their gratitude, while still others are ungrateful for what is done for them. How can Christians grow sincere, thankful spirits in their lives? By faith, one of the ten lepers that Jesus healed was able to express his gratitude and praise.

TOPOICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. The Grace of Thanksgiving
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Meeting (Luke 17:11-12)
   B. The Master’s Power to Heal (Luke 17:13-14a)
   C. The Miracle of Healing (Luke 17:14b)
   D. The Man Who Came to Give Thanks (Luke 17:15-19)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review the story of the ten healed lepers, among whom only one showed gratitude for his healing;
2. Feel and express gratitude for all blessings, including healing they have received; and,
3. Celebrate how the expressions of gratitude for personal healing become beneficial in the healing of others

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Saying Thanks
Youth Topic: Thank You!
Adult Key Verse: Luke 17:15
Youth Key Verses: Luke 17:15-16
Print Passage: Luke 17:11-19
—There were significant differences between Samaria and Galilee in Jesus’ day. Jesus was born in Nazareth of Galilee, and His ministry was headquartered in Capernaum of Galilee. As Galilee was a place of the Jews, Samaria was ethnically of a different character. The lepers who were healed were presumably all Jews except the one who came back and expressed gratitude, who was a Samaritan.
—Like forgiveness, gratitude is an inner quality, Jesus indicated, that shows a spiritual maturity of the person who expresses it.
—Jesus here and in other places in the book of Luke told stories and gave examples of human qualities and characteristics that reflected those who would be part of the kingdom of God.
—In the book of Luke, Jesus specifically stated that the kingdom of God was within when explaining it to those who were expecting an outward manifestation of the kingdom.
—The story of the ten lepers is found only in the book of Luke.
—Lepers kept their distance because law and custom forbid them to come near to those who were considered righteous and holy.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Thank You
I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Grace of Thanksgiving

There are many practical principles in the New Testament that will improve our ability to relate to others in meaningful ways. In 1 Corinthians 12:25, the apostle Paul wrote, “So that there may be no division in the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” We show the same care when we appreciate what God has done in the lives of all believers, regardless of their social, economic, or educational status. Love, kindness, forgiveness, and thanksgiving are not ideals; they should be the norm in every congregation.

One of the least-practiced graces in many congregations is the grace of thanksgiving and showing gratitude. There are people who never say “thank you” or “I appreciate your help and prayers.” Some people express their gratitude with sincerity; others find it difficult to express their gratitude, while still others are ungrateful for what is done. How can Christians grow a sincere, thankful spirit in their lives? By faith, one of the ten lepers that Jesus healed was able to express his gratitude and praise.

B. Biblical Background

The account of Jesus’ healing of the ten lepers is unique to the gospel of Luke. This is both a miracle story and an occasion for Jesus to make another pronouncement about the importance of faith. At the center of the passage is the gratitude expressed by a Samaritan whom Jesus miraculously healed of leprosy. Persons with leprosy were socially ostracized and were mostly confined to living in leper colonies (see Leviticus 13–14). There were significant differences between Samaria and Galilee in Jesus’ day. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea and reared in Nazareth of Galilee. His ministry was centered around the Sea of Galilee and was headquartered in Capernaum.

This encounter took place in the latter days of the ministry of Jesus as He travelled to Jerusalem one final time. Luke reported that Jesus’ encounter with the ten lepers took place along the border between Galilee and Samaria. We have no way of knowing the exact location; most likely it was somewhere in the Jordan River Valley area. This would fit the
geographical context and was the usual route that pilgrims took when travelling south to Jerusalem from Galilee.

Like forgiveness, which was a prominent theme in the previous lesson, gratitude is an inner quality. Jesus indicated that the expression of one’s gratitude shows the level of one’s spiritual maturity. In the lesson, we see God’s inclusion of people who were not considered to be religiously or ceremonially clean. The Samaritan leper’s act of humility stands as a clear example of faith in action. He did not take for granted the gracious gift of having been healed by Jesus.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Meeting
   (Luke 17:11-12)

And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off.

Verse 11 sets the stage for the miraculous event that was about to happen. Jesus, along with His disciples, was headed to Jerusalem. This was the third and final time that Luke would mention the movement of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem before He faced the agony of Calvary (see Luke 9:51; 13:22). The exact geographical location has been widely debated without any clear consensus.

The central and most important aspect of the passage is not the location, but what was going to happen. We have no way of knowing the name of the village that Luke mentioned. Jesus and His party were just about to enter the village when they were met by ten men who were all covered with leprosy. According to the Law, people with leprosy were required to live alone outside of the city, town, or village (see Leviticus 13:45-46). Whenever lepers approached other people they were required to cry out, “Unclean, unclean!” to alert people to the danger of coming near them.

Evidently these ten men had formed a small colony for the purpose of mutual support. We are not told where they were living or any other biographical information. It is clear that they were outside of the village. They remained at a safe distance from Jesus and called out to Him. How they knew that it was Jesus was not stated. They were probably close enough for someone to have recognized Him who knew who He was, or for someone in the crowd to tell them that it was Jesus.

B. The Master’s Power to Heal
   (Luke 17:13-14a)

And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go, shew yourselves unto the priests.

Verse 13 indicates that the men called out to Jesus in a loud voice. They knew that they would only have a few moments to attract His attention. In their appeal they addressed Jesus as “Master,” a recognition that He had the power to help their situation. The word master (Greek: epistates [ep-is-tat’-ace]) referred to someone who was a recognized overseer or superintendent. Whether or not these men had ever heard Jesus preach or teach is not stated. What is critical is that they knew Him to be the
answer to their problem. Thus, it should come as no surprise that these men would cry out to Jesus. His name was widespread throughout Galilee and into Samaria. They cried for “pity” or mercy, which was a frequent request when sick, blind, or lame people were in the presence of Jesus (see Matthew 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; Mark 9:47-48; Luke 18:38-39).

They were successful in getting Jesus’ attention. “He saw them.” He saw their condition and all of the attendant problems associated with leprosy. Jesus did not draw near to ask who they were, how long they had been in that condition, or the names of their villages. Nor did Jesus physically touch them. He simply spoke a command: “Go, shew yourselves unto the priests.” This was an imperative command, one that required immediate obedience. In the ten leprous men we see instant and complete obedience. They did as Jesus had instructed. Only the priest could authorize a cured leper to rejoin the larger community by declaring that person cleansed or healed of leprosy (see Leviticus 14:1-3).

Faith demands obedience. These men would have never been healed if they had debated with Jesus the process by which He healed them.

C. The Miracle of Healing
   (Luke 17:14b)

And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

The ten men turned and began their personal trek to find the local priests. Was the healing instantaneous, or was there a slow and steady cleansing of the skin? We have no way of knowing. What is clear is the result of the act of obedience. As they walked, they were healed. Imagine the excitement and overwhelming joy as they looked at one another and saw that the One who had all power had healed them as well. The phrase “they were cleansed” is translated from one Greek word, ekatharisthēsan (pronounced ehk-ah-thahr-his-the-san). It shows that the act of cleansing happened to them, and was not something that they produced of themselves. Their healing came from Christ’s miraculous power; they were otherwise doomed to their disease. The root word for “cleanse” can refer to literal, ceremonial, or spiritual purity. They all received the first two, while the one who would come back to give thanks received the third as well.

D. The Man Who Came to Give Thanks
   (Luke 17:15-19)

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

Verses 15-16 contain a series of statements that describe the response of one of the ten men. We are not initially told who it was; we are just told that when he saw that he had been healed, he turned around and came; he was not crying, “Unclean, unclean!”; rather, he came back praising God in a loud voice (see Psalm 95:1-6). What other response is there when God has done what no one else has been able to do? He offered praises to God. His actions acknowledged that Jesus had spoken the word and that God had done the healing.
He literally threw himself at the feet of Jesus. He rapidly and profusely thanked Jesus for healing him. Some would object to Jesus’ receiving this kind of affirmation and thanks. It is absolutely appropriate that this man responded as he did. Jesus, whether or not the man knew it at the moment, was God made flesh. He is worthy of our worship for the great things He has done.

Luke stated, “And he was a Samaritan” (verse 16). This suggested that some or all of the other nine were Jews, the chosen people, the ones through whom the Messiah would come. These did not give any words or evidence of thanks to God for what Jesus had done.

Verses 17-18 contain Jesus’ reaction when the healed Samaritan returned. Jesus did not seem to be addressing anyone in particular with the questions. They were probably rhetorical questions designed for both the man, the crowd, and His disciples. Jesus noted that all ten had been cleansed, but only one came back to give praise to God for His healing. What happened to the others? Jesus acknowledged that the man was a foreigner. He was the most unlikely person to return and give praise to God.

The passage ends at verse 19 with Jesus offering a word of commendation to the Samaritan. Jesus spoke directly to the man and instructed him to stand on his feet. “Rise and go: your faith has made you well” (NIV) (Greek: sozo [so’-dzo]). This word is used both literally and theologically. On the one hand, it literally means “to rescue or save” out of some dangerous situation. Theologically, it was used to express the redemptive work of Jesus. Thus, when Jesus said that the man was well or whole, He was saying that his faith had brought him into the kingdom of God.

The first response of the self-righteous man or woman would be to overly criticize the nine who continued to the priests. And one well might criticize them, but one must remember that the point of the passage is the presence of faith and gratitude in the most unlikely person.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The passage speaks to us on several different levels. The two that most stand out in the narrative deal with seeing and recognizing what had happened. In the first instance, Jesus saw the ten men. He could have looked away or declared that His schedule was too tight to take even a moment to speak to them. He saw them. This is an intentional statement about the actions of Jesus. He stopped where He was going and what He was saying to take time with these ten men, even if at a distance.

This act of seeing affirms to us that God sees us and our situations (see Exodus 3:7-8). The psalmist declared that the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and He is open to their cries. God sees us in all of our broken moments. He also sees us in our sin and secret acts.

The other level at which this passage speaks to us is at the point of our recognizing the work of God in our lives. The man saw that he had been healed. Here, we have a dramatic act of God on behalf of this man. Yet, we must always be reminded that God does many mighty and miraculous things in our lives that we do not always consider to be miracles. Believers become ungrateful and negligent in their praise and adoration when they look for
the spectacular and not the still, small voice of God. In everything we are to give thanks. It makes a difference in our lives when God is praised for everything that He does. The man reminds us that praise and adoration can sometimes be loud.

**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, grant that we will learn to show appreciation for everything You do in our lives. May we never take for granted Your grace and mercy. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

**Cleansed** (Greek: *katharizo* [kath-ar-id'-zo])—a verb that literally means “to purify or make clean.” The word is used both literally and figuratively in the New Testament. The most prominent use is figuratively to express theological principles and truths. In Matthew 23:25 and Luke 11:39, the word makes a symbolic reference to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes. In Acts 10:15; 11:9; 15:9, the word refers to ceremonial cleanliness. Theologically, the word is used to express the completion of the work of Jesus at Calvary. It is His blood that cleanses us from the stench of sin (see Hebrews 9:22, 25; Titus 2:14; 1 John 1:7, 9; compare with Ephesians 1:7).

**Master** (Greek: *epistates* [ep-is-tat-ace])—“a person of high authority, anyone who is an overseer, or superintendent” ([A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed.](#), p. 381). The word appears primarily in the book of Luke and was used almost exclusively by the disciples to refer to Jesus (see Luke 5:5; 8:24, 45; 9:33, 49). This is the only passage where the reference to Jesus as Master is by someone other than the disciples. These men recognized that Jesus had the power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*) to heal them of their condition.

**Mercy** (Greek: *eleeo* [el-eh-eh'-o])—“the state or quality of showing compassion for another person.” *Eleeo* is being greatly concerned about the condition or situation of someone in need ([A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed.](#), p. 315). One of the characteristics of the ministry of Jesus was the mercy He demonstrated for the sick and diseased (see Matthew 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; Mark 10:44-47; Luke 18:38-29). One of the signs of the messianic age would be acts of mercy and compassion; the blind would receive their sight, the lame would walk, the lepers would be cleansed, the deaf would hear, and the dead would be raised (see Luke 7:22).

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

* (May 2-8, 2016)

**Grateful Faith**

**MONDAY,** May 2: “God Cares for All” (Deuteronomy 11:12-21)

**TUESDAY,** May 3: “A Psalm of Thanksgiving” (Jonah 2:2-9)

**WEDNESDAY,** May 4: “Powerful God” (Psalm 9:1-4, 7-10)

**THURSDAY,** May 5: “Thankful Reverence for God” (Hebrews 12:25-28)

**FRIDAY,** May 6: “Living Gratefully” (Colossians 2:6-12)

**SATURDAY,** May 7: “Giving Thanks” (Luke 22:14-20)

**SUNDAY,** May 8: “Grateful Faith” (Luke 17:11-19)
HUMBLE FAITH

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Valuing Humility

Devotional Reading: Micah 6:6-8; 7:18-19

Print Passage: Luke 18:9-14

Luke 18:9-14—KJV
9 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:
10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.
11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.
12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.
13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.
14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Luke 18:9-14—NIV
9 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:
10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
11 “The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.
12 “I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’
13 “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’
14 “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

BIBLE FACT
The Dictionary of Bible and Religion states the following in reference to the term “humility”: Judaism and Christianity teach that humility characterizes the proper attitude of human creatures toward God and one’s fellow human beings.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
The faithful wonder whether their words, which are sometimes uttered out of desperation, will make a difference. Is there an attitude or posture that can assure them that their words are heard? Jesus taught that effective words of prayer are infused with power when uttered with humility of spirit rather than out of self-righteousness.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. A Spirit of Humility
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Reason for the Parable (Luke 18:9)
   B. Two Different Men (Luke 18:10)
   C. The Fallacy of Insincere Prayer (Luke 18:11-12)
   D. The Efficacy of Sincere Prayer (Luke 18:13-14)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Know what the Pharisee said that was so wrong and what the tax collector said that was right;
2. Appreciate the difference between self-righteous platitudes and true gratitude for God’s mercy and grace; and,
3. Inspect, and if necessary, correct, the participant’s motivation for his or her piety.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Valuing Humility
Youth Topic: Humility Makes Us Special
Adult Key Verse: Luke 18:13
Youth Key Verse: Luke 18:14
Print Passage: Luke 18:9-14

—The Pharisee and the tax collector were extreme opposite personalities in the social context of the times.
—The tax collector was viewed as somewhat of a traitor to his own people.
—Jesus often used parables of opposites to drive home a point in His teachings, such as that of the good Samaritan and the priests in relation to the man attacked by robbers.
—Self-righteousness was a characteristic depiction of the Pharisees in the Christian Scriptures.
—Jesus taught humility as a supreme virtue, such as in the case of the rich young ruler who was told to give up his riches and come follow Jesus, or the accusers of the woman caught in adultery.
—The Pharisees did not trust in God or the Messiah for righteousness but in their own works.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: I Can Do Better
Key Verse: Luke 18:14b
Print Passage: Luke 18:9-14

—Jesus taught by using stories that illustrate (parables).
—The man despised by most people was praised by Jesus, while the holy man was not.
—Jesus did not look down on others who were considered outcasts.
—The man was willing to accept who he was, but he accepted the change in his life that only Jesus could give.
—The Pharisee and the tax collector had very different social statuses.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Spirit of Humility

The Scriptures take a negative view of pride and arrogance (see Psalm 10:2, 4; Proverbs 6:17; 11:2; 16:18; 29:23; Jeremiah 50:32; Luke 1:51; 1 Timothy 3:6; 1 John 2:16). Some interpreters have seen in the words of the prophet Isaiah a portrait of the downfall of Satan. It was the arrogance of Satan that led to his ultimate downfall and his being cast out of heaven (see Isaiah 14:12-17).

In today’s lesson we see two sides of the human personality—one full of pride and the other displaying the grace of humility. One man prayed with himself, while the other spoke out of a humble spirit. The faithful wonder whether their words, which are sometimes uttered out of desperation, will make a difference. Is there an attitude or posture that can assure them that their words are heard? Jesus taught that effective words of prayer are infused with power when uttered with humility of spirit rather than out of self-righteousness.

B. Biblical Background

This parable is unique to the book of Luke—that is, it is not found in any other gospel. The current passage is a continuation of the teachings of Jesus about prayer that began with Luke 18:1-8, where the focus in that parable was on the necessity of being persistent in prayer. Prayer is one of the primary themes in the gospel of Luke. Jesus not only prayed but reminded His disciples of the absolute necessity of practicing and developing a life of prayer (see Luke 6:12, 28; 9:28; 10:2; 11:1-2; 14:18-19; 16:27; 18:1, 10; 21:36; 22:40; 22:46). Again, Luke did not give a specific geographical context, nor did he say when He spoke the words of chapter 18. We know from previous lessons that Jesus and the disciples were headed to Jerusalem for the final showdown with Satan and Jewish religious authorities. Jesus was evidently in the company of either Pharisees or scribes or both; we have no way of knowing.

There are two primary characters in the parable—a Pharisee and a tax collector. In the story we see two contrasting personalities—one filled with pride and arrogance, and the other humility and self-abasement. In Jewish society, Pharisees were highly regarded for their commitment to observing the Law of Moses and the oral traditions. Tax collectors, however, were regarded as national traitors because of their collaboration with the Romans in their abusive methods of collecting taxes.

It must be noted that not all Pharisees were self-righteous; nor did they all fit the description we see in this passage. In the lesson, Jesus taught that humility is a supreme virtue, which stood out against the pride and arrogance portrayed in the passage.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Reason for the Parable
   (Luke 18:9)

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.

The parable was addressed to a specific group of people: “to some who were confident of their own righteousness” (verse 9, NIV). Thus, they could have been just about anyone present to hear the story, and that may be the best way to read it. Nothing is more destructive of personal piety than a false sense of one’s own righteousness. The word righteousness is from a Greek word that has in it the idea of keeping the Law or doing those deeds that put one in a right relationship with God. Paul considered himself to be blameless and at the peak of what it meant to be righteous, when it came to the Law of Moses (see Philippians 3:4-6).

Luke stated that a certain group of people were confident in themselves and their ability to keep the Law (see Romans 10:1-2). Thus, for one to act with an air of righteous superiority is to make the false assumption that one is spiritually complete and in need of nothing (see also Colossians 2:8-10). Jesus pointed out that these very people looked down upon everybody and deemed them unfit and unworthy to call on the name of God. R. Alan Culpepper noted, “Trusting in oneself is obviously a posture of blindness to one’s position before God” (The New Interpreter’s Bible: Volume IX, Luke-John, p. 341).

B. Two Different Men
   (Luke 18:10)

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Temple was the highest point in Jerusalem. It was situated on Mount Zion and could be seen from all around. It was from another high point, the Mount of Olives, that Jesus looked at Jerusalem and wept over it (see Luke 19:44). Thus, to stand upon the Mount of Olives would afford the pilgrim the most majestic view of the ancient city. As one approached the Holy City one would descend the Mount of Olives, cross the Kidron Valley, and go up to the temple at Mount Zion (see Psalm 24:3; 1 Kings 12:21; Ezra 1:3, 5; Micah 4:2; Acts 21:12).

Jesus began the parable by saying that two men went up to the Temple to pray: one was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Temple was the main place of prayer in Jerusalem. Its prominence as the place of prayer went back to the time of Solomon and God’s promise to have His eyes always on that place (see 2 Chronicles 7:15-16). Prayer times were three times a day: 9:00 a.m., 12:00 noon, and 3:00 p.m. (see Acts 3:1). The day began at 6:00 a.m., or sunrise. The time that these two men went to pray may have been during a period when people would go for private moments of prayer.

The Pharisees were among the most pious and religious men in the nation. They often clashed with Jesus over His teachings, the people with whom He associated, and just about anything that disagreed with their positions (refer to the following passages: Luke 5:17, 21, 30, 33; 6:2, 7; 7:30, 36; 11:39, 42-44).

Tax collectors were despised among the Israelites, for several reasons: first, they were
viewed as traitors because of their collaboration with the Romans in the collection of tolls and other taxes. Second, they were often guilty of collecting more taxes than people owed. An example of this is found in the instructions given by John the Baptist to those who came to be baptized (see Luke 3:12-13). Third, tax collectors were often grouped with sinners in the New Testament (see Matthew 9:10-11; Mark 2:15-16; Luke 5:30).

C. The Fallacy of Insincere Prayer
(Luke 18:11-12)

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Verse 11 pointed out the pride and arrogance of the Pharisee. First, he stood up, which was the first sign of his self-confidence. The usual mode of prayer and worship was always to bow in the presence of God (see Psalm 95:1-7; 1 Chronicles 20:18; 2 Chronicles 7:3; Nehemiah 8:6). Second, he prayed about himself, reminding God just how good he was. He prayed in the first person, “God, I....” Third, he did not thank God for mercy, grace, or life; rather, he thanked God that he was not like the other men who were among the scum of the Earth—robbers, evildoers, adulterers, and “this tax collector.” Clearly, he saw himself in a different class of people than those deemed worthy of hell and the wrath of God.

Verse 12 contains the reasons why he was so absorbed with himself. First, he fasted twice every week. In this verse we learn something about the religious practices of first-century Pharisees, and that was their commitment to fasting twice each week. During His ministry in Galilee, Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees because His disciples did not always observe their rules regarding fasting (see Mark 2:18). Darrell L. Bock noted, “Fasting had a rich heritage in Judaism and was a highly regarded act of worship. Fasts were tied to the Day of Atonement in the O[ld] T[estament]” (Leviticus 16:29). He pointed out further that four day-long fasts were held to remember the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (see Zechariah 7:3, 5; 8:19) (Luke 1:1–9:50, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament, p. 508).

Second, in addition to fasting, the man declared his generosity. He gave a tithe of everything that he received. He was not content to just point out his personal piety, but gave a tithe on his earnings and the produce of his fields (see Matthew 23:23). Under the Law, tithing was required of all Hebrew people (see Leviticus 27:30-32; Deuteronomy 14:22-27).

This man reminds us of what we should not be and how we should not approach God. One of the biggest mistakes of this man was the assumption that he was not a sinner nor that there was anything in his life that needed correction. The danger for the believer is assuming, after living a relatively clean life for a while, that we are beyond failure and mistakes. We can become so absorbed in the images we have of ourselves that we lose sight of how God sees us (see Ephesians 2:1-4).

D. The Efficacy of Sincere Prayer
(Luke 18:13-14)

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other:
for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

In verse 13, the word But (NIV) sets the stage for a contrasting picture. The tax collector stood at a distance and bowed his face to the ground. He was too ashamed, and too broken, too filled with the guilt of sin to look up. Distance (Greek: makrothen) means that he stood away from the other worshippers. His guilt was too burdensome, and his eyes may have been filled with tears that flowed like a river, and would not have been understood by other worshippers. He must do his contrition alone with himself and the Lord. The man pounded upon his breast and cried out for mercy.

In these actions, he set himself apart from the Pharisee, who prided himself on his righteous deeds. This man cried out to God for mercy. He saw himself as a wretched sinner (see Romans 7:21-25; compare with Psalm 51).

In verse 14, Jesus drove home the point He wanted to make about pride and humility. The man who took the position that he was not worthy to stand before God is the one whom God justified, or declared to be righteous. The tax collector went home having received salvation. The very man whom many would consider to be a national outlaw, traitor, and co-conspirator with Rome was the one Jesus said received mercy and grace. It was not the man who congratulated himself and reminded God that he had no need or sins to be forgiven. He was everything God wanted in a man.

In the final conclusion, Jesus did not specifically point to just Pharisees but to everyone, including His disciples, who thought themselves to be righteous because of their good deeds. If one thinks more highly of himself or herself than one ought, watch out, because failure is coming. The Scriptures strictly forbid men and women from having self-estimates that are too high (see 1 Samuel 2:3; Proverbs 16:18-19; 29:33; Daniel 4:37; Habakkuk 2:4; Luke 1:52; Romans 12:3, 16; James 4:6, 10; James 5:5-6).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The lesson reinforces the belief that humility is a far greater virtue than pride. All believers should pray and seek to have the mind of Christ—to be a humble servant of the Father. At the heart of the lesson is the challenge to move beyond the tendency to want to elevate ourselves or ministries or even our churches. How do we take on the posture of humility?

First, we do so by recognizing that whoever one has become in Christ has been by an act of God’s grace. God has saved us for His purpose, and as long as one recognizes that without Him nothing can be achieved, this keeps one in his or her proper place.

Second, the lesson does not make light of the cultivation of high self-esteem and self-worth. Rather, it cautions against measuring oneself against others and then declaring that one is better than other people. All flesh is as the grass, and God is the Creator of all human beings.

Third, God is able to exalt even the lowliest of men and women. The Scriptures are filled with examples of men and women who were the least in their families or tribes, but God took them and elevated them. A very notable example is David (see 2 Samuel 6:2-22; compare with Judges 6:15). Jesus closed many of His teaching sessions by saying, “Take heed to how you hear.”
**PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, grant that in all things we may never lose sight of who You have called us to be. May we never be led to believe that we are greater than any other human being. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

**WORD POWER**

**Righteous** (Greek: *dikaios*)—a word that is rich in meaning and usage throughout the Scriptures. It literally means “just, justice, justly, right, or rightly.” In classical Greek, it comes from the root *dikaioo*, and it is a forensic term meaning “to make or establish as right; to judge or execute justice” (*The Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary—Delta-Epsilon*). In the Old Testament Greek translation, the word means “to acquit” (see Deuteronomy 25:1; Isaiah 5:23). Throughout the Old Testament, God is seen as the one who justifies and declares who is righteous (see Isaiah 45:24; 50:8; 53:11). There are a number of references in the Old Testament that speak against the willful attitude of self-righteousness (see Proverbs 28:26; 30:12; Job 32:1; Isaiah 47:8; Hosea 10:13; Obadiah 1:3). In the present passage, the righteousness to which Jesus was referring was a form of righteousness that was centered in keeping the Law of Moses.

**Trusted** (Greek: *pepoithotas* [pe-poi-tho-tas])—“those who trusted.” The word is from the root word *peitho*, which means “to persuade, induce to believe, or to cause someone to come to a particular point of view” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed.*, p. 791-92). Peitho can be used to express the act of persuading or the idea of having experienced persuasion (see Acts 17:4; 19:8, 26; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 2 Timothy 1:12). Those who trusted have a “misdirected state of self-confidence” (*Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament, Luke 9:51–24:53*, p. 1461).

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(May 9-15, 2016)*

**Humble Faith**

**MONDAY**, May 9: “Faith in a Merciful God” (Deuteronomy 4:32-40)


**WEDNESDAY**, May 11: “Living Humbly” (Micah 6:6-8; 7:18-19)

**THURSDAY**, May 12: “Living a Blessed Life” (Matthew 5:1-10)

**FRIDAY**, May 13: “Living a Peaceful Life” (1 Peter 2:9-16)


CHILDLIKE FAITH

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Being Open and Receptive to Life

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 11:1-9
Print Passage: Luke 18:15-17; Mark 10:16
Key Verse: Luke 18:17

Luke 18:15-17; Mark 10:16—KJV
15 And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.
16 But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.
17 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Luke 18:15-17; Mark 10:16—NIV
15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus to have him touch them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them.
16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.
17 “I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

BIBLE FACT

Biblical faith is simply belief or mental assent regarding a person or thing. It must of necessity include the will and the feelings. It also relates to the attitudes of the whole person.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE

Children’s openness to life is a worthy model for everyone in society. What can be learned from children? Jesus taught that to receive the gift of the kingdom of God, the faithful must become as children: open, attentive, and receptive to what God has freely given.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Cultivating Openness and Receptivity
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Touch that Was Coveted (Luke 18:15)
   B. Jesus Overruled the Disciples (Luke 18:16)
   C. The Conditions for Entering the Kingdom (Luke 18:17)
   D. The Tenderness that Was Conveyed (Mark 10:16)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Know that Jesus valued children so highly that they were His models for kingdom possessors;
2. Believe that the best qualities of children are the very ones that they should seek to cultivate in themselves; and,
3. Commit to self-examination and self-improvements with childlike faith.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

ADULT/YOUTH

Adult Topic: Being Open and Receptive to Life
Youth Topic: Learn from Children

Adult Key Verse: Luke 18:17
Youth Key Verse: Luke 18:16
Print Passage: Luke 18:15-17; Mark 10:16
—Jesus valued children so highly that they were His models for kingdom possessors.
—Jesus stressed the nature of a child’s faith as the main factor for believers to focus on.
—Jesus’ words “to such as these” do not say that the kingdom of God belongs to little children but that it belongs to those who exhibit an openness to learn about how to live to become part of the kingdom of God.
—Jesus often looked upon His followers as children of God, which is appropriate because the Hebrew Scriptures refer to the “children of Israel” as the people of God. God’s people were called “children” for many reasons—one being that God was considered the Father of the people.
—Jesus stressed the nature of a child’s faith as the main factor for believers to focus on.
—Adults with the faith of a child will believe God and gladly follow the spiritual guidance provided for them. Children receive the blessing of Jesus without trying to make themselves worthy of it or pretending that they do not need it. Adults need to receive God’s blessings the same way.

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Children Are Welcome Here
Key Verse: Mark 10:14b
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Cultivating Openness and Receptivity

What does it mean to be receptive? It means being open and willing to accept something new—new ideas, and new ways of approaching church and ministry. It calls for leaders to be open to the Holy Spirit’s doing new things in the congregation. How can believers cultivate openness and receptivity? First, they must recognize that God is not through with their lives. There is always more that we can do; more ways to serve; and more that we can give in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, they must step outside of their congregational comfort zone. Many congregations and Christians become locked into a single mode of thinking or acting. Third, they must remember that the kingdom of God is not static, but ever-expanding into the lives and worlds of each new generation. This is the lesson that Jesus sought to teach His disciples one day when He reminded them that children are an excellent model for growth, change, and openness. What can be learned from children? Jesus taught that to receive the gift of the kingdom of God, the faithful must become as children—open, attentive, and receptive to what God has freely given.

B. Biblical Background

The passage we are studying today follows the lessons that Jesus taught about humility and self-righteousness from Luke 18:9-14. In the previous sections, Luke used traditions and material that were unique to his particular gospel, often referred to as Luke’s Special Section (see Luke 9:51–18:14). With the current passage, we have teachings of Jesus that are paralleled in Matthew 19:13-15 and Mark 10:13-16. In Luke’s account, the context shows Jesus continuing His journey toward Jerusalem, probably while still on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

This lesson is comprised of material from the accounts of Luke and Mark. In these brief but important narratives, Jesus reinforced a point that God is concerned about all people, even the ones whom some people would ignore or discard. Jesus reminded His disciples that in the eyes of God, all of His followers were the children of God. God’s people were called children for many reasons; among the most prominent is the fact...
that God is referred to as Father (see Matthew 6:14, 26, 32; Luke 11:13; John 6:46; 8:41; Romans 15:6; Ephesians 1:3). Jesus valued children so highly that they were His models for the kind of people who would possess the kingdom of God. What was it that Jesus saw that impressed Him? It was the simple yet trusting faith of a child. Jesus taught that when adults have the faith of a little child, they will gladly follow God and achieve the spiritual maturity and greatness reserved for obedient children of the Father.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Touch that Was Coveted
   (Luke 18:15)

   And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.

   Verse 15 seems to suggest that Jesus was in the midst of a very busy day. The statement, “People were also bringing babies” means that Jesus was not just sitting around waiting for something to do. He may have been teaching or healing people who were sick and diseased. Babies (Greek: brephos) is an ancient word that refers to infants who needed to be carried. Luke’s use of the Greek word for “infants” does not necessarily mean that only infants were being brought to Jesus. For instance, in 2 Timothy 3:15, brephos is used to refer to a little child. Matthew and Mark used the word paidia, which means “little children.”

   The people wanted Jesus to touch their children. Luke did not say why they wanted Jesus to touch them. It may be that, by touching the little ones, parents believed their children would be blessed throughout life. According to Matthew 19:13, the people wanted Jesus not only to touch their children but also to pray for them. The disciples were not oblivious to the frenzied activity that was taking place around Jesus. In their attempts to be protective of Jesus and to His current ministry activities, they began to rebuke the parents. Although their actions may have been noble, they continued to miss the point of why Jesus had come into the world. John Nolland suggested, “It may be that the folk-religion aspect of this contributed to the annoyance of the disciples, though perhaps more likely it is their own sense of self-importance based upon their privileged proximity to Jesus, that is offended by the approach” (Word Biblical Commentary, Luke 9:21–18:34, p. 881). We must remember that by this point in His ministry, Jesus was riding a crest of popularity, given the large crowd of Galileans who were also travelling to Jerusalem. Although not recorded in any of the Gospels, it is possible that Jesus was performing miracles all along the way from Galilee to Jerusalem.

B. Jesus Overruled the Disciples
   (Luke 18:16)

   But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

   Rather than send them away, Jesus overruled the disciples and permitted the parents to bring their little ones to be blessed. The calling of the little children (Greek: paidion) may suggest that some of them were able to walk on their own to Jesus.
In Mark 10:14, Jesus became angry at the disciples because of their lack of concern for the children. In the ancient world, children were not viewed through the romantic glasses that our generation would like to believe. In many families children were forced to work, sometimes spending long hours tending family flocks (see 2 Samuel 16:11; compare with Genesis 37:12-13). Some children were raised to be gladiators or prostitutes, and others were even disfigured so as to make them more appealing beggars. Even today in many impoverished nations it is not uncommon to find mothers with their children, begging for money.

The actions of Jesus indicated that all people were invited to be part of the kingdom of God. None were excluded; none were turned away. Even in a society where children were not valued, Jesus showed that the Father values all people, even children.

Jesus exhorted the disciples not to hinder them. Jesus’ actions indicated that He would not tolerate people being turned away, even by His own disciples. Then He made a new pronouncement regarding the kingdom of God. The reference to “such as these” (verse 16) was a lesson that Jesus sought to instill in the disciples and the people who were present. The point being made was that if one expected to enter the kingdom of God (that is, bring themselves into alignment with the will of God) it must be through simple, childlike trust. On the contrary, the kingdom of God does not belong to those who are preoccupied with their own self-importance and interests.

C. The Conditions for Entering the Kingdom
(Luke 18:17)

Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.

Jesus made another pronouncement regarding the kingdom of God: this time, it was about entrance into the kingdom. He pointed out that His words were to be taken seriously. One can imagine this scene as Jesus looked around at the crowd and His disciples and gave this lesson. Here, we learn that the kingdom is something that is to be received. The question is, what did Jesus mean by this statement about receiving the kingdom? It is difficult to say, but the most likely response is that Jesus was referring to His message regarding the rule of God in the world and in the lives of people (see Mark 1:15-16; John 1:12).

Entry into the kingdom of God requires that a man or woman have the trust and faith of a child. Jesus did not say that one has to act like a child or be childish, but rather that children are very trusting of their parents and adults. Here, the implication is very clear: God desires our trust in Him. It is our childlike and unwavering faith in Him that opens the door for entry into the kingdom. Without this simple trust, one will never enter the kingdom of God.

D. The Tenderness that Was Conveyed
(Mark 10:16)

And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

Luke did not provide this detail in his account of Jesus’ receiving the little children; hence we take up the conclusion of the account in Mark’s gospel. Mark stated that Jesus took the children in His arms. It is not clear whether He picked them up or wrapped His
arms around them. What is clear is that Jesus went against the social norms of that day. He not only took the children into His arms, but He also touched them or laid hands on them. Many people in this generation do not think much about touching another person, holding hands, or giving hugs to individuals. It was not the same in the ancient world. It is important to keep in context that Jesus and the disciples were headed up to Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover, one of the most important and holiest days in Israel. Thus, it was important that people appear in the Temple ritually clean and free of contamination. Touching anyone or anything deemed to be unclean would render that person unclean and therefore unfit to partake of the Passover (see Numbers 19:22; compare with Leviticus 5:2; 11:24; 13–15; Numbers 19:13-17).

Another aspect of Jesus’ touching was that the act of laying hands on someone was a ritual of conveyance—that is, the passing along of authority or blessing (see Deuteronomy 34:9; compare also with Genesis 9:26-27; 28:1-4; 48:20; Ruth 4:11). Jesus blessed the little children. We are not told the wording of the actual blessing, but it may have been the blessing of Aaron (see Numbers 6:22-27).

Through His actions Jesus taught that children are as important as anyone else in the kingdom of God. He was concerned that children, women, and any others who were marginalized be treated with respect and dignity.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

American society makes the claim that children are our most valuable resource. We believe that children are the foundation for building a lasting and prosperous society. Yet, the lives of many children in America reveal a far different reality. An Internet search of the major problems facing children today paints a rather grim and gloomy picture of the future of children in America and around the world. Poverty is the leading social problem plaguing children in America. Poverty is the most devastating and most prevalent social ill of our time. Researchers have found that 1 in 4 American children lives below the poverty level. Hispanic children bear a huge part of the disparity created by the growing economic divide between the haves and have-nots (and also the “used to haves”). African-American children are more likely to be born into poverty, and many of them are unable to escape the trenches of generational poverty.

The example of Jesus and the teachings of the Scriptures are very clear that children are to be loved and respected. They should be given every opportunity to enter the kingdom of God. One of the sad realities of many children, even among those whose parents bring them to church at an early age, is that they are released prematurely from participation in church life and church-related activities and functions. When children reach a certain age we begin to allow them to determine their own spiritual growth and direction. When children are young they are eager to learn about God and Jesus Christ. They want to do the right thing and please their parents in every way. They are open to being taught how to make ethical choices and how to avoid the kinds of things that lead to destruction. At an early age they are impressionable and we can sow into them the kinds of values and lessons that will last
a lifetime. They learn the lessons of salvation and living pure and holy lives. However, when they reach puberty and start to grow into their early teens, many begin to rewrite the script and dismiss the earlier urgency for spiritual nurture and discipleship. We cannot do that! We must keep that urgency before them until they are grown and onward.

So what is the solution? Bring them to Jesus Christ as children. Bring them to faith in Christ as children. Lead them into a saving relationship with the Lord of life while they are children. Spend time reading the Gospels to them at an early age and explaining the teachings of Jesus to them while they are children. This will help the parents and caregivers as well. We are reminded by the example of Timothy that his grandmother and mother taught him the Scriptures, and the faith that developed in him began at home (see 2 Timothy 1:5-7; Acts 16:1-3). Paul reminded us that we must not grow weary in doing this because in due season we will see results (see Galatians 6:9).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, may we acknowledge You in all of our ways. Grant that we will never take for granted the precious gifts given to us in the persons of our children and grandchildren. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER


Kingdom of God (Greek: basileia ton theos)—literally refers to the rule and reign of God. The kingdom of God was one of the central themes of the preaching of Jesus (see Mark 1:14-16; Matthew 13).

Rebuke (Greek: epitimao [ep-ee-tee-mah’–o])—originally meant “to show honor, to raise the price,” and later came to be used in the sense of correcting, reproving, or severely censuring.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(May 16-22, 2016)

Childlike Faith

MONDAY, May 16: “Peaceful Faith” (Isaiah 11:1-9)
TUESDAY, May 17: “Children of Light” (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)
WEDNESDAY, May 18: “Children of Freedom” (Galatians 3:23-29)
THURSDAY, May 19: “Children of God” (Romans 8:12-17)
FRIDAY, May 20: “Innocent Faith” (Matthew 18:1-5)
JOYOUS FAITH

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Getting Back on Track

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 44:23-26
PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 19:1-10

Luke 19:1-10—KJV
AND JESUS entered and passed through Jericho.
2 And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.
3 And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.
4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.
5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.
6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.
7 And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.
8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.
9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.
10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 19:1-10—NIV
JESUS ENTERED Jericho and was passing through.
2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.
3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd.
4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.
5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.”
6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.
7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a ‘sinner.’”
8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”
9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.
10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE

All have experienced a loss of direction in their lives and the inability to make necessary changes and new plans. How can they remedy this loss of direction? After Zacchaeus gladly welcomed Jesus with great faith and repentance, Jesus declared that His own mission was to seek and save the lost.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Finding a New Direction
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Place
      (Luke 19:1)
   B. Zacchaeus Plans to See Jesus
      (Luke 19:2-4)
   C. The Meeting of Jesus and Zacchaeus
      (Luke 19:5-6)
   D. The People React to Jesus
      (Luke 19:7)
   E. The Promise of Zacchaeus
      (Luke 19:8)
   F. The Pronouncement of Salvation
      (Luke 19:9-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Remember the details of the encounter of Zacchaeus with Jesus;
2. Believe that they can make necessary, dramatic changes in their lives with God’s help; and,
3. Repent of their shortcomings and then commit to living godly lives.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

ADULT/YOUTH

Adult Topic: Getting Back on Track
Youth Topic: A Little Man Wins a Visit
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Luke 19:10
Print Passage: Luke 19:1-10

—The Jews despised the tax collectors because they betrayed their own people in collecting the exorbitant taxes levied by the Roman government and even overcharged the people to enrich themselves. They were outcasts, or pariahs.

—The character and attitude of Zacchaeus should be compared to those of the Pharisee’s and tax collector’s in the parable Jesus told in Luke 18:9-14.

—Jesus was known to go among sinners thought to be of the most abominable kind by the Jewish religious leaders, such as the woman at the well in Samaria and the woman caught in adultery.

—In what is considered His first sermon, Luke 4:16-21, Jesus described His mission to the “lost” as outlined by Isaiah 61:1-2.

—The Roman laws obliged the tax gatherers to make restitution when it was proved they had abused their power by oppressing the people. In Luke 19:8, Zacchaeus, to show the sincerity of his conversion, offered the obligatory amount of his own accord. He who had wronged his fellow man must make restitution (if possible). He who does not do so cannot expect the mercy of God. See the observations at the end of Genesis 42 and Numbers 5:7.
CHILDREN
Children Topic: Life Turns Around
Key Verse: Luke 19:10
Print Passage: Luke 19:1-10
—Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector who was short in stature.
—Zacchaeus climbed into the tree to get above the crowd so he could see Jesus.
—Jesus paid attention to Zacchaeus despite his height and his profession.
—Jesus did not look down on others who were outcasts.
—Jesus came to save people.
—God wants people to be honest with one another.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Finding a New Direction

What does it mean to be born again? And how do you know that your life has been radically changed? These are two of the questions that the lesson answers today. Think about it for just a moment. If you have been born again it is because through faith you believed that God, working through Jesus Christ, has completely changed the direction of your life (see John 3:1-5; Acts 9:1-9; Philippians 3:4-6; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Jesus Christ came into the world so that we might have eternal life. God sent Jesus into the world to restore what Adam and Eve ruined in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:1-15). Jesus came so that we could have the means to find forgiveness of our sins, which is the central message of the New Testament (see Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:9).

How does a man or woman find his or her way in life? All have experienced a loss of direction in their lives and the inability to make necessary changes and new plans. How can they remedy this loss of direction? After Zacchaeus gladly welcomed Jesus with great faith and repentance, Jesus declared that His own mission was to seek and save the lost.

B. Biblical Background

In Luke 19:1-10 we see a continuation of the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem to face the destiny of the Cross. The account of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus is found only in the book of Luke; and it comes on the heels of the healing of Bartimaeus, a blind man who sat by the side of the road begging for his living (see Luke 18:35-43). Jesus met Bartimaeus on the outskirts of Jericho; in this lesson, He met Zacchaeus as He was passing through Jericho. The men stood in stark contrast to each other: one was blind and was a beggar, while the other was rich and thirsty for more out of life.

The Jews despised the tax collectors because they betrayed their own people in collecting the exorbitant taxes levied by the Roman government, even overcharging them to enrich themselves. The story shows us what happens in the lives of men
and women who are desperate for change and who want to see Jesus. Zacchaeus did not have to invite Jesus to his home; Jesus invited Himself. When Jesus reached out to Zacchaeus it was further evidence that God is concerned about not only those who are righteous, but also those who are outcast and are on the periphery of life. Zacchaeus’s response to the message of salvation prompted a corresponding ethical and moral response. He was willing to help the poor and to give back four times the money he had extorted from others. The lesson also points out that in times of greatest need, Jesus is the one to whom men and women may turn.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Place
(Luke 19:1)

AND JESUS entered and passed through Jericho.

Jesus finally arrived in Jericho, the city of palm trees where Elisha healed the bitter waters (see Deuteronomy 34:3; Joshua 2:1; 2 Kings 2:5, 19-22). He was accompanied by a large number of religious pilgrims going to Jerusalem for Passover. At the time of Jesus’ ministry, Jericho was a prosperous city and was the main tax-collecting point for commercial goods entering Jerusalem from the east. Jericho was also the site of the winter palace of Herod the Great and was an overnight lodging place for pilgrims going to Jerusalem. Luke stated that Jesus was passing through, which means that He was planning to spend the night in the city before departing for Jerusalem, which was still a good distance away.

B. Zacchaeus Plans to See Jesus
(Luke 19:2-4)

And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.

Verse 2 introduces a man named Zacchaeus. We are told several things about him. He was a chief tax collector (Greek: architelones) in Jericho. The title suggests that he was the principal person or one of the principal persons in charge of collecting taxes in that area for the Romans. He was the only chief tax collector mentioned in the New Testament. Zacchaeus more than likely had several employees or others who actually collected the taxes for him. We are also told that he was wealthy (Greek: plousios), meaning that he had abundant resources.

As R. Alan Culpepper explains, the Romans required those who won the contract to collect taxes to pay the taxes in advance (Culpepper, The Gospel of Luke: New Interpreters Bible, Vol. IX, p. 357). In turn, the tax collector would be free to charge whatever he wanted or felt he could get out of the merchants and local citizens. This tactic was open to corruption and was one of the reasons why tax collectors were among the most despised people in Israel. As chief tax collector, Zaccheus took a cut from all of the revenue that tax collectors took in. This was
probably one reason why he was wealthy, and it likely made him a few enemies along the way.

Verse 3 tells us that he was trying to see who Jesus was. The words convey a deep desire and driving urgency on the part of Zacchaeus. This was something he had to do that day. It was a priority, and he kept working at it until he figured out a plan.

We can be sure that Zacchaeus had heard many things about Jesus. We cannot be certain of what he heard, only that his curiosity was aroused and he needed to see Him for himself. He had two problems with which to contend. First, he was short and would have difficulty trying to break through the crowd or see above them. Second, there was a very large crowd. This would lower his chances of being able to see Jesus if he were not already close.

Verse 4 tells us that Zacchaeus was willing to do just about anything to see Jesus for himself. He ran ahead of the crowd, which was an action out of character for men in that day. Zacchaeus knew exactly the route Jesus was taking, which was the main road that ran through the city. Zacchaeus ran ahead of the crowd and climbed into a sycamore tree. These trees have short trunks and very large, wide branches. It would have been very easy for Zacchaeus to sit and have a good view of Jesus’ passing.

C. The Meeting of Jesus and Zacchaeus

(Luke 19:5-6)

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.

According to verse 5, Jesus reached the location where Zacchaeus was anxiously waiting. Zacchaeus was sitting where he not only had a good view of the road, but also where he could not be missed. The wording of the text suggests that Jesus knew exactly where Zacchaeus would be sitting and went directly to the tree. When He reached the spot, Jesus looked up and saw Zacchaeus and called him by name. There is nothing to indicate how Jesus knew his name, outside of His Father having revealed it to Him (see John 2:24-25). Jesus commanded Zacchaeus to “come down immediately” (verse 5). He told Zacchaeus that it was imperative that He spend the night in his home. This willingness to spend the night in the home of Zacchaeus meant that Jesus recognized him as someone whom He valued. The invitation to come to Jesus was an imperative command. Jesus was not going to be coming back that way the next day. He was not going to sit around and wait for Zacchaeus to come down or make up his mind. He must respond at that moment.

Zacchaeus heard the voice of Jesus calling him out of that loud, noisy crowd. Jesus knows our names and where we are located. Zacchaeus came down out of the tree and went to Jesus. Further, Zacchaeus received Jesus joyously. One has the picture of two old friends who are meeting after a long separation. Zacchaeus accepted the gracious offer of Jesus to allow the Master to reside in his home for the evening.

D. The People React to Jesus

(Luke 19:7)

And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

Here in this scene the mood shifts from
excitement and anticipation to disdain and shock. When they saw Jesus’ interaction with Zacchaeus they began to mutter (diagguguzo, a word that conveyed a deep sense of disgust with Jesus). Jesus had been hailed as a hero upon entering the city, but to spend the night with a man everyone in town despised was unacceptable. This was not an attack by the Pharisees or scribes and elders of the people. All of the people were upset that Jesus would dare dine with a “sinner” (Greek: Hamartolos, someone whose lifestyle and conduct were deemed outside of the socially accepted norms of that day). Jesus had already been approached by some Pharisees regarding His willingness to associate with tax collectors and sinners (see Luke 5:30; 7:39; 15:2; John 6:41). The word Guest (Greek: katuluo [kat-al-oo'-o]) originally meant “to loose, untie, destroy, or to put an end to something.” It is used to denote the extension of hospitality to guests.

E. The Promise of Zacchaeus
(Luke 19:8)

And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

Zacchaeus seemed unmoved by the disdain because he had probably grown used to being called names and yelled at with obscenities. He was a tax collector! When he came down from the tree, he acknowledged Jesus as Lord. He vowed to do two things, which were indication that something dramatic had happened in his life (see 1 Timothy 6:16-18). First, he was prepared to give half of his wealth to the poor. In this act alone, he revealed that he became one who was worthy of being identified with those whom Jesus called “sheep” (see Matthew 25:31-44; Mark 8:34-38). Second, Zacchaeus offered to pay back those whom he had cheated out of money. He was prepared to give back four times the amount he had taken from them.

A person whose life has been transformed responds to and corrects the wrongs that he or she has committed against other people. The apology of Zacchaeus was not just in word, but in concrete deeds. The very same people who muttered and murmured against Jesus’ staying with Zacchaeus would see firsthand the power of the Gospel to change lives.

F. The Pronouncement of Salvation
(Luke 19:9-10)

And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, for somuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Verse 9 is the culmination of Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus. Jesus announced that salvation had come to the home of Zacchaeus that day. Jesus may have looked around at all of the people who were watching and listening to what was taking place. His announcement was not just for Zacchaeus, but for all who were members of his family and servant staff (see Acts 2:39; 10:33, 44). The people in the city may have rejected Zacchaeus as a true Jew, but Jesus did not and would not. He said that Zacchaeus, too, was a son of Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-3; compare with Romans 4:11-12, 16; Galatians 3:7). Zacchaeus was not excluded from the promise of God to all Jews.

Verse 10 contains one of the most important statements made by Jesus concerning His work. He had come for the express purpose of saving sinners.
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

The story of the conversion of Zacchaeus is important for three reasons. First, it points out that whether a person is rich or poor, that person can be saved. This affirmation removes the false assumptions that we can sometimes make about people. Jesus reminded His followers that every person is a mission field and no one is above or beyond God’s reach. Second, the story of Zacchaeus’s conversion teaches that one’s changed behavior is solid proof of one’s conversion experience. Indeed, in many instances people look for some dramatic display of emotion and jubilation. But in this case, the giving away of half of his wealth to help the poor was a clear indication that his life had been changed. There is always the testimony of “good works” of righteousness that provide evidence for our change (see Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-18). Third, it points out the initiative of Jesus to seek the lost and proclaim salvation for those who respond in faith. Zacchaeus may have thought he was seeking Jesus, but in reality he was on the radar screen of the Lord. The passage teaches that God is engaged in missions and evangelism; He is seeking the lost, and we can do no less.

PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, thank You for seeking us out and saving us from the power of sin and death. May we model the great example of our Lord Jesus Christ to seek the lost. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.*

WORD POWER

Cheated (Greek: *sukophanteo* [soo-kof-an-the’-o])—originally used to indicate a false accusation or charge brought against someone in a court of law. This act was strictly forbidden by the Law (see Leviticus 19:11). In the present passage it refers to the act of putting pressure on someone for personal gain; harassing, squeezing, or blackmail (W. Baur, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed.*, p. 995).

Welcomed (Greek: *hupodechomai* [hoop-od-ekh’-om-ahee])—to receive as a guest. As a guest, Jesus would be accorded all of the customary acts of kindness shown to guests (see Luke 7:42-44). There was no act of kindness greater than receiving someone into your home.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

*(May 23-29, 2016)*

**Joyous Faith**

MONDAY, May 23: “Singing Faith” (Isaiah 44:23-26)

TUESDAY, May 24: “Dancing Faith” (Jeremiah 31:11-14)

WEDNESDAY, May 25: “Proclaimed Faith” (Psalm 19:1-4, 14)

THURSDAY, May 26: “Fruitful Faith” (Galatians 5:19-26)

FRIDAY, May 27: “Sending Faith” (3 John 2-8)


Toward a New Creation

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This quarter has three units that explore the theme of creation and emphasize our need for new creation in Christ because of the sin and disobedience in which human beings have continually participated.

**Unit I, “Judgment and Salvation,”** consists of three lessons in which the proclamations of Zephaniah are presented to emphasize God’s desire to save the people from their rebellious state—which is a rejection of creation—and bring them to obedience and salvation.

**Unit II, “A World Gone Wrong,”** has four lessons that look at Paul’s words to the church in Rome about the need to turn from ungodliness, wickedness, and corruption and to move toward realization of the creation God intended: a loving, obedient relationship with God through the redeeming power of Jesus Christ.

**Unit III, “Life on God’s Terms,”** is a six-lesson study, also in the book of Romans, of Paul’s visions of what life is like when we become new creations in Christ.
LESSON 1

THE DAY OF THE LORD

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Maintaining the Good of the Earth

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 25:6-10
PRINT PASSAGE: Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14-16; 2:3
KEY VERSE: Zephaniah 2:3

Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14-16; 2:3—KJV
4 I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests;
5 And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham;
6 And them that are turned back from the Lord; and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him.

Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14-16; 2:3—NIV
4 “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests—
5 “those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the Lord and who also swear by Molech,
6 “those who turn back from following the Lord and neither seek the Lord nor inquire of him.”

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:1–2:3; Zephaniah 1:2–2:4

Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14-16; 2:3
4 The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly.
15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,
16 A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

3 Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.

3 Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord’s anger.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People sometimes greatly damage strong and beautiful relationships with others and with the Earth. What can happen when someone does something that harms a relationship? The book of Genesis says that God created the heavens and the Earth and the plants of the Earth and God declared creation to be good; Zephaniah described the Israelites’ marring of the creation by sinning against God and earning the Lord’s promised punishment—but they were offered an opportunity to seek righteousness and save their relationship with God.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. Oil in the Gulf
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Judah Faces Judgment (Zephaniah 1:4-6)
   B. The Day of the Lord Is Near (Zephaniah 1:14-16)
   C. One Final Call to Repent (Zephaniah 2:3)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Learn that on the great Day of the Lord, God the Creator of the universe will punish those who have not repented and humbled themselves under God’s authority;
2. Recognize the relationship between righteous living and one’s responsibility to maintain “the good” found in God’s created order; and,
3. Create a mechanism for youth and adults to repent and reaffirm their faithfulness to God.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult/Youth Topic: Maintaining the Good of the Earth
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Zephaniah 2:3
Print Passage: Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14-16; 2:3
—The prophet Zephaniah wanted to awaken the people of Judah out of their complacency and to urge them to return to God.
—The people of Judah had forsaken the Lord and worshipped false gods as well as nature.
—Zephaniah’s message was partly instrumental in motivating King Josiah and the people to undertake major reforms.
—God’s judgment would be used to purify the people of their sin and evil.
—God promised to severely punish all the nations but still show mercy to those who had been faithful.
—God’s wrath on Judah would come as military attacks that laid waste to the people and the infrastructure of their Promised Land.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Creation Started
Key Verse: Genesis 1:1
Print Passage: Genesis 1:1-13
—The Bible assumes the eternal existence of God.
—Creation is a demonstration of the power of God to bring order out of chaos.
—The universe came into being from the spoken Word of God as opposed to any action on God’s part.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Oil in the Gulf

On April 20, 2010, a massive explosion occurred on an offshore drilling platform in the Gulf of Mexico. As a result, eleven crew members were killed. That human toll was tragic enough. Yet, there was also an ecological tragedy that continues to unfold. For nearly ninety days, oil spewed continuously from the ocean floor in the Gulf. The spill became part of daily newscasts as news programs posted running clocks on the spill.

Years later, scientists are still assessing the damage to the environment. Sure, billions of dollars in fines have been assessed and billions more spent on the cleanup. Still, a large area of the Gulf Coast will never be the same.

Considering this oil spill, it reminds us how God commanded Adam and humankind to be stewards of the Earth. It was God’s intent for humankind to keep the “good” in God’s statement that His creation was “very good.” We all can play a part in maintaining the good of the Earth. If we fail to do so, we face even worse consequences than those of that massive oil spill.

B. Biblical Background

Today we open a quarter of study entitled “Toward a New Creation,” taking us from God’s original creation of the heavens and earth to our new spiritual creation in Christ. We begin with three lessons in Unit I, entitled “Judgment and Salvation,” based on the Old Testament prophecy of Zephaniah. Like most of the “minor” prophets, we have little biographical information outside his genealogy, underscoring the point that the message was more important than the messenger. The intent was to always place the emphasis on God. We do, however, learn that he was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah, making him the only prophet with a confirmed royal bloodline. We know that King Hezekiah was one of the good kings of Judah and the first king of Judah to rule after the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah (see verse 1)—approximately 640–609 BC. Josiah was also a good king of Judah.

His prophesying, along with others, moved King Josiah to action (see 2 Kings 23:2-3). Zephaniah was a contemporary of Nahum and Jeremiah’s. King Josiah led the last great revival in Judah before their exile. Zephaniah may not have been alive when Judah was taken into Babylonian captivity. However, his message was spoken as if God’s wrath was
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Judah Faces Judgment  
(Zephaniah 1:4-6)

I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests; And them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops; and them that worship and that swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham; And them that are turned back from the Lord; and those that have not sought the Lord, nor inquired for him.

A little more than eighty years prior, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians. Now, God was warning the Southern Kingdom of Judah that they were next in line for judgment. At the beginning of King Josiah’s reign, God called Zephaniah to prophesy of the utter destruction of Judah, from the land to the animals to the people (verses 2-3).

God specifically identified the nation of Judah as a whole and the city of Jerusalem in particular in verse 4. Judah—consisting of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon—had been loyal to God. Immediately after the fall of Israel, a remnant migrated to Judah under the reign of Hezekiah. Jerusalem was the site of Solomon’s Temple. It was Judah’s worship center. Unfortunately, there were all kinds of worship taking place in Jerusalem. God was not the only “god” in style during the time of Zephaniah’s prophecy. God was going to destroy all these pagan gods along with their priests and worshippers.

Jerusalem was home to four distinct religious movements. First, the most prevalent religion was the worship of Baal. The Jewish people had toyed with this Canaanite deity since the time of the judges. People worshipped this fertility god of the land through highly immoral activities involving temple prostitutes. Since it was a regional religion and highly sensual, Baalism never really left Jewish society until the Exile.

Second, some people worshipped the stars from their rooftops. In effect, they made their own home-based temples with the man of the house serving as the priest. Evil King Manasseh introduced this religion during his reign (see 2 Kings 21:3-5). Worship of the stars and celestial bodies was popular among the Assyrians and the Babylonians, key world powers during the time of Zephaniah’s prophecy.

Third, there was a blended religion of the worship of God and Molech. A pagan deity common among the Assyrians, Molech was a cruel god that required child sacrifices (see 2
Kings 23:10). In the ancient Near East, it was common for people to worship multiple gods. Why? People of that time wanted to cover all the bases. They did not know which god might deliver them, so they would pray to multiple gods.

Finally, there were those who did not worship any god. They were Jews who formerly worshipped God but, over time, had lost their faith in God or just became indifferent about religion. Literally, they turned their backs on God. They stopped praying to Him and worshipping Him.

B. The Day of the Lord Is Near
(Zephaniah 1:14-16)

The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.

Judgment was coming! The Day of the Lord was near. Some Bible scholars view Zephaniah’s prophecy about the Day of the Lord from a dual lens. They see it, first, as referring to the coming destruction of Judah and Jerusalem by the hands of the Babylonian Empire just over sixty years in the future. Second, they see it alluding to the final judgment at the second coming of Christ. We can view Judah’s day of judgment as a warm-up for the final Day of Judgment that looms before us today (see Revelation 6:17).

With just over sixty years to go, some of those hearing Zephaniah’s prophecy would experience the Day of the Lord. So, in both divine and human terms, it was close. Judah was so ripe for punishment that Zephaniah stated how the people of his day could literally hear the coming judgment. The Day of the Lord would be accompanied by His voice of vengeance. Now, this does not depict God as being mean or unfair. Rather, God had given His covenant people chance after chance to repent. Yet, each time they returned to their pagan gods. So human power would be useless. Judah’s army and defenses will be no match for the Day of the Lord.

In verses 15-16, Zephaniah described the Day of the Lord in graphic detail. First and foremost, it would be a day of God’s wrath. While Judah had experienced over twelve hundred years of God’s favor, they would now experience His wrath. Second, it would be a day of “trouble and distress” (verse 15). Even before the conclusion of this terrible day, the people of Judah would be troubled and distressed just thinking about what was going to happen. They knew they were powerless to keep it from happening.

Next, the Day of the Lord for Judah would be highlighted by the total devastation and destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. In 2 Kings 25 we read how the Babylonians ransacked and burned nearly everything, including the Temple. Third, it would be a day of darkness and gloominess. The smoke from the fires would fill the sky, literally turning day into night. Fourth, the smoke and soot would intermix in the atmosphere and make it appear even darker.

Finally, the Day of the Lord would be highlighted by the trumpets of the invading Babylonians and the war shouts (alarm) of their advancing army against Judah’s fortified cities and defensive towers. The noise of the
approaching army would strike even more fear among the people of Judah.

C. One Final Call to Repent
   (Zephaniah 2:3)

Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger.

Why did Zephaniah go into such detail in describing the Day of the Lord? God, though He is a God of judgment, is always ready to show mercy. It would not have been difficult for Judah to have received a reprieve from the looming judgment. All they had to do was assemble themselves before God as one people (Zephaniah 1:1). Zephaniah was not naïve. He knew that many in Judah had placed their total trust in pagan gods. They had discounted God’s words as nothing more than idle threats. After all, had not God threatened to punish them before? Each time, although He may have given them some lower level of punishment, God had not destroyed His covenant people.

So the prophet called on the meek to seek repentance (verse 3) before it was too late (verse 2). Keep in mind that the proud were not excluded. Zephaniah’s call went forth to everyone. Everyone would have one final opportunity to repent. Judah could still be saved. The use of the word meek to refer to the faithful few in Judah who still served God is common throughout the writing of the pre-exile prophets, including Joel, Amos, and Jonah. This group of people never wavered in their faith. They continued to worship God even when it was not popular to do so.

What were the characteristics of this meek group? First, they continued to keep God’s ordinances. They were faithful to the Law. Second, they sought to do the right thing in their daily living. Though obeying the Law would not help them achieve the righteousness of God, it would help them hold true to the essence of the Law, which was love for God and love for others. Third, they were not to become arrogant. Just because they were commended for their faithfulness, that did not give them any reason to feel like they were better than the others.

Yet, from the final words of verse 3, it appeared that God’s judgment might be delayed but not halted. It was surely going to come. So the best this meek remnant of Judah could hope for was to be protected on the Day of the Lord. This actually happened. The invading Babylonian army actually allowed some to remain in Judah (see 2 Kings 25:12), while others were protected while in exile. It was this group and their descendants that returned to Jerusalem after the seventy years of exile. Returning to the dual theme of the Day of the Lord, God will preserve a faithful remnant during the Great Tribulation (see Revelation 12:13-17). They will escape the final judgment (see Revelation 20:11-15).

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

“Religious pluralism” is the catchphrase for spirituality in America today. More and more people see religion as a buffet of beliefs. People can pick and choose what they like to craft their own self-styled religion. The underlying belief is that there are multiple ways to God. With that said, the thinking is “better safe than sorry.” For this type of thinkers, they want to
include the best of the top ways to God to ensure they get to Him.

Such practices are most prevalent during the holidays. Some modern households display symbols of multiple religions between October and January. They even participate in multiple religious traditions, teaching their children that no one religion has exclusive rights to God. We even see stories of such families on national news shows. Such practices are becoming increasingly mainstream. Where such families were once considered weird, they are now the en vogue group.

That same type of thinking was prevalent at the time of Zephaniah. So religious pluralism is nothing new. Yet, it is really attractive to many among our millennial generation. There is the notion that traditional religious denominationalism is too formal. There has to be a more free flow of the worship experience that puts the worshipper in control. That was the essence of the mindset of Jewish worshippers during the earliest days of King Josiah’s reign. Yet, Zephaniah placed his emphasis on the faithful few who were still loyal to God. The same holds true today. God is pleased with those of us who are religiously exclusive and not religious pluralists. God is calling on us today to remain true to our faith, reflecting His love in the world and drawing others to Him before the final Day of the Lord comes.

PRAYER
Merciful God, we know that You are a jealous God. You have taught us to have no other gods before You. We praise You in that, despite our imperfections, You continually bless us. We anxiously await that day when we will see You face-to-face. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER
The Day of the Lord—In Hebrew, the phrase the “Day of the Lord” is rendered “yom-Yahweh,” or “that day or time.”

Zephaniah ben Cushi—The complete name of Zephaniah is Zephaniah ben Cushi. In Hebrew, Zephaniah means “God protests.” The other part of the prophet’s name—“ben Cushi”—suggests that Zephaniah was also of African heritage.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(May 30–June 5, 2016)

The Day of the Lord
MONDAY, May 30: “A Day of Celebration” (Exodus 23:14-19)
TUESDAY, May 31: “A Day of Rest” (Exodus 16:25-30)
WEDNESDAY, June 1: “A Day of Agreement” (Deuteronomy 26:14b-19)
THURSDAY, June 2: “A Day without Tears” (Isaiah 65:13-19)
FRIDAY, June 3: “A Day to Finish” (2 Timothy 4:1-8)
SATURDAY, June 4: “A Day for Faithfulness” (Matthew 24:42-47)
SUNDAY, June 5: “The Day of the Lord” (Zephaniah 1:4-6, 14-16; 2:3)
THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISOBEDIENCE

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Maintaining Common Human Bonds

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 8:11-18
PRINT PASSAGE: Zephaniah 3:6-8
KEY VERSE: Zephaniah 3:8

Zephaniah 3:6-8—KJV
6 I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant.
7 I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.
8 Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

Zephaniah 3:6-8—NIV
6 “I have cut off nations; their strongholds are demolished. I have left their streets deserted, with no one passing through. Their cities are destroyed; no one will be left—no one at all.
7 “I said to the city, ‘Surely you will fear me and accept correction!’ Then her dwelling would not be cut off, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did.
8 “Therefore wait for me,” declares the LORD, “for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger.”

BIBLE FACT

Biblical obedience is defined as the practical acceptance of the authority and will of God. Disobedience is caused by rebellion and distrust of God. To be obedient is to be in agreement with God. (www.cbn.com/cbnteachingsheets/obedience_and_disobedience)
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Sometimes people persist in destroying something that has been created beautiful even when they know the grave consequences. What are some consequences of destroying a good thing? The book of Genesis tells us that God created the lights and the swarms of living creatures and God declared creation to be good; Zephaniah recounted the way God began punishing the people for their disobedience, hoping they would respond by correcting their behavior.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON

I. Introduction
   A. “Green Light” Living
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Punishment of Other Nations—to No Effect (Zephaniah 3:6)
   B. Judah Kept on Sinning (Zephaniah 3:7)
   C. Surely, Your Day Is Coming (Zephaniah 3:8)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:

1. Tell Zephaniah’s prophecy that God wanted to save His created people and the people’s intransigent rebellion;
2. Help adults realize that God loves His created people and wants their obedience and will give them another chance to turn from their sins; and,
3. Commit to asking God to give another opportunity for redemption and salvation.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED

ADULT/YOUTH

Adult Topic: Maintaining Common Human Bonds
Youth Topic: Listen Up!
Adult Key Verse: Zephaniah 3:8
Youth Key Verse: Zephaniah 3:7
Print Passage: Zephaniah 3:6-8
—God condemned Jerusalem for its sins of turning away from God.
—God rebuked all princes, judges, prophets, and priests for their disobedience and sins.
—The leaders were taking advantage of their position for self-gain.
—God sent many warnings to the people but they refused to listen.
—God would avenge those who have been treated unjustly.
—God punished people for sinning by using fire to consume the disobedient people and their environment.

CHILDREN

Children Topic: Creation Continues
Key Verses: Genesis 1:14a, 15b
Print Passage: Genesis 1:14-23
—God has given predictability to life by creating the various elements of days, seasons, and years.
—Power and authority are characteristics of God’s activity in creation.
—God is a reliable source of stability for all of creation.
—Everything God made was given a divine stamp of approval indicating that it was good.
—God is the only being capable of speaking things into existence.
—God’s blessings on life produce fruitfulness.
I. INTRODUCTION

A. “Green Light” Living

In reality, while growing up, many of us were more curious about the “norts” than the “dos.” After all, it is human nature to be curious about forbidden things. That type of curiosity was part of the reason for the Fall in the Garden. We have heard the age-old adage “Curiosity killed the cat.” Yet, in more recent times a more adventurous society has added a comeback: “But satisfaction brought it back.” This update seemingly reflects a cat’s supposed nine lives, signaling that it is okay to be dangerously adventurous in life. Many assume that they will get another chance if things go awry.

Whether it is illegal drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, or some other fleshly indulgence, our society has given the green light to adventurous living. One prime example of this green-light mentality is bachelor/bachelorette parties. They have become synonymous with outrageous behavior the night before marriage. Ironically, the original concept of such events was rather noble as a celebration of the transition of a man from being single to being married.

As we will discover with the people of Judah during the time of Zephaniah, people today want to “green light” adventurous living. Unfortunately, we have been plagued with revelations of such living among our religious and secular leaders. The good news is that God is ready, willing, and able to forgive. The bad news is that there are real consequences for disobedience. Hopefully, there is time left to repent before it is too late.

B. Biblical Background

After prophesying judgment against the nation of Judah in chapter 1, Zephaniah shifted his focus to the seat of religious and secular power—the city of Jerusalem. As the capital city of Jerusalem went, so did the rest of the country. Coming after the list of pagan nations in the previous chapter, Zephaniah’s prophecy made no distinction from these other nations. If anything, Judah and Jerusalem were even worse than their pagan neighbors because they knew better. They had received the Law and God’s words through His prophets.

God’s wrath had indeed been stirred up against Jerusalem. In verses 1-5, Zephaniah listed a number of reasons for His coming day of judgment. The first set of reasons was against the whole city. First, the inhabitants were rebellious. Second, they had defiled God’s holy city by their worship of pagan gods. Next, the people of Jerusalem would not heed God’s voice, stand for correction, or trust God. Finally, they had become distant from God. Their closeness to their pagan gods placed them farther away from God.

The next set of reasons for condemnation was directed against the secular leaders. From the princes to the judges, they were all unjust. The final set of reasons focused on the religious leaders and false prophets. Collectively, they had led the people of Jerusalem down the road
of extreme immorality. While the people of Jerusalem were bent on evil, God continued in His righteous ways day and night, unchanged by their evil ways. To act so blatantly evil, the people of Jerusalem had to have been living without consciences.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Punishment of Other Nations—to No Effect (Zephaniah 3:6)

I have cut off the nations: their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by: their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant.

Despite Israel’s long history with the one true God, she would see God’s wrath because of her sin. But God’s love is pervasive even in His judgment. A loving God will not allow His people to go unchecked when they sin. So the mere fact that God punishes sin is proof of His love. God’s loving and gracious relationship with His people Israel began to manifest through Abraham. Because He had made a promise to Abraham, God would not give up on Judah. If we notice God’s plan in action, He had started with all of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land up until the end of Solomon’s reign. At the division of the kingdom, Judah became the loyal remnant. Now, about three hundred years later, another remnant emerged amidst a rebellious majority.

God’s love, though, was still kindled toward all of Judah. He had punished other nations to get Judah’s attention. He annihilated these nations, destroying their fortresses. Their streets were laid bare. In Near Eastern culture, a city destroyed in such a devastating battle would be highlighted by desolate streets lying in utter ruin. No one lived in the dwellings. They were ghost towns. We can think of the cities destroyed from the time of Abraham onward, including Sodom and Gomorrh and Jericho. Stories of the destruction of these cities and others had been passed down through generations of the Jewish people. There was no doubting the devastating move of God against an evil nation.

Even cities well-defended, like Jericho, were no match for the mighty move of God. Architects of ancient Near Eastern cities prided themselves on building great defenses, including surrounding walls and reinforced guard towers atop the walls. Additionally, they had other defenses incorporated throughout the area near their cities. With their careful planning, they thought that they were safe from any type of enemy attack. God’s defeat of Jericho had made it clear that God’s might would prevail against the most well-defended in the known world of that time.

Being far removed from the times, one may be tempted to believe that God must have devastated nations distant from Judah. The truth was to the contrary. Their sister nation and neighbor Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrian army just over eighty years prior. Hoshea, king of Syria, had laid siege to Samaria, the capital of Israel, for three years before it fell (see 2 Kings 17). He removed most of the Israelites, resettling them in Assyria about a thousand miles away. In actuality, Israel’s defeat did have a positive effect on Judah in the immediate aftermath. Under the reign of Hezekiah, the people of Judah followed after God. However, his son did more
evil in Judah than any other king before him. So, the long-term effect was not lasting. In no small way, his evil reign helped permanently remove the fear of God from many in Judah. For the majority of the people of Judah, the stories of God’s destruction of other nations were just that—stories of other cities, not God’s holy city Jerusalem.

B. Judah Kept on Sinning

(Zephaniah 3:7)

I said, Surely thou wilt fear me, thou wilt receive instruction; so their dwelling should not be cut off, howsoever I punished them: but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings.

This lack of fear of God was the backdrop for verse 7. Zephaniah recorded God’s rhetorical “thought” at Judah’s response to the destruction of these other nations. God thought that Judah would have been moved to act in a righteous manner. They would have been scared straight. Yet, only a reasonable people would act in such a manner. According to Solomon, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10, NIV). Without a sincere fear of and reverence for God, the people of Judah gave no serious thought to the notion that God’s destruction of other nations could happen to them.

A God-fearing people would have surely honored God. They would have worshipped Him freely, acknowledging His omnipotent power. Additionally, they would have accepted God’s chastisement just as obedient children do from their parents. Obedient children accept discipline knowing they have been wrong and that their parents are trying to keep them on the right path. God had punished Judah previously. Up until the time of Zephaniah, their near defeat by the Assyrians during the reign of Hezekiah (see 2 Kings 18) had been the worst episode in their history. So some were surely thinking that God was going to protect Judah no matter what, in spite of the way they behaved. That is why they were bold enough to worship God alongside idol gods (see Zephaniah 1:5).

God’s punishment of these other nations should have spurred Judah to seek a means of escape from the pending Day of the Lord. They surely would not want to endure God’s punishment. God was really giving Judah one last chance to repent. If they did not repent, their cities would be destroyed. Their homes would be laid waste. In the end, only a remnant would seek after God.

Still, the people of Judah were unmoved. They kept on in their sinful ways. They rose early to go about their sinful ways. In the ancient Near East, the morning hours prior to the blistering midday sun were the best times to conduct business. So they conducted their unrighteousness early. Referring back to God’s condemnation of the people of Jerusalem and their secular and religious leaders in verses 1-4, the whole nation was serious about doing wrong. They had done wrong for so long that it seemed right in their eyes. They had succumbed to the temptations of the many pagan religions of their neighbors. They also saw the Temple as a sort of good-luck charm. Its presence, in their minds, was their assurance that God would always protect them. After all, why would God allow His abode on Earth to be destroyed? We read later in 2 Kings 25 that God did allow that to happen.
C. Surely, Your Day Is Coming
   (Zephaniah 3:8)

Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

Verse 8 actually opens a section on that faithful remnant in Judah, continuing through verse 13. We will focus on the bulk of this section in next week’s lesson. Today, we will focus on verse 8 as a transition between God’s words of punishment and His words of hope for restoration. Since the majority of Judah simply did not fear God, God gave the conclusion of the matter by stating matter-of-factly, “Therefore wait for Me” (verse 8, NKJV). They did not believe that God was going to punish them through near-total destruction. Sure, God might allow some temporary setback to overtake them, but they thought it would only be temporary and they then could return to their merry old sinful ways.

The Day of the Lord was coming soon. In verse 8, God’s words are like those of a divine court proceeding. On the Day of the Lord, God would “rise up as a witness” (verse 8, NASB) against His rebellious people and the other nations. God would bring them all together into court. They had already committed various crimes of rebellion against God, chief of which was idolatry. God had already formally charged them in chapters 2 and 3. Because they had no fear of God, Judah and the other nations did not mount a defense. Yes, they were guilty, but God was not going to punish them. He allowed them to enjoy their sins for an extended period of time. Surely, He would allow them to continue.

To their dismay, God would render His verdict. They would be found guilty. He would pour out His wrath on them. Once God’s wrath was released, it would be like a raging fire. Fire was symbolic of purification. This pointed to the great need for God to purify the land. Judah’s sins had corrupted the land. It needed to be cleansed. Simultaneously, God’s wrath and mercy would be satisfied. His wrath would be satisfied with the punishment of Judah in Babylonian exile. His mercy would be satisfied as a faithful remnant would survive and continue God’s promise to Abraham.

The King James Version translates the second line of verse 8 as “until the day that I rise up to the prey.” “Prey” is also the object in the English Standard Version. These versions are not in conflict with the New King James Version and other translations. God is pictured in these translations as gathering up all the sinful nations like a mighty predator does prey. All nations, those listed in Zephaniah 2:4-15, and Judah, would be brought forth into God’s presence for punishment in which “all the earth shall be devoured” (verse 8, NKJV). The word prey may also be interpreted to mean “booty,” or the spoils of war. God would literally conduct a war with the Babylonians as His army. Judah would be the spoils of war. The remnant that survived the Day of the Lord would be mostly deported to Babylon, while a few would remain in Judah.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In 1978, there was a documentary released entitled, Scared Straight. The premise of the documentary was to scare a group of juvenile delinquents into staying out of legal trouble. When we first see the juveniles, they are a
pretty bold group. They do not seem scared about anything. In fact, they are pretty scary themselves. These five teens seem destined for the adult prison system as career criminals.

As an opportunity to intervene in their lives, these teens are taken to Rahway State Prison in New Jersey, where they interact with a group of men serving life sentences. The men are hardened criminals. Throughout the documentary we see who the really hardcore people are. It is not the teens, but the prisoners. The teens realized that they were not as tough as they thought. They were “scared straight.”

Did this intervention last? Sure, they would act right immediately after such a dramatic intervention, but what about ten or twenty years later? Well, four of the five stayed out of trouble. They had not committed major crimes. Unfortunately, one young man was convicted of a felony and is serving time in state prison. He was the only one who did not make it.

Four out of five or 80 percent is a good success rate. However, as evidenced by the behaviors and lifestyles exhibited in society today, it looks like the world is experiencing a much lower success rate when it comes to people fearing and reverencing God. Yes, there are still a good number of people who reverence God today, but the numbers of people going their own way without reverencing God has been increasing steadily over the past fifty years. Ironically, it appears that the message of Zephaniah 3:6-8 is just as relevant today as it was nearly 2,700 years ago.

PRAYER
Almighty God, we praise You, for You do not change. You are the same today as You were yesterday. We ask You today to touch our hearts to be ever mindful of You, living lives with a healthy reverence for You. We also pray for those who fail to reverence You, that they might come near to You before it is too late. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER
Correction—Zephaniah employed the Hebrew wisdom tradition by using the word translated correction, which means “an openness” to learning from experience and from observation, thus gaining the ability to change.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(June 6-12, 2016)

The Consequences of Disobedience
MONDAY, June 6: “Remember the Commandments” (Deuteronomy 4:9-14)
TUESDAY, June 7: “Godly Planning” (Proverbs 16:1-9)
WEDNESDAY, June 8: “Ungodly Planning” (Ezekiel 33:27-33)
THURSDAY, June: “Promised Rest” (Matthew 11:25-30)
FRIDAY, June: “Humble Planning” (1 Peter 5:1-6)
SATURDAY, June 11: “Faithful Planning” (1 Peter 5:7-11)
SUNDAY, June 12: “The Consequences of Disobedience” (Zephaniah 3:6-8)
ASSURANCES AND JOY FOR THE FAITHFUL

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: The Joy of Restoration

DEVOTIONAL READING: Hebrews 11:29-39
PRINT PASSAGE: Zephaniah 3:9-14, 20
KEY VERSE: Zephaniah 3:14

Zephaniah 3:9-14, 20—KJV
9 For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.
10 From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering.
11 In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain.
12 I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.
13 The remnant of Israel shall do no iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.
14 Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Zephaniah 3:9-14, 20—NIV
9 “Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder.
10 “From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings.
11 “On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill.
12 “But I will leave within you the meek and humble, who trust in the name of the LORD.
13 “The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid.”
14 Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!

20 At that time I will bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD.

20 “At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” says the LORD.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People will sometimes repent of their harmful, destructive ways and seek to restore what has been originally created beautiful. How can people turn from destruction to reconstruction? The book of Genesis tells that God created cattle, creeping things, wild animals, and humankind and that God declared the creation to be very good. Zephaniah recounted that God’s intervention was required for the people to stop their rebellion and return to God with singing.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. “Restoration Day”
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Nations of the World Converted
      (Zephaniah 3:9-13)
   B. Israel Rejoices
      (Zephaniah 3:14)
   C. Israel Restored
      (Zephaniah 3:20)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Theologically reflect on God’s proclamation through Zephaniah that God would bring the people to obedience and restoration;
2. Comprehend God’s faithfulness to help repentant people through their times of trouble and disobedience; and,
3. Provide theological tools to help determine how God is present and involved in life.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult/Youth Topic: The Joy of Restoration
Adult Key Verse: Zephaniah 3:14
Youth Key Verse: Zephaniah 3:20
Print Passage: Zephaniah 3:9-14, 20
—Zephaniah prophesied in the seventh century BC, concurrently with Jeremiah and Nahum.
—The Scripture portrays God as both loving and just.
—The nations would be converted and a righteous remnant would be left in Israel.
—The glorious Gospel of salvation promised the joy of restoration to Jerusalem.
—God offered restoration to those who turned to Him.
—God would reward the poor and humble because of their trust in Him.
—God got rid of enemies and dwelled among His people, which caused the people to rejoice.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Creation Completed
Key Verse: Genesis 2:2
Print Passage: Genesis 1:24-31; 2:1-3
—God’s works are characterized by order, harmony, and beauty.
—All parts of creation had their “genesis” in God and through God’s creative genius.
—According to Genesis 1, humankind was the final work in God’s creative activity.
—Being made in God’s image suggests a “spark” of divinity in humanity.
—The fact that males and females were made in God’s image affirms a basic equality between the sexes.
In giving dominion over the Earth to humankind, God placed an immense degree of responsibility on humankind for Earth’s protection and preservation.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. “Restoration Day”

On a wonderfully sunny Sunday, Faithful Baptist Church celebrated Sis. Shalane’s Restoration Day. Filled with joyous testimonies, joyful tears, and grateful hugs, this was a day the FBC family would not soon forget. Her immediate and extended family, along with countless others including her husband’s family and classmates from high school and college, were present. Pastor Finley’s message entitled “Restoration Joy” capped a wonderfully blessed day of celebration. His main point was simple: there are all kinds of joy, but there is no better joy than that felt after restoration.

If this was a restoration Sunday, then Sis. Shalane had to have been restored from something. In her case, it was breast cancer. A year ago, Sis. Shalane completed her last chemotherapy treatment. She was fortunate to discover the cancer early. Her church had observed Bells for Remembrance Sunday on Mother’s Day a little more than two years ago. One of the challenges of the day was for mothers and their adult daughters to make joint appointments for mammograms.

While her mother was willing, Sis. Shalane was not. Finally, after some not-so-subtle pressure from her mom, they went. When the results were analyzed, it was clear Sis. Shalane had breast cancer. She began aggressive therapy. Literally, she had to declare war on certain cells in her body, according to her doctor. They would unleash the fury of chemotherapy followed by radiation treatment.

She had some good and bad days, followed by a lot of bad days. The treatments left her mentally and physically exhausted. In the end, though, they were successful. She was cancer-free. After her last treatment, her doctor told her that she would experience “chemo-brain” and bouts of extreme fatigue. For about a year she did. Today, however, she celebrated the joy of restoration from cancer and the effects of her cancer treatment.

B. Biblical Background

In our last lesson in Unit I and after two lessons focused on judgment and punishment, we end on a joyous note. Although not directly stated in Zephaniah’s writing, King Josiah heeded Zephaniah’s message along with that of other prophets, especially the prophetess Huldah (see 2 Kings 22:14-20).

Considering the meaning of his name, “supported of Yahweh,” Josiah was under God’s gracious hand even before he was born. He was preordained to become an instrument of good for God. He reigned for thirty-one years. Even before they rediscovered the Book of the Law (see 2 Kings 22:8), Josiah had gone about doing good by authorizing the
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Nations of the World Converted
   (Zephaniah 3:9-13)

For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering. In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.

There is a stark transition between verses 8 and 9. Verse 8 told of God’s coming judgment, resulting in the desolation of His covenant people and the nations of the known world. It would be as if a mighty, raging fire had consumed them. Then in verse 9, Zephaniah abruptly transitioned to words of restoration. After being transformed by Him, the same nations that would soon be destroyed would eventually worship and praise God.

Concerning verse 10, Bible scholars offer two views on who comprise this group of worshippers. One school of thought is that it encompasses the whole world. The fact that the people of Cush (modern-day Ethiopia) were listed under the nations to be punished in Zephaniah 2:12 makes it plausible that God’s transformative powers would bring worshippers from that nation. Another school of thought focuses on Israel. Since the Israelites would be dispersed throughout the known world, when God’s time of restoration arrived they would return from all points of the globe. They would come with offerings for worship.

Yet, when we view verse 9 in context with verses 11 and 12, we have to conclude that the consequences of Josiah’s reforms were staggering. He led his people from a pluralistic, polytheistic society to a God-fearing, monotheistic nation. Certainly, his reforms met resistance. However, with no external threats looming from world powers, he had the force of his army as an able deterrent to any thoughts of insurrection. Of course all of his actions were ultimately protected by the hand of God. For thirteen years Josiah led a great revival in his nation. Although it did not last beyond his death, he did do what was right in the sight of God. He was befittingly the last king of the Davidic dynasty, ending as it had begun—with a man after God’s own heart.
God is referring to Israel. God’s judgment would act as a purifying agent throughout the land of Israel. Literally, God’s Spirit would act through the Babylonian army to clean out all the years of immorality and disobedience. Afterward, the inhabitants who remained and those who would return after the exile would not have to feel guilty about the sins of those who would, by then, have been punished for their evil behavior (verse 11). The remnant that remained, the faithful few, would be “humble and lowly,” reverent people (verse 12). Obeying God would be at the center of their existence.

B. Israel Rejoices
(Zephaniah 3:14)

Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.

Although our lesson only covers up to verse 14, it would serve well to understand this verse in its larger context. In verses 14-17, Zephaniah shared about Israel’s future joy. Although most of the book had focused on the Day of the Lord, these concluding verses offered a stark contrast filled with rejoicing. We find the anticipation of future rejoicing in Zephaniah 2:3. He focused special attention on the few left in Judah who still followed the Lord. His tri-part call to avoiding the consequences of the Day of the Lord was to (1) seek the Lord, (2) seek righteousness, and (3) seek humility. The most immediate benefit of doing these three things was the escaping of the wrath of God. God knew only a remnant would comply. The others were too proud and set in their ways to change their ways.

In verse 14, we again see a big-picture focus on the entire nation, except the united name of Israel is used here. We can view this usage a couple of ways. First, Israel once again became the name of the nation after the exile. Although it was only Judah, the part of the nation that remained faithful, the covenant name took the place of Judah upon the return to their homeland. Secondly, it referred to the setting of the second coming of Christ at a time when Israel will be rejoicing at the Messiah’s coming.

Then there is the focus on Jerusalem specifically. Just it had been singled out as leading the nation astray, in the future it would be the place to help lead the nation in rejoicing. Zephaniah prophesied of a time when the Jewish people would be exhorted to praise God wholeheartedly. He reinforced this call to praise in verses 15-17.

C. Israel Restored
(Zephaniah 3:20)

At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord.

Finally, in verses 18-20, Zephaniah provided a vision of a restored Israel. His presentation of God changed one last time. We see God as Israel’s shepherd. He will gather His people together again. We have to keep in mind that the Day of the Lord would bring about the total destruction of Jerusalem and Judah. They would be scattered all over the known world. They would mourn the loss of their homeland (see Psalm 137). Even the return from exile could not totally erase their sense of loss. The rebuilding of the Temple and the city walls only provided a place that paled in comparison to what it was before the exile. Additionally, they were even worse off in
governance because they were operating under the authority of a foreign nation and in fear of possible attacks from neighboring nations.

Still, there was reason to rejoice. Why? God would turn their mourning meetings into praise parties (verse 18). When the postexile people of Israel wept at the hearing of the Law, they had begun to recognize their shortcomings (see Nehemiah 8:9). Then Nehemiah admonished them. He told them not to cry, but to rejoice and celebrate because the joy of the Lord was their strength. Nehemiah’s point was simple: only people who know God can have their special gladness of heart. It did not matter whether they had fallen short. The good news was that they had a special relationship with God that would give them spiritual, mental, and physical assurance even when the circumstances of life were less than ideal.

This same “joy of the Lord” mood would be present in the restored Israel. We have to view Zephaniah’s words in verse 19 through two different lenses. From the perspective of post-exile Israel, God would use the Persians to provide protection for the Israelites (see the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). From the perspective of Jesus’ second coming, God would once and for all eliminate Israel’s enemies. In both cases, like a good shepherd, God would provide healing to the afflicted. No one would be considered an outcast anymore. This prophecy also received interim fulfillment to include the Gentiles at Jesus’ first coming (see Luke 4:14-30). In the end, Israel’s name would no longer be used in shame but proudly as the people of the living God.

Verse 20 provides a fitting close to Zephaniah’s prophecy. Verse 20 opens with a reference to a future point of time. Debated by scholars is the question of exactly what “time” it was to which God was referring. Was it the time immediately after the exile? Was it the time of Jesus’ first coming? Or, was it the time of Jesus’ second coming? At such time, God will, as Israel’s great shepherd, gather all His people together. The key phrase to aid in understanding this verse is “when I return your captives before your eyes” (verse 20, NKJV). The word *captives* has a dual meaning. In the near term, it referred to the return of Israel from exile, freedom from Babylonian captivity. In the interim term, Jesus proclaimed liberty to the oppressed not by releasing their physical chains but rather by releasing their spiritual and mental chains. Some Jews (including Judas Iscariot) misinterpreted Jesus’ words to mean a release from Roman authority. In the far term, it refers to Jesus’ second coming. Today, most Jews recognize Jesus as an historical figure. However, they have not accepted Him as the Messiah. In the end times, Israel will accept Jesus as the promised Messiah.

### III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

God is still able to turn our mourning meetings into praise parties. Mourning is something that we all will experience multiple times in life. We have to allow God to help us move through the various stages of mourning to reach a new place of normalcy. Sure, life is not the same as it was before, but in the Lord we can come through stronger than we were before, especially spiritually. So many people who have gone through bouts of mourning share how God’s Holy Spirit had filled those voids in their lives. Although there was no way to replace the loss, there was a way to focus on
life, not death—moving forward, not standing still.

Too often we focus solely on mourning the transition of a loved one when there are so many other times that we mourn. In my doctoral studies, we studied the dynamics of organizational transition. We already knew that organizations can die. Whether they go out of business, change ownership, or eliminate positions, organizations undergo “deaths” or transitions that leave the members of the organization in a state akin to the death of a loved one. We were taught that organizations have to learn how to institute periods of mourning when such events occur. Still, these somber periods must be tied directly to a time of celebration of the renewal the transition enabled. The bottom line is simple: no matter what death comes, mourning follows. Unfortunately, too many people see the joy of restoration and renewal after loss as optional. That was and is never God’s plan for those who truly love Him. Just as the corn seed’s death ushers in new life more abundant than before, God can do the same today just as Zephaniah prophesied so many centuries ago.

**PRAYER**

_Loving God, we celebrate Your care and concern for us, especially during our periods of sorrow. No matter whether it is the death of a loved one or some institution near and dear to us, You have made it possible for us to move out of the ruts of our sorrow into a new level of joy in You. We thank You for being what we needed when we needed it most. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen._

**WORD POWER**

_***Eschatology***—the movement of history toward its final destiny. In Zephaniah’s eschatological vision, God’s end-goal of history was linked to a salvation that touched all nations and included Judah’s restoration and renewal. All of history is moving toward God’s goal and divine dream._

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**
*(June 13-19, 2016)*

**Assurances and Joy for the Faithful**

**MONDAY,** June 13: “Encouraging Others” (Hebrews 10:19-25)

**TUESDAY,** June 14: “Pleasing God” (Hebrews 11:1-6)

**WEDNESDAY,** June 15: “Trusting God” (Hebrews 11:7-12)

**THURSDAY,** June 16: “Testing God” (Hebrews 11:13-22)

**FRIDAY,** June 17: “Serving God” (Hebrews 11:23-28)

**SATURDAY,** June 18: “Commendable Faith” (Hebrews 11:29-39)

**SUNDAY,** June 19: “Assurances and Joy for the Faithful” (Zephaniah 3:9-14, 20)
IGNORING GOD’S PLAIN TRUTH

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** Willful Ignorance Will Lead to Disaster

**Devotional Reading:** Psalm 52
**Print Passage:** Romans 1:18-23, 28-32
**Key Verse:** Romans 1:20

Romans 1:18-23, 28-32—KJV
18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: 32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Romans 1:18-23, 28-32—NIV
18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. 28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Some people do what they believe is right, while others constantly do what is wrong. Why do humans act this way? The psalmist said that some people live lives consistent with God’s creation and even give praise constantly for all that God has done, while Paul pointed out that others disobey God and take pride in filling their lives with all kinds of actions that oppose God’s decree.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. God Is Not Fair
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Wrath of God
      (Romans 1:18-20)
   B. Humankind Refused to Honor God
      (Romans 1:21-23)
   C. The Consequences of Ignoring God
      (Romans 1:28-32)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Know Paul’s mournful story of God’s magnificent creation choosing to wreck itself with sin;
2. Help the participants realize that humans really do have the freedom to be disobedient, and the confirmation that God’s punishment will follow; and,
3. Discern God’s will and follow it.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Willful Ignorance Will Lead to Disaster
Youth Topic: Willful Ignorance Leads to Disaster
Adult Key Verse: Romans 1:20
Youth Key Verse: Romans 1:18
Print Passage: Romans 1:18-23, 28-32
— Paul wrote the book of Romans to a church he had not yet visited.
— Paul stated that all humans are sinful and need to put their faith in Christ in order for their sins to be forgiven.
— Wickedness suppresses truth, causing people to want to live their way rather than God’s way.
— All people deserve condemnation for their sins.
— People have great worth because they are created in the image of God.
— The whole created universe reveals who God is.
— God would abandon the wicked to their sins, letting the natural consequences of their sins be their punishment.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Wow!
Key Verse: Psalm 8:1a
Print Passage: Psalm 8:1-9
— The whole psalm praises the glory and sovereignty of God.
— God the Creator cherishes humankind, which is made in the image of God.
— God gave humankind the authority to manage the resources of the Earth wisely.
— Man is insignificant in comparison with the vastness of creation.
— God’s glory is illustrated in how He used babies to silence the enemy.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. God Is Not Fair

Today, some religious people have pushed forward a new movement rallying around the general theme that God loves us too much to punish us. Going further, they insist that God is not really going to allow anyone to go to hell. What is their reasoning? “God can love me or God can punish me; not both.” This statement summarizes their thinking. On face value, it makes perfect sense.

As humans, we think of the concept of fairness in conditional statements. That is to say that, to the alternative spirituality crowd, it would be grossly unfair for God to send people to hell just because they find another way to reach spiritual fulfillment. The problem with this kind of thinking is twofold. First, God does not send (think, “force”) anyone to hell, or even heaven for that matter. No, He allows human beings to make their own choices.

Second, God is not fair. Being fair would mean that God would give people what they deserve. If fairness were part of our relationship with God, humankind would have been destroyed thousands of years ago.

B. Biblical Background

Today we begin a new unit of study entitled, “A World Gone Wrong.” We also begin a series of ten lessons in the book of Romans. Paul’s letter to the church in Rome has been called one of the most influential books in the Bible. It is responsible for the conversion of St. Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Wesley (through Luther’s commentary on Romans).

Starting with words of doom and gloom and ending with words of hope for eternal life, Paul’s writing in the book of Romans indeed exhibited his theme verse, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Romans 1:16, NKJV).

Assuming a later date for the writing of Mark’s gospel, Romans was the seventh New Testament book, written in about AD 57. The previous books written were James, 1-2 Thessalonians, Galatians, and 1-2 Corinthians. Regardless of the date of the writing of the book of Mark, the first gospel written, the book of Romans was the only gospel the church in Rome and the surrounding areas had. Romans was the last of Paul’s epistles written on his third missionary journey. The other books were 1 Corinthians, followed by 2 Corinthians and Galatians. The overall focus of these four books was the Cross, with special emphasis on salvation and the life lived in response to being saved.

At the time of Paul’s writing, Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. With about 1 million residents, most people lived in four- to five-story wood or brick tenements...
with first-floor shops. It was a most modern city by the standards of the day. The church in Rome was probably started by Jews converted on the Day of Pentecost. The congregation was a mix of Jews and Gentiles, which created areas of friction between the old covenant of Moses versus the new covenant in the Holy Spirit ushered in by Christ.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Wrath of God

(Romans 1:18-20)

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

After underscoring the power and purpose of the Gospel in verses 16-17, Paul began a discussion of God’s wrath (verses 18-32). Instead of plunging at once into an exposition of the Gospel, Paul launched into a lengthy exposure of the sinfulness of humankind. This is sound procedure, for until people are persuaded of their lost condition they are not likely to be concerned about deliverance.

What is the wrath of God? It is God’s anger and punishment in response to unrighteousness. Since the righteousness of God is perfect, humankind falls under the wrath of God because of our sinful nature (see Psalm 51:5). If this definition is so simple, then why did Paul spend so much time discussing it in chapter 1? It was because of Paul’s mixed audience of readers. The Jewish Christians were familiar with the wrath of God from their history. The wrath of God had been kindled against Israel time and again for disobeying Him. Disobedience of God’s commands is an outcome of unrighteousness. So the wrath of God is always justified.

So Paul had to carefully make the case that the wrath of God had been stirred up against all humankind (verse 18) for the right reasons. Paul used two terms to frame his case, translated in the KJV as “ungodliness” and “unrighteousness” (verse 18). Ungodliness is translated from the Greek word *asebeia* from the root word *sebomai*, which means “to reverence or worship.” The “a” prefix in Greek is similar to our English use of “un” to mean the opposite or negative of something. Ungodliness means to not show God reverence or worship Him. In other words, to treat God as irrelevant.

Unrighteousness is translated from the Greek word *adikia*, a translation from the Septuagint of the Hebrew word for “violation of divine law.” According to John MacArthur, *adikia* “encompasses the idea of ungodliness but it focuses on the result. Sin first attacks God’s majesty and then His law. Men do not act righteously because they are not rightly related to God, who is the only measure and source of righteousness.” That is why
humankind has sought to “suppress the truth” (verse 18), literally keeping the lid on it. Once exposed to the truth of the righteousness of God, any sane person would have to, at the very least, acknowledge the existence of God. Humankind also suppresses the truth of God by twisting His Word to justify sin and all acts of unrighteousness.

Together, ungodliness was against God Himself and unrighteousness was against the Law of Moses in the Old Testament (Judaism), the Law fulfilled in the New Testament (Christianity), and the law of nature—“there must be a God” (all others). These three laws—the Law of Moses, the Law fulfilled, and the law of nature—were why Paul stated emphatically that God has revealed what is to be known about Him to all humankind (verse 19). Even for the non-Jew or Gentile Christian, the nature of God has been revealed since Creation through the evidence of what was created (verse 20).

B. Humankind Refused to Honor God
   (Romans 1:21-23)

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

One argument atheists continually make is that God does not exist. They believe that the world and the universe came into existence from some “big bang.” Yet, they enter into heated philosophical debates about God’s existence so passionately that one may get the idea that deep down inside they really do recognize that there must be some “Supreme Being.” Paul agreed with that line of thinking. He left no doubt regarding what he thought about the inner beliefs of such people: they knew God (verse 21).

In practice, these humanists (humankind over any type of deity) and secularists (science over religion) assign credit for creation and the natural order of things to happenstance. Everything else happens under the control of human design, in their estimation. So it is easy for them to deny God’s work in creation, allowing them to ignore God. Literally, they believe that God is irrelevant. To them, He is a figment of many people’s imaginations. Although they see God’s handiwork in nature, they do not give God credit for it. In turn, they have no need to thank God for His work in creation and His sustaining of creation (verse 21). Their supposed wisdom is nothing more than foolishness (verse 21).

Paul believed that deep down inside this misguided group of people knew that God ought to be glorified. We continue to hear stories of how atheists will call on the name of God in times of life-threatening danger. In college, I had a heated discussion with a fellow classmate who was an atheist. In the end of our discussion, I asked him, “Where did the first atom come from to power the big bang?” Of course he had no answer, but he smiled, shook my hand, and changed the subject. That was my confirmation that he knew God really existed.

Since the time after the Flood, atheists, humanists, and secularists (AHS) have claimed to be wise but really are foolish (verse 22). How foolish have they been? Paul used the Greek word moros from which we derive the English word moron to describe such people. Yet, moros people are not mentally
deficient. To the contrary, they are quite knowledgeable. Rather, they are people who are morally deficient. Their lack of morals has led them to give credit to creation instead of the Creator. Some people have gone beyond the thinking of the AHS group and have accepted a form of theology based upon the worship of images of humankind and animals (verse 23). We can actually say the same thing of the AHS group. In effect, by giving credit to it, they are worshipping the “big bang.” After all, worship is simply giving reverence and adoration.

C. The Consequences of Ignoring God
(Romans 1:28-32)

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Keep in mind that in the preceding verses Paul shared how humankind had literally put God to the test. For humankind, God had failed miserably. Now, Paul showed that it was humankind that had failed. He provided proof in verses 28-32.

When commenting on the wayward sinfulness of the world today, you may have heard someone quote Romans 1:28, “God gave them over to a reprobate mind” (KJV). Growing up, when I heard this quote I thought a person with a reprobate mind was the worst possible sinner there could be. Likewise, many Christians today think the same thing. In other Bible translations, we see the word *depraved*. Even still, it conjures up thoughts of a terrible sinner.

In actuality, though, the Greek word translated “depraved” is *adokimos*, which means “not standing the test; not approved.” In the context of verse 28, it means not passing the test of being morally right. Its Greek root word *dokimazo* gives the idea that by watching some people’s actions we can see how immoral they really are. They have no moral compass to tell them they are doing wrong. Although it has, is, and will continue to be God’s desire to be reconciled to humankind, many will still choose to separate themselves from God.

Since God “gave them over” to their wayward thinking, the lives of these “self-separated” people are characterized by their moral corruption. Paul listed twenty-one different sins in verses 29-31 describing the level of their depravity. The first four are general vices—every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity (verse 29). The next five are rooted in jealousy—envy, murder, strife, deceit, and maliciousness. The final twelve deal with slander (gossips and slanderers, verses 29-30); arrogance (haters of God, insolence, haughtiness, boastfulness, verse 30); and various other sins (inventors of evil, disobedience to parents, foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness, verses 30-31). Collectively, these sins are disobedience to God’s commands, but they also tear at the very fabric of society. We see the results of this disobedience on the news and in social media posts. Unfortunately, these acts have become so commonplace that we are becoming increasingly desensitized when we hear such news.

Could these “self-separated” ones plead ignorance in their actions? Paul emphatically stated that they knew what God desired (verse
They had heard it from those who followed after God’s ways, or had seen it in their righteous living. But even if they had not, their consciences had made them uneasy in their actions. What they were doing just did not “feel” right. To mask their guilt about their sinful ways, many of these wayward people are substance abusers. They want to dull the pain they feel inside caused by their actions.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

For those of us who experienced the deacons’ prayers during Sunday morning devotions, we may remember these words: “put here for any shape, form, nor fashion, nor for any outside show to this unfriendly world.” These saints of old recognized the importance of living righteously from the inside out. Their “audience” was not many, but just one—God. Their worship on Sunday was just an extension of what they practiced every day. What was in them poured out on Sunday mornings.

They had a healthy fear of God that was not rooted in getting caught doing wrong but rather in pleasing God. That is why there were so few murders in African-American communities for many years after the abolishment of slavery. There was sincere respect for God and for others.

PRAYER

Merciful God, we know You are a God of truth. Yet, we are shaped in iniquity and marked by our sin-stained nature. We ask You to keep us daily on the path of Your righteousness. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Reprobate (Depraved) Mind—Paul used the phrase “reprobate mind” in Romans 1:28 to refer to people who were both unrighteous and rejected the truth. So they could commit sin and not recognize the error of their ways or feel remorse for their actions.

Wrath of God—The phrase “wrath of God” is the New Testament equivalent to the Old Testament phrase the “Day of the Lord.” In both cases, they refer to God’s anger and punishment against unrighteousness.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 20-26, 2016)

Ignoring God’s Plain Truth

MONDAY, June 20: “A Person of God” (1 Kings 17:17-24)
TUESDAY, June 21: “Judging Deceit” (Psalm 52)
WEDNESDAY, June 22: “Liars and Truth Speakers” (Psalm 63:1-5, 11)
THURSDAY, June 23: “God Hates Injustice” (Isaiah 59:12-16)
FRIDAY, June 24: “Utter Contempt for Truth” (Jeremiah 5:1-5)
SATURDAY, June 25: “Seek Good and Truth” (Amos 5:10-15)
SUNDAY, June 26: “Ignoring God’s Plain Truth” (Romans 1:18-23, 28-32)
LESSON 5
July 3, 2016

IGNORING GOD’S TRUTH WITHIN US

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Matching Words with Actions

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Peter 1:13-23
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 2:17-29
KEY VERSE: Romans 2:13

Romans 2:17-29—KJV

17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, 
18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; 
19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, 
20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. 
21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? 
22 Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? 
23 Thou that maketh thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? 
24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. 
25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. 
26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? 
27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? 
28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 
29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Romans 2:17-29—NIV

17 Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; 
18 if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; 
19 if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, 
20 an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— 
21 you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? 
22 You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 
23 You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? 
24 As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” 
25 Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. 
26 If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? 
27 The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. 
28 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 
29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Many people talk about appreciating the world around them but do not demonstrate it with their actions. What causes such inconsistency? The psalmist sang praises that the Earth was full of the wonders of God’s creation; but Paul insisted that, while some people taught others how to obey the Law and live in ways consistent with God’s creation, they did not obey the Law themselves and did not have it written on their hearts.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Can a Person Be Too Religious?
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. The Jews Relied on the Law (Romans 2:17-20)
   B. The Jews Relied on Ritual (Romans 2:21-26)
   C. Who Is the Real Jew? (Romans 2:27-29)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Tell what Paul revealed about the people who claim to follow God’s Law while failing to keep it;
2. Recognize the hypocrisy of claiming to belong to God while breaking God’s Law; and,
3. Identify the hypocrisy in our beliefs and daily actions and ways to comply with God’s Law.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult/Youth Topic: Matching Words with Actions
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Romans 2:13
Print Passage: Romans 2:17-29
—Jews and Gentiles have equality before God’s judgment; the Law is not an advantage to the Jews or disadvantage to the Gentiles.
—God is both merciful and just in examining human character and action.
—Paul stated that the Jews were not following the laws they were teaching others.
—Circumcision is a sign of the covenant that God made with Israel (Leviticus 12:3).
—The Jews came to regard circumcision as a guarantee of God’s favor, putting more value on the physical circumcision than on the circumcision of the heart.
—Gentiles often obeyed the laws and committed righteous deeds more than the Jews did.
—Some people instinctively do what the Law requires and their consciences guide them to do what is right.
—The Jews had a high opinion of themselves, which made them feel that the laws of God did not apply to them.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Giving Praise
Key Verse: Psalm 104:1b
Print Passage: Psalm 104:1-9, 24-25
—Psalm 104 is a poetic summary of the Creation story in Genesis 1.
—God created the world to run like a flawlessly crafted machine.
—The capstone of creation is variety.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Can a Person Be Too Religious?

Can a person be too religious? That is a question that seems most appropriate for today’s lesson. Do you know of people who never seem to miss Sunday school, morning worship, Bible study, or any other church assembly? These same people also tithe and give well. They do not drink alcohol, gamble, or live riotous lifestyles. They do not work on Sundays. They always say grace before they eat, even leading grace at the table with people of mixed religious beliefs. They are the first ones to help with the Thanksgiving gift boxes and the Christmas gift bags. They say “Amen” the loudest on Sunday morning. They are the best encouragers of the pastor. They have an iPad with a cross on the opening screen and the latest Bible app installed. They always wear a big cross around their necks. They have a tag on the front of their cars that says, “Saved and Sanctified Christian Inside.” They are well respected in the community and considered upstanding by even the most worldly person.

B. Biblical Background

In Paul’s day, for the Jews, the Law was more than just the Ten Commandments and the other teachings of the books of the Pentateuch. It also referred to the traditions of the Jewish religious teachers. In my Old Testament class in college, I was amazed when our professor lectured on the Jewish Midrash and Talmud. These teachings included the Jewish religious leaders’ interpretations of the Law. These teachings were not inspired prophecies from God. Rather, they incorporated commentary and traditional practices into the Law of Moses. We may view their body of writing and teaching as the “Law plus.” Unfortunately, the “plus” was really a minus.

In Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount teachings, He referred to the traditions of the Jewish religious teachers (see Matthew 5:31, 33, 43). These teachings had gained the same weight as the Old Testament Scriptures. The big problem with these teachings was that they were heavily influenced by human selfishness and self-righteousness. These add-ins and add-ons made it rather easy for Jewish religious leaders to appear highly righteous in this very religious society. We have to keep in mind that the Jewish people had gone from one extreme of not obeying God and worshipping idols before their exile in Babylon to strictly obeying the letter of the Law and participating in religious rituals. In both cases, they were missing the mark of being right with God.
In Romans 2:1-16, Paul offered a bridge between his condemnation of the worldly people who had rejected God and lived unrighteous lives (see Romans 1:18-32) and his fellow Jews (see Romans 2:17-3:8). He anticipated that the Roman Christians would be familiar with those “good” people who, although they did not worship God, lived “good” lives from a human perspective. They did not believe that God was going to really punish anyone. God was too “nice” to allow someone to go to hell, in their reasoning. This group of “good” people may also be referred to as “moralists.” They thought that humankind was generally good. Sure, there were some bad apples, but they had not spoiled the whole bunch. Paul concluded in verses 11-16 that everyone falls under God’s judgment because of sin. He turned next to his own people in verse 17 to show that the Jewish people were not exempt from God’s wrath.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. The Jews Relied on the Law
   (Romans 2:17-20)

   Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

   After reading Paul’s teaching in Romans 1:18–2:16, his fellow Jews probably thought they were “off the hook.” After all, they were God’s chosen people. He had made a covenant with Abraham their ancestor. Although they had been disobedient prior to the Exile, they had been zealous about obeying the Law ever since. In their own thinking, the Jews were confident in their right standing with God.

   However, Paul quickly dispelled such beliefs. In a preview of Romans 10:2-3, he chastised his fellow Jews for being so self-reliant on external obedience to the Law as their means of being justified with God. They were great at practicing religion but sorely lacking in living righteously. Their “talk” and “walk” were a mismatch. The Jews had grown to be very arrogant in their religious practices. In verses 17-20, Paul sought to show his people how arrogant they really were.

   First, the name “Jew” is derived from Judah. Judah was the name given to the Southern Kingdom after Israel split following the death of Solomon. The Northern Kingdom was called Israel and later Samaria. Since Judah meant “Yahweh be praised,” the word Jew carried the same meaning. They boasted about their strict obedience of the Law (verse 17). So they were quick to use their name as a boast of their seemingly special position with God. Relying on his vast religious education by the best of the Jewish religious teachers, Paul was comfortable sharing about the intricacies of both the Law and Jewish traditions.

   Second, they took extreme pride in being the possessors of the Law for the rest of the world. The only problem was that some of them, especially the religious leaders, thought that they were exempt from God’s judgment. Third, they had no grounds to boast. Their praise to God was only external, not internal,
and thus was extremely hypocritical. Fourth, since they did know God’s Law and the other Old Testament writings, they had no excuse for not living righteously. They had been taught about what God required. Yet, their ways of living missed the mark of what God required. They were too focused on obeying the letter of the Law rather than the spirit of the Law.

Finally, they had the responsibility of instructing the Gentiles. They were the light for those lost in the darkness of unrighteousness, the sighted guides for those blind to what God required, and the teachers of those needing to grow to spiritual maturity. Although they bragged about their position in God, they fell miserably short in fulfilling their responsibility to the rest of the world.

B. The Jews Relied on Ritual
   (Romans 2:21-26)

  Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

Continuing with the theme of his teaching, Paul began a series of five rhetorical questions in verses 21-24. First, since they were supposed to be teaching the Gentiles, Paul asked whether they heeded their own teaching. Were they following their own words of instruction? These religious teachers were not. That is not a new phenomenon. We have heard the stories of how instructors in high school teach about the perils of illicit drug use. Then, we discover they are some of the biggest drug abusers. Paul continued his inquisition by asking how they could preach against stealing but were, in fact, stealing themselves. They were breaking the eighth commandment.

Continuing in the Ten Commandments, Paul chided them for speaking against adultery but committing this sin in violation of the seventh commandment. Next, Paul scolded them for breaking the second commandment by putting other things before their reverence for God—lack of commitment, and not giving in their tithes and offering. So Paul laid out a severe indictment of his fellow Jews.

But just in case some would say that they had not been guilty of the sins underscored in the previous four questions, Paul asked one last all-encompassing question: “You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” (verse 23, NKJV). They were all guilty! Even if they had been devout in obeying the letter of the Law, they were grossly short in obeying the spirit of the Law. Their “do as we say not as we do” lifestyles had made a mockery of God’s name in the Gentile community. Paul quoted Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:22 to show how their hypocritical lifestyles had been a problem for some time. It was nothing new.

In case his readers remained skeptical, Paul next shifted to the ritual hypocrisy of his fellow Jews in verses 25-26. They saw circumcision as not only a symbol of God’s covenant with them but also God’s “stamp of approval” that they were righteous. Paul explained that being circumcised without obeying the Law was the same as being uncircumcised. In other words,
if circumcision were the seal of the righteousness of God, their disobedience shattered that seal. Rituals reinforce righteousness; they don’t make people righteous.

C. Who Is the Real Jew? (Romans 2:27-29)

And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Again, the Jews were more concerned with external compliance with the letter of the Law instead of the intent, which was rooted in agape love. Only if people’s hearts are right with God are they truly circumcised. Even in the Books of the Law, Moses emphasized “circumcision of the heart” (Deuteronomy 10:16, 30; 30:6). Jeremiah shared this concept again (Jeremiah 4:4) as he laid the foundation for the New Covenant. With a heart focus instead of a ritual focus, the real circumcision was a result of obeying God’s commands in word and deed. Under this scenario, if Gentiles were able to obey the Law in total, they would be considered spiritually circumcised. In so doing, their lives would expose the disobedience of the Jewish people. Since the Law could only expose sin and not save from sin, Paul would discuss how both Jews and Gentiles were justified in Romans 3:21–5:21. This is, in fact, what happened with the coming of Christ and the advent of Christianity.

After advancing his argument in verses 17-27 against the misplaced self-righteous assurance of his fellow Jews, Paul, like a skilled lawyer, reached his conclusion in verses 28-29. Who was the real Jew? Of course, Paul knew the ethnic and religious definition of what it meant to be a Jew. Yet, he wanted the focus to be on what God desired. Ethnicity and religiosity only reflect human bloodlines and external rituals. Paul wanted to define “Jew” in terms of the meaning of their name—“Yahweh is praised.” Their hypocritical lifestyles made a mockery of this meaning. It was better stated as “Yahweh is mocked.”

The real Jew was not only one outwardly. Physical circumcision alone did not make a person a Jew. It was not a birthright. In Paul’s argument, he defined righteousness not from the outside-in but from the inside-out. Later, in Romans 3:21–5:21, he would show that the righteousness of God was only possible by believers being justified (accepted as righteous by God) through our faith in Jesus.

Paul laid the foundation of what it meant to be accepted as righteous by God in verse 28 by stating that circumcision was more than some outward, physical act. What really mattered, then, was spiritual circumcision. The real Jew was the one whose life reflected “Yahweh is praised” by being one inwardly. Their lives reflected a circumcision of the heart that could only be orchestrated by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). Again, the Law was powerless to make the Jews or any other people right. It could only show how they were wrong. In the end, only the inward transformation of God’s Holy Spirit can make people’s lives reflect the meaning of what it means to be a real Jew—“Yahweh is praised!”
III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

We cannot be too hard on the Jews of Paul’s day. Our congregations today are filled with very religious people. Although we sometimes use the words righteous and religious interchangeably, they have different meanings in real Christianity. If we look at just the practices of Christianity—Sunday worship, Communion, baptism, and the like—we are focused on religion. There are a lot of religious people. That means that they faithfully exercise the practices and customs of their religion. We still have people in church with a zeal of God but not according to knowledge. In the final analysis, what matters to God is His righteousness exhibited in the daily lives of Christians.

PRAYER

Lord God, we ask You to keep us humble before You. We desire to live lives pleasing in Your sight. We thank You for inscribing Your Word on our hearts and placing Your Spirit within our hearts. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Circumcision—Since three of the world’s largest religions (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) accept Abraham as their father of faith, male circumcision is strictly practiced by Jews and Muslims, and many Christians. The practice predates the Law and included both Isaac (see Genesis 21:4) and Ishmael (see Genesis 17:26).

The Law—Initially for the Jews, the Law, called the Torah in Hebrew, referred to the first five books of the Old Testament. Over time, it came to include the commentaries and interpretations (of the Jewish religious teachers) contained in the Midrash and the Talmud.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(June 27–July 3, 2016)

Ignoring God’s Truth within Us

MONDAY, June 27: “Dark versus Light” (John 1:1-9)

TUESDAY, June 28: “Hate versus Love” (John 15:18-27)

WEDNESDAY, June 29: “Doubt versus Faith” (2 Corinthians 4:1-6)

THURSDAY, June 30: “Grace versus Law” (Galatians 2:11-21)

FRIDAY, July 1: “Lies versus Truth” (Ephesians 4:25-32)

SATURDAY, July 2: “Wicked versus Righteous” (Isaiah 26:1-12)

SUNDAY, July 3: “Ignoring God’s Truth within Us” (Romans 2:17-29)
WE’RE ALL UNDER SIN’S POWER

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Everyone “Blows It”

Devotional Reading: 1 John 1:5-10
Print Passage: Romans 3:9-20
Key Verse: Romans 3:20

Romans 3:9-20—KJV
9 What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;
10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one;
11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.
12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.
13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:
14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:
15 Their feet are swift to shed blood:
16 Destruction and misery are in their ways:
17 And the way of peace have they not known:
18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.
19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.
20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:9-20—NIV
9 What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.
10 As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one;
11 “there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.
12 “All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”
13 “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.”
14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:”
15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood;
16 “ruin and misery mark their ways,
17 “and the way of peace they do not know.”
18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.
20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Many people are grateful for all they have in life, but others take every opportunity to abuse each privilege that comes along. Why does this wide variation exist? The psalmist said that God’s people must give thanks for all the wonders that He has done and for His steadfast love that endures forever, while Paul lamented that humans had corrupted God’s creation almost from the beginning and that all human beings continue to be sinful and will be held accountable by God.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I.  Introduction
   A.  Under the Influence
   B.  Biblical Background
II.  Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A.  Both Jews and Gentiles under the Power of Sin (Romans 3:9)
   B.  No One Is Righteous (Romans 3:10-18)
   C.  The Law Reveals Sin but Does Not Save (Romans 3:19-20)
III.  Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1.  Repeat Paul’s claim that nearly from the beginning of God’s creation, humankind began corrupting it and that God’s retribution will surely come;
2.  Accept their personal role in corrupting God’s beautiful creation; and,
3.  Be attentive to the biblical prophets and accept accountability to God.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/ YOUTH
Adult Topic: Everyone “Blows It”
Youth Topic: Tangled Up
Adult Key Verse: Romans 3:20
Youth Key Verse: Romans 3:10
Print Passage: Romans 3:9-20
—The Law gives believers the knowledge of sin. Neither Jews nor Gentiles are righteous before God.
—The Law exposed the power of sin and the participation in it.
—Some people have no fear of God or reverence for God.
—Verses 10-18 describe humanity’s deviation from God’s created order, drawn from Psalms 5:10; 10:7; 14:1-3; 35:2; 139:4; Ecclesiastes 7:20; and Isaiah 59:7-8.
—Paul’s use of sin: singular—is a power, dominating all people; plural—deeds. The created order is drawn as a magnet to sin’s force. Sin is an equal-opportunity enslaver.
—Some people have no fear of God or reverence for God.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: How Can I Say Thanks?
Key Verse: Psalm 136:1
Print Passage: Psalm 136:1-9, 26
—God’s faithfulness is unwavering.
—Psalm 136 calls God’s people to give thanks for all God has done.
—Nature is a reminder of God’s mercy.
—The psalmist reminded God’s people that God created all of the natural wonders in the heavens.
—They can respond to God’s faithful mercy by taking care of natural resources.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Under the Influence

At the time of this writing, there are several criminal trials dominating the news cycle. In one of the trials, the defense team did not focus on the guilt of its client. There was no denying his guilt. The evidence was overwhelmingly against him. He did it! Instead, the defense team focused on the penalty phase of the trial. They wanted to keep their client from death row.

They planned to use a strategy previously used in another high-profile case. They said that their client should not be sentenced to death because he was under the influence of his brother. Yes, he committed a horrible crime but, argued the defense team, he did so under the influence of another, and thus he was powerless to act of his own free will.

Speaking of being under the influence, for many years society allowed the justice system to be lenient when it came to punishing drunk drivers; the reasoning seemed to be that, without drinking, the person in question was normally a “good,” law-abiding citizen. It was the alcohol’s influence that was the real cause. This was often the defense even when someone was killed. The drunk drivers were simply under the influence. They were powerless to act on their own free will.

These stories have one thing in common: people using “being under the influence” as a defense. By this human reckoning, God should overlook humankind’s sin nature. Why? We are all under the influence of sin. However, there is one shortcoming to such reasoning: in every case people have a choice.

B. Biblical Background

Paul made the case for the condemnation of all humankind in Romans 1:18–3:20. In Romans 1:18–2:16, he showed how even the non-Jew had no excuse for being unrighteous. Although God had not revealed Himself through His Word to them as He had done with the Jews, He had revealed Himself through creation. Paul also condemned those who considered themselves righteous by human standards (see Romans 2:1-16). Next, Paul addressed his own people in Romans 2:17-29. Although they were God’s chosen people and received the Law, they were just as worthy of the wrath of God as the Gentiles.

Then in Romans 3:1-8, Paul offered a transition between his condemnation of his own people and his conclusion that no one is righteous in verses 9-20.

Paul had to acknowledge that the Jewish people did have special advantages over everyone else. First, God had given them the Law, or “oracles,” in verse 2. They did not have to come to an understanding of God indirectly through nature. They knew about God directly. Second, they were given the privilege of being the race from which the Messiah was born. God could have chosen to start a new covenant relationship and allowed His only
begotten Son to have an earthly mother from any other race. Instead, God stayed committed to His promise to Abraham. That was the third advantage. God was faithful to His promise. Finally, they had lived the consequences of disobedience to God. Israel had been taken into captivity to be punished for their transgressions against God. They knew better!

What is humankind’s real problem? What has stirred up God’s wrath? The simple answer is sin. Ever since Adam’s disobedience in the Garden, his original sin has separated God and humankind. Sin is rebellion against God. Continuing in rebellion, humankind has chosen to disobey God and live contrary to God’s will. Paul has shown in these opening chapters of the book of Romans that no matter who people are—Jew or Gentile—they have consciously chosen to disobey God. In today’s lesson, Paul moved a step further, using the Scriptures to underscore just how hopelessly unacceptable humankind’s position was with God.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Both Jews and Gentiles under the Power of Sin (Romans 3:9)

What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.

The NIV translation of verse 9 begins, “What shall we conclude then?” Here, Paul was referring to everything he had written from Romans 1:18 through 3:8. Based upon the evidence presented, any sane person would conclude that all of humankind should be charged and found guilty. That included Jews and Gentiles. The evidence was simply overwhelming. The Gentiles should be charged because they had lived godless lives, involving themselves in all manner of wickedness (see Romans 1:18-32) as well as considering themselves right by human standards (see Romans 2:1-16). But what about the Jews? Did their special position give them an exemption from God’s wrath?

Paul did not delay in his answer: “Not at all.” Paul had already argued the case against his own people in Romans 2:17-29. In a sense, he was reminding his Jewish readers in verse 1 that their special position was not without responsibility. Yes, they were given God’s words to share with the world. However, they had not been practicing what they had been preaching. So they should be charged just as the Gentiles were.

That is why Paul responded the way he did: “For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin” (verse 9, NKJV). We have to keep in mind that the church in Rome had a mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles, and there was still a strong Jewish non-Christian population in Rome. Sometimes we forget that Christianity began as a Jewish-only group. So the Jews brought with them all their beliefs, including obedience to the Law. The apostles preached the Gospel in the Jewish synagogues (see Acts 9:19-20; 13:5; 22:19). After all, this was the practice of Jesus, who was considered a Jewish rabbi (see Mark 9:5; John 3:2). So whether they were Jewish Christians or Jews, they all should be charged.
In fact, all humanity should be charged! The best human works were not enough to be counted as righteous before God. They “are all under sin” (verse 9, NKJV). The Greek word for “under sin” is hupoharmartia, meaning “to be under the power or authority of something.” Literally, humankind is under the power of sin and helpless to do anything about it.

B. No One Is Righteous
(Romans 3:10-18)

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now that Paul had shown enough evidence for all humankind to be charged, he presented his “indictment.” From judicial proceedings we know that an indictment is the formal written list of charges presented by a prosecuting attorney to a court. It provides the specifics of what the person charged is accused of doing. So as not to think that he was developing his own reasoning, Paul used Old Testament Scriptures to lay out a fourteen-count indictment against humankind in verses 10-18. They are presented in three different categories.

The first is, “under the power of sin.”

Count 1—No one was righteous (see verse 10). Righteousness is a key word in the book of Romans. Paul focused on the unrighteousness of humankind in Romans 1:18–3:20. He often contrasted humankind’s unrighteousness with the righteousness of God. In Romans 3:21–11:36, Paul shifted the focus to the imputed righteousness of those who accepted Christ as their personal Savior. Referencing Psalms 14:1-3 and 53:1-4, Paul focused on the righteousness of God in verse 10. By that standard, humankind always falls short of the perfection of God’s righteousness. This was a common theme throughout the Old Testament.

Count 2—No one understands (see verse 11). Although not a direct quote of Psalms 14:2 and 53:2, Paul used the essence of these verses to focus on humankind’s lack of spiritual understanding. The Greek word translated “understanding” in verse 11 is suniemi, which means “to put things together.” In this case, Paul was referring to humankind’s lack of spiritual discernment (see Ephesians 4:17-18).

Count 3—No one instinctively sought God (see verse 11). Based on Psalms 14:2 and 53:2, Paul placed his focus on human instincts. Instinctively, human nature does not seek to be more like God. Instead, it seeks to be unrighteous. It is only after we have received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit upon our acceptance of Christ that we earnestly seek after God.

Count 4—No one had a perfect walk before God (see verse 12). Considering the time of Paul’s reading, his writers would have pictured a camel caravan straying off course in the middle of a desert journey. Based on Psalm 14:3, Paul lamented the corrupt nature of humankind. Humankind not only had severely departed from seeking the path of God’s righteousness, but was also enjoying being on the wrong path.

Count 5—No one was useful (see verse 12). Here, Paul was not talking about being useless for work or other human tasks. Rather, he was referring to spiritual usefulness. Based again on Psalm
14:3, Paul’s words underscored the futility of human beings’ trying to save themselves. It was impossible apart from God. In the New Testament, we can read Jesus’ words about salt losing its savor, making it useless and good for nothing (see Matthew 5:13; Luke 14:34).

**Count 6**—No one did moral good (see verse 12). Although human beings did do good in human terms (helping the poor, providing for others, and so forth), they did not do morally good things. Once again referencing Psalm 14:3, Paul was emphasizing the lack of moral motives for humankind’s good deeds. They were done without the proper motivation of *agape* love.

For **counts 7-10**, Paul moved to specific charges involving the words of human beings. **Count 7**—Everyone used foul language (see verse 13). The speech of humankind was immoral. They were foul-mouthed. With their off-color jokes and disgusting words, their language was foul as the smell of an open grave with a decaying body in it. Based on Psalm 5:9, Paul gave the sense that such language was like acid eating away at the moral fabric of society. **Count 8**—Everyone deceived with their words (see verse 13). Like the tongue of a crooked salesperson, people continually used words of deception. Referencing Psalm 5:9 again, Paul was likening their words to those of a person speaking insincere words of praise to his or her boss in an effort to gain favor with his or her superior. The problem with their deceitful efforts was that God was and is not fooled. He knows the heart of every person. **Count 9**—Everyone used their words to hurt others (see verse 13). We have heard the saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” However, we know that statement is not true. With cases of people developing mental health issues or esteem issues, or committing suicide after cyberbullying and other insulting incidents, we see that words truly do hurt. Based on Psalm 140:3, Paul likened such hurtful words to the strike of a cobra. Its venom is stored in a sac under its tongue, thus appearing on the perpetrator’s lips. **Count 10**—Everyone’s words were filled with cursing and bitterness (see verse 14). Unrighteous people become the mouthpiece for Satan. Referencing Psalm 10:7, Paul stated how such people spoke words of cursing and bitterness. They refused to speak God’s praises. They would even stoop as low as to curse God when things did not go well for them.

For **counts 11-14**, Paul described the sinful deeds of human beings. **Count 11**—Everyone was quick to shed blood (verse 15). Based on Isaiah 59:7, Paul expressed how humankind was quick to perform violent acts. Their actions even led to bloodshed. They were cruel, seeking revenge at every turn. Their passion for revenge was never satisfied. **Count 12**—Everyone would receive destruction and misery (verse 16). Next, Paul provided a two-for-one. First, he stated how humankind sought to cause ruin and misery for others. They were not happy until others were unhappy. Second, referencing Isaiah 59:8, Paul also was sharing the fate of those who participated in such practices. The same fate as their victims awaited them. **Count 13**—No one could find peace (verse 17). Seeking to do evil, humankind could not have a peaceful existence. Such people are in constant turmoil. Their lives are like stormy seas—they are never at peace. Based on Isaiah 59:8, Paul’s
words made it clear that human beings can only find peace in God. **Count 14**—No one feared God (verse 18). Finally, Paul provided the foundational charge against humankind. Human beings did not reverence God. They had no fear. Referencing Psalm 36:1, Paul was also stating the obvious. People who do not respect God do not respect themselves and others. Also, the fear of God is the first step in the quest for His wisdom (see Proverbs 9:10). Without God’s wisdom, humankind is at a loss without an understanding of what God requires.

**C. The Law Reveals Sin but Does Not Save**  
(*Romans 3:19-20*)

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

After acting as the prosecuting attorney, Paul provided the defense attorney’s rebuttal in verse 19. While both Jews and Gentiles stood accused before God, Paul was only referencing the Jews in these verses. He anticipated the response of his people. They would hide behind the Law. The Jews thought that their strict obedience to the Law would justify them with God. This thought carried over to some Jewish Christians. These Judaizers (Galatians 2:14) believed that all Christians, in addition to accepting Jesus as Savior, had to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses. However, the Law only could reveal sin but was powerless to save from sin. Paul repeated the theme of chapters 1–3, that the righteousness of God only comes through faith in Christ because of His act of redemption on the Cross.

Paul quickly struck down their defense. Just as all human beings are under the power of sin, all were under the Law. While the Jews received the Law directly from God, the Gentiles saw the essence of the Law reflected in creation. So for both groups, they were left speechless without a defense. The whole world is guilty! Although the Jews saw it as a means to salvation, Paul taught how the Law was nothing more than a means of revealing sin (verses 19-20). The Law could help the Jews see what they were doing wrong but had no means to right their wrong before a righteous God (verse 20).

The Law puts forth what God wants done—it is the definition of “good works.” But the Law cannot produce these good works in us; it simply sets the standard. In fact, the Law’s very presence tends to make sin more appealing, and this is a very serious problem indeed—for when we find ourselves “under the law,” then we will find “sin crouching at our door,” just like Cain did. The Law is not at fault; it is our sinful nature that is the problem.

Paul’s “therefore” at the beginning of verse 20 referenced all that he had written from Romans 1:18 through Romans 3:19. The guilty verdict of the trial of humankind was based on one undeniable fact: no one can be declared righteous on his/her own account by observing the Law. Also, we must understand that our faith is just the means or channel by which we are saved. It is not the cause of our salvation. Jesus’ death made it possible.

**III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

Several years ago, Glen Ballard and Siedah Garrett wrote a song entitled “Man in the
Mirror.” Michael Jackson went on to make it a number-one hit. The chorus is most self-reflective:

If you want to make the world a better place,  
Take a look at yourself, and then make a change.

The essence of the words is clear. Too often many people look to others or “circumstances” as the cause of the world’s problems. You might hear this group of people saying, “Others are wrong. I’m right. It’s not me but somebody else. It’s a problem no one can solve.”

As the saying goes, “The only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.” Well, I’m not recommending that anyone eat an elephant. Rather, this statement teaches that every problem, no matter how big, is manageable when we consider it in its smallest components. Really, when we are in a right relationship with God, the Holy Spirit allows us to see our problems in such a light.

What is required to reach the “smallest component”? Well, the words of the song continue to offer what people must do: change. People have to commit to making a change. If people want the world to be a better place, they have to start with themselves. They have to look in their own “mirrors” and realize that everyone can do something. We all fall short in one way or another. The problem is that too many see the shortcomings of others but not their own. Yet, when we recognize that we are under the power of sin and only God can free us, then we are on the road to not only making a positive change in the world, but also preparing for life eternal with the Lord.

**PRAYER**

Almighty God, we stand helpless before You. We are born under the influence of sin. We need the indwelling power of Your Holy Spirit to empower us daily. We thank You for Your Son, Jesus, whose sacrifice made it all possible. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**WORD POWER**

Sin and Repentance—Sin is the perpetual human act of missing the mark of God’s holiness and righteousness through our actions and deeds. “To sin” in Hebrew: chata; “to miss the mark,” as in archery, in Greek: harmartano. However, “repentance,” in Hebrew, is shuvin; and in Aramaic, tuvin, which means acknowledging life’s being headed in the wrong direction.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

(July 4-10, 2016)

We’re All under Sin’s Power
MONDAY, July 4: “No One without Sin” (John 8:2-11)  
TUESDAY, July 5: “Forgiveness of Sin” (Acts 13:36-41)  
WEDNESDAY, July 6: “Confess Our Sins” (Psalm 38:17-22)  
THURSDAY, July 7: “Open Your Eyes” (Acts 26:12-18)  
FRIDAY, July 8: “Freedom from Temptation” (James 1:12-18)  
SATURDAY, July 9: “Walk Free of Sin” (1 John 2:1-6)  
SUNDAY, July 10: “We’re All under Sin’s Power” (Romans 3:9-20)
GOD SET THINGS RIGHT

Adult/Young Adult Topic: To See or Not to See

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 2:1-7
Print Passage: Romans 3:21-31
Key Verses: Romans 3:22-24

Romans 3:21-31—KJV
21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;
22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:
23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;
24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:
25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;
26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.
27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.
28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.
29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:
30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.
31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Romans 3:21-31—NIV
21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.
22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,
23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—
26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.
27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.
28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.
29 Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles too,
30 since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.
31 Do we then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
Some people give thanks for all that is good in life, while others seem to have no hope. Where can they find hope? While the psalmist sang praises for all God had done in creation, Paul held out hope that those who continued in sin could be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I.  Introduction
   A.  A Second Chance
   B.  Biblical Background

II.  Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A.  All Have Sinned! (Romans 3:21-23)
   B.  Justified by Faith (Romans 3:24-30)
   C.  Upholding the Law (Romans 3:31)

III.  Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1.  Recall Paul’s Good News that God provided Jesus Christ as a way for humankind to reestablish its loving, obedient relationship with God;
2.  Feel hope for getting right with God by believing in Christ Jesus; and,
3.  Confirm their belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and pledge anew to follow Him.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: To See or Not to See
Youth Topic: We’re Included!
Adult/Youth Key Verses: Romans 3:22-24
Print Passage: Romans 3:21-31
—Romans 3:21-22 is the theme for the rest of the letter—God’s righteousness is world-transforming.
—God’s righteousness is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.
—Jesus’ death opened the way for redemption for all people, a gift to Christians by God’s grace.
—Faith in Jesus Christ (not circumcision, good works, or adhering to the Law) is the key to a relationship with God. See Hebrews 11:6.
—The Law supports this new way of relating to God.
—Paul emphasized that true righteousness was and is available for free in Christ.
—Righteousness from God is not dependent on obedience to the Law but on trusting dependence on Christ’s atoning death.
—Since salvation is a gift through faith, no one can proudly boast of his or her own deeds.
—Jews and Gentiles will be treated on the same basis—faith, which fulfills the Law and makes it more possible to obey the Law.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: A Symphony of Praise
Key Verse: Psalm 148:13
Print Passage: Psalm 148:1-10, 13
—Praise of God, who is superior to everything and everybody, is the central purpose of creation.
—The whole universe joins in worship of God as Creator.
—All of creation is like a majestic symphony with many harmonious parts.
—Although each part of creation is independent, it becomes part of the whole choir of praise.
—Each element of creation functions in the place and manner for which it was created or it adapts to a changed environment.
—This “hallelujah” psalm calls on all creation to praise the Lord.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Second Chance

Some years ago, the movie Day after Tomorrow was released. It is a cautionary tale of what could happen if the tide of climate change is not halted. It shows a world where, almost overnight, much of the Northern Hemisphere is covered by solid ice. The scenes in the movie are dramatic. In one, a helicopter crashes because its fuel lines freeze in mid-flight. That can only happen, it is noted, at a temperature of minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Humanity cannot survive extended periods in such bitter cold.

Understood in the movie is humankind’s lack of stewardship in maintaining God’s creation. Although God charged humankind to be stewards of the Earth, our history is plagued by our extreme abuse of the Earth’s resources. Ironically, most of the problems in the environment are a product of about the last hundred years or so with the advent of automobiles and the industrialization of the world, the so-called “smokestack” effect. We can think of it this way: some people still pour hazardous wastes, like old household chemicals and used motor oil, down the drain with no thought about the negative consequences of such actions.

Back to the movie: the fictional vice president is in denial. He just does not believe the doom-and-gloom prediction of the climate scientist hero of the movie. However, at the end of the movie, the vice president is president and has a change of heart. He relishes the opportunity for a second chance to get things right. Unfortunately, there is nothing he can do to undo the bitter cold and newly expanded continental ice shelf. This would be humankind’s punishment for years of poor stewardship. We have a similar issue in today’s lesson. Instead of climate change, we are dealing with sin. Unlike in the movie, though, God offers humankind a second chance without having to be punished for past transgressions.

B. Biblical Background

In Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul had argued his case against humankind’s unrighteousness. From these opening chapters, it would seem that the book of Romans was going to be a somber discussion with little opportunity for hope. Humankind faced a stiff sentence—eternal damnation. All human beings seemed to be on their way to death row. Paul reemphasized this point in verse 23 by stating how everyone was a sinner, not even coming close to the righteousness of God.
But Paul began to share about God’s grace in Romans 3:21-31. Simply speaking, grace is God’s unmerited favor. No one has earned God’s blessings. He blesses us because of His love for humankind. In the New Testament, grace has its greatest expression in God’s provision of the opportunity for salvation to all. Although humankind can never live up to the righteousness of God, through saving faith all who believe in Jesus are declared righteous. In other words, believers are declared innocent of sin and counted as righteous through the redemptive work of Christ. God’s declaration of righteousness is called justification.

Justification is not a process. It is an immediate change in standing with God from unrighteous enemy to reconciled believer.

In the original Greek, the words righteousness and justification are closely related. They are derived from the same root word, dikaiosynē, which means “to be declared to be right, or being in a right relationship with another person.” So we see then that justification is the process of making a person righteous, and righteousness is the outcome of the process.

Understood in this process is the biblical concept of redemption. Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross paid the sin debt of all who believe (see Romans 3:24; 8:23). Before Christ’s redemptive act, there was no mechanism by which humankind could be saved. The Law was imperfect because it only revealed sin, but did not provide a remedy. Now in the age of grace, humankind not only can receive a pardon for sin but also have the crime of sin removed as if it never happened. That is the difference between justification and a simple pardon. In the legal system, people receiving a pardon have their crimes forgiven and the associated criminal penalty cancelled. However, the fact of their transgressions remains. The debt to society is not paid. Justification goes farther than a pardon. Believers are forgiven, considered right, but the debt is paid.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. All Have Sinned!
(Romans 3:21-23)

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

As Paul was writing, he was celebrating the dawning of the age of grace. His opening phrase, “but now,” in verse 21, signaled a change of themes from condemnation because of sin to justification because of Jesus. We often place our focus on the Old and New Testaments, ignoring the period in between, some four hundred years. During that time, the Jewish religious leaders had advanced their own notion of what it meant to be righteous. Building upon the Law, they added their own traditions that actually made a mockery of Moses’ spiritually inspired writings. So Paul proclaimed in verse 21 that the righteousness of God had been made known to humankind apart from obeying the Law. Contrary to the prevailing school of thought in the Jewish
religious community of that time, there was no way for humankind to obey its way into achieving the righteousness of God. The Old Testament writers knew that this age of grace was coming (see Psalm 32:1-2; Habakkuk 2:4).

It did not matter whether a person was a Jew or Gentile. The righteousness of God was available to everyone. There were no long lists of laws, rules, and traditions to follow. Instead, all that was needed was faith in Jesus. This saving faith is different from living faith. When people recognize that they are lost and trust that Jesus’ death on the Cross can save them, they have saving faith. As they grow in their Christian walk, they develop living faith. All humankind is in the same boat. Everyone is a sinner. No one is anywhere near to obtaining the righteousness of God.

Adam’s original sin had taken humankind away from the glory of God. God had intended for humankind to live forever, walking with Him. A close examination of Genesis 2 reveals a literal heaven on Earth. Having not yet sinned, humankind was in the direct presence of God. They did not have to hide their faces or bow down in fear. They could talk to God face-to-face just as we talk to one another today. Moses, God’s mighty liberator, could not see God directly (see Genesis 33:18–34:3). Sin had placed what seemed to be a permanent barrier between humankind and God. There was nothing humankind could do to eliminate the barrier. Only God could do it. God the Son removed the barrier (see Matthew 27:51).

B. Justified by Faith
(Romans 3:24-30)

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

In verse 24, Paul made three observations about the righteousness of God. First, it is free. Second, it is because of God’s grace. Finally, it occurs through the redemptive work of Christ. Paul went on to provide details of the centrality of Christ’s sacrifice to our faith in verses 25-26. So it would seem that all believers had something to brag about. We are now counted as righteous by God. Returning to the analogy of a person being pardoned for a crime, can that person really brag about being set free from prison and/or having the crime removed from his or her record? No! the person has no right to brag, but does have every right to be humbly thankful.

Paul shared the same sentiments in the question to open verse 27, “Where is boasting then?” (NKJV). Could believers boast because they obeyed the Law? Here, Paul was referring to his fellow Jews and Jewish Christians. Both groups had taken extreme pride in their strict obedience to the Law and the other Jewish traditions. Could they boast because of their works or good deeds? This was a prevailing thought in both Judaism and world religions in general. In Judaism, it was believed that a person could come into right standing with God through repentance of sins, good deeds,
and a life of devotion. The good deeds could supposedly cancel out bad actions. The world religions took great stock in the power of good deeds to overcome a terrible sinful act. We see such beliefs depicted in Greek mythology. Paul concluded that it was only by faith that believers are justified. So no one had any reason to boast.

Mirroring his writing in Romans 1:18–2:28 and reflecting some of the inter-congregational conflicts in the Roman church, Paul focused on the impartiality of God in verse 29. Is God really the God of the Jews only? After all, the Jews were God’s chosen people. Jesus, the Savior, was a Jew. Or is God the God of the Gentiles also? Paul emphatically answered, “Yes!” He is the God of both Jews and Gentiles. Partly referring to his writing in Romans 2:25-29, Paul reintroduced the issue of circumcision. Salvation was available to Jews. They were the circumcised and justified by faith. They demonstrated their belief in God through the act of circumcision. It was also available to the Gentiles. They were the uncircumcised, justified through faith. Faith was the common denominator in both cases. Faith is the necessary component for salvation, not circumcision.

C. Upholding the Law
(Romans 3:31)

Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Finally, Paul closed this section of his writing with a final focus on the role of the Law. On face value, it would seem that Paul was calling for complete disregard for the Law. Could believers simply ignore the Law? Paul emphatically stated that this was not the case. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians uphold the Law through their faith in Christ. Paul’s teaching about justification through faith alone did not destroy the Law but fulfilled it. We have to remember what has been stated previously. Individually, the Law could identify sin but could not save from sin. Justification by faith closes the loop and provides an opportunity for salvation. While no one could live a perfectly righteous life worthy of the glory of God under the Law, the act of justification through faith counted believers as righteous, secured their justification before God, and began the glorification process.

Verse 31 also provided even more support for the continued status of the Law. We have to understand that the Law was really the Pentateuch, the books written by Moses. Because of the number of commandments, rules, observances, and rituals sanctioned by God, over time the Jewish people placed emphasis on strict outward obedience without having the proper internal intent. What was the proper intent? Jesus taught on the real essence of the Law. It was agape love summed up in love for God and love for a believer’s neighbors (see Mark 12:28-34).

So believers’ faith in Jesus actually upholds the Law and continues to make it relevant. Paul outlined three reasons for this continued relevance in verse 31. First, Jesus, God the Son in human form, was obedient to the Law and did achieve the glory of His Father (see Matthew 17:1-13). Well, some might say that was only good for Jesus but not everyone else. Yet, some miss the other important aspect of Jesus’ first coming. He was able to pay the penalty of sin revealed by the Law once and for all. The Law did reveal sin. Neither it nor
humankind could pay the penalty, but Jesus did on Calvary. Jesus’ first coming, then, achieved two important things. He fulfilled the statutes and intent of the Law and paid the penalty for humankind’s sins.

Second, whenever sinners admit their guilt they are actually admitting that they are breaking the Law. They have not loved God or their neighbor as God commanded. The Law becomes the basis for a moral code that provides practical applications of what to do or what not to do. For example, the Ten Commandments give specific examples of how believers ought to conduct themselves in society.

The third and final reason for the continued reliance on the Law combines the first two reasons. Because believers recognize what Jesus has done in paying the penalty of sin considering humankind’s sorry, sinful state, we cannot help but want to follow after Him (see 2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Why? Jesus laid down His life for us.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Life is all about second chances. Yet, all sinners are way beyond the second chance. It is wonderful to know that God is willing to forgive us of our sins even after we are saved. All we have to do is confess our sins. God is ready, willing, and able to forgive us because of the blood of His Son. Jesus is at the right hand of His Father, making intercession for us. In turn, we have to thank God for salvation through more than mere words. We have to be good stewards of our bodies—mind, body, and spirit—and God’s other parts of creation.

PRAYER

Merciful God, we come knowing we are unworthy of even one blessing. Yet, we acknowledge Your infinite goodness to us. We call on You to help us to be better stewards of our bodies and the rest of Your creation. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Charis—The Greek word *charis* simply means “gift.”

Gospel—The Greek word *euangelion* means “Good News” or simply “Gospel.”

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

*(July 11-17, 2016)*

**God Set Things Right**

**MONDAY,** July 11: “Free in Christ” (Galatians 4:28–5:1)

**TUESDAY,** July 12: “One in Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:10-17)

**WEDNESDAY,** July 13: “Rich in Christ” (Romans 11:30-36)

**THURSDAY,** July 14: “United in Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12-20)

**FRIDAY,** July 15: “Dwelling in Christ” (Ephesians 2:15-22)

**SATURDAY,** July 16: “Believing in Christ” (John 12:40-50)

**SUNDAY,** July 17: “God Set Things Right” (Romans 3:21-31)
NOT WITHOUT HOPE

**Adult/Young Adult Topic:** Got Hope?

**Devotional Reading:** Psalm 42

**Print Passage:** Romans 5:1-11

**Background Scripture:** Romans 5:1-11

**Key Verse:** Romans 5:5

**Romans 5:1-11—KJV**

THEREFORE BEING justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

1 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

2 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

3 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

4 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

5 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

6 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

7 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

8 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

9 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

10 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

**Romans 5:1-11—NIV**

THEREFORE, SINCE we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!

10 For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

11 Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People are weak, endure suffering of different kinds, do wrong, and face various enemies all around them. What sustains Christians in the midst of these difficulties? Paul told the Romans that, through faith in Christ and with the presence of the Holy Spirit, God had given them reconciliation and hope.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Life’s Challenges
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Peace with God
      (Romans 5:1)
   B. Hope of the Glory of God
      (Romans 5:2-4)
   C. God’s Love
      (Romans 5:5-11)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Hear Paul’s encouraging words about peace, endurance, character, hope, and love as gifts given by God through the death of Jesus;
2. Appreciate the reality that God’s provision of the Savior is His continuing commitment to His creation; and,
3. Take hope through Jesus Christ into the difficult times in life.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult/Youth Topic: Got Hope?
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Romans 5:5
Print Passage: Romans 5:1-11
—The conjunctive adverb, “Therefore,” which opens Romans 5:1, connects the complete thoughts of Romans 4:1-25 to Romans 5:1-5 regarding righteousness through faith.
—Because Abraham is recognized as a “prototype of Jesus Christ,” whatever God reckoned to him, God also reckons to us.
—Based on the analogy in #2 above, Paul proved they could have peace with God through Jesus Christ.
—Paul also proved that through justification they started on the process of being sanctified.
—As their faith grew strong, enabling them to rejoice in their adversity, they could have hope in the midst of difficulties.
—Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has shown love for His people, declared them righteous, and given them hope of sharing in the glory of God.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: We Got Hope!
Key Verse: Romans 5:2b
Print Passage: Romans 5:1-11
—Christian believers have access to God’s grace through Jesus Christ and thereby find peace.
—Jesus is the one in whom Christians boast in the hope of sharing God’s glory.
—Believers who suffer because of their faith have access to hope through the Holy Spirit.
—Jesus’ unselfish act of dying demonstrated God’s love, not for those striving for moral and ethical perfection, but for imperfect sinners.
—Jesus’ death and resurrection opened the way for sinners to be reconciled with God and have hope for eternal life.
—Christian believers can boast of their fellowship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Life’s Challenges

Life has its challenges. If we live long enough, we will discover that these challenges can either make or break us. Most of us have experienced the heartache of losing a loved one. Even we ourselves may have had a terrible sickness or experienced a severe financial setback. Perhaps we have been betrayed by those closest to us. At the time these events were occurring, we may have wondered if we were going to survive. We may even have felt like our prayers were falling on deaf ears.

Moving forward to today, we can reflect on those challenges from a different perspective. Whereas then we looked through the lens of crisis, anger, or sadness, we now look through the lens of victory and triumph. What really made the difference? What brought us through? It was really our earnest heartfelt hope in God. We trusted that He would bring us safely through.

B. Biblical Background

This lesson begins a new unit of study entitled, “Life on God’s Terms.” These six lessons move us beyond justification. Although a necessary step, justification is only the beginning. We are ever thankful to Jesus, God the Son, for making salvation possible. But believers cannot stay stuck at the starting gate. We have to move beyond “our day.” In reality, truly saved people will yearn to grow in Christ.

This yearning is the inner nudging of God’s Holy Spirit. He begins, continues, and sustains the sanctification process. This transformation process culminated in believers’ glorification in heaven. While the opening chapters of the book of Romans focused on humankind’s unrighteousness in contrast to the righteousness of God, Romans 3:21–5:21 give a much brighter picture by examining humankind’s being reconciled with God and counted as righteous. Righteousness is the linking theme of Romans 1:18–11:36.

Other key themes in these chapters include reconciliation, the role of Israel in God’s plan of salvation, election, and God’s sovereignty. Collectively, we will study some of the most important theological pillars of Christianity.

We will end this unit of study with a lesson describing the transformed life. In Romans 12–15:13, Paul moved beyond righteousness to agape love. While the previous chapters were more doctrinal in nature with limited references to daily living, this section of the book of Romans provides lessons on how believers ought to conduct themselves daily. Paul provided lessons on how to love as God desires, engage in civic responsibility, and act in unity. Although not part of our quarter of study, Paul closed on a personal note in Romans 15:14–16:27.
The previous lesson ended with Romans 3. Since today’s lesson picks up with chapter 5, it would be wise to review Romans 4. Romans 3:21–5:21 comprises the “justification” section of the book. At every turn, Paul sought to reaffirm his Jewish upbringing and to fully integrate it into God’s plan of salvation. So in chapter 4, Paul used the life of Abraham to illustrate one who was justified by faith as an example for both the Jews and Gentiles. His choice of Abraham was sure to have resonated with his fellow Jews. They had already recognized him as “Father” Abraham. Their patriarchs of old were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Israel).

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Peace with God

(Romans 5:1)

THEREFORE BEING justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapter 5, Paul used therefore to open verse 1, linking his teachings from Romans 3:21–4:25 to what he was about to share. All believers receive a great benefit at the time of salvation. They are justified, or counted as righteous, by God. We can think of our “righteousness account” being on zero with no way to replenish it. Then God gives us saving faith in Christ to completely fill our account. We did nothing to earn God’s favor. Without His sovereign act of agape love, we would still be broke. We owe Christ for giving us salvation. We owe God for His unmerited favor in filling our righteousness account.

Fortunately, we do not have to work to pay our justification debt. All God requires of us is to live holy lives, to consistently move through the sanctification process. Romans 12:1 refers to this as our spiritual act of worship. We were graciously given saving faith, according to Ephesians 2:8. Simultaneously with our justification, we were also reconciled with God. As a result of justification, we are no longer God’s enemies. Since humankind had been God’s enemies—literally in a state of war with God since Adam’s original sin—God’s grace and Jesus’ sacrifice have allowed those who would believe to cease being enemies. Justification brought about reconciliation with God. We are at peace with God through Christ.

Through Christ is the key phrase in being reconciled to God. Humankind was powerless to achieve the righteousness of God. We needed an intermediary, a peace envoy, to act as a go-between for us with God. The Good News is that God loves humanity. Although not possible due to the hardheartedness of some human beings, His desire is that everyone might be saved (see 1 Timothy 2:3-5). Christ was uniquely qualified to be both sacrificial lamb and mediator. His sacrifice paid our sin debt. His mediation allows us direct access to God, as His Spirit dwells within us.

But our lives do not end at the moment of our being saved. They actually begin. We can think of it this way: we were spiritually dead before we accepted Christ as our personal Savior. Once we accepted Christ, we received the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the One who brings us to life. Because we are justified to be in God’s presence, God gives
us four blessings: peace (verse 1), grace (verse 2), hope (verses 2-5), and love (verses 5-11). Since we are no longer at war with God, we are at peace. Jesus’ blood on the Cross sealed the peace treaty. In human terms, we hear the phrase “peace dividend.” Wars demand many resources and occupy people’s attention. Peace, however, is just the opposite. Let’s be clear here. We are talking about the general state of peace between believers and God. We are not referring to the peace of God experienced by individual believers (see Philippians 4:1-7).

B. Hope of the Glory of God
(Romans 5:2-4)

By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope.

We are so thankful that Jesus gave us access to His Father’s grace. Grace is our second blessing from being justified by our faith. Our belief in Christ literally unleashed God’s grace in our lives individually and collectively. Experiencing God’s unmerited favor places us in God’s presence. Before we were saved we were on the outside looking in. We now stand in the privileged position of joint-heirs with Christ (see Romans 8:17).

God’s third blessing to us through justification is hope. Now this is not a simple hope, like hoping for a big Christmas. Rather, it is an involved hope that can only be experienced by Christians through a process beginning with suffering. Paul’s use of suffering linked to hope may seem strange for modern readers. At the time of his writing the church was undergoing severe persecution from the Jews and the Roman authorities. Considering that the word *martyr* means “witness,” early Christians faced persecution joyously because they recognized the providence of God at work (see Philippians 1:27-30).

Paul so eloquently linked our sufferings to perseverance. Without sufferings, we would live lives of untested living faith. How long can we last in trials? Without sufferings, we will never know the power of God at work in us. And by ourselves, we cannot! The Good News is that God is with us. He allows us to endure trials just, for example, like Job. Sufferings make us better as they strengthen our perseverance, our “stick-to-itiveness.”

Perseverance has its own result. It produces character. Character is our inner strength. It is what keeps us going, that inner drive that keeps us moving forward when lesser people have already given up. As the old adage goes, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” Peter, also writing during a time of fiery persecution, echoed the words of Paul in verses 2-4, declaring that trials test the genuineness or real character of our faith (see 1 Peter 1:6-7). Ironically, a stronger Christian character is based upon not our efforts but on the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and God’s providential care.

Only in a person of strong character can an involved hope exist. An involved hope is not wishful thinking. Rather, it is confident assurance that God is in control and will work things out. Although we might not know the immediate outcome of a current situation, we already know the outcome of our lives. It is our heavenly home. So an involved hope is interwoven into the sanctification process as the Holy Spirit molds us more into the image
of Christ daily. Experiencing sufferings does not mean we are not Christians, and struggling through them does not mean our faith is weak, as some would say. Instead, it identifies us with what Christ endured. It helps us reach spiritual maturity.

C. God’s Love
(Romans 5:5-11)

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Love is the believer’s fourth blessing of the justified life. Paul, actually, was referring to God’s Old Testament covenant love. In Hebrew the word was ḥesed, which is often translated “faithfulness.” Once God entered into covenant with Abraham (and later Israel), it was a total commitment on His part. Though He would have to punish Israel for disobedience, God would hold up His end of the bargain regardless of the circumstances (see Hosea 11).

In the New Testament, the Greek word ἀγαπὲ encompasses God’s love. God is the source of ἀγαπὲ love (verse 5a). John so eloquently wrote in 1 John 4:7-21 that God is the very definition of ἀγαπὲ love. Not only is justification immediate, but believers’ receipt of God’s love is, too. It is delivered through God’s Holy Spirit (verse 5b; see also Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29). There is no delay between accepting Jesus as personal Savior and receiving the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14). If there was any doubt of God’s love for humankind, Paul shared that Jesus’ death was proof (verse 6). Paul’s words echo John 3:16 and John 15:13.

God’s allowing His only begotten Son to sacrifice His life for our sins on the Cross was an unbelievably gracious act of love. When we consider that most people would not die for a righteous person, Christ died for us while we were still sinners (verses 7-8). That is remarkable! Yet, the measure of God’s love did not stop there. He has justified us through our faith. Finally, He has saved us from His own wrath. No longer God’s enemies, we enjoy the benefits of being reconciled with Him, giving us reason to rejoice in our new standing with God.

The Christian concept of justification was far different from what the Jews believed. While Paul emphasized that our justification is not and cannot be based on works, the Jews believed that if people’s good works outnumbered their evil deeds they would stand justified before God in the end. Paul would later expound upon the uselessness of works in salvation in his letter to the church in Ephesus: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9, NKJV). Written to a mixed audience of Christians, Paul’s words made sense to the Gentiles but had to be quite shocking to the Jews. After all, Paul’s teachings contradicted centuries of Jewish belief. We cannot forget that, although a number of
Jews had accepted Christ as the Messiah, they still held on to their Jewish beliefs. That is no different than today when new believers come to Christ with a lifetime of experiences and beliefs.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

We must learn to be thankful amid life’s sufferings. In the end, we are made better as we grow stronger in our living faith. Some may have heard the comparison of faith to the brakes on an automobile: we assume they work; however, it is not until we have to use them that we really know they work. That is what life’s trials and tribulations do for us. They test our living faith. Each test makes our living faith stronger.

In verses 12-21, Paul shared how everyone is either unrighteous by Adam’s original sin or declared righteous by faith in Christ’s death. After the believer is declared righteous by God, the sanctification process begins.

PRAYER

Mighty God, we thank You for always being right there with us in our suffering. Your Holy Spirit has been our strength in our weakest hours. We truly know that we would have never made it out without You on our side. We give You all the glory and praise. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER

Hope—There are several Hebrew words that translate as “hope,” or “to hope” in English. One of them is qawa, which means “to hope in the sense of trust,” as in “the Lord is the hope of Israel” or “Israel’s God is worthy of trust.”

Peace—The biblical meaning of peace is rooted in the Hebrew translation sim or shalom, which means “to be complete” or “whole” or “live well in harmony with God and others.”

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(July 18-24, 2016)

Not without Hope

MONDAY, July 18: “Hope in God” (Isaiah 40:27-31)
TUESDAY, July 19: “Redeemed in God” (Isaiah 52:7-12)
WEDNESDAY, July 20: “Safe in God” (Isaiah 54:9-14)
THURSDAY, July 21: “Restored in God” (Jeremiah 29:10-14)
FRIDAY, July 22: “Help in God” (Psalm 42)
SATURDAY, July 23: “Fulfilled in God” (Matthew 12:15-21)
SUNDAY, July 24: “Not without Hope” (Romans 5:1-11)
DEATH BECOMES LIFE

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Choose Life!

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 6:1-4, 12-14, 20-23

Romans 6:1-4, 12-14, 20-23—KJV

WHAT SHALL we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?
1 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?
2 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?
3 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.
13 Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.
14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.
21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.
22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.
23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6:1-4, 12-14, 20-23—NIV

WHAT SHALL we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?
2 By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?
3 Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.
13 Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.
14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

20 When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.
21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!
22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.
23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People often give in to the temptation to do wrong. How can they overcome this temptation and avoid it altogether? Paul told the Romans that through Christ, they could be freed from sin and could become slaves of righteousness—thus receiving sanctification and eternal life.

TOPICAL OUTLINE
OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Real Freedom
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application
    of the Scripture
   A. Are We to Continue to Sin? (Romans 6:1-4)
   B. Sin No Longer Reigns (Romans 6:12-14)
   C. The Wages of Sin (Romans 6:20-23)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall Paul’s explanation that accepting Jesus frees one from sin while it enslaves one to righteousness and gains one eternity;
2. Connect being baptized into Christ, giving up sin, and renewing creation; and,
3. Renew their baptismal commitment.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult/Youth Topic: Choose Life!
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Romans 6:4
Adult Print Passage: Romans 6:1-4, 12-14, 20-23
Youth Print Passage: Romans 6:1-4, 12-14, 17-23
—Paul opened Romans 6:1 with a question springing from Romans 5:20 to defeat the false idea that grace invites people to sin more.
—Justification by faith is the starting point for the process of sanctification, which ultimately leads to eternal life in Christ.
—Christian baptism frees people from slavery to sin.
—God’s grace enables people to become slaves to righteousness.
—They must become dead to sin in order to live in righteousness.
—“Wages” in verse 23 really means compensation or payoff (Greek: opheilo). Sin’s payoff is deadly; God’s gift of life is free and eternal.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Living a New Life
Key Verse: Romans 6:4b
Print Passage: Romans 6:1-4, 12-14, 20-23
—Jesus’ death was evidence of God’s loving, forgiving, and reconciling grace offered to those who repent and are willing to be reborn as new creatures.
—Through baptism, believers participate in Jesus’ death and resurrection.
—Baptism through the intercession of the Holy Spirit means living as instruments of righteousness.
—God’s grace keeps sin from exercising dominion in humans and thereby frees them to live righteous lives.
—All persons are free to choose to live in righteousness.
—Sanctification and the gift of eternal life are advantages given to those willing to live as new creatures in Christ Jesus.
I. INTRODUCTION
A. Real Freedom

God’s desire is for us who have accepted Christ to undergo a continual transformation through sanctification until we share in His glory in heaven. As believers, although we live in a sinful world and will continue to commit sin, in our hearts we are allowing the Holy Spirit to continually sanctify us to become more like Jesus every day.

B. Biblical Background

Chapters 6–8 mark the next major section of Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome. The focus is on sanctification. In the Old Testament, sanctification referred to the separation of the sacred from the secular. We read throughout the Old Testament where God had the people of Israel to “sanctify” (or set aside) either themselves for worship or articles to be used in the Temple worship. In the New Testament, sanctification actually happened in reverse. God’s Holy Spirit entered the secular to make it sacred. In this case He enters us, sin-stained and tarnished by the world, and makes us sacred from the inside out.

Paul began a new section of his letter in chapter 6 that focused on the process of sanctification. Sanctification (a change process) begins immediately after justification (immediate change).

In the previous two lessons, we focused on justification. As a change of our relationship with God because of His grace and through the redemptive work of Christ, justification occurs as soon as we accept Jesus as our personal Savior. We move from being unrighteous to being counted as righteous. So our salvation has happened (past tense). We are justified. Our justification produces an external righteousness. In other words, our inner sin nature still remains. Yet, externally, the blood of Jesus makes us righteous in the sight of God. Internally, we are undergoing a change in response to the presence of the Holy Spirit. So our salvation is also happening (present tense). We are being sanctified. Our salvation will happen. We will be glorified, having the righteousness of God internally.

Some of the earliest believers had problems understanding the concept of spiritual rebirth.

Our physical birth was the result of an interaction between a man and a woman. It was intended by God to occur within the bounds of holy matrimony, although that is not always the case. From the time of Adam and Eve, this has been God’s plan.

The new birth is radically different. It is a spiritual, holy, and heavenly birth signified by being made alive in a spiritual sense. Our first birth, however, was one of spiritual death because of inherited sin. To fully understand spiritual rebirth we have to accept the triune nature of humankind—mind, body, and spirit. When we are born, by default, we do not have the Spirit of God—we have the spirit of the world.
At some point we made a conscious choice to accept Jesus as our personal Savior. Simultaneously, we received God’s Holy Spirit, who changed us from being spiritually dead to being spiritually alive toward God. The Holy Spirit, then, began the sanctification process.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Are We to Continue to Sin?
(Romans 6:1-4)

WHAT SHALL we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

In Romans 4–5, Paul placed God’s grace at the center of his writing. Keeping in mind that Christianity had only been in existence less than thirty years and was considered by the Roman authorities a splinter sect of Judaism, there were many misconceptions about basic beliefs. This was especially true of the Gentile Christians who came from backgrounds of serving pagan gods. Paul was concerned that some Christians would see God’s generous provision of grace as a license to sin. With that concern in mind, Paul opened chapter 6 asking, “So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving?” (Romans 6:1, The Message).

We all recognize that Paul was asking a highly exaggerated rhetorical question. He quickly provided the only possible answer to that question: “Certainly not!” (verse 2, NKJV). Paul used verses 1-2 as a transition from his teachings on justification and sanctification. Justification is followed by sanctification. Believers are born again, regenerated into new creatures (see 2 Corinthians 5:17). In a perfect world, we would not have to worry about ever sinning again. Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world. Additionally, we have an internal war going on (see Romans 7:7-25). So in reality, the righteousness of God runs counter to our human nature. We can liken it to how our bodies’ antibodies attack anything deemed foreign, even good medications. Following that same analogy, researchers have to use different techniques to get our bodies to change. Likewise, sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out. Because we live in imperfect bodies in an imperfect world, we will still have relapses in which our sinful nature prevails over the righteousness of God. Yet, over time these relapses get fewer and fewer until they are totally eliminated when we get to heaven. We become more like Christ, discovering God’s unlimited and eternal agape love. In turn, we eagerly seek to share this same agape love with others.

Sanctification is a growth process, with the ultimate outcome being perfection in heaven. Paul provided five guiding principles for the sanctification process for every believer: knowing what justification means (verse 3); knowing that the sinful nature was crucified with Christ (verses 6-7); understanding that we now live with Christ (verses 8-10); considering ourselves dead to sin (verses 11-12); and presenting ourselves to God in His service (verse 13; see also Romans 12:1-2).
What does justification mean? Paul used the meaning of baptism to help his readers understand what it meant to be justified. Like a judicial action, justification has declared us righteous because of Jesus’ redemptive sacrifice. In turn, when we are baptized we are “buried” in the water (verse 4). The act of having our bodies completely immersed in the water identifies us with Jesus’ being buried in a tomb. When we are raised out of the water, it is symbolic of Jesus’ being raised from the dead.

B. Sin No Longer Reigns
(Romans 6:12-14)

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Based upon his teaching in verses 1-11, Paul at this point prepared to share several conclusions. First, since believers are declared righteous by God through faith in Christ and the Holy Spirit has begun the sanctification process, sin should not reign in our lives. It should not be our master, causing us to continue being slaves to our sins and to obey the passions of our flesh. Sure, we will still sin, but sin should not dominate our thinking and our doing. Our whole attitude toward living should reflect a heavenly up-look instead of an earthly outlook.

Second, we have to be careful about our physical senses. We cannot place ourselves in positions where our physical senses unnecessarily put us in jeopardy of yielding to temptation. We too often discount people recovering from substance abuse when they relapse into their previous behaviors. They are told not to place themselves in situations where they are in the same vicinity of their abuse substances. If they do, their eyes will see it and noses smell it and this will possibly lead them to crave the “high” from using it.

Third, we have to recognize that we are not strong enough to overcome all temptations. The only cure we have is to present ourselves totally to God. His indwelling Holy Spirit, in turn, will take over. He will strengthen us against temptations. Even better, He will guide us away from or around temptations, if we heed His internal call. In actuality, the Holy Spirit is able to allow us to live perfect lives. The problem is our inherited sinful nature. It is not possible for us to totally obey the Holy Spirit. Why? Because of our humanity we sometimes confuse the urges in us, not realizing that it is the urging of our sinful natures or Satan, and not the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, we have a special relationship with God. While many in the world are physically alive but spiritually dead, believers are both physically and spiritually alive. We will enjoy the blessings of life in Christ on Earth, and then share in the eternity of praise to God in heaven. Only a people of faith can truly appreciate what it means to have the opportunity for life in Christ.

Fifth, we have to allow God to use our physical senses as instruments for good. Instead of allowing Satan to use our senses to lead us into temptation, we need to do the opposite and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us into doing good deeds. Keep in mind that good deeds do not earn us a place in heaven. Rather, it is just a natural outcome of a life lived with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, for those who would consider
obedience to the Law as necessary for salvation, Paul ended his summary in verse 14 by reminding his readers that believers were no longer under the Law. We recognize that the Law cannot save from sin but only allows followers to recognize their sins. In effect, strictly following the Law would keep people in sin. Only by living under grace, which allows us to be justified, can we be saved.

C. The Wages of Sin
   (Romans 6:20-23)

For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Before Paul concluded his first section on sanctification, he provided a final contrast of lives of unrighteousness and righteousness. To fully appreciate this contrast, we have to recognize our dual nature as believers. Every Christian is both a saint and a sinner. Because our sinful nature remains when we are declared righteous by God, we are still sinners. Simultaneously, because we are declared righteous by God, we are saints. At face value, this might seem like a contradiction. To fully understand how we are both saints and sinners, we have to consider the sanctification process toward glorification. We can think of it like this: we become less like our sinful human nature and more like God and His holy nature. As we will see in the final lesson of this quarter, we will one day be transformed (see Romans 12:1-2).

Before we accepted Christ as our personal Savior, we were slaves of sin. Righteousness was not part of who we were. We were in open rebellion, at war with God. We sought to satisfy the desires of our flesh. Although it seemed as if we were in control of our lives, sin was our slave master, controlling us in every way. We did not recognize that the fruit of our labor under sin was a deadly harvest. Paul called on his readers to reflect on the benefits of living as slaves to sin. In reality, there really were no benefits at all. The cravings of the flesh could never be fully satisfied. Our lives were never truly settled. We did not even recognize that the final reward of our labor was death.

In contrast, our new lives bring life. In Christ, we have been set free from sin. We find satisfaction in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. We receive the singular fruit of the Spirit that yields the nine characteristics listed in Galatians 5:22-23. These characteristics allow us to find satisfaction in the Spirit instead of the passions of the flesh. The more our lives bear the fruit of the Spirit, the further we progress in the sanctification process. We have the greatest outcome from sanctification—eternal life! So we finally arrive at one of the most famous verses in the Bible as well as Paul’s summary of chapter 6: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (verse 23, NKJV). Whether people accept it or not, they are the slaves of one of two masters: sin (Satan) or God. They can remain on the path to hell or death or accept the free gift of eternal life through God’s grace.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

In human nature, it is typically easier to do something than not to do something. In the sanctification process, it is more difficult
to stop sinning and totally separate from our evil natures than it is to start loving God and consecrate our lives to Him. In essence, to stop doing something is negative and to start doing something is positive. Therein lies one of the biggest distinctions between Judaism and Christianity. Judaism placed great emphasis on what not to do through its diversity of laws (negative), while Christianity called believers to practice agape love (positive).

So our goal in this world is not perfection in the sense of living sinless lives. Rather, it is reaching spiritual maturity in which sin is not our predominate nature. What should be the difference in our lifestyles after being justified? We should not exhibit continual sinful behavior. Now this does not mean that we will never act in sinful ways. Instead, sin becomes the exception to our ways instead of the rule. So in this life every believer strives for spiritual maturity. In the next life in eternity, we have moral perfection.

Sin’s dominion over our lives died, ending the moment when we accepted Christ. Upon acceptance, we inherited once and for all His victory over sin and death on the Cross and from the grave. So Paul was telling the Roman believers that it did not make good sense to live again in something that was already dead. The same is true when we are saved. It would be foolhardy for us to ask sin to stay in our lives once we have accepted the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. We do not have to worry about calling the “authorities” to remove sin from our spiritual premises. The Holy Spirit takes care of that for us.

PRAYER
Gracious God, we shout Your praises for bringing us from death to life. We thank You for Your Holy Spirit, who renews us daily. We lift up Your Son Jesus in our daily living to draw more people to You. Finally, we ask You to help us daily to become more like You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER
Grace (Greek: charis [khah-ris])—preeminently used to refer to the Lord’s favor—freely extended to give Himself away to people (because He is “always leaning toward them”).

Sin (Greek: hamartia)—refers to loss (forfeiture) because of not hitting the target; sin (missing the mark).

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(July 25-31, 2016)

Death Becomes Life
MONDAY, July 25: “Kept in Christ” (John 17:1-6, 12-15)
TUESDAY, July 26: “Raised in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:12-19)
WEDNESDAY, July 27: “Alive in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:51-57)
THURSDAY, July 28: “Ambassadors in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)
FRIDAY, July 29: “In Christ for Others” (Philippians 1:20-26)
SATURDAY, July 30: “Pressing On in Christ” (Philippians 3:7-14)
SUNDAY, July 31: “Death Becomes Life” (Romans 6:1-4, 12-14, 20-23)
UNIT III: Life on God’s Terms  CHILDREN’S UNIT: New Creations in Christ  SUMMER QUARTER

LESSON 10  August 7, 2016

SAFE IN GOD’S LOVE

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: We Can Conquer!

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 John 4:7-16
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 8:28-39

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:28-39
KEY VERSE: Romans 8:31

Romans 8:28-39—KJV
28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.
29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.
31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?
32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?
33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.
34 Who is he that condemneth? Christ Jesus, who died—ynt que rere, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.
35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.
37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.
38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,
39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:28-39—NIV
28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.
31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?
32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?
33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.
34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.
35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?
36 As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”
37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,
39 Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People are constantly tossed about by the trials and tribulations of life. Where can they find safe haven? Paul told the Romans that through the love of God in Christ Jesus they would find a Savior from whose love they could never be separated and by whom they would be loved, protected, glorified, and delivered from all trials and tribulations.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Separated from a Loved One
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. God’s Purpose
      (Romans 8:28-30)
   B. God Is for Us
      (Romans 8:31-35)
   C. Nothing Can Separate Us from God’s Love
      (Romans 8:36-39)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Review the principal points of Paul’s teaching on Jesus from whose love they can never be separated by any turmoil or hardship;
2. Believe that Christ Jesus was God’s plan for humankind from before the beginning of creation; and,
3. Communicate the joy and love of Christ with others.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: We Can Conquer!
Youth Topic: Safe Indeed
Adult Key Verse: Romans 8:31
Youth Key Verse: Romans 8:39
Print Passage: Romans 8:28-39
—Because of the intercession of the Spirit, people are assured that everything that happens to them or might happen to them is of the divine purpose of God.
—Paul pointed out that people must view their present existence in relation to God’s activity throughout eternity.
—What God purposed in eternity will be carried out in His own time.
—When God’s call reaches Christians through the Gospel, then God’s eternal purpose goes into effect.
—in verses 31-39, Paul summed up his presentation with a series of six questions and his answers to support his theme: God is for us.
—in conclusion, Paul rendered a jubilant song of praise to the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Surrounded by Love
Key Verse: Romans 8:39
Print Passage: Romans 8:28-39
—All believers are called into Christian service.
—Christian servants were predestined to live worthy of the image of Jesus Christ.
—Those who are predestined to conform to Jesus Christ’s image are anointed and made acceptable by God.
—God stands in the gap against any forces threatening to harm those who are anointed to serve.
— Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God, making intercession for God’s elect.
— Because nothing can separate the faithful from God’s love, they will be victorious when confronted by any manner of adversity.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Separated from a Loved One

Tragedy struck the southern Asian nation of Nepal on April 25, 2015, in the form of a massive earthquake. Thousands of people lost their lives and many thousands more were injured. The damage was extensive, with numerous villages, cities, and towns leveled and scores of historic sites destroyed. Yet, the danger was not over after the initial earthquake. There were several major aftershocks that made it unsafe for residents to stay inside buildings.

The question of where to find safety became the singular issue in life. It was as if there was no safe place to go. Life’s problems can create the same feelings of desperation in those who do not know Christ. The troubles of life can be like terrible storms that test the structures of our mental and spiritual habitations. What makes all the difference for the believer is the calm assurance of knowing that no matter what, God is our shelter from life’s stormy blasts.

B. Biblical Background

Paul closed his section on sanctification in chapter 8. The ultimate outcome of the sanctification process is to experience God’s glory in heaven. We live spiritual, not carnal, lives in the Holy Spirit. Unlike justification, which happens all at once, sanctification is a process. There are past, present, and future components. In the past, we began the sanctification process with the receipt of the Holy Spirit upon salvation. We did not have to “tarry” for Him. We received Him immediately upon our acceptance of Jesus as our personal Savior. It was a package deal.

In the present, we progressively live better lives. Though not perfect, we are better today than we were yesterday. God does not use a magic wand to instantly make us perfect. Instead, He uses the precision of a master artist who may take years to perfect a painting though the image of what it is to be appears long before the finished product. Finally, in the future Jesus will present us faultless to His Father in glory. Then our sanctification process will have ended.
II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God’s Purpose

(Romans 8:28-30)

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

Verse 28 is composed of six phrases. First, Paul boldly stated, “And we know….” Paul shared a note of great confidence when writing this verse. He did not use words of possibility. Now this does not mean that we have some magical way to tell the future. Instead, Paul was including every possible thing imaginable, whether good or bad.

Second, in the original Greek, emphasis was placed on the phrase “to those who love God” (NKJV). The message of this verse was for believers only. Paul’s intent was not to give an explanation of adverse life events to all people. Instead, he was offering assurance to believers that everything that happened to them was part of God’s will for their lives. Nothing happens in believers’ lives that God does not intend. And His intent is to use all things to bless, encourage, mature, and perfect our walk with Him.

Third, in actuality we really do not know the specific outcome of “all things” in our lives. Yet, we trust God that in the end “all things” will work out. The Greek word for “all things” used in this verse is the same word used to refer to the whole universe.

Fourth, God “causes all things to work together…” (NASB). The Greek word for “work together” is synergei, from which we get the word synergy. While “energy” may be understood as $1+1=2$, synergy may be defined as $1+1=\text{unlimited possibilities}$. We can think of God carefully weaving “all things” in our lives to become something beautiful and useful.

That gets us to our fifth phrase, “for good.” This phrase is better translated “into good.” God literally weaves all things into a good result. Now “good” is not as we might see it in human terms. Rather, it is good in moral terms. A more accurate way to think of “good” in this sense is to consider how our parents made us take awful-tasting medicine when we were sick. It was for our good, but it surely tasted awful when we were taking it.

Finally, the sixth phrase is “called according to his purpose.” This phrase is a mirror image of “to those who love God.” Sinners heed God’s call to salvation and then the subsequent call to a particular ministry role in the congregation. Every believer’s call is in accordance with God’s overall general purpose for the church and His particular purpose for the individual believer. “That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good” (verse 28, The Message).

What is God’s purpose for us? His purpose was simple (verses 29-30). He knew everything about us even before we were born. Since He foreknew us, He has predestined us to be just like His Son. God has already set the boundaries of our lives. We may stray, but we never get beyond the boundaries of our salvation. We will eventually “be conformed to the likeness of Jesus” (verse 29, NIV). In a sense, Jesus is our
elder brother, the firstborn of many to come. Since God foreknew us and we are predestined to be just like Christ, we are called to believe in Jesus as our personal Savior. Upon our belief, we are then justified, declared righteous by God. Finally, we begin the sanctification process that will result in our being glorified.

B. God Is for Us
(Romans 8:31-35)

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

After reading from Romans 1:8:30, what conclusions could believers make? There was one certainty: God was orchestrating it all. Knowing this fact, Paul answered this question with a series of four rhetorical questions. Although only the first question begins with “If God is for us” (verse 31, NKJV), the next three are understood to also begin with this “conditional, not really conditional” statement. Why is it not really conditional? Since we already know that God is for us, we can replace if with because.

Because God is for us, who can be against us? (See verse 31.) Was Paul really saying that, as believers, we would not have any enemies? No. The apostle was really saying that no enemy would be strong enough to be victorious over God. God’s greatest enemy, Satan, is already defeated. He is the orchestrator of nothing but harm and mayhem for humankind, especially for believers. One of his major tactics is fear. Even Elijah, one of the Old Testament’s greatest prophets, succumbed to fear (see 1 Kings 19:1-3). No matter what our senses lead us to believe, God has given us the calm assurance that we are already victorious. How can we have such assurance? If God was willing to give His Son as a ransom for us, surely He will protect us from our enemies.

Because God is for us, who can bring a charge against those God has chosen? (See verse 33.) Suppose people began to doubt the salvation of believers. Essentially, they would be accusing us of living a lie. But we have God as our defender, and the seal of the Holy Spirit as proof of our salvation. Reflecting on Paul’s times, we could even say that the Judaizers were disputing the salvation of the Gentiles (since they had not been circumcised) and some Jews (those who were not strictly obeying the Law). Paul gave a to-the-point response to such accusations. God has already justified us. We are already declared righteous. Just like in our legal system, we cannot face double jeopardy. Since God has already declared us innocent, that closes the case.

Because God is for us, who can condemn us? (See verse 34.) In other words, who can say that believers should still face God’s wrath along with the rest of unsaved humanity? Yes, God condemns the unrighteous (see Romans 1:18–3:20). Yes, every human being has a sin debt that must be paid. Every human being is born on God’s death row. We were condemned to hell because of Adam’s original sin. We could not pay the debt. Thankfully, though, Jesus died on the Cross to pay our sin debt once and for all. That moved us off death row. But that was not good enough. We were still prisoners of sin. Christ was raised from the dead, bringing us out of prison and into right
standing with God and becoming the firstfruit of those raised from the dead. His resurrection released us to live freely both in this life and the life to come. How so? Whenever we succumb to the temptations of our flesh, He is at the right hand of God interceding for us.

Because God is for us, who will separate us from the love of Christ? (See verse 35.) The fact that Christ died for us is evidence of His love for us. His continued intercession on our behalf is proof of His continuing love for us. Is it possible for anyone or anything to separate us from the love of Christ? Since Christ and agape love are one and the same, can anyone or anything separate us from Christ? Paul provided a comprehensive list of things that could conceivably but never successfully separate us: trials or tribulations, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword.

C. Nothing Can Separate Us from God’s Love (Romans 8:36-39)

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Before Paul answered the question of what or who can separate us from the love of God, he quoted Psalm 44:22. Trouble, persecution, and the like have always plagued God’s people. It was true in the Old Testament. It was still true in the first-century church. It is even still true today. God’s people will always face opposition and persecution. Yet, Paul did not describe us as being very able to defend ourselves. The essence of his quote from Psalm 44:22 is that we are God’s sheep. We are pictured as meek sheep awaiting slaughter by predators. Sheep are defenseless against predators—easy pickings. Sheep are not equipped to be fighters. They are simple grazers. They are totally reliant on their shepherd for protection.

Just like the sheep without protection, believers would be easily defeated. The good news is that God is our protector. Returning to verse 31, God is for us. So we are more than conquerors (verse 37). In all the things Paul described in verse 35, we are super-conquerors. That is to say, God has already given us the victory. As sheep, we were incapable of winning. Yet, we are not winning by a photo finish, but by a lopsided margin. How are we able to win when we are defenseless? The truth of the matter is that we are not even in the game—we are on the bench. God is playing the game for us. But just like a championship team, everybody on the roster, even those who did not play in the game, receives a champion’s reward. In our case, it is eternal life. God does all this for us for one simple reason: He loves us!

Just in case he missed something, Paul added everything else that God created. None of that can separate us, either. After his review, he could find nothing.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

This lesson takes me back to my childhood in Coldwater, Mississippi. I was amazed at how the deacons and mothers would “get happy” while singing hymns. I could better understand the choir. They had the piano player, but a hymn often lacked a “clappable” beat. One song that would really move the whole congregation was “Blessed Assurance.”
When I really took time to follow the words, I was moved, too. What powerful words we read:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Paul’s words in Romans 8:31-39 resonate in these lyrics. We have that blessed assurance amid life’s travails because we have accepted Jesus. We then get a taste of the glory to come with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. We did not do anything to earn it, but we are saved from our sins.

We have to look at our sin debt realistically. If we owed an unbelievably large amount of money, far beyond our means to pay to a debt collector, we would be severely stressed. Regardless of how strong our faith is, such a debt load would weigh on us. Now suppose someone we did not know came along and paid the debt in full. To make things even better, that person does not ask us for repayment. All they ask us to do is to accept a gift. You know we would be extremely happy, even shouting for joy. We would tell others about this stranger who paid our debt.

Well, we know this is what Jesus did for us. He paid a debt we could not pay. We then accepted the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is why the last verse of “Blessed Assurance” summarizes how we ought to feel in God’s love:

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Savior am happy and blest;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

PRAYER
Gracious God, we are thankful that You are with us in our trials and tribulations. You have brought us through so many adversities in our lives that we cannot recount them all. Instead, we just give You praise for Your goodness and mercy. Your love for us is boundless. We continue to bask in the glow of Your blessings. We offer this prayer of thanksgiving. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER
Separate (Greek: chorizo [kho ree zoh])—properly, to separate, divide (put asunder), i.e., depart, vacate; create space (which can be very undesirable or unjustified).

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(August 1-7, 2016)

Safe in God’s Love
MONDAY, August 1: “Safe in Evil Times” (Psalm 12)
TUESDAY, August 2: “God’s Safety and Care” (Ezekiel 39:25-29)
WEDNESDAY, August 3: “Living Safely” (Proverbs 28:18-20, 26-27)
THURSDAY, August 4: “Living Steadfastly” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-5)
FRIDAY, August 5: “God Is Truth” (1 John 5:13, 18-21)
SATURDAY, August 6: “God Is Love” (1 John 4:7-16)
SUNDAY, August 7: “Safe in God’s Love” (Romans 8:28-39)
UNIT III: Life on God’s Terms  
CHILDREN’S UNIT: New Creations in Christ  
SUMMER QUARTER

LESSON 11  
August 14, 2016

LIVING UNDER GOD’S MERCY

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: To Know Self

DEVOTIONAL READING: James 5:7-12  
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 9:6-18

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 9:6-29  
KEY VERSE: Romans 9:18

Romans 9:6-18—KJV
6 Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. 9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. 10 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; 11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) 12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. 14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. 17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Romans 9:6-18—NIV
6 It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring. 9 For this was how the promise was stated: “At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son.” 10 Not only that, but Rebekah’s children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. 11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” 14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” 18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People’s need for healthy feelings of self-worth and self-esteem creates a longing in them to know who they are and where they came from. Besides ancestry, what other connections with the past and people determine who they are? Paul said that all those who trust in God and what Jesus Christ has done for them, by God’s mercy, will become God’s covenant people and new creatures in Jesus Christ.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. God Has Not Made a Mistake
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. God’s Word Did Not Fail (Romans 9:6-7)
   B. Children of the Promise (Romans 9:8-13)
   C. God Shows Mercy (Romans 9:14-18)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Know the details of Paul’s teaching about who the true descendants and inheritors of God’s promise are;
2. Feel a strong familial connection to the people of God and to believe themselves to be inheritors of the promise intended by God from the time of creation; and,
3. Proclaim God as the author and reason for all the good they do in order that God may be glorified.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: To Know Self
Youth Topic: Have Mercy on Me
Adult Key Verse: Romans 9:18
Youth Key Verse: Romans 9:16
Print Passage: Romans 9:6-18
—The text reflects tension between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility; this tension has been the subject of much scholarly inquiry.
—Romans 9:7 challenges Islam’s view that the promise is mediated through Ishmael rather than Isaac.
—The problem was Jewish unbelief, not that God failed to fulfill the divine promise to Israel.
—God’s promise was not about Israel’s descendants of the flesh, but Israel’s descendants of the spiritual promise.
—Whom God chooses is about God’s sovereignty, not the freedom of human will.
—God is a God of both mercy and compassion.
—Paul quoted from Exodus 9:16 to support his argument that God has a right to choose whom He desires.
—In his discussion of the sovereignty of God and human free will, Paul eliminated the issue of God’s justice.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: A Promise Kept
Key Verse: Romans 9:8
Print Passage: Romans 9:6-18
—The elect of God are chosen not through the flesh but through divine promise and divine purpose.
—Abraham’s children were Abraham’s natural children; however, Isaac began a line of descendants based not on natural order but as ordered by God.
—God chose Jacob before he was born to receive both a natural birthright and a legacy of faith from Isaac.
—God is the one who determines human destiny and calls the elect to respond and act in accordance with God’s purpose.
—God’s family includes all who believe in the authority of Jesus Christ as God’s Son, the Messiah, and their Savior.
—God intercedes in the lives of those who are called for God’s purpose and who choose to live accordingly.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. God Has Not Made a Mistake

God does not make mistakes. Everything happens in our lives just as God has planned. We live each day under God’s mercy. The reality is that our condemnation to death should have been without the possibility of reprieve. With that knowledge, it still does not make dealing with the death of a loved one easier. However, it does open the door to being able to cope with and eventually overcome such a loss. The bottom line is that God never makes mistakes. We just sometimes think that way from our humanly flawed perspective.

B. Biblical Background

Some Bible scholars view Romans 9–11 as a parenthetical section of Paul’s writing to the church in Rome. To them, it was as if he was taking a break from the rest of his teaching. Yet, a careful reading of these chapters reveals a different story. If we consider the overall theme of the book of Romans taken from 1:16, Paul’s focus was on salvation for the Jews and the Gentiles through the teaching of the Gospel message.

Going further, we see Romans 1–8 as Paul’s presentation of salvation basics for Jews and Gentiles, and chapters 12–16 as salvation in action through transformed living. In this context, Romans 9–11 provides an historic examination of God’s plan of salvation for His covenant people Israel. Each chapter in this section deals with a different time period in Israel’s history. Chapter 9 focuses on Israel’s past; chapter 10 deals with their present; and chapter 11 tells about their future. God had a special covenant relationship with Israel. Some believed that this relationship would continue, while others saw the church as the new, true Israel. Both camps affirmed that that special relationship would ultimately lead to their acceptance of Jesus as Messiah at His second coming.

To help his fellow Jews understand God’s plan of salvation for all of humanity, Paul opened chapter 9 focusing on God’s sovereignty to act as He pleases. What is God’s sovereignty? In the simplest terms, according to the Revell Bible Dictionary, it is “God’s absolute right to govern all things as He chooses, without any limitations imposed by circumstances or human choices.” God has the right to decide how He wishes to interact with humankind. In fact, He has already decided in eternity past who will be saved. He
knows who will deliver the Gospel message to the masses, and who among us will accept it.

From a human perspective, this seems grossly unfair. We may feel that human action ought to play a part in God’s decision making. There ought to be opportunities to earn favor with God. Yet, that is the essence of God’s sovereignty. God acts independently of humankind’s actions. If He did not, He would have destroyed the world many times over because of gross sin. Instead, God has continued to act on His divine plan for humankind. He has already set a timetable for the world that only He knows. Living in a democracy, we find the concept of God’s sovereignty hard to grasp. Although we will discuss the perceived unfairness of God in the outlines below, we must accept the fact that our human minds are incapable of fully grasping the sovereignty of God.

Paul made it clear that Israel should not feel left out or overlooked. They had had an opportunity to accept Jesus as Messiah and, for the most part, had rejected Him. Paul revealed the irony of their rejection in verses 1-5. Israel had enjoyed a special position with God.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. God’s Word Did Not Fail

(Romans 9:6-7)

Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

God made a promise to Abraham in Genesis 15. It was an irrevocable promise. There was no expiration date or conditions that would make it void. Yet, for Paul’s fellow Jews, it seemed as if God had broken His promise. His Word was no longer His bond. Although flawed, the Jews had a great argument against God’s actions. They could set their argument in the words recorded in the Law. Before he died, Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 10:15, “The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day” (NKJV). They took God’s Word to mean that He would have an exclusive relationship with them forever. The context of this verse, though, does not support their contention.

In any event, God already knew the hearts of His covenant people: “Therefore understand that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people” (Deuteronomy 9:6, NKJV). He knew that they were very stubborn. They really were not worthy of God’s favor to begin with. They had not earned their way into God’s covenant relationship. Their election was all part of God’s sovereignty. So the Jewish people had no reason to be angry with God. A sovereign God can show mercy to whomever He wants. After all, it has always been God’s desire since Adam’s original sin that all humankind would have an opportunity for reconciliation. Israel should have never thought that God would have an exclusive relationship with them over everyone else forever. God’s desire for inclusion is further evidenced by the genealogy of Jesus. He had at least three non-Jews in His mother’s bloodline: Rahab (see Matthew 1:5), Ruth (see
Matthew 1:5), and Bathsheba (see Matthew 1:6). The outer court of the Temple was even open for the Gentiles.

So, did the inclusion of these Gentile women support Paul’s assertion in verse 6 that not everyone who descended from Israel was an Israelite? No. Paul was referring to Israel as a nation and not as a spiritual instrument in God’s hand. The name of Israel means “God preserves” or “God gives victory.” Preserves gives the sense of a part being taken out of a greater whole. Israel was God’s chosen people to bring salvation to the world and not just one select nation. So it would make sense that at some point God would offer the opportunity for salvation to the Gentiles. Therefore, God could not simply be referring to the blood descendants of Israel. Paul seemed to latch onto the notion in verse 7. His point was simple: not everyone physically descended from Abraham were Israelites. Keeping in mind that Abraham had multiple sons—Ishmael, Isaac, and the sons of Keturah (see Genesis 25:1-4)—all could have asserted, in human terms, their rights as descendants of Abraham.

B. Children of the Promise
(Romans 9:8-13)

That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

In verse 8, Paul quickly set forth God’s design for the real descendants of Abraham. God’s focus was not on Abraham’s natural or biological children but on the one born by supernatural means. Why was this important? If God’s promise had been fulfilled through Ishmael, it would have been because of human action. Abraham and Sarah would have been responsible for his birth through Sarah’s handmaiden, Hagar. As we have studied this quarter thus far, God’s grace is central to salvation. Paul shared this principle with the church in Ephesus: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9, ESV). So as to not include the works of human beings, God sent His angel to tell Abraham that Sarah would have a son at the time God had set forth (see Genesis 18:10, 14). Isaac’s birth was not the result of works but God’s grace—His unmerited favor toward Abraham.

Still, for some of Paul’s readers the story of Abraham’s descendants might not be the best example. They may have used the fact that Ishmael was born to Sarah’s handmaiden as an excuse to disqualify him from being the eldest son. In that line of thinking, that would have made Isaac the oldest compared to Abraham’s sons with Keturah. So as not to leave any doubt, Paul supported his notion of the “children of the promise” with the example of Jacob and Esau. To overcome such objections, Paul used the example of Isaac’s wife, Rebekah. She had twin sons. In human terms and based on Near Eastern tradition, the elder son should have had the place of prominence and been the designated heir to his father’s estate. Instead, God chose the younger son, Jacob.
If God had chosen Esau, then God’s sovereignty would have been questioned. God’s election (verse 11)—His sovereign choice—of Jacob was not because of Jacob’s order of birth or his deeds. If it were, then the choices of human beings would influence God’s decisions. It could then be said that people had earned God’s favor. In actuality, neither the early lives of Jacob nor Esau were befitting that of a patriarch of the children of the promise. It was not by works! It was God’s sovereignty at work deciding how His plan of salvation to all would unfold. The Old Testament prophet Malachi proclaimed that God favored Jacob over Esau (see Malachi 1:2-3).

C. God Shows Mercy

(Romans 9:14-18)

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

Based upon verses 1-13, Paul asked and answered another rhetorical question: “Now do we conclude that God is monstrously unfair? Never!” (verse 14, Phillips). Why would Paul even ask this question? Well, in human terms, God’s actions were unfair. He had favored Isaac over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau. Further, God’s choice had been made before they were even born. They had not had an opportunity to live lives to determine if they were relatively good or bad. Although human thinking is logical, it is often wrong when it comes to spiritual matters. As a spiritual matter, God’s grace is a gift. It is God’s choice as to whom He shows favor. Likewise, since mercy is given as a consequence of God’s grace, it is also God’s choice as to whom He shows mercy. In other words, it is God’s choice as the giver as to whom He shows mercy, not to the Jews or Gentiles as the receivers. Additionally, no one can do enough good works to earn grace or mercy.

To make his point about God’s giving of grace and mercy, Paul contrasted the lives of Moses and Pharaoh. We often overlook the fact that both of these men grew up in the same household. Although Moses was a Jew, he grew up under the pagan influences of the Egyptian culture. He was groomed to be a royal prince. By human terms, he was on the direct path to holding a powerful position in Egypt. Then God intervened. Moses was accused of murder and escaped into the wilderness where he lived for forty years, while the soon-to-be Pharaoh continued on his royal path. Although both had a similar start in life and would be used by God, only one of them would receive God’s mercy and compassion (verse 15). Moses would victoriously lead Israel out of Egypt. Pharaoh would be defeated at the Red Sea. These were God’s sovereign choices for these two men. God had predestined them for their positions.

At the time of Paul’s writing, God’s mercy was nothing new. Since his writing in Romans 9–11 was focused on Israel’s special position in God’s plan of salvation for humankind, Paul repeatedly made references to Old Testament teaching. In verse 18, Paul focused on God’s covenant love and the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart. “Mercy” in verse 18 is the translation of
the Greek word *eleos*, which is the equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew word *hesed*. *Hesed* is often called “God’s covenant love.” In the Old Testament, God’s faithfulness to and mercy toward Israel were tied to His covenant with Abraham. God’s faithfulness and mercy continued into the New Testament and expanded to include the Gentiles. We should note that this expansion was not a rejection of Israel. Rather, it was inclusion of all those who, like Abraham, are counted righteous because of their faith in God. It was God’s initial and ultimate intention.

What did Paul mean when he used the word translated “harden” in verse 18? He used the Greek word *skleruno*, from which we derive the word *sclerosis*. In that sense, we may be familiar with such diseases as multiple sclerosis and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS, or Lou Gehrig’s Disease). These diseases are a hardening of key parts of the nervous system. Given his reference to Pharaoh in verse 17, Paul was focused on the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart that led to the defeat of Pharaoh’s mighty army. We know that “heart” in this sense referred to Pharaoh’s mind and will. Pharaoh was predestined by God to be used to demonstrate God’s mighty power. Although he had his own free will, Pharaoh, caught up in the expectations of his position, went against what would have been a more common-sense approach—allowing Israel to go without interfering. The same is true today. Although people have free will to accept Christ as their personal Savior, they are ensnared by fleshly desires that prevent them from making the common-sense decision.

In the end, although predestined by God, Moses and Pharaoh made their own choices. The results were in keeping with God’s plan of redemption for humankind. Anticipating that some of his readers would object to God’s sovereignty seen in predestination, Paul provided further justification in verses 19-33. Paul explained how predestination shows God’s mercy (verses 19-22) and fairness (verses 23-33) to humankind (verses 19-22). God’s and humankind’s time horizons are totally different. Also, human beings can only view a snapshot in time. So from a review of a short period of history, it might seem that God is playing favorites and is somehow unfair. However, from the perspective of eternity, God is always merciful and loving.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Every church is (or should be) comprised of multiple generations and constantly renewed with an influx of new believers beginning or continuing their discipleship walk. Unfortunately, sometimes those who are already a part of the congregation see new congregants as outsiders. They are met with suspicion, but not because they have done something wrong. Rather, it is sometimes out of fear that they will either displace someone who has occupied a particular position or performed a particular task. In other instances, it is because their presence may open an opportunity for the congregation to move outside its comfort zone.

In a sense, this was one of the problems Paul faced when dealing with his fellow Jews. They could not grasp that God had sent His Son, Jesus, to fulfill the Law and that He was opening the door for non-Jews to have a personal relationship with Him.
Today, too many churches are filled with nominal but not active Christians. What is the difference? Nominal Christians wear the name of “Christian” on Sunday or when convenient, but fail to be active Christians reflecting God’s love and walking in truth throughout life. The real church is comprised of active Christians. These sincere believers embrace new congregants, knowing that without growth their local fellowship will die.

In contrast, the nominal Christians are not very accepting of change. Certainly not all change is good. Yet, the one constant in life is change. Peter had to accept change in the early church. Initially, the church was only comprised of Jews. Then God opened the door for Gentiles. This was a radical change for the early church, but it always was the heart of God. And God’s plan of salvation does not promote exclusivity to a certain set of people.

No, it is open to everyone who believes in Jesus. That might prove problematic for a nominal Christian, but for an active Christian it is nothing more than putting practice in action. After all, a team that always practices but never plays will never win.

PRAYER
Merciful God, we come to You with open hearts. We know You know all about us. You know the design for our lives. We humbly ask You today to help us always to be active Christians, accepting of everyone You send to be a part of our local assembly. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

WORD POWER
Election (Greek: próthesis [from pró, “before,” and tithēmi, “purposefully set forth”])—literally, a setting forth in advance for a specific purpose.

Mercy (Greek: elecéó [el-eh-eh’-o])—granting even to the unworthy favor, benefits, opportunities, and particularly salvation by Christ.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS
(August 8-14, 2016)

Living under God’s Mercy
MONDAY, August 8: “Reproach and Mercy” (Deuteronomy 3:22-29)
TUESDAY, August 9: “Sovereign Mercy” (2 Samuel 7:20b-29)
WEDNESDAY, August 10: “Awesome Mercy” (Psalm 68:20, 24-26, 32-35)
THURSDAY, August 11: “Hopeful Mercy” (1 Peter 1:3-9)
FRIDAY, August 12: “Wise Mercy” (James 3:13-18)
SATURDAY, August 13: “Patient Mercy” (James 5:7-12)
SUNDAY, August 14: “Living under God’s Mercy” (Romans 9:6-18)
LESSON 12
August 21, 2016

GOD PRUNES AND GRAFTS

Adult/Young Adult Topic: Finding Common Ground

Devotional Reading: John 15:1-8
Print Passage: Romans 11:11-24

Background Scripture: Romans 11:11-36
Key Verse: Romans 11:22

Romans 11:11-24—KJV
11 I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.
12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?
13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.
14 If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. 
15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?
16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.
17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;
18 Do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.
19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be graffed in.
20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:
21 For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.
22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.
23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief,
shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again.
24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive tree?

24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Common Ground
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. Israel’s Stumble, the Gentiles’ Gain
      (Romans 11:11-12)
   B. Making the Jews Jealous
      (Romans 11:13-16)
   C. Grafted into the Olive Tree of God’s Chosen People
      (Romans 11:17-24)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Know what Paul said about Jews who have not become Christ’s followers and the Gentiles who have become believers;
2. Affirm that God has not rejected the Jews and that Gentile believers have not superseded the Jews, but that believing in Jesus is the fulfillment of creation; and,
3. Develop some ecumenical ministry or possibly a ministry with Jewish or Muslim communities of faith.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Finding Common Ground
Youth Topic: Pruning and Grafting for Me!
Adult Key Verse: Romans 11:22
Youth Key Verse: Romans 11:19
Print Passage: Romans 11:11-24
—Paul used metaphors of yeast with bread and the pruning and grafting of branches to substantiate his reasoning for how salvation was opened to the Gentiles.
—Paul also referred to Abraham and his descendants to illustrate that some were still in the chosen family, but some had been broken off from the family tree.
—The rejection of or disbelief in Jesus Christ by the Jews caused God to reject the Jews temporarily.
—Paul’s conviction was that Jews would become so envious of the Gentiles that they would become convicted and believe or accept Jesus Christ in faith.
—Paul used an analogy of pruning and grafting of the olive tree to better explain the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.
the Christian church (Gentiles): the Jews were natural branches, while Gentiles were the branches from a wild olive shoot that were grafted, and God’s grace grafted them together. —There was hope that the unbelieving Jews could be grafted back.

—Paul believed that salvation was offered to the Gentiles when the Jews were slow in accepting Jesus as the means through which full reconciliation with God could be realized.

—Paul said that his salvation offer to the Gentiles was an attempt to make the Jews rethink and reevaluate their relationship with God.

—God eliminates unbelievers from the opportunity to gain eternal life in God’s kingdom.

—All who believe, Jews and Gentiles, are holy because their God is holy.

—Faith is not a passport for arrogant boasting, but is rooted in humility, obedience, and submission to God.

—Becoming new creations in Christ Jesus has many benefits, including an unbreakable bond with God.

I. INTRODUCTION
A. Common Ground

In the spring of 2015, massive protests and riots occurred in Baltimore, Maryland, in response to the death of an African-American man who was severely injured while in a police transport vehicle. Initially, hundreds of people rallied, mostly peacefully. But on the day of the young man’s funeral, the riots broke out. Certainly, the perpetrators of the rioting were intent on destruction and mayhem. The irony is that they ended up destroying their own neighborhoods and causing their fellow residents to lose their jobs and businesses.

What lies at the root of the city’s unrest? There are a number of issues. Some fault police tactics. Some cite gang involvement. Others focus on the general depressed state of socioeconomic opportunities in many central city neighborhoods. Debate about the root causes could go on for days. In the end, debate without an action plan only generates more debate. At some point, all sides have to find common ground. The truth is that all sides probably have contributed to the problem in some way, and all have the ability to contribute to a solution. The only hurdle is that all involved must willingly seek, secure, and work from that “common ground.”

For Paul, there was a degree of unrest among Jewish and Gentile Christians and non-Christian Jews. The unbelieving Jews discounted Christianity and openly persecuted Christians. The Jewish Christians were outnumbered. Some even called for the Gentile Christians to adopt Judaism. Finally, some of the Gentile Christians were boastful of their newfound religion. Collectively, there was unrest all around. Paul wrote his letter to the
church in Rome, in part to help the Christian believers—Jews and Gentiles—find common ground in the author of their faith, Jesus. In the end, then and now, only Jesus can help the world truly find common ground.

B. Biblical Background

While Romans 9 focused on Israel’s past, Romans 10 was written from the first-century perspective. Israel was a shell of itself both secularly and religiously. The people of Israel were under Roman domination. They no longer had self-rule. In fact, the Jewish religious leaders had to seek the permission of the Roman authorities to crucify Jesus. Religiously, Israel was heavy on external compliance to the Law but short on heartfelt obedience. The religious leaders had designed myriad rules and regulations to “clarify” aspects of the Law. Paul lamented that his fellow Jews had zeal for God, but lacked a real understanding of God’s overall plan of salvation.

Yet, the message of salvation was not complicated. It was not limited to whether a person was a Jew or Gentile. It was available to everyone. The only requirement was belief in Jesus Christ. The essence of Romans 10 spoke to the theme of the book of Romans (see Romans 1:16) and to the state of the non-Christian Jews. Because Jesus was not the type of king they expected, they rejected Him as Messiah. They sought national liberation, restoring the glory seen in the time of King David. Instead, Jesus ushered in the advent of a spiritual kingdom rooted in heaven. For some Gentiles and Jews, it was a blessed time. They happily accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. However, things did not look good for the rest of the unbelieving world, especially the Jews. It looked as if they had totally rejected God’s plan of salvation through His Son.

Still, Paul looked forward to a bright future for the Jews (discussed in chapter 11). Though not all Jews would accept Jesus as Messiah, Paul foretold of a remnant that would. God has always had a Jewish remnant that would truly follow Him. Paul cited the time when Elijah thought he was the only prophet who remained faithful to God. God let Elijah know that there were some seven thousand remaining who had not committed idolatry (see 1 Kings 19:18). There was even a remnant in Paul’s day who accepted Jesus. Though nowhere near the size of those who rejected Him, it was further evidence that God had, has, and will have a portion of the Jews to fully accept His will.

This Jewish remnant was at the heart of Paul’s response to his rhetorical question opening in chapter 11. Had God rejected His covenant people? Had their disbelief and even persecution of those who accepted the Messiah disqualified them from their covenant position? Would God break His promise to Abraham? Paul quickly responded emphatically that God had not.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. Israel’s Stumble, the Gentiles’ Gain

(Romans 11:11-12)

I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?
Again, Paul used a rhetorical question to begin this section. This time it was not whether God had completely rejected Israel. Rather, it was whether Israel had disqualified itself because of its past sins. Had Israel disobeyed (“stumbled”) so much that it was impossible for them to recover? Again, Paul responded with a positive affirmation of God’s redemptive power. No, Israel had not disqualified themselves. In fact, Israel had stumbled in the wilderness. God used the forty-year delay before entering the Promised Land to discipline His covenant people. There was a remnant that finally entered the Promised Land, with Joshua and Caleb.

Likewise, at Jesus’ first coming the religious leaders were like the first set of spies sent to scout the Promised Land. They were generally skeptical that Jesus was the Messiah. Like their ancestors of the Old Testament, they only had a worldly perspective. They did not focus on the possibility that Jesus was a spiritual Messiah. Instead, they were laser-focused on a worldly deliverer who would end the Roman domination. Truly, their focus was on themselves and not God or the people of Israel they were leading. Only a few like Nicodemus and others made up a remnant willing to believe. Though obviously lacking total understanding, these courageous Jews were moved to accept Jesus because of His teaching and miracles. In comparison, just as the ten spies and the Israel of the Old Testament had to be disciplined for forty years, most of the religious leaders and Israel of the New Testament would be disciplined. Less than twenty years in the future, the Roman emperor Nero would destroy the Temple, and the Jews would be purged from the land. They would not return until almost 1900 years later.

Yet, the Jews’ rejection of Jesus and the accompanying period of discipline had a two-fold benefit. First, it allowed the Gentiles an opportunity for salvation and to enjoy God’s favor. Although there were only Jewish believers when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost, there was going to be a limited opportunity for worldwide growth, since most Jews held fast to the Law and rejected Jesus. So God used Peter’s teaching to convert Cornelius (see Acts 10), opening the door to the Gentiles. None of this outreach would have been possible that soon had the Jews as a whole accepted Jesus.

Second, the Jews’ rejection of Jesus followed by the Gentiles’ acceptance made the Jews jealous. Evidence of the impact of the conversion of the Gentiles was the near split of the early church over their inclusion (see Acts 15). Paul continued to encounter the same jealousy on his different missionary journeys. Paul still sought dialogue with his fellow Jews in the local synagogues when he travelled across the known world. Ultimately, he had more success with the Gentiles, but he never gave up on his people. Paul still had hope for Israel’s future acceptance of Jesus. In verse 12, he recognized that Israel’s rejection of Jesus had brought the “riches” of salvation and God’s favor to the Gentile world. So, how much would the world be better off when Israel accepted Jesus? Paul was foreshadowing Jesus’ second coming. At that time the true Israel will finally accept Jesus as Messiah.

B. Making the Jews Jealous
(Romans 11:13-16)

For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I
may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

In verse 13, Paul was not bragging about his ministry to the Gentiles. Yes, he was God’s appointed messenger to the Gentiles. Yes, he took much pride in his work. Yes, his work was very rewarding. Yet, he could not escape his desire to see his fellow Jews accept Jesus as the Messiah. Although Romans 11 looked to Israel’s future relationship with God, Paul went back to the days of Moses as he referenced Deuteronomy 32:21 in verse 14, which he had already quoted in Romans 10:19. In the book of Deuteronomy, these words were part of Moses’ song near the close of the book and his ministry. God had already shown him that Israel would be disobedient. In turn, God would bless other people to make Israel envious enough to turn from their wayward ways. This, in fact, happened repeatedly throughout Israel’s history. The same thing was happening during the time of Paul’s writing, this time with the Gentile Christians. Paul’s words in verse 14 expressed his hope that Israel’s jealousy would cause some to accept Christ as Messiah. He was realistic enough to realize that not all would accept Christ, just as it was with all Gentiles.

Returning to his analogies of Israel’s rejection and the Gentiles’ acceptance, Paul focused on reconciliation and eternal life in verse 15. The world had an opportunity to be reconciled with God because of Israel’s rejection of Jesus. So their acceptance be would an even more momentous outcome, “life from the dead?” (verse 15, NKJV). Verse 15’s ending question has led to multiple interpretations: “What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (NIV). In particular, the phrase “life from the dead” has led to at least three possible meanings. First, some Bible scholars see it as a reference to the general resurrection of the dead at the time of Jesus’ second coming (Romans 8:21). A second school of thought views it as a metaphor of what it will be like when the Jews accept Jesus as the Messiah and are reconciled to God. Finally, the third interpretation combines the previous two meanings. Israel’s acceptance of Jesus as Messiah at His second coming will be like the dead coming back to life.

In verse 16, Paul again alluded to the Pentateuch, this time Numbers 15:17-21—where God commanded the first-fruits offering of the harvest. In the new covenant context, Paul applied it to the Jewish people and their relationship with God.

So Paul concluded that the faith of the patriarchs (root) made Israel holy before God. Now we should not confuse holy here to mean the same as being sanctified as Paul discussed in Romans 6–8, a new covenant context. Rather, he was referring to Israel’s special relationship with God. Regardless of whether they had accepted Christ as Messiah at the time of Paul’s writing even up to that point, Israel still commanded special attention from God (see Revelation 21:9-27).

C. Grafted into the Olive Tree of God’s Chosen People
(Romans 11:17-24)

And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt
say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be
grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off,
and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:
For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest
he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness
and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but
toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness:
otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they
abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is
able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of
the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed
contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more
shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into
their own olive tree?

Paul concluded this section of chapter 11 by comparing the relationship between
Gentiles and the Jews to that of a branch being grafted into a tree. Paul chose not just any
tree, but the olive tree. Why? It was probably because olive trees were plentiful across the
region. Also, although it developed slowly, at maturity it could produce much fruit for hun-
dreds of years. Grafting was a common practice during Paul’s time. However, the usual practice
was to graft weak fruit-bearing branches into the sturdy trunk of a wild olive tree. The sturdy
trunk could not produce fruit. In this way, the weakened branch would not only continue to
produce fruit in the short term, but it would also grow stronger and produce even more fruit
in the years to come.

Paul, however, flipped this practice on its
head. He spoke of a wild branch (sturdy but
not fruit-producing) being grafted into the
stock of an olive tree. This really made no sense
because the wild branch would not be produc-
ing fruit. It was useless. In this analogy, the tree
was Israel and the branch was the Gentiles. So,
was Paul calling the Gentiles useless? No.
He was showing how God’s plan of salvation
worked. It was always God’s plan to include all
humankind. Although Israel had viewed Gen-
tiles as useless when it came to God, God saw
Gentiles as valuable, the same as the Israelites.

Yet, Paul warned the Gentiles not to get
arrogant about their current position of favor.
After all, their faith was rooted in the faith of
the Old Testament patriarchs. They were be-
ing nourished from these roots. Literally, God
had broken off some branches and allowed the
Gentiles to be grafted in. These branches were
the Jews who were broken off because of their
unbelief. They rejected Jesus as the Messiah.
The Gentiles’ newfound position was not an
opportunity for great pride. Instead, it was an
opportunity for healthy fear and reverence for
God. Why? If God had not spared the “natural
branches” (Israel) from pruning, surely He
would do the same to the Gentiles if they were
disobedient.

God is balanced—both kind and stern.
Yes, He is a God of grace, but He also is a
God of judgment. Technically, God’s judg-
ment results in punishment or discipline. It is
punishment for non-followers and discipline
for followers. Punishment is rooted in God’s
wrath, while discipline is rooted in His love.
So Israel was to decide if she was being dis-
ciplined or punished, for Paul reminded his
Gentile readers that if the Israelites stopped
their unbelief, though broken off, they would
be grafted back in.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Even today we can learn a lot from the
characteristics of the olive trees of Paul’s day.
These characteristics made the olive trees
quite resilient and very valuable. First, they
were durable. The region around Jerusalem
was rugged and arid. Not just any tree could survive. Second, they could produce fruit for hundreds of years. Generations of families could reap the benefit of the tree’s fruit. Finally, its fruit could be pressed into oil that could be used for multiple purposes, including fuel, cooking, and medicine.

The olive tree’s characteristics are also prevalent in the church. This should not be surprising, since Paul used it as an analogy for God’s plan of salvation. The world has not been the most receptive place for the church. Yet, the church has continued for nearly two thousand years. It has been counted out several times throughout history but has always managed to survive and thrive.

Finally, the church has a number of ministries. Like the fruit of the olive tree, these ministries fill a number of needs in the communities in which the church is located. They offer health and wellness opportunities, job training, Christian counseling, food pantries, clothes closets, small business incubators, and schools. These are just a few of the ministry fruits borne by today’s church.

**PRAYER**

_Righteous God, we are grateful that You thought enough of us to graft us into Your trunk of salvation. We humbly serve others in our ministry to You. We strive daily to reflect Your love as we go about our daily activities. We look forward to the day when Your children Israel join us in praising Your Son as Savior. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen._

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**WORD POWER**

Islam—Arabic word _salama_, which means “surrender” and “peace.”

Oneness in Christ—oneeness with God’s truth, which transcends all barriers to love, justice, and peace.

The Beloved Community—This is a phrase similar to the reign of God or kingdom of God. It identifies the larger fellowship of believers.

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**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

_(August 15-21, 2016)_

**God Prunes and Grafts**

**MONDAY**, August 15: “Restoration after Repentance” (Isaiah 49:8-13)

**TUESDAY**, August 16: “Repent and Return” (Hosea 14:1-7)

**WEDNESDAY**, August 17: “Repent and Repair” (Ezra 9:5-9)

**THURSDAY**, August 18: “Repent and Live” (Zechariah 8:9-17)


**SATURDAY**, August 20: “Repent and Bear Fruit” (John 15:1-8)

**SUNDAY**, August 21: “God Prunes and Grafts” (Romans 11:11-24)
LOVE FULTIFLIS THE LAW

ADULT/YOUNG ADULT TOPIC: Love for Others

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 13:15-20
PRINT PASSAGE: Romans 12:1-2; 13:8-10
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:1-2; 13:8-14
KEY VERSE: Romans 13:8

Romans 12:1-2; 13:8-10—KJV
1 BESEECH you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.
2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.
9 For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Romans 12:1-2; 13:8-10—NIV
THEREFORE, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.
2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.
9 The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

BIBLE FACT
Paul’s teaching on law and grace was the same as Christ’s. Paul appreciated God’s grace and respected His law. Paul emphasized in his writings that we are not to sin so that grace may abound.
UNIFYING LESSON PRINCIPLE
People want to know how to live in a manner that transcends the selfish and corrupt ways of the world. How can they live to fulfill the law of love? Paul urged Jesus’ followers to allow the love of Christ to transform their minds into Christlike minds, so that they would be able to love one another and themselves as Christ had loved and continued to love them.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF THE LESSON
I. Introduction
   A. Getting Love Right
   B. Biblical Background

II. Exposition and Application of the Scripture
   A. An Active Pursuit (Romans 12:1)
   B. A Passive Action (Romans 12:2)
   C. Put Love into Action (Romans 13:8-10)

III. Concluding Reflection

LESSON OBJECTIVES
Upon the completion of the lesson, the students will be able to do the following:
1. Recall Paul’s exhortation to be transformed in order to discern the will of God and to fulfill God’s law by loving ourselves and others;
2. Accept God’s will to love one another unconditionally; and,
3. Commit to a new beginning in which they actively carry God’s love into the world.

POINTS TO BE EMPHASIZED
ADULT/YOUTH
Adult Topic: Love for Others
Youth Topic: What’s Love Got to Do with the Law?
Adult/Youth Key Verse: Romans 13:8
Print Passage: Romans 12:1-2; 13:8-10
—Romans 12:1-2 is one of the best-known passages in the Christian Scriptures.
—Romans 13:8 implies that Christians are never in a position in which they can claim that they have “loved enough.”
—This section of Paul’s letter to the Romans presents the ethical principles of the justified and sanctified life in Christ and the community of faith.
—The Christian’s conduct should be different from the non-Christian’s conduct because the Christian is living by the Spirit and walking in love.
—Christians relying on God’s mercies should live their lives holy and acceptable unto God.
—Since Christians have died to sin, Christians should also die to the old way of life by going through a transformation of mind and conduct.
—Living Christian lives entails being good citizens, obeying all laws, including paying all debts and obeying all obligations, especially loving their neighbors.

CHILDREN
Children Topic: Love One Another
Key Verse: Romans 13:8b
Print Passage: Romans 12:1-2; 13:8-10
—True worship requires one to renounce worldly pleasures and to live according to what is acceptable and pleasing to God.
—Spiritual transformation comes from transforming one’s mindset from doing evil to doing good, from being universal
haters to universal lovers, from arrogance to humility, and from lackluster spiritual zeal to enthusiastic religious fervor.

—Manifestations of their love for one another include hospitality, generosity, and associating with persons from all lifestyles.

—Loving God means that people must allow God to love them enough to handle enemies and any adversity in their lives.

—It is difficult to resist evil and do good, especially when tempted by evil dressed in righteous clothing.

—All commandments concerning human interactions can be summed up in one phrase: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Getting Love Right

Love is a word that we either over- or underuse. We just cannot seem to get the right level of usage. In relationships, people use love the same as a common greeting. We commonly hear or say ourselves, “I love you!” In reality, too many people saying those words barely know the people they share them with. Instead of getting to know the person so that the words make sense, too many people hope that the relationship will catch up to the words.

For believers, we have the ability to get it right. We understand that love begins and ends with God. We love Him because He first loved us. Truly loving God makes loving others possible. It might not be easy, but it is possible. Some people are hard to love. Some are hard to love because of what they say. Others are hard to love because of what they do. Some of us are just hard to love, period.

Our lesson offers an opportunity for us to see sanctified life in action. Evidence of where we are in the sanctification process is our ability to love those who are hard to love. We have to remember that agape love does not require us to like a person’s actions. Instead, it looks beyond that to a person’s heart, recognizing that God has the ability to change the heart of even the worst person. It is never our job to change the person. It is just to love that person as God’s Word teaches us.

B. Biblical Background

Today, we conclude our quarter of study as well as our study of the book of Romans. After Paul dealt with the problem of Israel’s rejection and future acceptance of God’s plan of salvation in Romans 9–11, he reconnected to the life of the individual believer in Romans 12:1–15:13. These chapters truly reflect the title of our unit of study, “Life on God’s Terms.” As a master teacher or an expert lawyer, Paul carefully guided his readers through what it took to move from unrighteousness to the righteousness of God.

Since this is our last lesson of the quarter, we ought to review the outline of the book of Romans. Paul began with greetings and the theme of his epistle in Romans 1:1-17. In Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul continued with an examination of the unrighteousness of
humankind. All human beings, Jews and Gentiles, face the wrath of God because of sin. But just as it seemed that Paul was going to write a truly dismal book, he introduced us to God’s grace in Romans 3:21–5:21, which resulted in every believer being justified, or declared righteous, upon confession of our faith in Jesus as Savior. Justification also reconciled us with God. Because we are justified, we begin the process of sanctification described in Romans 6–8. Empowered by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, we become more like Jesus as we grow in our spiritual walk until we achieve the glory of God in heaven. Although Paul was God’s messenger to the Gentiles, he never forgot his fellow Jews. In chapters 9–11, he focused on Israel’s past, present, and future standing in God’s plan of salvation.

Today, we close with a lesson in the final section of the book of Romans focused on righteousness in practice as evidence of the progress of the sanctification process.

II. EXPOSITION AND APPLICATION OF THE SCRIPTURE

A. An Active Pursuit
   (Romans 12:1)

I BESEECH you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

The Gospel message is at the heart of Paul’s epistle to the church in Rome. The Gospel has the power to save anyone who believes—the Jews first, then the Gentiles, rescuing us from the power of sin and justifying us and imputing to us the righteousness of God. Yet, this is just the beginning. In Romans 12:1–15:13, Paul described how the Gospel transforms the way believers live. Paul used Romans 12:1-2 as an introductory statement, a call to every believer to live a transformed life in Christ.

Based upon everything he had written through chapter 11, Paul provided a call to action for his readers. Paul found a happy medium in his call to live the transformed life. He did not command or suggest. Rather, he urged his readers (verse 1). The Greek word for “urge” used here is parakaleo, which is derived from the same root as paraclete. John used the verb form of this word to describe the Holy Spirit (see John 16:7). Further, Paul was not directing his words to nonbelievers. Rather, he was focused on fellow believers. He understood something very important: Since God could have allowed His wrath to consume the world and chosen not to offer His Son to redeem us, believers ought to be responsive to God’s mercy.

How did Paul expect believers to respond? He expected believers to offer themselves as living sacrifices. All of Paul’s readers, whether Jewish or not, were familiar with the use of animal sacrifices. So it would not have been lost on his readers as to what he meant. Paul called them to “present” themselves as a “living sacrifice” (verse 1). To “present” was the appropriate action by believers in response to saving faith and justification. It is the initial step in the sanctification process. Literally, believers are giving themselves totally to God for a complete makeover. While Judaism and the Law focused on what not to do (negative), Christianity focused on what to do (positive). As Christians, we seek to live righteously daily not because we fear God but because we love...
God (see 2 Corinthians 5:14-15). We are to be “living” sacrifices as opposed to a “live” sacrifice. The word living denotes an ongoing action for a lifetime.

We are called to live holy lives. That is to say, we are to separate ourselves from the world. Now that does not mean that believers are to withdraw from society. On the contrary, it means that believers live lives differently from worldly norms. People in the world ought to be able to easily identify Christians not by a cross hanging from our necks, but by the way we interact with the world. Living holy lives is enabled by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

B. A Passive Action

(Romans 12:2)

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

While Paul urged believers to be active in verse 1, he focused on a passive action in verse 2. Knowing that it is impossible for believers to live holy lives apart from the Holy Spirit, Paul urged his readers not to conform to the ways of the world. In reality, Paul was reflecting on Romans 1:18–3:20. It did not matter whether it was truly wicked Gentiles or the Jews who had a misguided excitement about their relationship with God. No one in the world had it right. Yes, the world has norms that seem acceptable. Yet, these norms do not even come close to what God desires. We have to be different from the world. To conform literally means to be squeezed into a mold. In a sense, the world wants to squeeze the righteousness of God out of us by squeezing us to fit its pattern.

Going back to Romans 1–2, humankind had distorted God’s creation. Before the Fall in the Garden of Eden, all of creation was at peace with God. Since the Fall, creation has been in a state of war with God. Yes, Creation responded to humankind’s rebellion against God by being in a state of unrest that will not be completely settled until the second coming of Christ. So to be conformed to the world is to be distorted just like the rest of Creation.

In contrast, God wants us to be transformed. That means to become new creatures just as God had originally designed humankind to be in the beginning. While conforming occurs from the outside in, transforming occurs from the inside out. How are we transformed? It is when we are justified by God, or declared righteous, which leads to a changed way of thinking (part of the sanctification process). The only way not to be conformed to the world is through the renewal of our minds. We can think of renewal the same way we think of renovation. When people renovate houses, the finished product often looks nothing like the original. Now, for believers, we do not change externally but are changed, or renovated, internally.

How do we know we have been transformed? We know when we are able to discover and follow God’s plan for our lives. We have to yield to God’s will for our lives. Until we are transformed, we have no clue as to what God wants us to do. Even still, the transformation process is not like justification; it is sanctification. We are continually transformed by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit until Jesus presents us fully transformed to His Father in heaven. For now, we continue to be transformed and learn more about God’s will in our lives.
C. Put Love into Action
(Romans 13:8-10)

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

In verse 8, Paul resumed his discussion of *agape* love begun in Romans 12:9-21. Paul had already provided the definitive description of *agape* love a couple years before in his letter to the church in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 13). So in verses 8-10 he presented *agape* love as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. We have to be clear that verse 8 is not a command not to have debt. Rather, it referred back to verse 7 in paying taxes and fees to governmental authorities. Yet, all believers were to have one debt that was ongoing and never paid in full—a debt of *agape* love to their neighbors. Jesus had already defined who our neighbors were in Luke 10:25-37.

Every believer has to love others. We have no choice. If we love God, then we love others. It is significant that Paul’s admonition to love others is included in a chapter devoted to believers’ practicing righteousness in the world. Surely it would be easier to show love for others in the church. After all, in theory, the church should be filled with people living lives reflecting God’s love. However, the world contains all kinds of people. Many of them are hard to love.

Can we pick and choose how we are to love? No. Paul referenced the Ten Commandments as a moral compass for believers. Jeremiah had already prophesied about the day when God’s commands would move from stone tablets to the hearts of believers (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). Paul referenced the portion of the Ten Commandments related to interpersonal relationships. Note that although the *King James Version* includes all five interpersonal commandments, other translations, relying on other source documents, do not reference bearing false witness against one’s neighbor. However, since the Ten Commandments consists of two sets of five commandments, with the first set relating to God and the second set relating to human relationships, it is clear that Paul’s intent was to encompass the complete second set. Additionally, the practice of *agape* love would encompass any other law or commandment whether explicit or implicit in the Law of Moses or required in civil society, and did not miss the mark of God’s Law.

We should not be alarmed that Paul only addressed one-half of Jesus’ teaching on the “Greatest Commandment” (see Matthew 22:36-40). Believers’ love for God is assumed in Romans 12:1-2. It would be impossible for believers to present themselves as living sacrifices to God without loving Him. Paul also sought to change the attitude of his Jewish readers who may have still held to the traditional interpretation of *neighbor* to mean “a fellow Jew.”

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTION

There are all kinds of home renovation projects. Some renovations involve the inside or outside, while others involve both. The inside-only renovations are deceiving. People casually passing by would never know the inside had
been renovated without going inside. There is no motivation to stop; there is no visible change. It is only when we stop and go inside that we see the change. We marvel at the new décor and fixtures. What really amazes us is when we see a totally modern interior in a house with a totally historic exterior. The contrast is startling. The owners of the house devoted much time, effort, and expense in the renovation of their home. They take pride in showing it to others. In essence, it is a brand-new home. Yes, it has the same address. Yes, it has the same exterior. Yes, the same people live there. Yet, everything on the inside would be new.

That is the way it is for us as believers. At our acceptance of Jesus we did not change on the outside. We still looked the same. Sure, we have sung the songs that our “hands looked new and our feet did, too.” But we knew we were still the same physically. Yet on the inside we were radically different. Our whole way of looking at life changed in an instant. What is amazing is that, even though it is our bodies, we do not do the transforming. The Holy Spirit did it and is continuing to do it. We may have heard of multiyear renovation projects. That is the way it is with us. The Holy Spirit is renovating us from the inside out over our entire lives. Finally, Jesus will complete the final touches and present us to His Father in heaven.

**PRAYER**

Loving God, we call on You today to help us love others as You would have us to love them. We know that some people are hard to love. Yet, we are trusting in Your Holy Spirit to guide us into responding in the way that You instructed us to do. We thank You for Your love for us that makes it all possible. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**WORD POWER**

Agape—the unconditional love of God operating in the human heart.

The law of love—Though unenforceable, this is a moral mandate in the heart.

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

*(August 22-28, 2016)*

**Love Fulfills the Law**

MONDAY, August 22: “Diligence and Law” (1 Timothy 4:11-16)

TUESDAY, August 23: “Obedience and Law” (Deuteronomy 11:1-9)

WEDNESDAY, August 24: “Choose the Law and Life” (Deuteronomy 11:13-21)

THURSDAY, August 25: “Take Care and Live” (Joshua 22:1-6)

FRIDAY, August 26: “Love and the Law” (1 John 3:4-11)

SATURDAY, August 27: “Prayer and Love” (Ephesians 3:14-21)

SUNDAY, August 28: “Love Fulfills the Law” (Romans 12:1-2; 13:8-10)