

Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

WINTER 2025–2026
ENDURING BELIEFS
OF THE CHURCH

► International Sunday School Lessons

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

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WINTER 2025–2026 ENDURING BELIEFS OF THE CHURCH

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Enduring Beliefs of the Church

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Quarterly Quiz

Use these questions as a pretest or as a review. The answers are on page iv of This Quarter in the Word.

Lesson 1

1. “The law of the LORD is _____.” *Psalm 19:7*
2. Paul tells Timothy that Scripture makes one “_____ unto salvation.” *2 Timothy 3:15*

Lesson 2

1. The beauty of the “lilies of the field” is more glorious than which Old Testament figure? (Saul, David, Solomon) *Matthew 6:28–29*
2. Jesus taught, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his _____.” *Matthew 6:33*

Lesson 3

1. The shepherd invites his friends and neighbors to rejoice upon finding the lost sheep. T/F. *Luke 15:6*
2. Christ died for us while we were still _____. *Romans 5:8*

Lesson 4

1. The Holy Spirit testifies that we are children of Abraham. T/F. *Romans 8:16*
2. Who intercedes for us when we don’t know what to pray for? (the Father, the Son, the Spirit) *Romans 8:26*

Lesson 5

1. Walking in what results in fellowship with other believers? (light, truth, joy) *1 John 1:7*
2. We know that we know God if we keep His _____. *1 John 2:3*

Lesson 6

1. The father responded to his son’s return with compassion. T/F. *Luke 15:20*
2. Peter describes the Holy Ghost as what? (blessing, honor, gift) *Acts 2:38*

Lesson 7

1. Abraham claimed that he was “dust and ashes” before the Lord. T/F. *Genesis 18:27*

2. Jesus’ parable depicts whom? (choose two: Sadducee, Pharisee, publican, zealot) *Luke 18:10*

Lesson 8

1. Who revealed to Peter that Jesus is the Christ? (the Father, Jonah, Elijah) *Matthew 16:17*
2. Jesus inquires of Peter’s love _____ times. *John 21:17*

Lesson 9

1. Jesus uses parables to describe the “_____ of God.” *Mark 4:26, 30*
2. In Ephesians 4, Paul mentions “deacons” as one of the offices of the church. T/F. *Ephesians 4:11*

Lesson 10

1. Jesus told His followers to baptize exclusively in the name of the Son. T/F. *Matthew 28:19*
2. Jesus said the cup is the “new _____” in His blood. *1 Corinthians 11:25*

Lesson 11

1. “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it _____.” *Exodus 20:8*
2. John heard a “great voice” like a cymbal. T/F. *Revelation 1:10*

Lesson 12

1. Jesus was asked when He would restore the kingdom to Israel. T/F. *Acts 1:6*
2. Who did Paul ask to help finish the Corinthians’ gift of grace? (Timothy, Thomas, Titus) *2 Corinthians 8:6*

Lesson 13

1. The commandment that is “first of all” is the command to “love thy neighbour as thyself.” T/F. *Mark 12:29–30*
2. According to James, faith is “dead” if not accompanied by what? (grace, works, prayer) *James 2:17*

Quarter at a Glance

by Joshua Seth Houston

The lessons of this quarter invite us to meditate on the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. This study will show us that God has revealed His grace and mercy. As a result, God's people are called to live by His standard—a standard that is often countercultural.

Our God and the Holy Scripture

The quarter begins as we study the Trinitarian God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—whom we know through Scripture's revelation. Scripture recounts how God's people can know Him and live faithfully through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:14–15; see lesson 1).

Through various word images, Scripture conveys characteristics of God and reveals aspects of our relationship with Him—He is our caring heavenly Father (Matthew 6:24–34; see lesson 2), the shepherd who seeks lost sheep (Luke 15:3–7; see lesson 3), and our advocate or comforter (Romans 8:26–27; see lesson 4).

Grace and Reconciliation

The apostle Paul teaches that humans are in a state of sin (Romans 3:23). The letter of 1 John expands on this fact, reminding us that no one can claim to “have no sin” (1 John 1:8; see lesson 5). However, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has become our advocate and the “propitiation” for sins (2:1–6). Christ's defeat of sin on the cross introduces us to the gracious gift of new life. We are invited to respond to this gift through repentance, seeking forgiveness for our sins (Acts 2:38–39; see lesson 6).

Our reception of God's gracious gift of salvation leads us to “walk in the light” of new life (1 John 1:7). We walk in this way as we become disciples of Jesus Christ, following Him with obedience, worship, and humility (see lesson 7). The journey of discipleship will not always be easy—the life of the apostle Peter demonstrates the ups and downs of discipleship (see lesson 8)! However, we don't have

to go on this journey alone. In Christ, we are reconciled to God and one another, called into the covenant community: the church.

The Church and Its Teachings

The final unit focuses on the church as the one body of Christ, spiritually gifted for ministry and mission (see Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:4–6; see also lesson 9). Each member is essential to the function of the body (Romans 12:4–8; 1 Corinthians 12:12). Together, all parts work to build each other up for the edification and growth of the body that is the church.

In Christ, we are reconciled to God and one another, called into the covenant community: the church.

Christ gave the church two ordinances vital for its mission and witness. Baptism serves as the ritual entry to the life of faith and a way to follow the example of our Savior, who Himself was baptized (Matthew 3:13–17; see lesson 10). The Lord's Supper invites us to a time of self-examination as we remember Christ's sacrifice and anticipate His bodily return (1 Corinthians 11:23–29; see lesson 10). Through these ordinances, the church receives spiritual nourishment and empowerment for its mission: calling people to repentance and proclaiming the reign of Christ “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8; see lesson 12).

The church's mission flourishes when we obey God and proclaim the gospel and its transforming power. One way we can contribute to this mission is through our generosity and hospitality, reminiscent of the practices of the burgeoning first-century church (see 2 Corinthians 8:3–9; see also lesson 12). When the church remembers and obediently follows its mission, we learn to love God and our neighbors, thus fulfilling the two greatest commands (Mark 12:28–34; see lesson 13).

Get the Setting

by Brenner S. Carlson

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus established an institution we call the Lord's Supper. This meal inaugurates a new covenant and a new community: the assembly of Christ's followers called *church*.

In some ways, this group was like others of its time: its initiates underwent a practice for entry into the community (baptism), met regularly to celebrate special meals (the Lord's Supper), and had expectations for ethical behavior. However, the trajectory of the church has always differed from the prevailing culture.

Early Organization and Practices

Since the earliest days, apostles and leaders have urged the church to live up to its mission and potential. Acts describes the leadership of this fledgling movement and its strategy of mission to the world from the city of Jerusalem (6:1–7; 15:1–41; etc.). Equally, Paul's letters to local church leaders call for the careful structuring of organization and practices so that Christians might present a proper witness (1 Timothy 2:1–3:13, Titus 1:5–9). In the decades to follow, these churches continued to codify their moral instructions and expectations for one another.

One additional witness is the anonymous Christian document called the Didache (which means “teaching”). The short text offers guidance on baptism, fasting, prayer, and the Lord's Supper (Didache 7:1–9:4). It concludes with standards of conduct for church leaders, much like similar sections of the New Testament (Didache 11–13, 15). This extrabiblical text shows the efforts of the early church to organize itself according to the example and ministry of first-century apostles.

Religious and Social Movements

The ancient Mediterranean world had many religious clubs and cults: the Greek “mystery religions” of Demeter and Dionysus, the Egyptian cults of Isis and Osiris, and the Persian cult of Mithras, among others. These movements offered

camaraderie between adherents and “communion” with a pagan deity but not necessarily with high expectations of personal morality. Individual behavior was usually not an issue of *morality* but of *legality*: any action was permissible so long as it did not rouse the ire of authorities.

The best example of this is the celebration of Bacchanalia, a festival of drunken revelry in honor of Bacchus, the Roman title for the Greek god Dionysus. The first-century historian Livy depicts the immorality of the celebration and describes the official response. The Roman authorities did not condemn the immorality of the celebration but sought to restrict the revelers to mitigate any social disruption from their antics. It would seem that Roman authorities were suspicious of civil unrest but ignored the immorality of their citizens.

A Community Set Apart

Christianity, by contrast, was never a simple “social club” of shared symbols and beliefs that have no bearing on morality. Although the cultural milieu of the early church emphasized social peace over individual morality, the church—then and now—is called to a higher standard: love of God and love of others (Matthew 22:37–39). God expects the community of Christ to uphold certain behaviors and attitudes, and not mere ritualism—a criticism that Old Testament prophets leveled against Israel and Judah (Psalm 50:7–11, 23; Jeremiah 7:9–15; Hosea 6:6; etc.).

The church consists of people set apart from the world, precisely because the church is the light of the world and witness of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 5:14–16). God expects the church, first and foremost, to love Him and, as a result, to act morally and ethically. While order and charity has always been essential for collective worship (compare Romans 6:3–4; 1 Corinthians 11:17–22; etc.), God's transformation goes deeper to include the human heart.

Mon, Feb. 16	Blessings to Those Who Give	Malachi 3:7-12
Tue, Feb. 17	Giving More than Enough	Exodus 36:2-7
Wed, Feb. 18	May God's Ways Be Known	Psalms 67
Thu, Feb. 19	Ready with a Voluntary Gift	2 Corinthians 9:1-6
Fri, Feb. 20	Bountiful Sowing and Reaping	2 Corinthians 9:6-15
Sat, Feb. 21	Go and Make Disciples	Matthew 28:16-20
Sun, Feb. 22	Excel in Generous Giving	2 Corinthians 8:3-9
Mon, Feb. 23	Work Toward Common Good	Nehemiah 4:15-23
Tue, Feb. 24	Welcome One Another in Christ	Romans 15:1-17
Wed, Feb. 25	Do Good Whenever You Can	Proverbs 3:27-32
Thu, Feb. 26	Fulfill Your Vows	Ecclesiastes 5:4-7
Fri, Feb. 27	Bear One Another's Debts	Philemon 8-21
Sat, Feb. 28	Provide for Others and Demonstrate Faith	James 2:14-26
Sun, Mar. 1	Love God and Love Your Neighbor	Mark 12:28-34

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 114

Lesson 1—1. perfect. 2. wise. **Lesson 2**—1. Solomon. 2. righteousness. **Lesson 3**—1. True. 2. sinners. **Lesson 4**—1. False. 2. the Son. **Lesson 5**—1. joy. 2. commandments. **Lesson 6**—1. True. 2. gift. **Lesson 7**—1. True. 2. Pharisee, publican. **Lesson 8**—1. the Father. 2. three. **Lesson 9**—1. kingdom. 2. False. **Lesson 10**—1. False. 2. testament. **Lesson 11**—1. holy. 2. False. **Lesson 12**—1. True. 2. Titus. **Lesson 13**—1. False. 2. works.

This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Dec. 1	God's Word Reclaimed	2 Kings 22:1-10
Tue, Dec. 2	God's Word Leads to Repentance	2 Kings 22:11-20
Wed, Dec. 3	God's Word Touches Hearts	Luke 24:25-32
Thu, Dec. 4	God's Word Interpreted	Nehemiah 8:1-8
Fri, Dec. 5	God's Word Testifies of Jesus	John 5:37-47
Sat, Dec. 6	God's Word Is Truth	John 17:14-19
Sun, Dec. 7	God's Word Is Perfect	Psalms 19:7-13
Mon, Dec. 8	The Father's Compassion	Isaiah 49:13-17
Tue, Dec. 9	The Father Seeks Authentic Worshipers	John 4:20-24
Wed, Dec. 10	The Father Strengthens the Powerless	Isaiah 40:27-31
Thu, Dec. 11	The Father Enacts Discipline	Isaiah 64:1-8
Fri, Dec. 12	The Father Blesses and Forgives	Psalms 103:1-18
Sat, Dec. 13	The Father Gives Perfect Gifts	James 1:13-18
Sun, Dec. 14	The Father Cares for Our Needs	Matthew 6:24-34
Mon, Dec. 15	Sitting at the Lord's Right Hand	Psalms 110
Tue, Dec. 16	Christ Died for the Ungodly	Romans 5:1-11
Wed, Dec. 17	Christ Offers Eternal Life	John 3:14-21
Thu, Dec. 18	Christ Cares for His Sheep	John 10:9-16
Fri, Dec. 19	Welcome the Davidic Heir	Isaiah 9:3-7
Sat, Dec. 20	The Messiah Reigns	Psalms 2
Sun, Dec. 21	Rejoicing for Repentance	Luke 15:1-7

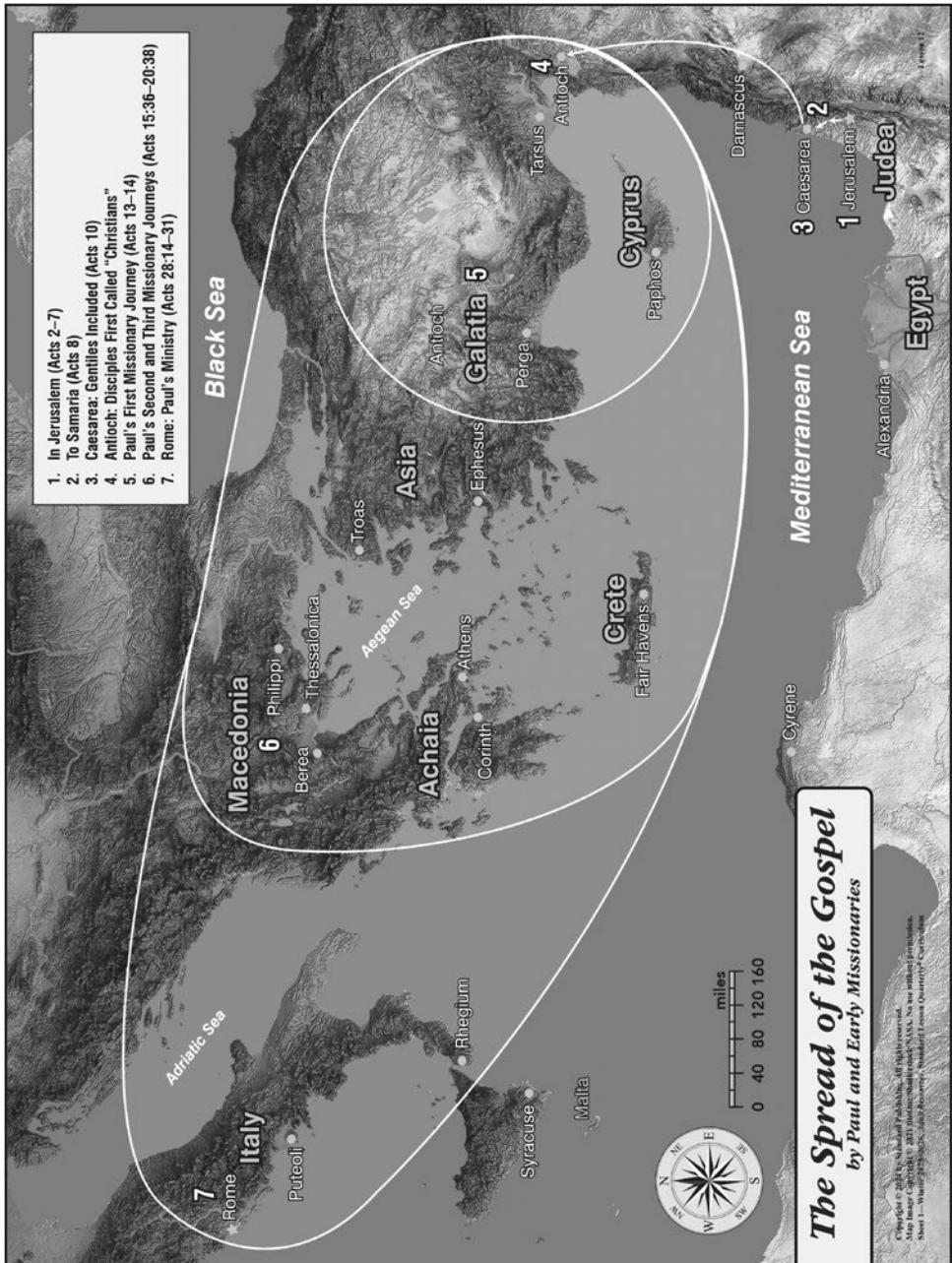
Mon, Dec. 22	The Spirit Has Power	Zechariah 4:1–7
Tue, Dec. 23	The Spirit Bestows Gifts	1 Corinthians 12:1–13
Wed, Dec. 24	The Spirit Gives Wisdom and Understanding	Isaiah 11:1–9
Thu, Dec. 25	The Spirit Works in Jesus' Birth	Matthew 1:18–25
Fri, Dec. 26	The Spirit Reveals God's Glory	Acts 7:51–60
Sat, Dec. 27	The Spirit Creates and Renews	Psalms 104:24, 29–35
Sun, Dec. 28	The Spirit Affirms Our Adoption	Romans 8:12–17, 26–27
Mon, Dec. 29	The Man and the Woman Sin	Genesis 3:1–13
Tue, Dec. 30	God Pronounces Judgment	Genesis 3:14–24
Wed, Dec. 31	God's Wrath Is Revealed	Romans 1:18–25
Thu, Jan. 1	Jesus Warns against Defilement	Mark 7:14–23
Fri, Jan. 2	A Prayer for God's Mercy	Psalms 51:1–12
Sat, Jan. 3	God Demands Right Living	Micah 6:1–8
Sun, Jan. 4	Jesus, Our Advocate	1 John 1:5–2:6
Mon, Jan. 5	Turn Away from Sin	Ezekiel 18:20–23, 27–32
Tue, Jan. 6	Learn to do Righteousness	Isaiah 1:10–21
Wed, Jan. 7	Jesus Has Power to Forgive Sins	Mark 2:1–12
Thu, Jan. 8	Draw Near to God by Faith	Hebrews 11:1–10
Fri, Jan. 9	Repent and Seek God's Face	2 Chronicles 7:11–22
Sat, Jan. 10	Repent and Be Baptized	Acts 2:32–39
Sun, Jan. 11	The Prodigal Returns	Luke 15:11–32
Mon, Jan. 12	Praying for Wisdom	James 1:2–8
Tue, Jan. 13	Praying and Seeking God	Jeremiah 29:10–14
Wed, Jan. 14	Praying with Thanksgiving	Philippians 4:4–9
Thu, Jan. 15	Praying for Protection	Psalms 61
Fri, Jan. 16	Praying as Jesus Taught	Matthew 6:5–15
Sat, Jan. 17	Praying for Others	Genesis 18:23–33
Sun, Jan. 18	Praying for Mercy	Luke 18:9–14

ii

Mon, Jan. 19	Grow by Following Jesus	Matthew 4:18–22
Tue, Jan. 20	Grow in Love for God	Deuteronomy 7:7–11
Wed, Jan. 21	Grow in Spiritual Wisdom	Colossians 1:3–12
Thu, Jan. 22	Grow in the Fear of the Lord	Proverbs 1:2–7
Fri, Jan. 23	Grow in Discerning Good from Evil	Proverbs 1:8–12
Sat, Jan. 24	Keep on Growing	Philippians 3:10–16
Sun, Jan. 25	Grow in Grace and Knowledge	2 Peter 3:14–18
Mon, Jan. 26	A Community of Testimony and Praise	Psalms 22:22–28
Tue, Jan. 27	A Community of Hope-Filled Heirs	Ephesians 1:15–23
Wed, Jan. 28	A Community with Divine Authority	Matthew 16:13–20
Thu, Jan. 29	A Community Made Strong Together	Ecclesiastes 4:7–12
Fri, Jan. 30	A Community United in Worship	Psalms 150
Sat, Jan. 31	A Community Silently Growing	Mark 4:26–32
Sun, Feb. 1	A Community United	Ephesians 4:4–16
Mon, Feb. 2	Saved through the Sea	Exodus 14:21–31
Tue, Feb. 3	Baptized into a New Life	Romans 6:1–14
Wed, Feb. 4	God Provides Bread	Exodus 16:13–16, 31
Thu, Feb. 5	Jesus Is the Bread of Life	John 6:28–40
Fri, Feb. 6	A Blessing with Bread and Wine	Genesis 14:14–20
Sat, Feb. 7	Beloved Child of God	Matthew 3:13–17
Sun, Feb. 8	A Meal of Remembrance	1 Corinthians 11:23–29
Mon, Feb. 9	God Rests on the Seventh Day	Genesis 1:31–2:4a
Tue, Feb. 10	The Promise of Entering God's Rest	Hebrews 4:1–11
Wed, Feb. 11	Delight in the Sabbath	Isaiah 58:8–14
Thu, Feb. 12	Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath	Matthew 12:1–13
Fri, Feb. 13	The Day of Resurrection	Matthew 28:1–10
Sat, Feb. 14	Keep the Sabbath Day Holy	Exodus 20:1, 8–11
Sun, Feb. 15	Living or Dying to the Lord	Romans 14:1–8

iii

Map Feature



Using Internet Resources

Teacher Tips by Tanae Murdic

In this article, we will expand on part one (found in the Fall 2025 quarter) and explore resources that can aid you in (1) developing lesson plans from *Standard Lesson* and (2) presenting your teachings. We will also discuss criteria to consider when selecting reliable Internet resources.

Lesson Helps from *Standard Lesson*

Visit www.standardlesson.com to find teaching help for *Standard Lesson Commentary* or *Standard Lesson Quarterly*. There you will discover monthly newsletters, weekly teacher tips, “In the World” articles, activity pages, and more. It is a one-stop shop to help you prepare for the week’s lesson.

Sites Providing Helps for Presentation

Video clips, audio files, and PowerPoint presentations are frequent additions to Bible study curriculum. You can find these resources online. Here are potential websites to assist you:

- www.bible.org
- www.biblegateway.com
- www.bibleproject.com

As these websites are not tied to any specific lesson or topic, they will provide continuing help to enrich your teaching.

Selecting Internet Resources

Just as not every book on a topic is necessarily useful for every purpose, the same can be true of online resources. Since websites can be posted with far more ease than books can be published, it is possible for anyone to easily broadcast any notion or falsehood via the Internet. That is why it pays to be discerning regarding your sources and resources. Here are a few guidelines:

- Make sure to explore general resources (such as those listed in the section above). Bible dictionaries, maps, and studies of historical context will serve you well.

- Treatments of texts, such as those found at www.blueletterbible.org, are also good places to begin. These are not exhaustive studies, but they provide a tone and direction that can serve as a helpful comparison with other materials you find.
- When you find unfamiliar ideas and theories, see how they square with accepted resources. If they disagree, research further to see whether you find the unfamiliar view critiqued by other sources.
- Information from websites of reputable colleges and seminaries is good to compare with ideas acquired from other sites that are not as familiar or known.
- Discuss your findings—especially those of which you are uncertain—with your minister or another knowledgeable Bible teacher in your congregation.

Even after you’ve had an opportunity to ascertain the value of the material, it is still vital to be selective. In fact, only after you have evaluated a website’s material are you equipped to be selective.

Conclusion

The Internet provides a library at your fingertips. But one additional caution is in order: *There are no shortcuts to good preparation.* Even with the vast information you can receive from the Internet, what it cannot do is prepare for you. You must research, assess the validity of the information, compile (and sometimes scrap) that information, and incorporate what is relevant into your presentation. A website can neither decide on the main thrust you intend for the lesson nor form the outline or choose the teaching methods and illustrations.

In other words, to be an effective teacher, you still must put forth the effort to prepare. But if you use your expanded study possibilities wisely and prepare well, you will enjoy the fruits of your labor as you present effective Bible lessons.

God's Word

Devotional Reading: Psalm 119:105–112

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Joshua 1:8–9;
2 Kings 22:8–20; Acts 17:10–12

Psalm 19:7–13

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

12 Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.

13 Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

2 Timothy 3:14–15

14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.



Key Text

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

—2 Timothy 3:16–17

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 1: Our God and the Holy Scriptures

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the role of Scripture in revealing God and His desires.
2. Explain how the two lesson passages teach believers to value God’s Word.
3. Make a plan to look to God’s Word for guidance in making wise choices.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Treasured Possessions
- B. Lesson Context

I. Gifts from God (Psalm 19:7–11)

- A. Life-Giving Instructions (v. 7)
- B. Trustworthy Guidance (v. 8)
- C. Enduring Value (vv. 9–11)

II. Purpose for the Gifts

(Psalm 19:12–13; 2 Timothy 3:14–15)

- A. Warning Against Wrongs (Psalm 19:12–13)
To See Ourselves as Others See Us
- B. Granting Wisdom (2 Timothy 3:14–15)
A Value of Childhood

Conclusion

- A. Book of Immeasurable Value
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Treasured Possessions

My mother was a woman of exemplary Christian faith. After she went to be with the Lord, members of our family began going through her belongings. Among the items we found were various Bibles that mom had kept through the years. There were a couple of Bibles in which she kept family records, bookmarks, newspaper clippings, and small pieces of paper filled with Scripture references. More recently, mom had acquired a large study Bible with footnotes and commentary helps. Even those bore the signs of regular use. I was reminded of the saying, “A Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.”

Mom didn’t just treasure the Bibles in her home; she memorized Scripture, which kept the wisdom of God on her lips and near her heart. As a result, she found opportunities to apply Scripture in many situations. Through her testimony of faithfulness, the Spirit of God was active.

B. Lesson Context

This lesson pairs two texts—one from the Old Testament and one from the New—that praise God for revealing Himself. Although the canon of Scripture was not complete when either of today’s texts were written, the claims of these texts apply to the entirety of God’s self-revelation in Scripture. It is not the invention of any human; it is inspired by God and communicated by human witnesses (2 Peter 1:16; compare Hebrews 1:1).

The superscription of Psalm 19 calls it a “Psalm of David,” meaning the words could have been written by David, the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1), or written for him, perhaps as a reminder that Israel’s kings should listen carefully to God. The psalm is known as the great “hymn of revelation” within the corpus of the Psalms because it speaks to both “general” and “special” revelation. The first half of Psalm 19 heralds God’s revelation as made known from the fact of creation; this is information available to everyone (compare Romans 1:20). The second half of the psalm, which includes the reading for today, turns to praise for God’s spoken and written word.

These two sources of divine self-revelation—creation and word—hang together because they find their source in God’s desire to communicate with those created in His image.

When we shift to considering the New Testament text for this study, we will be moving forward in time more than 1,000 years from the writing of Psalm 19. Our arrival point will be about AD 67, when the apostle Paul was near the end of his ministry (and his life), and he knew it (2 Timothy 4:6–8). It’s easy to sense a tone of urgency in his second letter to his protégé Timothy as the aged apostle stressed anew which was the more important revelation.

I. Gifts from God

(Psalm 19:7–11)

A. Life-Giving Instructions (v. 7)

7. The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

Beginning with this verse, the psalmist shifts from general revelation to special revelation (see the Lesson Context for the distinction). Each of the six lines of Psalm 19:7–9 begins with a noun; these are set in parallel phrases, each expressing something about God’s revealed truth. The six nouns are *law* and *testimony* here in verse 7, “statutes” and “commandment” in verse 8, plus “fear” and “judgments” in verse 9.

It’s tempting to work through these terms individually to detect minute differences in meaning. But to do so is to risk missing the bigger picture of how the feature of parallelism works in Hebrew poetry. That parallelism is characterized by the use of synonyms to express the same thought. Such parallelism is at work in the first four of the six words noted above: *law*, *testimony*, *statutes*, and *commandment*. Each word has specific characteristics, but all four are synonymous.

Parallelism isn’t the only feature we see here. These verses also contain repetition of sentence structure. In verses 7 and 8, we see this pattern four times:

synonym for law + LORD + fact + outcome

Parallelism is much less evident in the outcomes

in our text, and that is the psalmist’s point: reading and heeding God’s instructions have many benefits. The first to be mentioned among the four is the role the instructions have in *converting the soul*. The word *converting* has the sense of “restor-eth,” as translated in Psalm 23:3.

The nature of *making wise the simple*, the second outcome, is significantly expanded in Psalm 119:98–100, 130. The word *simple*, as used in our daily conversations to describe people, is often a positive evaluation. In that sense, it may refer to someone who is free from vanity. But in the Old Testament, “the simple” are those who are either gullible, lack a moral compass, or are inclined toward evil (Proverbs 1:4; 7:7; 21:11; etc.).

B. Trustworthy Guidance (v. 8)

8. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The parallelism in sentence structure explained above continues. The purity and correctness of God’s stated requirements produce two results (in addition to those of the previous verse): *rejoicing the heart* and *enlightening the eyes*. Descriptors “right,” “upright,” and “pure” can describe people (Job 11:4; Psalm 24:4; Proverbs 29:10; etc.). God may also be praised as “upright” (Psalms 25:8; 92:15). But in this verse, these qualities even apply to the directives that come from God.

This verse corrects a common misunderstanding—that the teachings of God will stifle human enjoyment or make life dull. Instead, wisdom from God is like a treasure to be uncovered or a reward to be enjoyed (Proverbs 2:1–4; compare Psalm 119:162). In other texts, merriment for the heart—the intent of God’s *statutes*—comes from hearing music, enjoying wine, or receiving a kind word (45:8; 104:15; Proverbs 12:25). These are not activities of a dull life!

At the same time, living by God’s standards will train the human gaze to focus on what is good in God’s sight, thus avoiding “lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16). Eyes that are trained to see people and situations as *God* sees can glimpse with clarity. That kind of gaze is sound—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—for God

does not leave His people to grope blindly through life with no sense of direction. God's declarations are a trustworthy guide.

C. Enduring Value (vv. 9–11)

9. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

Fear of the Lord is known as “the beginning of wisdom” (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10), since all wisdom has its source in God. “Fear,” in this case, means a reverent respect for God's authority, which also accepts *the judgments of the Lord*. Fear of God is sometimes coupled with disdain for evil—even the evil that might arise in one's own selfish motives (8:13).

Submission to God's authority means accessing a “fountain of life” (Proverbs 14:27; compare Deuteronomy 30:19–20). God's people can be confident that the Creator knows what is best, for “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7).

The word *clean* is often used for ceremonial purity (Leviticus 10:10; Deuteronomy 12:15). This can also describe God's words, perhaps by analogy to “pure gold” (compare Exodus 25:11–39). To revere God and abide by His words leads to a clean life (Psalm 119:9; compare John 15:3). As the *true and righteous* judge, God is always fair and immune to bribes or partiality (Deuteronomy 10:17).

What Do You Think?

How will you practice “fear of the Lord” this week?

Digging Deeper

In what ways is our “fear of the Lord” connected to our love for Him? How do Deuteronomy 10:12 and 1 John 4:18 inform your response?

10. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

David uses a pair of comparisons to highlight the value of God's Word. *Gold* and *honey* are each pleasing and satisfying in their own way, but neither can provide the spiritual riches and nour-

ishment that God's Word can. Even the highest quality of each of these items (the finest gold; honey from the *honeycomb*) will provide only temporary pleasure (compare Psalm 119:72, 103, 127). Gold cannot refresh the soul; it cannot give lasting joy to the heart.

What Do You Think?

What modern-day comparisons would you use to highlight the value of God's Word?

Digging Deeper

How will you use these comparisons to teach others to study God's Word?

11. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

In many Bibles, the words of Jesus are printed in red to call attention to them. What if Bibles were printed in another color whenever words of warning appear? Many verses would bear that color, for numerous warnings can be found within God's Word. Therein lies part of the value of the Scriptures: they are honest in their assessment of the human condition and make very clear the consequences of choosing to reject what God has spoken.

On the other hand, the Scriptures are just as clear concerning the *reward* that comes to those who faithfully keep their message. Both warnings and rewards are seen in passages such as the blessings and curses that Moses set before the Israelites in Deuteronomy 28. The New Testament epistles include an abundance of “great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4), but they also contain numerous warnings to Christians. The book of Hebrews provides several examples of both: promises of blessing (Hebrews 4:14–16; 6:9–10; 12:22–24; 13:14) and solemn warnings (2:1–4; 4:12–13; 10:26–31; 12:25).

II. Purpose for the Gifts

(Psalm 19:12–13; 2 Timothy 3:14–15)

A. Warning Against Wrongs (Psalm 19:12–13)

12. Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.

The psalm takes a sudden turn as David, in the middle of extolling the greatness of the Lord and the virtues of His Word, pauses to reflect on his personal failures to measure up to the high standards revealed therein. Much the same occurs in Psalm 139, where David praises the Lord for His awareness of every detail of David's life (139:1–18) then ends with a prayer for God to examine him and reveal any areas of his life that He finds displeasing (139:23–24). In the previous verse of Psalm 19, David notes the “great reward” awaiting those who have kept the Lord's commandments (19:11, above). Then, looking into his own heart, he wonders, “Have I kept them? What if there are *secret* sins I am unaware of?” Given the context, David is likely referring to secret or unknown thoughts, words, and actions that have not been pleasing to God (compare 90:8; 139:23–24). David echoes what the prophet Jeremiah declared about the human heart: it is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

David's plea for cleansing is similar to his words of repentance in Psalm 51:1–2. God alone can create a clean heart (51:10). Only He can wash our sins so that they are as white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). We should also take note of how Psalm 19 concludes: with David's prayer that both his words and his thoughts will be pleasing before the Lord (Psalm 19:14, not in our printed text).

What Do You Think?

How does confession to another believer lead to revealing and cleansing “secret faults”?

Digging Deeper

Who is another believer to whom you may confess sin and be strengthened in your obedience to God?

To See Ourselves as Others See Us

One of my fellow hospital chaplains had a problem with habitual sin. He was angry at a fellow chaplain, and that anger affected the way he did his job. He struggled to maintain a professional relationship with the other chaplain. The enraged chaplain was tempted to gossip about this other

person. When he did so, he felt justified in having a bad attitude toward the chaplain he did not get along with.

When we pointed this out to him in one of our meetings, he was shocked. He had not realized he was doing this, and he immediately apologized to the group and the other chaplain. This blind spot now revealed provided an opportunity for growth.

God's Word can show us our blind spots in uncountable ways. If this doesn't happen—and we all have blind spots—spiritual growth is stunted. When was the last time God's Word revealed one of yours?

—L. M. W.

13. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

Presumptuous sins is the category of deliberate, intentional sin, committed not in ignorance but in defiance. Whether the sins are “secret” (Psalm 19:12, above) or committed in willful rebellion against the Lord, David wants no part. His prayer brings to mind the example that Jesus set for us in the Lord's Prayer: “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13).

However, we note that David did not always follow his own prayer. David is called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22), yet David and the nation were punished because of his presumptuous, sinful pride (1 Chronicles 21:17). His adultery with Bathsheba and his role in the death of Uriah would have a significant effect on his life and the lives of his descendants (2 Samuel 11–12). Therefore, David well knows that certain types of sin may exert a powerful sway over people. He describes this influence as *dominion*. We are wise to recognize that the devil may have strongholds of sin in our lives (see 2 Corinthians 10:4).

How to Say It

Bathsheba	Bath-she-buh.
Eunice	U-nye-see or U-nis.
Lois	Lo-is.
Uriah	Yu-rye-uh.

The content of the temptations in our high-tech contemporary world is far different from what David faced, though the issues are the same (such as lust, pride, and hatred). God's Word remains our "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17); without it, we leave ourselves vulnerable to "the wiles of the devil" (6:11).

What Do You Think?

How can believers overcome destructive sin habits that "dominate" our lives?

Digging Deeper

To what extent is this possible through personal willpower? through mutual accountability? through the Holy Spirit?

B. Granting Wisdom (2 Timothy 3:14–15)

In this letter, Paul has been very candid with his protégé Timothy about the latter's need for exceptional courage, strength, and spiritual discipline (2 Timothy 1:7; 2:1, 22). Paul warns Timothy of the "perilous times" to come in the "last days" (3:1). This is because of the variety of "perilous people" who will oppose Timothy and his message (3:2–9). That message, however, possesses an authority and a power that stands above the times, no matter how perilous they may be.

14. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.

The apostle Paul has placed the spotlight primarily on himself up to this point in the letter. This is seen in his use of the words *me*, *my*, and *I* about twice as often as he uses the words *thee* and *thou* in 2 Timothy 1:1–3:13.

But the imperative *but continue thou* signals a change in focus. From 3:14 through 4:5, the spotlight shifts to Timothy, Paul's "son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). He is the one being encouraged—even commanded—to embrace and practice fully the things he *hast learned and hast been assured of*.

15. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The ultimate basis of Timothy's faith and practice is to be *the holy scriptures* since "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16–17, not in our printed text). Because the New Testament as we know it does not exist at the time Paul writes to Timothy, Paul is affirming the texts we know as the Old Testament to be capable of making one *wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (compare Luke 24:27; Acts 8:30–35; Romans 1:2–4).

But lest we be too eager to jump to that ultimate basis, we should take note of a model in that regard: the apostle Paul himself. Paul is the one from whom Timothy "hast learned and hast been assured of," regarding the final phrase of the previous verse. To this point in the letter, Paul has been stressing himself as a pattern to follow (2 Timothy 1:8, 13; 2:2–3). Two other patterns for Timothy to follow are those of his own "grandmother Lois" and "mother Eunice" (1:5), since they were undoubtedly the ones who ensured that Timothy knew the Scriptures from his childhood days.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you be a spiritual "parent" or "grandparent" to a younger believer?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to mentor a younger believer in studying Scripture?

A Value of Childhood

Recently a coworker complained to me that she had made a mistake that another employee then blamed on the woman's youth. The complainer was frustrated because she did not think her youth had contributed to her mistake. As she spoke, the words of 1 Timothy 4:12 came to mind. There, Paul urges Timothy not to let others look down on him because of his youth.

I likely stored this gem away in my heart and memory during my early days of Sunday school and youth group. While I admit that Scripture

memorization is not a big part of my adult life, the verses I memorized as a child still come to mind in relevant circumstances.

Our text from 2 Timothy 3:15 reminds us that those Scriptures we have learned in childhood are foundational to who we are today. What role can you play in teaching children Scripture?

—L. M. W.

Conclusion

A. Book of Immeasurable Value

In May 2023, a Hebrew Old Testament described as “one of the most important and singular texts in human history” became the most valuable manuscript ever sold at an auction. The Codex Sassoon, dating from the late ninth or early tenth century AD, sold for \$38.1 million at Sotheby’s in New York City. It may be the very earliest single volume containing all the books of the Hebrew Bible.

That multimillion-dollar auction value may tempt us to connect it with Psalm 19:9–10, which values God’s Word above gold. But no matter how much an ancient or modern Bible sells for, it renders no eternal value to the one possessing it who does not read and heed its contents. Today’s lesson texts highlight this timeless truth. There is a value to the Bible that cannot be measured in monetary terms.

But not all agree, and the Bible’s timeless value has been called into question by various challenges, attacks, and misunderstandings as the ages of history have progressed. But truth is truth in any era of history. What David acknowledged back in the Iron Age was reaffirmed by Paul in the Classical Age and invites reaffirmation today in the Information Age.

One particular challenge of the Information Age is the sheer volume of information available. Were they alive today, we might wonder if the writer of Ecclesiastes would change the word *books* to *websites* in this observation: “Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12:12)! One observer of culture commented that people today don’t actually *read* while on the Internet; they are



Visual for Lesson 1. Allow one minute for silent personal reflection on the statement shown, following the lesson’s conclusion.

merely *scanning for information*. The difference between the two is important. If we slip into the scanning approach, the Bible will become for us no more than a collection of proof texts lacking genre and historical context.

When was the last time you read an entire book of the Bible in one sitting? If it’s been a while, try this right now: read the whole letter of 2 Timothy without interruption. This will take no more than nine minutes of reading at a leisurely pace of 200 words per minute. If you “don’t have time” to do so, what does this say about your Bible study habits?

B. Prayer

Thank You, heavenly Father, for providing us with the precious treasure of Your Word, the Bible. It is indeed a light for us in this dark world. Thank You for its timeless wisdom and, most of all, for its message of salvation through the living Word, Christ Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Keep the words of Scripture—
and they will keep you.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 127) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Winter Quarter. Order No. 9780784739631 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Begin class time with an icebreaker game of charades. Divide participants into two teams. On index cards, write keywords or phrases from today's Scripture, such as "God's Word," "wisdom," and "teaching." Instruct each group to choose a team member to act out the words or phrases without talking. The volunteer from the first team selects a card and has a time limit of two minutes for their team to guess the word or phrase. If the team guesses correctly, they earn a point. Repeat this activity with the second team. As time allows, alternate between teams until all cards have been used. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Our game used keywords from today's text. Today, we will study two passages that give us insight into the role of God's Word, how it affects us each day, and its power in our lives."

Into the Word

Divide the class in half, designating one as the **Psalmist Group** and the other as the **Timothy Group**. Distribute handouts of the questions below for in-group discussion.

Psalmist Group. Read Psalm 19:7–13. 1—What are the descriptions the psalmist uses about God's Word? 2—How does the psalmist explain the effect of God's Word on those who listen to it? 3—What do these verses reveal about God and His desires for His people? 4—How can you apply the wisdom of these verses to your relationship with God? 5—How do these verses challenge your understanding of Scripture? 6—What personal experiences have you experienced, like those listed by the psalmist?

Timothy Group. Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17. 1—What are some of this passage's descriptions of God's Word? 2—What do these verses teach us about the importance of Scripture? 3—What do

these verses teach us about the influence of spiritual role models and influences? 4—What do these verses teach us about the wisdom found in God's Word? 5—How do these verses challenge your understanding of Scripture? 6—How can you encourage others to engage more deeply with God's Word?

Option 1. Distribute blank sheets of paper and art supplies. Invite participants to create a representation of a key theme or verse from today's text. This visual could be in the form of a picture, symbol, or even a word cloud. Support students who do not consider themselves "creative" by providing examples or encouraging them to work together.

Option 2. Distribute copies of the "Treasure Hunt" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.

If willing, provide time for those who completed Option 1 to share their creations briefly. As a class, discuss how the two lesson passages teach believers to value God's Word.

Into Life

In whole-class discussion, ask volunteers to share how they are equipped by God's Word. If you have willing volunteers, ask them to share how they successfully established the habit of Bible study and memorization. Ask that they give advice to classmates looking to develop a better pattern of Bible study.

Divide participants into pairs. Invite partners to work together to make a plan to study God's Word for guidance and wisdom. If participants need examples, consider asking them to commit to reading a chapter of the Bible each day and to spend time praying after they read. In this example, encourage participants to use a journal to record insights, questions, and personal applications from their reading.

Our Heavenly Father

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 1:3–10

Background Scripture: Exodus 34:4–7; Psalm 103:10–14; Isaiah 40:27–31

Matthew 6:24–34

24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?



31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Key Text

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof —Matthew 6:34

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 1: Our God and the Holy Scriptures

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the totality of God’s provision for the needs of all creation.
2. Explain how to trust God in order to be free from worries.
3. Make a plan for serving to meet the basic needs of people in the community.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Pulling Back the Curtain
- B. Lesson Context

I. Serve or Despise the Father? (Matthew 6:24)

II. Worry or Trust the Father? (Matthew 6:25–32)

- A. Anxious for Provision (v. 25)
- B. Examples of Provision (vv. 26–29)
- C. God of Provision (vv. 30–32)

Mississippi Wildflowers

III. Kingdom Living (Matthew 6:33–34)

- A. Righteousness First (v. 33)
- B. Today, Not Tomorrow (v. 34)

Living Day by Day

Conclusion

- A. Connecting People to the Father
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Pulling Back the Curtain

In the classic movie *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and her companions go “off to see the wizard” to get what each so desperately wants. The wizard has a reputation as someone who has the ability to grant their requests.

On first encountering the wizard, they are intimidated by the booming voice of a mysterious, imposing figure. But soon, the curtain is pulled back, revealing that the “wizard” is not an intimidating figure at all!

When thinking about the person and work of Jesus, the opposite often occurs. People at first tend to think much *less* of Jesus than who He really is. That seems as true now as it was in the first century. Jesus “pulled back the curtain” between heaven and earth to reveal the truth about God. Today’s lesson reveals one of those truths.

B. Lesson Context

Today’s lesson text comes from a section of Jesus’ teaching called the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5–7). In his record of Jesus’ life, Matthew sometimes arranges the material in topical rather than chronological order. The Sermon on the Mount is a case in point. It is located early in Matthew’s Gospel, but it was actually delivered during the first half of the second year of Jesus’ ministry. Some commentators have called this second year of ministry Jesus’ “year of popularity” because large crowds gathered wherever He went (Matthew 4:25).

Matthew 6 begins with Jesus’ warning about hypocrisy as one serves God in various ways. Then come instructions on prayer, fasting, and priorities. Today’s lesson text continues Jesus’ teaching on living a life that depends on a loving heavenly Father’s gracious provision of all our needs. Luke 12:22–31 and 16:13 are parallel texts.

I. Serve or Despise the Father?

(Matthew 6:24)

24. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else

**he will hold to the one, and despise the other.
Ye cannot serve God and mammon.**

Jesus continues His teaching about living as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, a teaching He began in Matthew 6:19. The word *master* in this context implies a singular individual who has overall charge of a group and its mission. Can any group function smoothly with two bosses who are equal in authority? Think about a *maestro* (an Italian word meaning “master”) who conducts an orchestra. The orchestra is composed of many individuals and their instruments, but there can be only one maestro. Otherwise, there can be confusion. The same can be said for trying to live one’s life under *two masters*. Those who attempt to do so will find themselves constantly torn between who or what receives their attention.

The specific contrast that Jesus depicts is service to *God* versus service to *mammon*. The word *mammon* comes from an Aramaic word that refers to wealth and riches. It is found elsewhere in the New Testament (compare Luke 16:9, 11, 13). Jesus is saying it is impossible for a person to give their total allegiance both to God and wealth. We note that financial wealth can be used to serve God and the church (example: 1 Corinthians 16:1–4). However, these things are secondary to serving God.

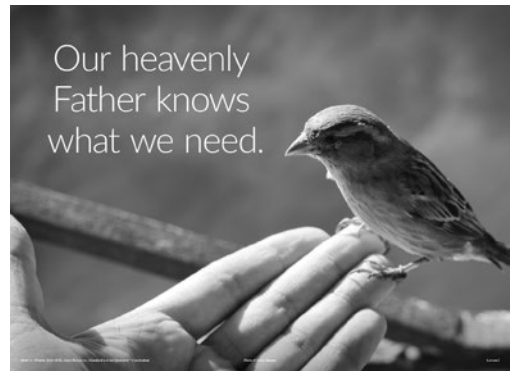
In another teaching from Jesus on this topic, it is noteworthy that following His teaching, “the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him” (Luke 16:14). The temptation to place excessive value on items that constitute mammon is what makes covetousness such a deadly trap. Covetousness is a sin addressed numerous times in the Scriptures (see Exodus 20:17; Joshua 7:21; Acts 20:33; Romans 13:9).

What Do You Think?

How does our culture encourage people to give allegiance to financial wealth?

Digging Deeper

What steps can we take to ensure that wealth and its pursuit remain secondary to serving God?



Visual for Lesson 2. *Point to this visual and ask, “In what ways has our heavenly Father provided what we need?”*

II. Worry or Trust the Father?

(Matthew 6:25–32)

A. Anxious for Provision (v. 25)

25. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

By saying *take no thought*, Jesus is not expressing His opposition to careful planning. The apostle Paul engaged in a great deal of planning (examples: Romans 1:13; Acts 20:13–16; 2 Corinthians 9:5). Instead, the phrase is connected to the concept of worry. We should try to provide for ourselves, our families, and others. However, concerns regarding these necessities should not create worry or anxiety—which is sometimes easier said than done.

Readers should be aware that the bigger picture may be missed if one’s attention becomes tunnel-vision focused on procuring the necessities of life. The idea is not to be overly concerned (see Philippians 4:6).

It can be challenging in today’s culture to hear Jesus’ words above the barrage of sounds and allure of sights in advertisements that encourage us to “take much thought” about life’s needs. Jesus encouraged us to see the more significant, heaven-oriented picture regarding such matters: there is more to life than food and clothing.

B. Examples of Provision (vv. 26–29)

26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

In a lesser-to-greater argument, Jesus illustrates His point with an image familiar to anyone in His audience: birds. Humans *sow*, *reap*, and *gather into barns*, but birds do not (compare Psalms 104:27–28; 147:9). Since the *heavenly Father* nonetheless feeds them, will He not also provide for those who are created in His image (Genesis 1:26–27), who labor at sowing, harvesting, and storing?

In declaring God to be heavenly Father, Jesus reinforces Old Testament teaching about God (compare Deuteronomy 1:29–31; 32:6; 2 Samuel 7:12–14; Jeremiah 31:9). This is just one of the numerous times Jesus refers to God this way in the Sermon on the Mount. No matter how much we labor to meet our needs, we should never forget that our heavenly Father is ultimately the one who provides for us (contrast Luke 12:16–21). Ignoring that truth can lead to yet another “two-master” situation, against which Jesus has just warned.

27. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

The phrase *taking thought* translates the same Greek word used by Jesus two verses earlier. Of additional interest here is the translation regarding adding *one cubit unto his stature*. The underlying Greek word translated as *stature* refers to physical height, as it is also translated in Luke 12:25; 19:3. But it may also refer to one’s “age,” as it is translated in John 9:21, 23 and Hebrews 11:11.

How to Say It

Aramaic	Air-uh- <i>may</i> -ik.
Corinthians	Ko- <i>rin</i> -thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Demas	Dee-mus.
Gentiles	Jen-tiles.
Pontius Pilate	Pon-shus or Pon-ti-us Pie-lut.
Thessalonians	Thess-uh- <i>lo</i> -nee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).

The idea either way is to ask the rhetorical question: *Why be overly concerned about things beyond your control?*

Worry can consume us as we waste time stewing over matters that we have no power to change. Excessive worry can contribute to a wide range of health issues and actually shorten our lives in the process.

What Do You Think?

When do we cross the line between making prudent decisions about the future and engaging in undue worry about the future?

Digging Deeper

What questions do you ask to help you discern in this regard?

28–29. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Jesus now addresses the issue of clothing (*raiment*). To illustrate the counterproductive nature of worry, He again uses a lesser-to-greater comparison. This one involves a word picture of flowers, specifically *lilies of the field*. God provides what is necessary for them to grow and develop. He is responsible for their beauty.

The *glory of Solomon*—referring to the wealth and splendor of his kingdom—was known and admired throughout the world of his day. The queen of Sheba remarked, after having witnessed several examples of that splendor, “The half was not told me” (1 Kings 10:7). Yet nothing produced by human wisdom or creativity can match the simple beauty seen in the flowers God has created and provides for. The God who invests such care regarding flowers is the same heavenly Father who created and cares for us.

C. God of Provision (vv. 30–32)

30. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

The life expectancy of some vegetation is quite long, redwood trees being an example. But those are an exception. The life expectancy of most plants is relatively short compared to humans. And so it is with *the grass of the field*. That is true in terms of both natural life expectancy and the use of flowers and grass to heat the ovens for baking bread. Once again, Jesus' point is that if God bestows such beauty upon items in nature that are so short-lived, how much more will He care for human beings? Even so, we must do what flowers and grass are incapable of doing: exercise faith that God will provide such care for us (contrast Matthew 8:26; 14:31; 16:8).

Mississippi Wildflowers

I remember the first spring we lived in Mississippi. An unremarkable patch of grass just down the road from our house suddenly began to bloom with the most beautiful wildflowers I had ever seen. They were not part of a garden or a carefully tended landscape. The flowers appeared out of nowhere and took over the plot of land.

I drove by that beautiful scene nearly every day. And every day, I admired their loveliness. Imagine my surprise when, by midsummer, the property owner had simply mowed them all down! What a loss! I briefly considered knocking on the homeowner's door and demanding an explanation.

The truth is, I knew why. Summer in Mississippi is brutally hot. The flowers were already wilting under the extreme heat. They would never have survived the temperatures. But once again, in the spring, the wildflowers returned and flourished for their season.

God cares for the wildflowers and the grass, even though they wilt in the heat. If He cares about something so seemingly insignificant as seasonal flowers, how much more can we trust that He cares for us? When you consider His tender care for nature, in what ways are you encouraged to believe He cares deeply for your needs? —B. R.

31–32. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after

all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

With His repeat of *take no thought*, Jesus returns to the challenge He issued in the first verse of today's study. In the first century, pagan worshipers often sacrificed to their gods, hoping to appease them and receive blessings. However, for followers of Jesus, the situation is different. Jesus demands nothing besides faith, highlighting the stark contrast between pagan practices and the assurance provided by faith in Him.

A tunnel-vision focus on the necessities of life is characteristic of the *Gentiles*. The underlying Greek word is also translated as "nations" (Matthew 24:9). The term points to non-Jewish peoples. Jesus calls His followers to possess an outlook or mindset different from theirs. The new mindset is based on acknowledging the awareness of the *heavenly Father*. He knows that we need the necessities of life (*all these things*). The question is whether we possess the faith to trust in His provision for us.

That does not imply that God endorses carelessness regarding our earthly responsibilities. Followers of Jesus should be known for their diligence (Hebrews 6:11–12), respected for their honest work (2 Thessalonians 3:7–10), and worthy examples of loving service (Acts 6:1–4).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can we grow in faith to trust in God's provision?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance faith in God and personal responsibility in this regard?

III. Kingdom Living

(Matthew 6:33–34)

A. Righteousness First (v. 33)

33a. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.

The verse now before us switches the instruction from the negative (what to avoid) to the positive (what to seek as *first* priority). That priority is *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*. Jesus

does not want His followers to be so consumed by the concerns of this world that those concerns influence the priorities they set, the decisions they make, and the time they spend. There is something else worth seeking that is of far greater, more lasting value.

Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount with a reference to this kingdom, calling it the “kingdom of heaven,” to which the “poor in spirit” belong (Matthew 5:3). The realms of the “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are one and the same (compare Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15). Jesus taught His followers to pray, “Thy kingdom come” (Matthew 6:10). As His crucifixion drew near, Jesus stood before a puzzled Pontius Pilate and told him, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Jesus did not come to institute a kingdom like the typical kingdoms of history, which use military strength to exercise and expand their control. (That was the kind of kingdom that many in Jesus’ day expected the Messiah to establish; compare Acts 1:6). But the power that characterizes God’s kingdom is a different kind of power (1 Corinthians 4:20). His kingdom is characterized by “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17).

The nature of Jesus’ kingdom can also be seen in the words that follow “Thy kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer. They are the words, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). To seek first the kingdom of God is to make His will the most important pursuit and priority in our lives. Jesus’ kingdom is not a matter of conquering nations or peoples by force but of individuals submitting to King Jesus and prioritizing His will daily. To seek God’s *righteousness* is to seek what He wants in the world in an effort to make the world right—in a way, to bring heaven to earth by being the salt and light that Jesus calls His followers to be (Matthew 5:13–16).

Thus, we could rephrase the question asked in the previous verse as follows: Do the concerns of the *kingdom of God* consume our attention to the extent that they influence the priorities we set, the decisions we make, and the money and

time we spend trying to satisfy these concerns? Which kingdom are we seeking: the earthly or the heavenly?

What Do You Think?

What concerns and actions are indicative of the kingdom of God and the righteousness of God?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to prioritize the kingdom of God in the upcoming week?

33b. And all these things shall be added unto you.

The phrase *all these things* refers to the food, drink, and clothing previously discussed. Jesus promises that when we dedicate ourselves to the pursuit of the kingdom of God, the things that consume so much of the world’s attention will no longer dominate our thoughts since they will be provided. As Jesus has already clarified, our loving heavenly Father will be the provider.

We note, however, that countless Christians throughout history and from around the world have suffered and died from dehydration, malnourishment, and starvation. This verse is not saying that these things result from a lack of faith. Instead, it is a promise that God is the ultimate provider for His people. One way that He provides for His people in need is through the generosity of others. As believers “seek . . . first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33a, above), they will show generosity to others in need (Mark 10:30; Luke 12:33; compare 2 Corinthians 8:3–5).

We must remember that Jesus’ words transcend all times and cultures. They are meant to be a standard for His followers, no matter the time in history in which they are living. Since Jesus’ kingdom is “not of this world,” His promise still holds true, regardless of the time or place in history, when and where we are living.

B. Today, Not Tomorrow (v. 34)

34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

The degree to which we hoard *for the morrow* may indicate the degree to which we trust God to provide for our daily needs. An excellent example of this problem is found in Exodus 16:4, where the Israelites were instructed to gather enough manna only for the day (except for the sixth day). Most followed the instructions, but some didn't (Exodus 16:20).

Fear of the future can keep us from seeking first the kingdom of God by making us overly earth-centered (compare the case of Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10). We cannot be servants of "two masters"!

Each *day* will likely include some measure of *evil* or tragic, unpleasant circumstances. That's because we continue to live in a world reeling from the curse of sin. Yet, to discipline our thinking and focus our attention on kingdom priorities, we must maintain our intent. Paul's words challenge us: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). This is also part of being "transformed by the renewing of your mind" and living all of life as an act of service to God (see Romans 12:1–2).

What Do You Think?

How can we balance focusing on "things above" with the need to pursue justice and righteousness in the world?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:13–16; Acts 20:32–35; and James 1:27 inform your response?

Living Day by Day

Several years ago, my husband and I found ourselves in the midst of a personal financial crisis. We both needed jobs, and we spent nearly every moment searching online job boards and applying for various positions. In the meantime, bills were piling up, and our pantry stockpile was quickly dwindling. Anxiety was overwhelming us.

Before long, my husband stumbled upon an app offering daily work and pay. He started working immediately, and his wages would be deposited into our bank account each day. There was

rarely enough for more than the bills or groceries, but God provided just enough each day. During that season, we learned to trust God to give us our "daily bread" and not worry about the future. He was our provision.

Living day-by-day does not come easy. We prefer to live in security, knowing for sure that we will have more than enough to cover our own needs. But life is not always that predictable. Our inability to control may be exposed in the form of a troubling health diagnosis, job loss, or unexpected news. How might the Lord teach you to trust Him for your daily needs? —B. R.

Conclusion

A. Connecting People to the Father

All followers of Jesus can demonstrate the difference that living in the trust of a loving heavenly Father can make. Each of us has a sphere of influence that includes people to whom God seems far away. In some cases, this distance can become magnified during the Christmas season for various reasons. A change in people's understanding of God may not occur overnight through our efforts. Still, with patience and prayer perhaps we can use the illustration in the Lesson Introduction, "pulling back the curtain" and helping people see how much their Father really does love them.

In this season, when we celebrate how God came near in a special way, perhaps in some small way, you can show someone around you, through your simple acts of kindness, that their Father has not forgotten them.

B. Prayer

What a sacred privilege it is to know You as our Father in heaven! May we never take this relationship for granted, and may we help others to see what a blessing it is to know You in that way and the difference it makes in our lives, both now and for eternity. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

No one knows our earthly needs better than our heavenly Father.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Divide the class into small groups and distribute a sheet of paper and a pen to each group. Direct groups to write the following words as headers of three columns on the sheet of paper: *Minor, Serious, Unusual.*

Under the appropriate header, ask groups to write down examples of minor, serious, and unusual worries or concerns people may have. After three minutes of group work, reconvene the class and ask volunteers to share examples. Then, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—How often do we think about our fears? 2—How often do we let our fears consume our thinking? 3—How do we handle our fears?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Timeline of a Day” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions with a partner.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “We have all felt fear and worry. Sometimes, these things take up a significant part of our thoughts and concerns. Today’s study on Matthew’s Gospel will recount a teaching from Jesus regarding our trust in God’s provision.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 6:24–34. Divide the class into three groups: **Life Group**, **Provision Group**, and **Kingdom Group**. Distribute handouts of the questions below for in-group discussion.

Life Group. Reread Matthew 6:24–27. 1—Explain Jesus’ claim in verse 24. Why is this true? 2—Explain Jesus’ mention of “fowls” (v. 26). What is the significance of their mention? 3—How would you summarize Jesus’ teachings in these verses?

Provision Group. Reread Matthew 6:28–30. 1—What is Jesus teaching in these verses? 2—What

is the significance of God caring about “the grass of the field” (v. 30)? 3—What do these verses teach regarding God’s care and provision for our needs?

Kingdom Group. Reread Matthew 6:31–34. 1—What is Jesus teaching in these verses? 2—What does it mean to seek God’s kingdom and righteousness? 3—What do you think Jesus meant when He said, “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself” (v. 34)?

After calling time, bring the groups back together. Ask a volunteer from each group to summarize their group’s findings. Conclude by asking the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What reasons does Jesus give as to why we don’t need to worry? 2—What do these verses teach us about God?

Into Life

Say, “One way we can deal with worry is to notice the needs of others in our community.” Ask participants to create a list on the board of difficulties that people in your community may face. Lead a brainstorming session on ways to address those difficulties. To help with brainstorming, ask the following questions: 1—What is already being done to help with these difficulties? 2—How can we partner with those already addressing these difficulties? Write brainstorming responses on the board.

As a class, circle the most viable ways your class can help. Take time to write a plan and timetable for implementing that community plan.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Visualize Trust” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete the activity as a take-home activity. To ensure completion, state that you will ask volunteers for their responses at the beginning of the next class period.

Conclude class by praying and thanking God for His concern over every detail of your life.

Christ the Savior

Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8–13
Background Scripture: John 3:14–17; 10:9–11, 14–16, 27–28



Luke 15:3–7

3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Romans 5:6–10

6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

10 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.



Key Text

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. —Romans 5:10

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 1: Our God and the Holy Scriptures

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the paradox that Jesus is both shepherd and sacrifice.
2. Give examples of ways believers might experience Christ's rescue.
3. Make a plan to resist complacency and resolve conflict according to Christ's reconciling example.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Rescues and Rejoicing
- B. Lesson Context: Luke 15
- C. Lesson Context: Romans

I. The Seeking Shepherd (Luke 15:3–7)

- A. Lost Sheep (vv. 3–4)
Missing Lamb
- B. Found Sheep (v. 5)
- C. Communal Rejoicing (v. 6)
- D. Sinners Like Sheep (v. 7)

II. The Self-Giving Son (Romans 5:6–10)

- A. Sacrifice for Sinners (vv. 6–8)
A Life for a Life
- B. Saving Former Enemies (vv. 9–10)

Conclusion

- A. Coming Home
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Rescues and Rejoicing

On October 13, 2010, the first of 33 men emerged from a collapsed mine in Chile. They had been trapped for nearly 10 weeks. When the rescue drill reached the underground chamber where the men had been confined, a siren announced the breakthrough. Families of the miners celebrated as the men emerged one by one. All had survived! The US president spoke of “the joy of people everywhere” as they heard the news of the successful multinational rescue effort.

Dramatic rescues capture the attention of people around the world. Such outcomes elicit great celebration. Today's lesson calls attention to the most important rescue effort of all time: Jesus' rescue mission on behalf of lost humanity.

B. Lesson Context: Luke 15

The first of our two printed texts for this lesson is drawn from a sequence of three “lost and found” parables that constitute the entirety of Luke 15. An element common to all three parables is the joy that occurs when that which was lost is found.

Jesus spoke these parables while on His final trip to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–56). It was a lengthy journey, but the crucifixion was near. Matthew 18:12–14 is another version of today's parable.

C. Lesson Context: Romans

Paul's letter to the church in Rome was most likely written in AD 57 or 58. During Paul's third missionary journey, he spent about three months in Greece (Acts 20:1–3). This may have been the time during which he wrote this letter. He had never visited the church in Rome, but he planned to (Romans 1:8–13).

Many consider Romans to be Paul's most outstanding epistle. It is a profound doctrinal treatise, dealing with many aspects of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:5). The universal sinfulness of humanity was the issue (1:18–3:20). The remedy is “the righteousness of God” that comes to individuals through their faith in Jesus (3:21–24). The printed text leads us to explore the intersection of these facts.

I. The Seeking Shepherd

(Luke 15:3–7)

The previous chapter of Luke ends with Jesus offering a strong word of caution to count the cost before deciding to follow Him (Luke 14:25–33). His words likely shock many in the audience, especially the part about carrying a cross (14:27)!

Even so, chapter 15 begins with “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him” (Luke 15:1). Apparently, Jesus’ candid language about what true discipleship means does not dissuade His audience from wanting to hear more. On the other hand, the religious leaders “murmured” against Jesus because of His willingness to welcome such “sinners” and even eat with them (15:2).

A. Lost Sheep (vv. 3–4)

3. And he spake this parable unto them, saying.

The word *them* in this phrase points us to “the Pharisees and scribes” in Luke 15:2. It is worth noting that Jesus was not the first to teach in parables (compare Judges 9:7–15; 2 Kings 14:9–10), but His authoritative use of this method characterizes much of His teaching.

4. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

The hypothetical setting of the parable resonates well with those of a preindustrial era, when the majority of people lived on farms. Indeed, that fact of drawing on images of common life is foundational to what makes a parable a parable. Beyond this foundation, however, there is disagreement on a precise definition.

The imagery of a shepherd leaving 99 sheep in search of 1 is startling—and that’s exactly the shock effect that is intended. Much is left unsaid here. Were there other workers available to watch over the 99 during the search? How long would the shepherd be willing to search before giving up? These and other questions are neither posed nor necessary. The emphasis is God’s intense concern for the lost, a concern the Pharisees lack.

The expertise of these men should cause them to remember the shepherd-and-sheep imagery in their own Scriptures (compare Psalms 23; 119:176; Jeremiah 31:10; Ezekiel 34:11–16).

Missing Lamb

My daughter received a stuffed lamb as a gift at a baby shower. When she got old enough to notice the lamb, she immediately loved it. She held it every night when she was falling asleep. She chewed on its ears and nose. When she got a little older, she dressed it in doll clothes and took it to Sunday school with her. The lamb was her constant companion—until the day it disappeared.

We had gone to the park. When we came home, it was not in the car seat, the diaper bag, or the stroller. During her nap time, I left her with my husband, and then frantically drove back to the park to look for the lamb. Unfortunately, it was gone forever.

I searched for that stuffed lamb but never found it. However, the shepherd in this parable found his lost sheep. We have a “good shepherd” (John 10:14) who takes care of His flock, searching out those who are lost. In contrasting Christianity with other religions, it’s been noted that while other religions feature humans’ search for God, Christianity features God’s search for us. Are you willing to be found, or are you hiding?

—L. M. W.

B. Found Sheep (v. 5)

5. And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

As we work our way through this parable, it is essential that we keep in mind the original audiences—plural, because there are two. The audience of Luke 15:1 is eager to hear Jesus; the audience of 15:2 is eager to criticize Him. The lamb that was *found* represents those of 15:1. Jesus came “to seek and to save” the lost (Luke 19:10), and that’s exactly what He’s doing here—something the audience of 15:2 disapproves.

Again, we are cautious not to fill in details that we think should be in the parable. For example, some may doubt that a sheep weighing between 100 and 200 pounds could be carried on one’s

shoulders. But that imagery is part of the shock value of the parable. The imagery is designed to get Jesus' hearers to think as they identify the characters in the story with those of real life.

C. Communal Rejoicing (v. 6)

6. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

The wording here is nearly identical to that of Luke 15:9, which describes shared joy at the recovery of a lost coin. Good news is always worth sharing. Indeed, the language of shared joy and celebration permeates the three parables of Luke 15, with nine references in total (see 15:5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 23, 24, 29, 32; see also Lesson 6). Luke 15 is one of three points in Luke's Gospel where the call to rejoice is especially stressed; the other two places are found in Luke 1–2 and Luke 6:23. The contrast in attitude with that of the dour Pharisees could hardly be more striking. To them, sinners are to be marginalized, avoided, shunned, and condemned, not sought out!

What Do You Think?

What do you find most striking about this parable?

Digging Deeper

What about God's character is revealed in what stands out to you?

D. Sinners Like Sheep (v. 7)

7. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Jesus now gives the application of His brief parable, which applies to the two main groups listening to Him: the "sinners" and the religious leaders. The one sheep that had strayed represents *one sinner* who has strayed from the Father in heaven. When that sinner repents (changes course to return to the Lord), there is *joy in heaven*.

Again, we resist the temptation to press other ideas into the lesson that Jesus is teaching. For

example, we realize that everyone has sinned and is in need of repentance (Acts 2:38; Romans 3:23; etc.). Therefore, how can Jesus properly compare one sinner who *repenteth* with a fictitious group *which need no repentance*?

What Jesus is doing is reflecting the self-image of the *ninety and nine just persons*—the religious leaders who speak against Him and His actions. It is not that these leaders need no repentance; rather, they believe that they do not need to repent. This makes their spiritual condition even worse (John 9:39–41). Those who have truly repented should not feel superior to the unrepentant. If anything, their compassion should increase, for they know the freedom from sin that repentance brings. They should desire to see others experience that same freedom.

A shepherd's concern for one lost sheep, while touching, pales in comparison to God's desire to reach lost people. It is clear from Jesus' words elsewhere, especially in John 10:1–18, that He is the shepherd who has come to rescue lost sheep. Luke records the following words of Jesus, spoken while in the house of the transformed Zacchaeus: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

What Do You Think?

Which group do you more easily see yourself in—the "sinners" or the "just persons"?

Digging Deeper

How does this parable invite you to respond?

II. The Self-Giving Son

(Romans 5:6–10)

Romans 5 begins with one of Paul's favorite methods of argumentation: the use of the word *therefore* to summarize a point in the sense of "consequently" or "accordingly." Thus, it behooves us to take a quick look at the reason for this "therefore" before we consider what flows from it.

The reasoning behind the "therefore" of Romans 5:1 is Paul's citing Abraham as an example of someone whose faith "was counted unto

him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3). Paul closes the chapter by building a bridge from Abraham to the followers of Jesus. Just as righteousness was “imputed” to Abraham by faith (4:20–22), so it will be imputed to those who “believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (4:24). That faith allows us to have “access . . . into this grace wherein we stand” (5:2). Our printed text expands on the wonder of God’s grace by contrasting our position before God prior to Jesus’ death with where we now stand because of His death.

A. Sacrifice for Sinners (vv. 6–8)

6. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

The verse’s opening *for when* signals additional information to the “therefore” of Romans 5:1. The additional information deals with an intersection of *time* and our lack of *strength*. Paul first pictures the desperation of our condition before Jesus’ atoning death on the cross: *we were yet without strength*. This is not measuring physical strength, but spiritual. Sin renders every human incapable of saving oneself. It is another way to say what Paul states in Romans 3:23, that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” By this standard, the most righteous of human beings is as much in need as the wickedest.

The adjective translated *ungodly*, used to describe humanity’s condition, is fairly rare in the New Testament (other occurrences in Romans 4:5; 1 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 4:18; 2 Peter 2:5; 3:7; and Jude 4, 15). This refers to a life lived without regard for God-honoring beliefs and practices. No one is exempt from being so characterized.

The solution to our sad condition is this: *Christ died for the ungodly*. The timing of that event was carefully planned by God, as Galatians 4:4 establishes: “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son” (compare Mark 1:15; Romans 4:25; Ephesians 1:10).

Christ’s dying for the ungodly is His substitutionary death on the cross, an essential element of the gospel message (1 Corinthians 15:3). The prophecy of Jesus’ death in Isaiah 53 is perhaps the most powerful description of that event in Scripture, even though Isaiah issued it sev-

eral hundred years before Jesus came to earth. Romans 5:1 notes the peace with God that we have through Jesus. Here in verse 6, Jesus’ death is connected to that peace, as expressed in Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 53:5).

Paul’s insight is that while the enemies of Jesus had nothing but malice in their hearts, God had planned all along for His Son’s death to be the means of salvation for humanity. The high priest spoke better than he knew when he declared that it was better for one man to die than to have an entire nation perish (John 11:49–53).

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you think people value individual strength or power?

Digging Deeper

What is the significance of Christ dying for us when we were “yet without strength” (Romans 5:6)?

7. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

One issue within this verse is the difference between a *righteous* person and a *good* person. Some suggest that the righteous person describes an especially pious individual who possesses a “holier-than-thou” attitude. He may be highly respected, but he is not the kind of person for whom someone would be willing *to die*. The good person would be someone whose good deeds make her a much more likable individual, and, thus, a person for whom others would be more likely to die.

Others suggest that there is basically no difference between the righteous person and the good person, and that Paul is making the same claim in two different ways. The first part of the verse states Paul’s claim in a negative way; the second states it positively. Regardless of the exact distinction between the “righteous man” and the “good man,” the gist of Paul’s statement is that people are not likely to give their lives on behalf of even the best of human beings.

8. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Reading this verse with the previous two, we can see the contrast Paul desires to make. It is not so much between the righteous person and the good person as it is between the good (and righteous) people of verse 7 and the ungodly people of verse 6. If the chances of someone dying for a good or righteous person are so slim, then the chances of someone dying for an ungodly person are laughable. Herein lies the contrast.

We see the incredible *love* God has shown to all humanity—all of whom are *sinners*—in the fact that *Christ died for us*. Self-help is out of the question; before receiving His salvation, we are all dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1, 4–5). We need a Savior!

Paul himself never lost his sense of wonder and gratitude for Jesus’ death. The grace that resulted saved him from a sinful past that included the persecution and murder of Christians (Acts 9:1–2; 22:4–5; 26:9–11; 1 Corinthians 15:9). He referred to himself as the “chief” of sinners but also the recipient of “exceeding abundant” grace (1 Timothy 1:14–15).

What Do You Think?

What is more surprising: that Christ died for us, or that this happened while we were still sinners?

Digging Deeper

What is the significance of Christ dying for sinners?

A Life for a Life

A little girl was walking with her father down a sidewalk along a busy street. They came to a crosswalk and started to cross. Halfway across the street, the girl caught sight of a balloon floating above them and stopped just as a car barreled down the street toward her. Seeing the danger, her father ran to push her out of the path of the car to safety. Tragically, the car hit her father, killing him instead.

The girl grew up with the memory of the accident and the knowledge that her father gave his own life for hers. Initially, she felt shame that he had died because of her inattention and carelessness. It was not until she had her own child that

she realized the depth of her father’s love. She would willingly do the same for her baby. Only when she realized that was she able to be free from shame.

Jesus willingly sacrificed His life for each of us, thereby paying the debt for our sin. How will you live in the knowledge of that love daily, free from the guilt and shame of sin? —L. M. W.

B. Saving Former Enemies (vv. 9–10)

9. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

Romans 5 begins with Paul’s declaration that we are “justified by faith” (Romans 5:1). Here, he adds that we are *justified by Jesus’ blood*. To be *justified* is both to be pardoned from all sin (and thus reconciled to God) and to be counted as righteous. Because Jesus died in our place, we are free from condemnation (3:25; 4:25; 8:1). In this vein, some describe “justified” as being treated “just as if I’d never sinned.”

The means of our justification is Jesus’ blood. The blood of Jesus given at the cross is the price paid to cleanse us from our sins (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 2:13; 1 Peter 1:18–19; etc.). Just as God saw the blood on the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and declared, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13), He will “pass over” us when He sees the blood of Jesus covering us (1 Corinthians 5:7). We will not be judged according to our sins. Rather, we will *be saved from God’s wrath* (compare Romans 1:18).

10. 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.

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh-losh-unz.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).
Ezekiel	Ee-zeek-ee-ul or Ee-zeek-yul.
Jeremiah	Jair-uh-my-uh.
Pharisees	Fair-ih-seez.
Zacchaeus	Zack-key-us.

This verse continues a pattern from verses 6 and 8, above: *when we were* most unfit for saving, *God* in Jesus Christ took the necessary action to save us. Building on this idea, Paul introduces another term to picture the impact of Jesus' death: *reconciled*. This Greek word occurs six times in the New Testament, and the first two of those are right here. Three more occurrences are in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, which goes into more depth about the concept of reconciliation (compare 1 Corinthians 7:11).

To be considered *enemies* of God is terrifying—or it should be. Many passages of Scripture speak of God being with us and for us (Psalm 23:4; Matthew 1:23; Romans 8:31; etc.). But there are also passages that speak of His being against sinners (Jeremiah 21:13; Ezekiel 13:8; 21:3; etc.). In the verse before us, Paul declares that it is God who has taken the initiative to remove what results in this enmity: the sin barrier. That means of reconciliation is *the death of his Son* (see also Colossians 1:19–22). This introduces the concept of Christ's "intercession," covered in more depth in Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25.

What Do You Think?

What does Jesus' *death* accomplish?

What does Jesus' *life* accomplish?

Digging Deeper

What does this teach us about the importance of both Jesus' death and resurrection?

Conclusion

A. Coming Home

A homecoming is often a time of great joy. Think of those miners in Chile whose dramatic rescue was recounted in the Introduction. But such earthly celebrations pale in comparison to celebrations in heaven over the repentance of a sinner, an enemy of God. The angels themselves join the celebration!

Strictly speaking, Paul does not use homecoming language in Romans 5. But the reconciliation made possible through Jesus' death is



Visual for Lesson 3. Display this visual as you ask, "Explain how Jesus is both our seeking Shepherd and sacrificial lamb."

what allows a spiritual homecoming. Those who accept Jesus' sacrifice according to the biblical plan of salvation become reconciled to God. The sin barrier no longer stands. They are at peace with Him. They have come back to their Creator, back to where they belong. They are home spiritually and are destined for the eternal home being prepared for all faithful followers of Jesus (John 14:1–3).

For many, "coming home" is a vital part of the Christmas season. The real message of Christmas is that our heavenly Father has provided a way for every person to "come home" to Him: the gift of Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). God wants to be for us! He proved that desire in the death of His Son. Everyone in rebellion against God is a lost sheep. But Christ specializes in finding lost sheep. What is your part in being His hands and feet in that regard?

B. Prayer

Father, in this season of gift-giving, we acknowledge that You have given the gift of all gifts in Your Son, Jesus. We look beyond the manger to the cross and empty tomb, declaring with gratitude that "Christ died for us." In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus is both the seeking Shepherd and the sacrificial Lamb.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Recount a time that you got lost. It could be a scary experience as a child or even as a parent losing a child. You could share a time when you got lost in a town or neighborhood. Perhaps you lost your group at an event or large gathering. Take a few minutes to share your experience. Ask others to share their own “lost” experiences.

Take a minute or two to debrief what was common about these experiences.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “We all have experienced the feeling of being lost. Today, we will study a parable from Jesus along with a teaching from Paul that shows us the extent to which God reaches out to those who are ‘lost’ spiritually.”

Into the Word

Divide the class in half, designating one half as the *Luke Group* and the other half as the *Romans Group*. Distribute handouts of the questions below for in-group discussions.

Luke Group. Read Luke 15:3–7. 1—What are the main themes in this text? 2—How is God’s redemption evident in it? 3—How does the parable demonstrate God’s love and grace?

Romans Group. Read Romans 5:6–10. 1—What are the main themes in this text? 2—How is God’s redemption evident in it? 3—What does this text teach us about the significance of Christ’s sacrifice?

After allowing several minutes for discussion, have the groups present their findings.

Say, “In today’s study, we see that Jesus is both our shepherd and our sacrifice. This is a paradox that we must explore and understand.” Divide the *Luke Group* into two groups, assigning one group Romans 5:6–10 and the other Hebrews 9:26–28. Divide the *Romans Group* into two groups, assigning one group Luke 15:3–7 and the other John 10:11–18. Ask groups to read their assigned passages and discuss how they portray Jesus as either shepherd or sacrifice, noting key insights and

thoughts. While the groups are working, write on the board *Shepherd* and *Sacrifice* as the headers of two columns. Then write the assigned Scripture references as rows that extend across the two columns. After calling time, ask the groups to come back together and invite them to share their findings. Write key insights in the chart on the board.

Option. Distribute copies of the “God’s Love and Grace” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before checking answers with a partner.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—How do these passages reveal the surprising nature of Jesus’ roles? 2—What does it mean for Jesus to be both shepherd and sacrifice in our lives? 3—How do we, as believers, experience Christ’s rescue in daily life?

Into Life

Encourage your students to spend one minute in self-reflection to identify areas where complacency may be present in their lives. Ask them to take another minute to reflect on how that complacency can cause conflict and to consider how Christ’s reconciling example can inspire change.

Discuss together, “How does knowing that Jesus is both shepherd and sacrifice motivate you to be reconciling instead of complacent?”

Have participants pair up. Ask partners to read Ephesians 4:29–32 and Matthew 5:23–24, then plan together ways to resolve conflict based on Christ’s example. Their plans should also include a way to be accountable to each other.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Testimonies of Christ’s Rescue” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it as a take-home activity. Remember to begin the next class by asking for volunteers to share insights regarding the activity.

Close in prayer, asking for guidance, wisdom, and a desire to follow Christ’s example.

The Holy Spirit

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 3:14–21

Background Scripture: John 3:5–8; 14:16–17, 26; 15:26–27; 16:7–15;
Acts 2:1–21, 32–33; 1 Corinthians 12:1–13

Romans 8:12–17, 26–27

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God,

and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.



Key Text

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. —Romans 8:16

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 1: Our God and the Holy Scriptures

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Describe the Spirit's work as an "advocate" in the lives of believers.
2. Give reasons to trust the Spirit's witness about believers' standing before God.
3. Make a plan to deal with fear in favor of living confidently as God's Spirit-led children.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Real Brother
- B. Lesson Context

I. Flesh and Spirit (Romans 8:12–14)

- A. Owe the Flesh (v. 12)
- B. What Leads to Death (v. 13a)
- C. What Leads to Life (v. 13b)
- D. What Results (v. 14)

II. God's Children (Romans 8:15–17)

- A. Not Slaves (v. 15a)
- B. Adopted (v. 15b)
- C. Confirmed (v. 16)
Welcome to the Family
- D. Heirs with Jesus (v. 17)

III. Helped by the Spirit (Romans 8:26–27)

- A. To Pray (v. 26)
Advocating for a Friend
- B. Through Intercession (v. 27)

Conclusion

- A. God's Real Children
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Real Brother

When my friend Chris was 10, his family adopted a 5-year-old boy named Mark. At first, Mark was afraid that his new parents would send him away. He tried to behave perfectly so they would keep him.

A few weeks after becoming part of Chris's family, Mark broke one of Chris's toys. Mark started to shake and cry. Chris gave him a big hug and asked why he was trembling. Mark replied, "Because Daddy will be mad that I broke your toy." Chris assured Mark that their dad wouldn't be angry. Mark replied, "But you're the real son." Chris pulled Mark closer and whispered, "You're his real son now too. You're my real brother." Chris still remembers the tension in his brother's arms melt away. The barrier was broken. Mark finally knew that he was part of the family.

B. Lesson Context

The context for last week's lesson on Romans 5 applies to this lesson as well, so that information need not be repeated here.

Romans 6–8 is Paul's rebuttal against false applications of the gospel message he has been preaching. Believers cannot continue in sin because Jesus' death released them from sin's dominion. Believers are united with Christ in His death (Romans 6:3–11), which frees them from slavery to sin, death, and the law (6:11; 7:1–6; 8:1–2; Galatians 2:19). They also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Since God has freed believers from sin's mastery, they are to see themselves instead as God's servants (6:12–23). This is crucial because a conflict rages in every believer (7:21–23).

The Holy Spirit lives inside of believers (Romans 8:9–11), and His will stands in opposition to the will of sin (8:5–7; Galatians 5:16–17). There is no neutral ground: one either sides with the Holy Spirit and follows His orders, or one submits again to sin's desires. Those sinful desires lead only to death (Romans 8:6a; Galatians 5:19–21). But the Spirit guides believers to "life and peace" (Romans 8:6b), and God will raise them from the dead just like Jesus (8:10–11).

The apostle Paul wrote about 25 percent of the New Testament. But nearly half of the New Testament references to the (Holy) Spirit occur in his letters. Clearly, the person and work of the Holy Spirit is a vital doctrine for him—and should be so for us.

I. Flesh and Spirit

(Romans 8:12–14)

A. Owe the Flesh (v. 12)

12. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

The word *therefore* indicates that Paul is concluding a line of thought as he points out implications of the topic to this point. A quick look back at Romans 8:1–11 reveals that Paul has been demonstrating the absolute incompatibility between the realm of *the flesh* and the realm of the Spirit. We have to decide which we are indebted to.

The word translated “flesh” is one of Paul’s favorites—he uses it over 100 times in his letters, about one-third of those in Romans alone! But Paul doesn’t use this word to refer to the same thing in every context. Furthermore, the term “the body” is virtually synonymous with “the flesh” in many cases, so it’s useful to consider them together. In six instances Paul uses the words translated “flesh” and “body” together in the same verse to compare or contrast one with the other in various ways (Romans 8:13 [below]; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Colossians 1:22, 24; 2:11, 23). Here’s a thumbnail sketch of those two terms, plus “world,” categorized in three senses each:

<u>SENSE: POSITIVE</u>	<u>NEUTRAL</u>	<u>NEGATIVE</u>
<i>Flesh</i> : Galatians 2:20	1 Corinthians 15:39	Ephesians 2:3
<i>Body</i> : Romans 7:4	Romans 6:12	Romans 8:13
<i>World</i> : Romans 1:20	Romans 1:8	Colossians 2:20

As you can see, we have some careful reading to do to determine how Paul is using “flesh” or “body” in any given text. Considering the seven verses that immediately precede the one we are now reading, the sense is decidedly negative.

Those seven verses of Romans 8:5–11 reflect Paul’s portrayal elsewhere of “flesh” and “Spirit” as opposing categories (Galatians 3:3; 4:29; 6:8;



Visual for Lesson 4. Display this visual as you ask the discussion question associated with Romans 8:16.

etc.). The same opposing categories present themselves in places where “body” is contrasted with “Spirit” (Romans 8:10, 13 [below]).

Another way we speak of “the flesh” in a negative sense is when it is equated with “the world,” when in turn the world is contrasted with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12). The listed passages and others reflect a complex reality: even though we have been saved from the sinful principles of this world, we still live in it. And we may encounter the world insisting that we are in debt to it in terms of meeting the various appetites of the flesh.

While the mind can recognize sin and delight in God’s law (Romans 7:22–25), the flesh is unruly, tempted by the sins of the world (7:14, 23). Its desires are oriented toward the things that God disdains, and one cannot please God while submitting to the flesh (8:7–8). But believers are empowered to resist the flesh’s desires. We will see how as we consider additional verses below.

B. What Leads to Death (v. 13a)

13a. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.

Here we note a shift from the first-person plural “we” of the previous verse to the more pointed second-person plural “ye” as Paul states the central reason why not to *live after the flesh*, fulfilling its desires. It’s because the flesh, as used in this context, stands in opposition to God’s desires (Romans 8:7; Galatians 5:17). Allowing the desires of the flesh to control one’s life leads to death.

But this is nothing new; Paul here is reiterating a point that he makes throughout the letter. This point is most memorably summarized in Romans 6:23 as “the wages of sin is death” (see also Romans 2:6–8; 6:16, 21; 7:5). Paul is not referring to physical death, but to the outcome of the final judgment, where one’s eternal fate is sealed (Acts 17:31; Romans 2:15–16; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10). The one who lives to gratify the desires of the flesh will pay the highest price.

Paul was not alone in affirming the end-time judgment. The Gospels record Jesus teaching about the judgment (Matthew 12:36; 25:31–46; John 12:48). Other New Testament authors refer to it as well (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Peter 3:7; Revelation 20:11–15).

C. What Leads to Life (v. 13b)

13b. But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

The alternative to living after the flesh is to *mortify the deeds of the body*. Yet Paul does not suggest that his readers can be saved by their own strength, as if salvation were by works. Rather, believers are empowered by the life-giving *Spirit* to resist their temptations and to subdue the desires of their carnal natures (Romans 8:4). Paul similarly encouraged the Galatians in this regard (Galatians 5:16–18, 24–25).

Paul draws the death/life and law/Spirit contrasts from the covenant texts of the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 30:15–20, Moses renews the covenant that began at Sinai (Exodus 19–24) and tells the Israelites, “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil” (Deuteronomy 30:15). Keeping the covenant would bring the people life and prosperity, while break-

ing it would bring them death and disaster. While the Israelites failed to keep the covenant, God promised through Jeremiah that He would make a new covenant with His people. In the new covenant, God would write His laws on their hearts and enable them to obey Him (Jeremiah 31:31–34). Paul refers to believers as ministers of this new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6) and identifies the Holy Spirit as the one who circumcises the hearts of God’s people (Romans 2:29). Under this new covenant, believers have the help they need to live in ways that please God (7:6).

What Do You Think?

What do you think it looks like to live by the Spirit and not according to the flesh?

Digging Deeper

How does Galatians 5:16–18 contribute to your previous response?

D. What Results (v. 14)

14. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

The word *for* that begins this verse indicates a reason for or expansion on something stated previously. In this case, the verse now before us expands on what “ye shall live” of the previous verse means: it means to be considered as *the sons of God*. It is essential to recognize that Paul is not excluding women here. While this Greek term can be rendered either “sons” or “children,” the force of the male term “sons” evokes common ideas about the rights of male children in the ancient world. In both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, sons would inherit their fathers’ estates. Paul likely uses this term (rather than another Greek word for “children”) because of its association with inheritance, a point that he will make more explicit in verse 17.

Another grammatical feature to notice is that while the verse before this one is stated in the active voice (in terms of something the readers must do), the verse now before us is stated in the passive voice (in terms of something the readers must allow to be done to them). That “something”

How to Say It

Abba	Ab-buh.
Colossians	Kuh-losh-unz.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Ephesians	Ee-fee-zhunz.
Galatians	Guh-lay-shunz.

is to be *led by the Spirit of God* (compare Galatians 4:6; 5:18). Opinions differ on exactly what form this leading takes. But most all agree that the picture is, at the least, that of a Spirit-dominated life.

II. God's Children

(Romans 8:15–17)

A. Not Slaves (v. 15a)

15a. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.

The *for* introducing this verse again signals an expansion of the prior point. Here Paul explains his statement linking the experience of the Spirit's leading to one's status as a son of God. Paul doesn't want his readers to conclude that embracing a Spirit-dominated life is just to exchange one negative *bondage* for another negative bondage. Thus Paul emphasizes, as he has before, that believers have been freed from slavery to sin, death, the law, and judgment (Romans 6:6–22; 7:6; 8:2).

But there's more to the story! This is only a statement of what believers *do not* end up with. The next half-verse finishes the thought by stating what believers *do* receive (compare Hebrews 2:15).

What Do You Think?

What is it like to know that you are no longer bound to fear?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do you struggle to believe that you are freed from fear?

B. Adopted (v. 15b)

15b. But ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The earlier description of opposites was “the flesh” versus “the Spirit”; now the description of opposites is “the spirit of bondage” versus *the Spirit of adoption*. Adoption was a common and important practice in the ancient world. Infant mortality rates were high, and many children who survived infancy died at young ages from accidents or diseases. Men would often adopt adult males as their heirs to preserve family lines and secure caretakers for their old age. An adopted son

would take the father's family name and would have all the rights of a natural-born child. There is even some evidence that adopted sons had special rights against disownment, so that they were always a part of the family.

The reality of the adopted heirs' inclusion in God's family inspires them (us) to *cry, Abba, Father*. Paul here uses an Aramaic term and immediately translates it with the Greek equivalent. While some suggest that *Abba* is a child's term of endearment (like “Daddy”), the relevant literature from the time does not support this conclusion. Adults often used this term for their fathers without any childish affection implied. However, this misunderstanding does not diminish the significance of this cry. To call God one's own father was the kind of honor usually reserved for demigods. Paul proclaims that the one true God has given this honor to human beings as He adopts them into His family.

C. Confirmed (v. 16)

16. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

Paul here emphasizes the Spirit's role in testifying to the believer's new status (compare 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13). This testimony is delivered to the believer's own *spirit*, but Paul does not explain precisely what he means by this. It is likely that Paul refers back to the cry in Romans 8:15b, above. Some commentators suggest that the expression comes from a baptism ritual, but the evidence for this possibility is weak. It is more likely that Paul refers to the believer's inner sense of assurance, a gift from the Holy *Spirit* within them.

Here, instead of the Greek word for *son* (which he uses in Romans 8:14, above), Paul uses the term for *children*. This is a more comprehensive word that includes both males and females.

What Do You Think?

How should our lives look different, knowing we are children of God?

Digging Deeper

How does 1 John 3:1–2 contribute to your consideration of this?

Welcome to the Family

My brother and his wife spent years preparing to adopt children who were in the foster care system in the United States. Finally, they received a call about a sibling group of three children. The soon-to-be parents quickly made plans to visit. Before long, the kids had made the trip across several states to live with their new parents.

Almost a year went by before adoption day finally arrived. Everyone was somewhat nervous with excitement when a judge publicly declared the news: the children were officially adopted! They were no longer “in the system.” They were given new last names and legally welcomed into the family that they were already emotionally part of.

Just as a judge, with authority, “bore witness” to the official adoption of my nieces and nephew, the Holy Spirit “bears witness” to our adoption as children in the family of God. We have a new title as heirs, and we can truly call Him “Father.” What promises are now yours because of your adoption into His family? —B. R.

D. Heirs with Jesus (v. 17)

17. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Paul makes explicit here what he implies in Romans 8:14, above: those who are God’s *children* are His *heirs*. They have become part of God’s family and will receive an inheritance as *joint-heirs with Christ*, who is “appointed heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2). But what exactly are we to inherit? It’s tempting to answer that question quickly by turning to other well-known texts that speak of eternal life. But let’s not be too hasty in doing that before we let the verse at hand have its say. In this regard, we focus on the phrase *heirs of God*. There is ambiguity in the original language as to what exactly this means. Several passages throughout Paul’s writings and beyond speak of the promises that are ours as heirs, including God’s “promise in Christ” and “hope of eternal life” (Ephesians 3:6; Titus 3:4–7; compare James 2:5). While this remains broad and rather ambiguous, the main thrust is joyful hope.

At the same time, our inheritance comes with a cost: those who desire to be *glorified together* with Christ must also *suffer with him*. The suffering that Paul has in mind here is likely the persecutions Jesus faced, which believers will also experience if they live like Jesus (Mark 13:13; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:12–14; etc.). This suffering will result in sharing in glory with Christ. We will experience resurrection, our bodies being transformed and perfected like Jesus’ body was (Romans 8:11; Philippians 3:21). God will free His creation from bondage to death and decay (Romans 8:18–22).

What Do You Think?

What does it mean to share in Christ’s sufferings?

Digging Deeper

How do Philippians 3:1–7 and 1 Peter 4:12–19 inform your understanding of suffering with Christ?

III. Helped by the Spirit

(Romans 8:26–27)

A. To Pray (v. 26)

26. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

In Romans 8:18–25, Paul describes how the whole cosmos looks forward to God’s renewal of creation and how believers must wait with patient hope for that day.

Arriving now at Romans 8:26, Paul explains how *the Spirit* helps us as we wait. The word translated *infirmities* often refers to physical sickness or disease (Matthew 8:17; Acts 28:9; etc.). But here that word seems to speak of human limitations in a broad, general sense. This is a weakness that we cannot overcome in and of ourselves. The prayer task mentioned in Ephesians 6:18 is the challenge; the fact that we don’t even know *what we should pray for as we ought* is the reality. Both texts note the involvement of the Holy Spirit. The text at hand states that the Spirit makes up for our limi-

tations by making *intercession for us*. That concept refers to someone advocating on behalf of another.

Some interpreters have understood *groanings which cannot be uttered* as a reference to the gift of tongues (see 1 Corinthians 14:1–19). But Paul says here that it is the Holy Spirit who delivers such *groanings*, not the human believer. The Spirit communicates with God the Father on behalf of all believers with expressions that humans cannot mimic or understand.

What Do You Think?

In what ways might your prayers change, recognizing that the Spirit intercedes for you?

Digging Deeper

What weaknesses or infirmities do you desire the Spirit's help with?

Advocating for a Friend

In a volunteer role, I have the privilege of teaching English to asylum seekers. My work involves teaching them the basics of English communication so that they may seek jobs, find housing, and obtain additional assistance available to them.

One day a student stayed after class to ask me about a letter he received from the state. He didn't understand the letter's contents and needed to call the helpline mentioned in the letter. He asked if I would be willing to make the call for him.

I spent several minutes on the phone as an advocate between my student and the state representative. She explained what he needed to know and do; I then broke the information down in terms he could understand.

We might say that we can't speak the language of heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4), so the Holy Spirit does it for us as a go-between or intermediary. When you pray, do you acknowledge the Spirit's role in that regard?

—B. R.

B. Through Intercession (v. 27)

27. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Paul emphasizes the unique connection between *the Spirit* and *God the Father* as well as the effectiveness of the Spirit's advocacy. Interceding *according to the will of God*, the Spirit is not trying to convince the Father of something the Father does not wish to do. On the contrary, the Spirit prays for those things that the Father desires for us. They are thus aligned in their purpose, and believers can trust that God will answer those prayers.

Conclusion

A. God's Real Children

Unfortunately, some cultures view adopted children as having a kind of second-class status. While most parents love their adopted children as full members of their families, one can find accounts on social media of parents treating adopted children as inferior to their biological children.

When we have a faulty view of adoption, we can easily miss the radical nature of Paul's claim that God has given us the Spirit of adoption. Believers are not second-class children. Rather, we are fully integrated into God's family, given both His name and His Spirit. God begrudges us nothing; instead, He makes us joint heirs with Christ, promising us a share in His inheritance. Nor does Christ begrudge our inclusion in His family. On the contrary, He joyfully calls us His brothers and sisters and willingly shares His rightful inheritance with us. Adoption into God's family is not a legal fiction but a spiritual reality.

God also shows His love for His adopted children by sending us His Spirit as our advocate. He changes us so that we look more like Jesus, and one day He will resurrect our bodies just like He resurrected Jesus. We are never alone, never inferior or illegitimate children in God's eyes. We are God's real sons and daughters.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for making us Your children and giving us your Spirit to intercede for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We are God's real children!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Have participants identify a vulnerable population or an endangered animal species. Consider researching ahead of time to find one that might be in your area. Divide participants into small groups. Distribute index cards of the following questions to find out what learners know about advocating for this population: 1—Which organizations or foundations serve this purpose? 2—What are some things people do to help, serve, or bring awareness about this group? 3—Would any of the participants say they are an advocate for this cause? If so, how? 4—Why are advocates helpful to this group?

Bring the groups back together to present their findings in a whole-class discussion.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “An advocate is someone who speaks up for someone or something that cannot speak for themselves or struggles to be heard. As we study, consider in what ways the Holy Spirit is an advocate for us.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Romans 8:12–13. Write the following headers on the board: *In the Flesh* and *In the Spirit*. Have participants name behaviors and attitudes that can be displayed by living in either of these ways. For inspiration, recommend that they refer to Galatians 5:19–23. After several items are listed in each column, ask participants to identify ways that these attitudes and behaviors lead to life or death—physically, relationally, and spiritually.

Ask a volunteer to read Romans 8:14–17. Divide the class into two groups: **Children of God Group** and **Heirs of God Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) of the questions below for in-group discussion.

Children of God Group. Read Romans 8:14–15. 1—How does this passage define what it means to be a child of God? 2—How do Matthew 7:7–11 and Hebrews 12:7–11 add to this? 3—Based on

these passages, what is an implication of being called a child of God?

Heirs of God Group. Read Romans 8:16–17. 1—How does this passage explain what it means to be an heir of God? 2—How do Galatians 3:26–4:7 and Ephesians 1:3–14 add to this? 3—Based on these passages, what is an implication of being called an heir of God?

After calling time, bring the groups back together to share their findings. As a whole class, create a list of why believers can trust the Spirit’s witness about their standing before God.

Ask a volunteer to read Romans 8:26–27. Refer to the definition of *advocate* used earlier in the lesson. Talk about how the Holy Spirit is an advocate for believers. Distribute an index card and envelope to each learner. Give them a minute to write down an area in their lives where they feel weak, inadequate, or helpless. Then encourage them to place the card inside the envelope, seal it, and write the words of these two verses on the envelope. Invite them to put the envelope in a place where it will be seen regularly during the coming week. Encourage them to read the above verses aloud as a reminder to live confidently as a Spirit-led child of God.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Intercessor Inquiry” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Lead a brief brainstorming session by challenging learners to list ways to live confidently as believers. Divide the group into pairs. Challenge pairs to make a plan to deal with their fears so they can live confidently as God’s children.

Option. Distribute the “I Am a Child of God” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a couple of minutes before discussing conclusions with a partner.

Sin and Forgiveness

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 59:1–8

Background Scripture: Genesis 3:1–24; 1 John 1:5–2:6

1 John 1:5–10

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 2:1–6

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

6 He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.



Key Text

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. —1 John 1:8–9

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 2: Grace and Reconciliation

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the gospel using the terms *light* and *darkness* as used in 1 John.
2. Explain the significance of confession.
3. Celebrate Christ's pardon from sin by walking in the light and seeking fellowship with other believers.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Talk vs. Walk
- B. Lesson Context

I. True Fellowship (1 John 1:5–7)

- A. God Is Light (v. 5)
- B. Walking in the Light (vv. 6–7)
Light and Dark

II. Necessary Confession (1 John 1:8–2:2)

- A. Our Sin and Us (vv. 8–10)
- B. Our Sin and God (2:1–2)

III. Obedient Walk (1 John 2:3–6)

- A. Proof of Knowledge (vv. 3–5)
The Christian's Uniform
- B. Proof of Abiding (v. 6)

Conclusion

- A. Talk = Walk
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Talk vs. Walk

When our children were younger, one of our sons, then a preteen, burst into the house to report a fire he had seen in a vacant lot nearby. We immediately contacted the fire department and managed to contain the fire with a garden hose before firefighters arrived. Upon arrival, the fire chief expressed his gratitude to our son. Later, they awarded him a certificate in recognition of his alertness and for preventing what could have been a much larger disaster.

As parents with experience raising seven children, we understood that initial reports might not always be accurate. Upon questioning him, it became clear that the details of his account were untrue. His body language contradicted his words, indicating that something was amiss. Eventually, he admitted to accidentally starting the fire while playing with a lighter he'd found. He felt relieved after confessing.

The next step was challenging for our son and us, yet it was necessary. We visited the home of the fire chief, who lived in our neighborhood, where our son "came clean" about the incident. The chief scolded him and required the return of the certificate. Following the reprimand, the chief forgave him, cautioning him about the potential severity of his actions. In today's lesson, we examine the implications of when our talk (what we say we believe) conflicts with our walk (how we conduct ourselves).

B. Lesson Context

In his Gospel, the apostle John avoided using his own name, instead identifying himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7). This profound love significantly influenced John's life and writing. The dozens of uses of the word *love* found in the Gospel that bears his name exceeds that of the other three Gospels combined!

No one knows exactly when John wrote his Gospel and his three epistles. Our best guess is the latter part of the first century. This places John's writings several decades after he experienced the love of Jesus personally—an experience he wanted others to accept as true (1 John 1:1–5).

There are four listings of apostles in the New Testament, and John's name occurs in the first third of the 12 names in all listings (Matthew 10:2–3; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13). Regarding his personal experience with Jesus, John is recognized as having been one of the “inner circle” of disciples. We see this designation in his being one of only three disciples to have witnessed Jesus’ transfiguration. This was a profound experience, as he saw Jesus’ face and attire radiantly shining, emitting a brilliant white light similar to the sun (Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–35). Some commentators propose that that event profoundly influenced John’s use of light and darkness metaphors in his writings, including the passage we examine today. While this may be speculation, the profound imagery is no less poignant in John’s writings.

In the opening verses of the epistle we call 1 John, the writer emphasizes his tangible interactions with Jesus. This emphasis may be a response to false teachings that were beginning to take shape. One such teaching was Docetism. Docetism taught that Jesus did not possess a physical form but merely appeared to. This belief stemmed from the notion that material substance was inherently evil, making it inconceivable for the divine to be associated with it. But John will have none of this! His in-person interactions with Jesus form the basis of all he has to say in this letter.

I. True Fellowship

(1 John 1:5–7)

A. God Is Light (v. 5)

5. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The correct understanding of this verse depends on how that little preposition *of* is understood. It could be understood as referring to *the message which we have heard about him* or *the message we have heard from him*. The immediate context and other usages in this letter indicate that “of” signifies “from” in this instance, as it does also in 1 John 2:27 and 3 John 7 in the *King James Version*.

The message to which John refers was not a rev-



Visual for Lesson 5. *Display this visual as you ask, “What is the connection between confessing sin and walking in the light of God?”*

elation to a singular individual. Rather, the plural pronoun *we* suggests it was confirmed by many witnesses. While the Gospels do not provide a direct quote of Jesus speaking the particular message *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*, it is understood that not all of Jesus’ words and actions were documented (John 21:25). In fact, the phrase “God is light” is found nowhere else in the Bible (compare Psalm 104:2; 1 Timothy 6:16; etc.). This statement indicates that light is not just a characteristic of God but a fundamental part of His being, similar to how “spirit” and “love” are essential attributes (John 4:24; 1 John 4:8).

Those in the original audience who were familiar with the Hebrew Bible—what we now know as the Old Testament—would have interpreted John’s use of light and darkness metaphors as representing good and evil, respectively, as they saw parallels with texts such as Isaiah 5:20; 50:10; 59:9; and Micah 7:8. John uses “light versus dark” imagery also in John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46; and 1 John 2:8–9. His audience dare not miss the message: spiritual darkness and light are incompatible. If God embodies light, it logically follows that God possesses no aspect of darkness.

B. Walking in the Light (vv. 6–7)

6. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.

This verse introduces the first of five consec-

utive, and six total, *if we* clauses in today's text (1 John 1:6–10; 2:3). To *have fellowship with* God implies a profound relationship or communion with Him. However, a lifestyle that is inconsistent with God's nature and expectations results in a false representation—a *lie*. Such a lie may or may not fool other people, but it won't fool God. To *walk in darkness* is to sin habitually (Acts 26:18; 2 Peter 2:4). Sin has consistently severed the bond between God and humanity (Genesis 3:24; Isaiah 59:1–2; etc.).

The true nature of a person's beliefs, declarations, and position of the heart is revealed through behavior that aligns with Jesus' teachings (John 13:35; 14:15, 23). These actions do not result in salvation but result from it (Ephesians 2:8–10; James 2:14–19). The internal transformation becomes visible externally, guided by the work of the Spirit (2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). An emerging heresy of the time claimed that the actions of a person's physical body could not taint a person's spirit. We're not sure if John is opposing this particular heresy as he writes. But he leaves no doubt that it's "either-or," not "both-and."

What Do You Think?

What evidence would point to someone walking "in darkness"?

Digging Deeper

How can you become aware of whether you are in danger of walking in darkness?

7. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

We come to the second of the five consecutive *if we* clauses. We might assume that *walking in the light* would represent a renewal of fellowship with God. That's true, but it's not John's aim here. Rather, John challenges the reader by stating that walking in the light is not separate from having *fellowship with one another*. Fellowship with God and with other believers go (or should go) hand in hand (Psalm 55:14; Isaiah 2:5; John 13:34–35; etc.).

The light of God reveals sin (John 3:20; Ephe-

sians 5:11–13). As such, it also reveals our need for cleansing from that sin. That's exactly what *the blood of Jesus Christ* does in paying the penalty for sin we owe. John comforts his audience in this regard (compare Hebrews 9:12–14, 22; 13:12). This serves as a reminder that salvation is not achieved by our own efforts to walk in the light; instead, it is the cross of Christ that pays sin's penalty, enabling that walk.

What Do You Think?

What does it look like to "walk in the light"?

Digging Deeper

How might you encourage fellow believers to walk in the light?

Light and Dark

My husband and I served as missionaries in Ukraine in the 1990s. During those years, Ukraine was experiencing a financial crisis after the fall of the Soviet Union. Inflation was high, and resources were low. To cope, the government restricted the amount of electricity, water, and gas people could use, which resulted in rationing utilities.

The impact of this rationing resulted in hours of darkness every night. We were never sure exactly when the power would turn off, but we knew it would happen around dinner time. We scrambled to get things done before the lights went off, but inevitably, the outages caught us off guard. I still remember the feeling of being right in the middle of writing an email or putting dinner on the table when suddenly we were plunged into absolute darkness, without even the light from street lamps or the hum of appliances to fill the pitch-black silence. What a relief when, several hours later, the electricity suddenly turned back on. What had been a darkness so deep we could not see our hands in front of our faces became a blinding light. Not a bit of darkness remained.

Light is a "something"; darkness is not. Instead, darkness is a "lack of something." Light drives out darkness. If you're experiencing a darkness of the soul right now, what is missing? —L. M. W.

II. Necessary Confession

(1 John 1:8–2:2)

A. Our Sin and Us (vv. 8–10)

8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

We now arrive at the third of the five consecutive *if we* clauses. Some commentators view this verse as addressing an error that certain false teachers have been promoting. By claiming to be in the light while behaving contrary to it, they deny their sinfulness. This amounts to self-deception; not only do false teachers fool others, but they also fool themselves.

We should not miss the fact that *truth* is extremely important to John. The word *truth* appears (in Greek) more than 100 times in the New Testament as a whole, with more than 40 percent of them occurring in John's Gospel and epistles. This is noteworthy given the relatively small percentage of the New Testament that these books comprise.

9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In the fourth of five consecutive *if we* clauses in today's text, John highlights the stark contrast between the self-deluded people of the previous verse and those who have received forgiveness from God. Whereas sin was stated in the singular there, here it is plural: *sins*. Some commentators propose that this distinction underscores the idea that those who admit to their personal sins are fully aware of the seriousness of their condition apart from God's pardon (compare 1 Timothy 1:15).

The language used implies that sins are confessed to God, who is the one who forgives sins (see Psalm 32:5; Luke 11:4; compare James 5:16). Furthermore, the forgiveness offered by God transcends mere pardon; it involves a cleansing of the

believer from all acts of unrighteousness (1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 2:14; and 1 John 1:7, above).

10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

This is the fifth consecutive *if we* clause in our lesson (a sixth appears in 1 John 2:3). Again, some commentators see a corrective to claims by false teachers. Opinions along that line vary on how this “if we” clause differs from the one in 1 John 1:8, above. One proposal sees that verse opposing denials of humanity's sinful nature, whereas the verse now before us is seen to deny having engaged in sinful behaviors at the individual level. Ultimately, however, we must conclude that (1) sin is a real thing, (2) we are guilty of committing it, and (3) to disbelieve makes God *a liar* in our eyes as we sink deeper into self-deception.

What Do You Think?

In what ways do we tend to say that we have not sinned?

Digging Deeper

How can relationships help us recognize our need for God's forgiveness?

B. Our Sin and God (2:1–2)

1. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

The term *little children* is a favorite way for John to address his audience; he uses this designation also in 1 John 2:12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; and 5:21. It occurs on the lips of Jesus as well, but only in John's Gospel (John 13:33). A slightly different Greek word, translated “children” (without “little”), is much more common, occurring about 100 times in the New Testament; John uses this word as well (1 John 5:2; 2 John 1, 4, 13; 3 John 4). John appears to view his role as that of a father figure to his readers.

John explains Jesus' ongoing role in heaven as *an advocate with the Father*. The word translated *advocate* is also a term unique to John, occurring in the New Testament only here and in John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:7. It refers to a mediator

How to Say It

Docetism	Doe-set-iz-um.
epistles	ee-pis-uls.
Gnosticism	Nahss-tih-sizz-um.
heresy	hair-uh-see.

or intercessor who speaks on behalf of another. After Jesus offered Himself as the sacrifice for sin and rose from the dead, He took His place at the Father's right hand. There, He continuously advocates (intercedes) for believers (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). The unique sinlessness and righteousness of Jesus enables our purification from sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).

2. And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

John builds on his previous statements with the rare word *propitiation*, which means "something that turns away wrath." This term appears twice in this epistle (here and 1 John 4:10). Closely related words are found in Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5 (as nouns) as well as Luke 18:13 and Hebrews 2:17 (as verbs). The foundation of Jesus' serving as our mediator lies in His sinless offering of Himself on the cross, which paid the penalty for the sins of all who would believe. This doctrine is often referred to as "substitutionary atonement" (compare John 1:29; Colossians 1:20).

III. Obedient Walk

(1 John 2:3–6)

A. Proof of Knowledge (vv. 3–5)

3. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

Here, we have a sixth *if we* clause in the second half of this verse. Keeping *his commandments* is evidence *that we know him*. Perhaps John has in mind Jesus' answer to the question about the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36–39; Mark 12:28–31; see John 13:34; 15:12). Love is the hallmark by which Jesus indicated the world would recognize His followers. Additionally, the apostle Paul regarded love as the law's fulfillment (see Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14).

Regardless of the specific interpretation of "commandments" in this context, John implies that following the commandments is not the way to salvation; it serves as evidence of that relationship. This aligns with teachings found throughout Scripture (Galatians 2:16, 21; 3:11; Hebrews 7:19). Moreover, John's emphasis on the certainty

believers in Christ possess contrasts starkly with the uncertainty propagated by false teachers (compare John 14:15; 15:10).

What Do You Think?

What role does action play in our life of faith?

Digging Deeper

In what ways are we dependent upon Jesus Christ, our advocate?

4. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

John now elaborates on his earlier remark (1 John 1:6, above), drawing it to a logical conclusion. This might be summed up by the old axiom that actions speak louder than words. Anyone who professes to know God yet whose life contradicts God's commandments is making a false claim.

Some commentators suggest that John is addressing the heresy of Gnosticism here. The followers of this heresy claim exclusive enlightenment, secret knowledge. However, their conduct fails to align with the elevated knowledge they claim to possess.

5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

John continues to distinguish between those who adhere to *his word* and those who do not. The central element in the statements in this verse is *the love of God*. Three main interpretations of what this love entails have been proposed: the love of God could signify (1) His love for individuals, (2) an individual's love for God, or (3) a divine type of love that individuals have for one another. Evidence exists for each of the three alternatives. But given John's portrayal of this love as a distinctive sign, it is likely that he is referring to the divine love among believers (see John 13:35). This form of love is poured into a person's heart by the Spirit when one comes to faith in Christ (see Romans 5:5).

We also acknowledge differing opinions regarding the interpretation of the word *perfected* in this verse and in 1 John 4:12, 17. This word is used in

John 4:34; 5:36; and 17:4 to refer to something that is finished (in terms of having reached a goal). Given the nature of the fallen world in which we live, our growth in love for one another will be perfected in an ultimate and final sense only after Jesus returns. Until then, we continue to grow and mature in our expressions of that love.

The Christian's Uniform

When my children were in elementary school, administrators there decided to require uniforms for all students. As a parent, I appreciated the school system's attempt to standardize the students' appearance in order to prevent comparisons and judgments regarding clothing choices. I understood that the administration hoped to eliminate the bullying that could occur between students who could afford expensive, designer clothes and those who could not.

However, parents and administrators quickly realized that students still personalized their looks by the style of shoes they chose, the hairstyles they sported, and the socks they wore. Even things such as hair ties became status symbols. Students followed the human desire to identify themselves as part of certain groups by the way they accessorized their uniforms.

Such desires can result in both positive and negative outcomes. Positively, believers validate their identity as Christians by the way they express love for one another. That expression is our "uniform," identifying us as believers. However, a problem can present itself in the way we "accessorize" that uniform, particularly if the accessories end up overshadowing the uniform itself. What dangers do you need to be aware of in that regard?

—L. M. W.

B. Proof of Abiding (v. 6)

6. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

To *walk even as he walked* is to follow Christ's example (John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21). The author fronts this conclusion by using a Greek word translated as "abide"; he uses this word 23 times in this letter, and this is the first. In doing so, he speaks of a close, ongoing connection. Those who

abide in Jesus will live consistently in ways that reflect His love and teaching.

What Do You Think?

What outward fruit should we expect to see in Christ-followers?

Digging Deeper

How does Galatians 5:13–26 align with these passages from 1 John?

Conclusion

A. Talk = Walk

My experience as an airline supervisor required me to interact with passengers. Some attempted to board the plane with household pets by falsely claiming they were service animals. With no official registry for service animals, our team had to assess each case based on the animal's behavior. Disruptions like barking led to denied boarding.

This situation is akin to what John addresses in his letter: distinguishing the true claims from the false. John uses a firm, fatherly tone to stress that claiming to live in the light while walking in darkness is deceitful. The message is straightforward: one's walk must match one's talk. Jesus highlighted that, on Judgment Day, many will profess to know Him by citing a list of their deeds. However, their lack of a genuine relationship with Christ will result in their condemnation (Matthew 7:21–23).

This is a powerful reminder! In our spiritual walk, Jesus is our standard. When we compare our lives to Christ's example, we must ask ourselves whether we see a reflection of Him or a contradiction. This self-assessment and willingness to correct our course when necessary is crucial to authentic faith.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are grateful for Jesus' light. Thank You for the reminder that when we abide in You, we walk in the light. May the world know that we are Christians by our "walk" being aligned with our "talk." In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Praise God for the light of the gospel!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Ask participants to discuss the significance of light in the physical world, providing examples such as its role in plant growth, its ability to reveal hidden objects, and its part in vitamin D production and energy levels. Contrast how darkness affects the world. Next, invite the participants to consider light metaphorically and share their thoughts. Examples might include guidance, purity, revelation, hope, unity, and comfort. Conclude your discussion by contrasting the metaphorical ideas of “light” with the metaphorical ideas of “darkness.”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Light and Darkness” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. Discuss if time allows.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “John often employs the metaphors of light and darkness in his writings to create a clearer mental image for his readers. In today’s lesson, we’ll explore a passage where John uses light to represent God and the daily life of Christians while portraying sin and unrighteousness as darkness.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into two groups, designating one the **Truth Trackers** and the other the **Assurance Alliance**. To each participant, distribute a copy of the lesson text you prepared, a highlighter, and a pen. Assign the following activities for group discussion.

Truth Trackers. Read 1 John 1:5–10. Highlight all the statements that about truth with one color (light). Use a different color to highlight statements about falsehood (darkness).

Assurance Alliance. Read 1 John 2:1–6. Highlight in one color everything the text instructs believers to do. Use a different color for assurances or promises mentioned in the passage.

After five minutes, ask each group to summarize their findings on a separate sheet of paper.

Reconvene for whole-class discussion. Have volunteers from each group read their Scripture passage aloud and share the group summary.

Option. Engage the two groups in a role-playing exercise to explore what it means to walk in the light in real-life scenarios. Have groups discuss how they would respond to the following situations based on the text from 1 John.

1. A family member wants to do something that contradicts your beliefs. How would you navigate this while maintaining love and respect for them?
2. A friend is seeking guidance during a crisis, feeling hopeless and guilty about a mistake. How can you use assurances from 1 John to encourage and help them find a path forward?

Present these questions for further whole-class discussion: 1—What does “walk in the light” mean, as mentioned in 1 John 1:7? 2—Based on John’s text, why is confession important? 3—How does knowing that Jesus is our advocate influence how we respond to our failures and others’ sins?

Into Life

Say, “One way to walk in the light is to maintain fellowship with other believers.” Give participants time to brainstorm concrete ways to walk in the light and stay in fellowship. Distribute index cards to learners. After allowing time to reflect on the brainstormed ideas, ask, “What is one thing you can do this week to walk in the light and seek fellowship with another believer?” Invite learners to write their ideas on the card. Challenge them to follow through with the plan throughout the week.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Walking in the Light” activity from the activity page. Have learners work with a partner to complete as indicated. After calling time, invite pairs to share their poem with the whole class.

Conclude class with a prayer, thanking God for the light He provides for us to walk in and for the forgiveness of sins we have in Christ.

Repentance and Faith

Devotional Reading: Mark 1:14–20

Background Scripture: Isaiah 1:10–21; Ezekiel 18:20–23, 27–32

Luke 15:11–24

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 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.

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:

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.

Acts 2:38–39

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Key Text

This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

—Luke 15:24

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 2: Grace and Reconciliation

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the actions of the younger son and the father in the parable.
2. Explain why each of us must welcome others returning to God.
3. Commit to sharing God's generosity with others.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Leaving Home
- B. Lesson Context

I. Jesus' Parable (Luke 15:11–24)

- A. Son's Request (vv. 11–16)
- B. Son's Return (vv. 17–20a)
- C. Father's Response (vv. 20b–24)
Wait Until Your Dad Gets Home

II. Apostle's Teaching (Acts 2:38–39)

- A. The Gift (v. 38)
- B. The Promise (v. 39)
A Long Way in the Wrong Direction

Conclusion

- A. Homecoming
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Leaving Home

At age 16, armed with a job, car, and license, I experienced true independence for the first time. I exercised this freedom by telling my parents I would no longer join them at their church. Instead, I intended to explore and find a religion of my own. To my surprise, my parents did not resist. But what I initially viewed as rebellion transformed into a genuine quest for truth.

Each Sunday, my girlfriend and I would explore churches of different doctrinal convictions and styles of worship. The search led us to a particular church where visitors were encouraged to complete a visitor's card. I completed a card to have something to "contribute" to the offering plate since I needed my money for gas. The card led the pastor to our home and me to a relationship with Christ. My parents proudly sat in the congregation the day I was baptized. What I had mistaken for a departure from my roots was, in truth, a journey toward Christ.

In today's lesson, we will revisit one of the most beloved but often misunderstood Bible passages: the story of the prodigal son.

B. Lesson Context

In Luke 15 (see also Lesson Context for Lesson 3), tax collectors and sinners gather to hear Jesus. Nearby, Pharisees—adherents of the Law of Moses and their traditions—murmur their disapproval (compare Mark 7:1–8). This setting underscores the meal-sharing tradition in first-century Judaism as a sign of acceptance (see Mark 2:16; 1 Corinthians 5:9–11; Galatians 2:11–14).

Jesus' use of parables was a teaching method and a profound way to convey spiritual truths. These parables, often simple earthly narratives, were vehicles for deep spiritual meanings. While the exact number of parables Jesus taught is a topic of discussion, it's widely agreed that He presented at least 30 unique ones. Figurative language, in which "this" stands for "that," predominates in parables. A failure to recognize figurative language is to repeat the errors of Jesus' disciples and the Pharisees (Matthew 16:5–12; Mark 7:18; John 10:6; etc.).

Acts 2 depicts Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came and filled believers, causing many to speak in foreign tongues (Acts 2:1–12). In Acts 2:14–39, Peter addresses the Jews gathered to behold this miraculous sight, sharing the good news of Jesus. Peter quotes an Old Testament prophecy stating that God’s Spirit would be poured out on “all flesh” (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28), and that “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord” will be saved (Acts 2:21; Joel 2:32). While Peter likely did not have Gentiles in mind yet, as this was prior to his vision and encounter with Cornelius (see Acts 10), he perhaps meant at least that God’s Spirit would not be limited to prophets, priests, and kings. It is possible that Luke had the Gentiles in mind while writing this account, perhaps showing that just as Jesus’ followers are charged to take the gospel to Jerusalem, Samaria, and the rest of the world (1:8), so would God’s Spirit be given to all those He calls and who turn to Him in faith.

I. Jesus’ Parable

(Luke 15:11–24)

Jesus speaks this parable against the religious leaders and their attitude, as evidenced in Luke 15:2. They undoubtedly realize Jesus’ intent to challenge their position, as Luke 20:19 later indicates.

A. Son’s Request (vv. 11–16)

11. And he said, A certain man had two sons.

The way Jesus starts this narrative signals its nature as a parable. Just as when a story begins with “in a land far, far away,” listeners recognize that what Jesus is about to relate is not a historical account. In the Gospel of Luke, several parables begin with the introduction of *a certain man* (Luke 12:16; 14:16; etc.). A distinctive feature of these parables is their lack of named characters, setting them apart as figurative rather than historical. This storytelling technique enables listeners to place themselves within the narrative. It also makes it less obvious that Jesus is the one highlighting their sin.

The emphasis of this parable is frequently placed on the prodigal son. Nonetheless, Jesus presents three characters: a father and his *two sons*.

Every character plays a role in the narrative, allowing listeners to identify with at least one.

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.

Then as now, inheritance is passed along to descendants only after the death of the testator (Hebrews 9:16). However, an advisory in a Jewish non-biblical text to not do otherwise suggests that there were instances where an inheritance was indeed distributed before death (Sirach 33:19–23).

According to the Law of Moses, the eldest son was entitled to a double share of his father’s estate (Deuteronomy 21:17; compare Genesis 25:31). Given the declaration that (1) this man has two sons and that (2) the one making the request is *the younger of them*, this means that (3) the son desires one-third of his father’s *living*. Jesus doesn’t find it necessary to specify exact ages; He merely mentions the request of the younger son.

The audience of Pharisees and scribes knows that such an outlandish request is indicative of a rebellious son who is subject to the death penalty (see Deuteronomy 21:18–21). But the father doesn’t go there; instead, he grants the younger son’s desire. This response from the father likely strikes Jesus’ audience as unorthodox and unexpected.

What Do You Think?

What might have compelled the father to give the younger son his share of the inheritance?

Digging Deeper

How might the father have felt after this series of events?

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.

The younger son, having gained possession of his inheritance (*substance*), moves a significant distance away from his father. The specifics of how the money was squandered are not detailed, though Luke 15:30 may suggest one such avenue.



Visual for Lesson 6. Display this visual during the lesson conclusion and ask volunteers how they want to celebrate God's forgiveness.

14. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

In great contrast to the comfort in which he was raised, the son becomes impoverished as bankruptcy coincides with *a mighty famine*. The two lacks join to deal a severe hit on the son; food shortages cause food prices to rise as the law of supply and demand asserts itself (compare 2 Kings 6:24–25; 7:1, 16).

15. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

Driven by his situation, the young man seeks employment. Scripture expects those physically capable of working to earn their food (Proverbs 10:4–5; 12:11; 19:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:8). Moreover, Jesus introduces an additional cultural layer to the narrative: the man indentures himself into the service of a Gentile, *a citizen of another country*. The conclusion that the citizen is a Gentile is established by the fact that he has *swine*, animals considered unclean according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 14:8).

16. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

The man's dire hunger serves the purpose of bringing him to a new depth of desperation—now, even the pigs' food seems enticing to him. In Jewish tradition, Gentiles were considered

unclean, leading Jews to abstain from dining with them (see Acts 10:28; 11:3; Galatians 2:12). Desiring the pigs' food was another thing entirely.

B. Son's Return (vv. 17–20a)

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!

This is a critical turning point in the story. The young man, having reached his lowest point, regained his clarity of mind. Self-examination is a recurring motif in Scripture, invariably serving as the initial step toward repentance (2 Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 6:4; Revelation 2:5; etc.).

18. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.

Repentance requires returning to his *father* and admitting wrongdoing. However, his offense, as is the case with all transgressions, is chiefly *against* God, as implied by the term *heaven*. Undoubtedly, the listeners well acquainted with God's laws recognize the son's conduct as dishonoring his father and thereby breaking the law of God (Exodus 20:12; Matthew 15:4).

19. And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

Declaring himself unworthy of sonship, the young man's sentiments are deeply rooted in the honor and shame dynamics prevalent in that era. By squandering his inheritance, he has tarnished his father's reputation. Legally, his father is no longer obligated to provide for him. Thus, he resolves to request the bare essentials from his father through the position of a servant. Even this status will be preferable to starving as he watches pigs feed.

What Do You Think?

When do you think the younger son was at his lowest?

Digging Deeper

What experiences enable you to relate to the younger son?

20a. And he arose, and came to his father.
The younger son's repentance will be meaning-

less if he remains where he is. Hence, the penultimate act of his repentance is to get his feet moving toward home.

C. Father's Response (vv. 20b–24)

20b. 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.

The narrative transitions to the father's perspective. Apparently, the *father* has been eagerly awaiting his son's return. The father's joy is a motif that echoes across the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin just before (Luke 15:1–10). To the audience, the sight of an elderly Jewish man running likely seems unusual and undignified. Yet, his act underscores the father's profound longing to be reconciled with his son.

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.

The son's reaction echoes that of David in Psalm 51:4 as *the son* humbles himself before his *father*. It's easy to imagine that the son has rehearsed his apology many times during the long journey back.

What Do You Think?

What circumstances of repentance and return call for public confession of sin? Why?

Digging Deeper

Do the circumstances depend on whether it is a sin of commission or a sin of omission?

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.

Before the son can suggest becoming a servant as he has planned, *the father* interrupts by embracing him as a son instead (compare John 15:15; Galatians 4:6–7). The finest *robe*, likely the father's own, and the *ring* both signify the father's acceptance of the young man as a son again, with the ring perhaps also symbolizing authority (compare Genesis 41:42).

23. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry.

The father's subsequent command suggests he plans to host a celebration. Traditionally, a family reserves a fatted *calf* for significant events (example: Genesis 18:7), such as when a young man reaches adulthood. Since the son's previous actions and disrespect toward his father had undoubtedly spread through the village, it is appropriate for the father to organize a festivity to spread a counteracting message. As a bit of speculation, the pronoun *us* may indicate that the neighbors are invited to witness the son's transformation and the father's demonstration of love, acceptance, and forgiveness.

24. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

This celebration mirrors the rejoicing in this chapter's parables of the lost sheep (Luke 15:6) and the lost coin (15:9). From the father's point of view, his son's departure had led him to mourn as though he had lost him to death. The son's return symbolizes a reversal of that.

What Do You Think?

Can you think of an example of radical forgiveness in your life, such as is exhibited by the father?

Digging Deeper

What enables the father to respond with lavish grace and love?

Wait Until Your Dad Gets Home

When I was a little girl, I loved to change outfits throughout the day, discarding clothing all over my bedroom floor without a thought. When my mom would see my messy room, she would demand that I clean it up—immediately. I usually obeyed. But when I didn't, then came Mom's dreaded words: "Just wait until your dad gets home."

Knowing I was going to be in trouble with my dad was enough to leave my stomach in knots for the rest of the day. However, my fearful expectations rarely matched reality. Although my father was stern, his rebuke and discipline were not as terrifying as I had feared.

To the prodigal (which means “wastefully extravagant”), the best-case scenario upon returning to his father was to become a servant. The worst case would have been to be cut off entirely. The reality, however, was nothing less than unmerited, unexpected grace, mercy, forgiveness, a homecoming celebration, and a restored relationship.

How should this parable affect how you consider approaching the Lord with your own confessions of sin? Will you make excuses and try to justify yourself? Or will you accept responsibility and repent? Before you answer, see 1 Samuel 15:13–21; Psalm 51; and Luke 18:9–14. —B. R.

II. Apostle’s Teaching

(Acts 2:38–39)

A. The Gift (v. 38)

38a. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Peter’s declaration is in response to a question the crowd poses following his address to them. The previous verse depicts the people’s realization of guilt that prompts the question, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). In reviewing the two imperatives *repent, and be baptized*, we conclude that other elements are implied that only later will be stated explicitly. First, notice that faith isn’t mentioned. But given the requirement for repentance, faith must be present as well. The implicit connection between repentance and faith will be made explicit later (Acts 20:21; Hebrews 6:1).

Also unexplored at this point are various elements regarding baptism. Jews are familiar with the use of water in ceremonial cleansings and would naturally make a mental connection with baptism

(Ezekiel 36:25–26; Mark 7:3–4; John 2:6; 3:25). Various instances of baptism are recorded in Acts (Acts 2:41; 8:36–39; 9:17–18; 10:44–48; 16:15, 30–33; etc.), but only later will more robust explanations of baptism receive treatment (Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; etc.).

Likewise, the phrase *in the name of Jesus Christ* implies allegiance to God in its fullest sense. What is implied here is made explicit in Matthew 28:19, which specifies baptism “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Taken together, all these elements signify the beginning of a new relationship.

38b. for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Peter highlights two blessings for those who respond as he has just directed. Forgiveness, another word for *remission of sins*, is possible because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. There, He paid sin’s price for us (Romans 3:9–26; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Peter 2:24; etc.) and cleared our debt completely (Colossians 2:14). This act initiated the new covenant, under which God has pledged to forget our sins and lawless actions (Jeremiah 31:34; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 10:17–18). The Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7), empowers believers to support the Christian community and embody virtues like love, joy, and peace (1 Corinthians 12:4–11; Galatians 5:22–23). Additionally, the Spirit assists in prayer and affirms an individual’s salvation (Romans 8:16, 26; see Lesson 4).

B. The Promise (v. 39)

39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The promise of the previous verse is not only to those asking the question of Acts 2:37 (*you*) but also *to your children*, which reflects Isaiah 44:3. The same promise *to all that are afar off* reflects wording in Ephesians 2:13, referring to Gentiles.

Peter likely does not yet understand the full implication of his words at the time, given his surprise at the inclusion of Gentiles in Acts 10:44–46. This issue sparked significant debate in the first-century church, prompting the gathering of a council in Jerusalem to deliberate on whether Gen-

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh-losh-unz.
Ephesians	Ee-fee-zhunz.
Galatians	Guh-lay-shunz.
Gentiles	Jen-tiles.
Pentecost	Pent-ih-kost.
Pharisees	Fair-ih-seez.
prodigal	praw-dih-gull.

tiles needed to embrace the practices of Judaism in becoming followers of Christ (Acts 15:1–29).

A Long Way in the Wrong Direction

Last year, some friends and I took a weekend trip to the beach. The car ride down was filled with excitement. The ride back was a different story. We were tired, sunburned, and not a little reluctant to get back to our normal routines. At some point, Jen took an exit, thinking it was a shortcut to drop off our friend Dot. After about an hour, she realized the shortcut had taken us 50 miles in the wrong direction!

As soon as we realized the mistake, we found the first safe place to turn around and head back the right way. We can laugh about it now, but at the time, it wasn't very funny. One wrong turn was all it took.

Until we recognize our need for Christ, our lives are like that car going a long way in the wrong direction. When we hear the good news of the gospel, we are awakened to our need to repent—to turn around—and begin heading in the way of Christ. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be road signs that tell those around us, “You’re going the wrong way! Repent! There is hope and healing for your life!” How well is your life functioning as a “road sign” for others? —B. R.

Conclusion

A. Homecoming

I recall the most bountiful spread of food from my childhood at our annual church homecoming. This is a tradition that, as a child, I looked forward to more than any other Sunday. Everyone dressed up and brought their finest homemade dishes and pies to share. After the service, we gathered at a long table under a shady tree for a meal, followed by an afternoon of worship. Although many faces were unfamiliar to me during these homecoming celebrations, their ties to our little church granted them a place at our table.

The two segments of today's lesson share a common element of God's love for and inclusion of those once far off. Jesus' parable in Luke 15:11–32 emphasizes the joy over the repentant return of the

wayward. The prodigal son represents the publicans and sinners who gathered to hear Jesus speak (Luke 15:1). The elder brother (not considered in today's texts, see Luke 15:25–30) represents the attitude of Jesus' opponents, the Pharisees and scribes (15:2). Acts 2:38–39 communicates a similar theme, calling for repentance, expressing what the repentant shall receive. Though initially addressing Jews, this passage (in light of the rest of Scripture) points toward the inclusion of the Gentiles to come. The message of Acts 2:38–39 is relevant to those who had departed and returned as well as to those who had always been far off until first being brought near.

In churches everywhere, individuals step into a congregation for the first time, while others return after a lengthy absence. God greets each one with a welcoming embrace, and there is jubilation in heaven for every soul that repents. In the parable, God is depicted as the father, and those of us who have remained in the church are invited to join our Heavenly Father in welcoming the repentant with open arms as well. When we see the prodigal return—or the unbeliever come to faith for the first time—may we be compelled by our Father's love to offer them a seat at the table and welcome them home as our brother or sister in Christ!

What Do You Think?

Do you find it more difficult to welcome new believers or those who return after a time of rebellion?

Digging Deeper

How do these Scripture passages encourage you to welcome both well?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are grateful for Your boundless grace and mercy. Teach us to seek Your forgiveness wholeheartedly and extend that grace to others. Grant us wisdom that we may avoid learning lessons “the hard way.” We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The Father eagerly waits to welcome us home!

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write the phrase *Coming Home* on the board. Distribute index cards to each participant and ask them to recall when they or someone close moved away from their hometown. Invite them to reflect on their first return visit. What specific details stand out from that experience? Encourage each learner to write down a few memorable aspects of the homecoming on the cards provided.

Be ready to share a personal example from your own experiences. After allowing time for reflection, ask a few volunteers to share what they wrote on their cards. Invite them to explain why certain details were significant. Highlight to the class how we each assign different meanings or varying levels of importance to specific information.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today’s lesson explores the well-known parable of the prodigal son. One intriguing element of this story is the vivid detail about the father’s actions and the specific gifts he presents to his son upon their reunion. Jesus employs earthly language through this parable to convey a heavenly message about how the Father welcomes us into His home.”

Into the Word

Have a volunteer read Luke 15:11–16 aloud. Write *Prodigal Son* and *The Father* as two headers on the board. Ask participants to list characteristics, actions, or phrases from the passage that describe each character. Write their responses on the board.

Have a volunteer read Luke 15:17–24 aloud. Ask participants to list characteristics, actions, or phrases from the passage that describe each character. Write responses on the board under the appropriate header.

Add two more headers to the board: *Peter* and *God*. Have a volunteer read Acts 2:38–39 aloud. Ask participants to list Peter’s instruction and God’s promise from these two verses.

Divide into two groups: **Returners** and **Wel-**

comers. Distribute the following questions and prompts to the groups for in-group discussion.

Returners Group. 1–What does the son’s journey teach about repentance and reconciliation? 2–Identify other Bible verses for support.

Welcomers Group. 1–What does the father’s response reveal about God’s love? 2–Identify other Bible verses that support your answers.

Reunite the class and have a volunteer from each group share their findings.

Distribute copies of the lesson text (you prepare) and two different colors of highlighters or pens to each participant. Instruct them to use one color to highlight Acts 2:38 and a different color for Acts 2:39. Then, allow participants time to examine the text from Luke, using the verse 38 color to highlight verses corresponding to the command to repent. Have them use the other color for verses reflecting the promise in Acts 2:39. Discuss: 1–What parallels did you find between Acts 2:38–39 and the parable in Luke? 2–How do these verses help you understand why we should be welcoming toward those returning to God?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Journey Home” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. Share as time allows.

Into Life

Point out the actions on the board the father took to show his love. Discuss how this relates to God’s generosity. Distribute index cards to each participant and ask them to write one way to demonstrate God’s generosity to others. Invite them to commit to act on what they wrote during the week.

Split the class into small groups to pray together, seeking God’s assistance in implementing their planned actions throughout the week.

Option. Distribute the “Prayer of Celebration” exercise from the activity page. Have participants complete it individually as a take-home.

Prayer and Humility

Devotional Reading: Psalm 141

Background Scripture: Nehemiah 1:4–11; Daniel 6:10;
Matthew 6:5–15; Luke 18:1–14; John 17:1–26

Genesis 18:25–27

25 That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

26 And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

27 And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.



Luke 18:9–14

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.

1 John 5:14–15

14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Key Text

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 18:14

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 2: Grace and Reconciliation

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the characteristics of prayer from the lesson's Scripture texts.
2. Discern which occasions call for bold prayer and which occasions call for humble prayer.
3. State a way to ask God for good things while humbly sharing the gospel with friends and neighbors.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

A. God, I Need You!

B. Lesson Context

I. Bold Prayer (Genesis 18:25–27)

A. Abraham's Petition (v. 25)

B. The Lord's Promise (vv. 26–27)

II. Humble Prayer (Luke 18:9–14)

A. Jesus' Parable (vv. 9–10)

B. The Pharisee (vv. 11–12)

C. The Tax Collector (vv. 13–14)

No Excuses

III. Confident Prayer (1 John 5:14–15)

A. Our Request (v. 14)

B. God's Response (v. 15)

Praying for a Miracle

Conclusion

A. The Foundation of Prayer

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. God, I Need You!

I knew, maybe for the first time in my life, that I really needed help. As a logistics analyst in a large textile firm, my role was to purchase all the necessary components of the clothing we produced and make sure they arrived at the production facility on time. Things were not going well. As I struggled to keep track of everything, I was terrified that I would fail. Who could help? I was not sure anyone could.

On the way to work one day, I began to pray. For the first time, these prayers came from a place of desperation. Within a couple of months, something had changed. The job was still difficult and fast-paced. But my experience of the job was different. Fear had been replaced with peace. I realized that God cares to listen to the prayers of His children.

B. Lesson Context

The word *pray* occurs in 348 verses in the Bible in 74 different forms. Today's lesson takes us into three of those instances. We take care, however, to remember that these three textual segments occur within the broader context of the Bible as a whole. While there are times when prayer is at best a waste of time (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 1 John 5:16b; etc.) and at worst an improper substitute for action that God is expecting us to take (see Exodus 14:15), in the many circumstances where prayer is an appropriate action, there are various postures we might take, which the passages below depict.

I. Bold Prayer

(Genesis 18:25–27)

In Genesis, God selects Abraham for a unique task and relationship. Those involve a promise to make him a great nation, to bless him, and to bless all the families of the earth through him (Genesis 12:1–3). Following God's call, Abraham (known as Abram at the time) journeys to a new land with his wife, Sarah (Sarai), and their nephew, Lot (12:4–9). Through many circumstances, Abraham comes to know God more and to trust Him—

Genesis 16:1–4 recording a notable failure—even when it looks impossible for the promises to be fulfilled. The three verses of our first text take us to Abraham’s reaction to God’s decision to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.

A. Abraham’s Petition (v. 25)

25. That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Abraham and the Lord are having a dialogue about the fate of the two cities just noted. This is of special concern to Abraham because his nephew, Lot, lives in Sodom (Genesis 14:12). Sodom has an evil reputation (13:13), and the Lord plans to destroy the city (18:20–21). Being startled by the Lord’s plan, Abraham begins to voice his objection in the verse now before us.

Exactly what it is that should *be far from* the Lord in the current context is located between the two occurrences of that phrase. Abraham is making a bold appeal to the Lord to rethink the forthcoming destruction. Their conversation is predicated on the recognition that Sodom’s fate has not yet been decided. But rather than telling the Lord what to do, Abraham asks the Lord to *do right*. The key question is, what is right? The basis of Abraham’s appeal is the Lord’s identity and character. Since He is the one who sets the standard for right and wrong—and indeed *is Himself* that standard—it is impossible for Him to do anything but what is right.

B. The Lord’s Promise (vv. 26–27)

26. And the LORD said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

Abraham had begun his appeal by asking the Lord what He would do if 50 *righteous* people could be found living in Sodom (Genesis 18:24). The verse before us now is the Lord’s answer.

27. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes.

Surprisingly, even after this initial agreement,

Abraham does not stop. He continues to intercede boldly for the inhabitants of Sodom. He goes on to inquire regarding successively lower numbers of righteous people: 45, 40, 30, 20, and then 10! At each point, the Lord agrees to spare the whole city for the sake of the righteous.

Before continuing, however, Abraham recognizes the audacity of his plea. He has *taken upon* himself to *speak unto the Lord* even though Abraham is *but dust and ashes*. To identify oneself in this way is an act of extreme humility. These terms also occur in circumstances of humiliation and contrition (Job 30:19; 42:6; Ezekiel 27:30). God is attentive to the man’s concerns. Implicit in this recognition is a second one: Abraham knows that the Lord, as God, knows what is wise. He also knows that the Lord cares to listen because the Lord initiated this conversation (Genesis 18:20).

Thus, Abraham’s bold intercession is dependent on three things. First, he appeals based on the Lord’s character. Second, he recognizes his own inferior status. In other words, in his boldness, he is humble. Third, he feels confident to approach the Lord because of the relationship that they share (Genesis 18:17–19).

What Do You Think?

Would you have been as bold as Abraham in his situation?

Digging Deeper

What caused Abraham to have such faith to pray boldly?

II. Humble Prayer

(Luke 18:9–14)

At the point of our lesson’s second passage, Jesus has been on the way to Jerusalem since Luke 9:51. He has announced His pending death twice (Luke 9:21–22, 43–45) and will do so a third time shortly after the parable of today’s study (18:31–34). On this journey, Jesus teaches what His kingdom is like and who will have a place in it. The parable below helps to fill out that picture, connecting the preceding parable—also about prayer—with the story that follows, which emphasizes the need for humility.



Visual for Lesson 7. Display this visual after the lesson conclusion during a time of personal reflection.

A. Jesus' Parable (vv. 9–10)

9. And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.

Up until chapter 18 of his Gospel, Luke introduces most of Jesus' parables with a minimal note that He was addressing "them" (Luke 5:36; 6:39; 8:4; 12:16; 14:7; 15:3). At one point, Peter is even confused about whom the parable is for (12:41).

But chapter 18 is different. There are two parables here; the first one is addressed to the disciples (Luke 18:1, tracking the identity of "them" back to 17:22), and the second begins in the verse now at hand. The description fits the Pharisees well, although Luke does not state that explicitly. By leaving the identification a bit vague, perhaps Luke is allowing the readers to consider whether they fit this description.

10. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The opening lines of the parable set the context for a regular activity for devout Jews in Jesus' time (Acts 3:1). *The temple* was the place where people went to be in the presence of God, to worship, and to seek forgiveness for their own sins and the sins of the nation. Pharisees of the first century are respected for their dedication to the Law of Moses. They studied Scripture and were committed to lives of holiness and worship. Their presence at the temple for prayer is exactly what Luke's audience expects.

The publican or tax collector, on the other hand, is despised. These individuals are viewed as traitors as they collude with the Roman authorities to exact tax revenue from the Jewish population. They are often dishonest (like Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10) and classified along with notorious sinners (Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1). No one would expect such a person to make an appearance at the temple.

B. The Pharisee (vv. 11–12)

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.

Jesus shares the Pharisee's prayer first. The standing position is normal (Mark 11:25). That he prays *with himself* may mean that he intentionally separates himself from the rest of the worshippers. His attitude in prayer is made clear by what he goes on to say.

Thanking *God* is appropriate content for prayer, of course (Psalms 106:47; 136:2, 26; Jeremiah 33:11; etc.). However, for the Pharisee, what is seemingly a prayer of gratitude is actually one of pride. He is thankful not for God but for himself. He makes sure that God knows he is *not as other men are*.

The Pharisee mentions particular groups that he will have nothing to do with: *extortioners, unjust, and adulterers*. It is unquestionably good that the Pharisee does not engage in the actions that these characterizations imply. But his foundation for avoiding these activities is his image as a "self-made man"—in other words, he has a bad case of believing that God owes him divine approval. This results from (or results in) an attitude of superiority to people he views as unrighteous. He even makes it a

How to Say It

Abraham	Ay-bruh-ham.
Abram	Ay-brum.
Gethsemane	Geth-sem-uh-nee (G as in get).
Gomorrah	Guh-more-uh.
Sodom	Sod-um.
Zacchaeus	Zack-key-us.

point of wagging a finger at a person who is particularly unrighteous: the *publican*.

12. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

The Pharisee then reminds God (and himself) of his good deeds. Both fasting and tithing are characteristics of the devout. Fasting is a good thing when it is practiced with godly motives (see Joel 2:12; contrast Zechariah 7:4–5). Tithing (giving a tenth of one's income) is also expected (see Leviticus 27:30; contrast Malachi 3:8–10). Outwardly, this Pharisee meets or exceeds the expectations. But Matthew 23:13–36 reveals the Pharisees' legalism, their works-righteousness mentality, and their hypocrisy (see also Luke 11:37–52). Although this Pharisee has worked hard both to abstain from sinful actions and to do what is required, the result is pride and self-importance. He's not praying so much as he is bragging.

What Do You Think?

How can we avoid "bragging" in our prayers like the Pharisee?

Digging Deeper

What misaligned speech habits can you identify in your own prayers?

C. The Tax Collector (vv. 13–14)

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.

The *publican* also prays in a standing position, but the similarities end there. He exhibits no self-congratulatory "thanks." The fact that he is *standing afar off* indicates hesitation to approach the holy God. Like the Pharisee, he is separated from the other faithful supplicants, but with a different motive. Jesus' extended description of the publican's physical positioning helps the reader understand his distinct motivation for this separation.

The words of his prayer correspond to his physical demeanor; he prays for mercy, aware that he is *a sinner*. He has nothing to offer; he realizes that his deeds will not make him worthy. Rather, he depends on God's mercy for forgiveness.

We can pause here to remind ourselves that what Jesus is teaching is nothing new. God's approval of the publican's humility is well reflected in Isaiah 66:2b and elsewhere. To beat one's *breast* is an outward sign of this inward disposition, one of internal distress (Jeremiah 31:19; Luke 23:48; etc.).

A final interesting feature is the relative lengths of the two prayers: more than 30 words for the Pharisee but only 7 words for the publican. The latter is consistent with passages such as Ecclesiastes 5:2b and Matthew 6:7. We ought to be wary of where wordiness can lead!

What Do You Think?

What is the most important part of the publican's prayer?

Digging Deeper

How might you incorporate such aspects of humble prayer into your prayers?

No Excuses

A video on social media showed a man standing before a judge to answer for a burglary charge. The judge looked at the man closely, recognizing him as a boy she had gone to middle school with. When the recognition became mutual, he began to cry. Holding his head in his hands, he repeated, "Oh my goodness, oh my goodness!"

The judge said she remembered his kindness, intelligence, and friendship from their younger days. She expressed her sadness that he had made some poor decisions. The man was subsequently convicted and sentenced to prison. When released 10 months later, the judge was right there waiting for him. They embraced and renewed their friendship as she encouraged him to take a better path in life, and he vowed to do so.

Relationships break when offenses are committed. As true as that is for human-to-human connections, it is all the more so with God-to-human relationships. God, the ultimate judge, has provided the means for restoring our broken relationship through Jesus, but it's not automatic. Our choice is either to be a self-justifying Pharisee or to be an admitted sinner. "To this man will I look,

even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isaiah 66:2b). Be sure to make the right choice. —L. M. W.

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.

Jesus concludes the parable by giving His evaluation of the prayers. And this isn’t the only time in the Gospels where Jesus draws the sharp distinction between those who exalt themselves and those who humbly realize their situation and need (Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11).

This outcome would have been surprising to Jesus’ audience. A hated publican who is *justified* ahead of a devout Pharisee? What a reversal! This follows a pattern in Luke’s Gospel, beginning with Mary’s song (Luke 1:46–55), where the humble, poor, and despised are exalted by God, and the proud, rich, and strong are brought low.

III. Confident Prayer

(1 John 5:14–15)

As he did in his Gospel (John 20:31), the apostle John explicitly states his purpose in writing the letter we call 1 John: it is so that those who believe can know that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13). Throughout this letter, John encourages and challenges his audience to walk in the light, obey God’s commands, and be confident in their standing before God. As the letter moves toward its conclusion, John applies this confidence to prayer.

A. Our Request (v. 14)

14. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.

Confidence has been a consistent theme in John’s letter. He wants Christians to reach the day of judgment with confidence in their standing before God (1 John 2:28; 3:21; 4:17). Now, at the end of the letter, John encourages his audience to have confidence when they pray.

This confidence is possible only *in him*—in

God (1 John 5:6–12). It is available to Christians because they believe in the name of the Son of God (5:13). It also allows them to know that God listens. There is, however, a condition to this confidence. Previously, John had said that Christians would receive their requests if they obeyed God’s commands (3:22). Here, the condition is *if we ask . . . according to his will*.

This raises (at least) two important questions. First, if prayers that are heard are prayers that are already *according to his will*, then why pray? Won’t such things happen anyway? The interaction between prayer and God’s will is complicated and cannot be adequately covered here. But John and Jesus clearly expected Christians to pray, and in some way, God hears and responds to believer’s prayers (John 14:13–14; 15:7, 16; 16:23–24).

Second, how can Christians know God’s will in order to ask accordingly? It seems that what John envisions here is the Christian’s will, desires, and requests being conformed to God’s through prayer. We can follow Jesus’ example. At Gethsemane, he prayed, “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36).

The opposite of confident prayer is seen in James 1:6–7: “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.”

B. God’s Response (v. 15)

15. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

John explains what it means that God hears the Christian’s request: *we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him*. God’s hearing leads to acting. This is a persistent motif in Scripture (Exodus 3:7; 1 Kings 3:12; 2 Kings 20:5; Luke 1:13; etc.). If our request aligns with God’s will, a positive answer is assured. Therefore, John encourages his readers to approach God confidently in prayer knowing that He cares, hears, and acts.

What Do You Think?

What is the difference between appropriate and inappropriate confidence in prayer?

Digging Deeper

How does 1 John 5:14–15 describe appropriate confidence?

Praying for a Miracle

“Chaplain, please pray that God will save my baby! Pray for a miracle!” the dad begged me. I looked at his tiny son, attached to machines keeping him alive. My head said this baby would not live. I had a flash of shame for doubting that God would save him, but God had not spared the physical lives of many children with whom I had worked over the years. I looked into the father’s eyes to see both hope and fear.

“Okay,” I answered, pushing my own doubt aside. “Let’s pray for a miracle for your baby.” We laid our hands on the blanket covering the tiny body and prayed that God would heal the child. The father confidently approached the throne of God with his request.

You may be wondering if a miracle did indeed take place. I will not reveal the answer to that question because God’s response is not the point of the story. The point, rather, is that our prayer was evidence of our confidence that God would do His will in this situation. Do you approach God in prayer with this kind of confidence? —L. M. W.

Conclusion

A. The Foundation of Prayer

These three passages of today’s lesson address prayer from distinct angles. In Genesis, Abraham makes his request in terms of appealing to God’s character; Abraham does so while acknowledging his own subordinate status. In the Gospel of Luke, the publican acknowledges his status as a sinner as he seeks God’s mercy. In 1 John, Christians are encouraged to pray with confidence because of their relationship with God, conformity to God’s will, and God’s disposition to listen to His children.

God’s character is the constant in these three passages. It must serve as the foundation for prayer today. Abraham’s rhetorical question, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” has never lost its validity. Abraham’s bold appeal is consistent both with the Lord’s character and with Abraham’s desire to do what was right.

Christians can pray confidently because God delights in our prayers and wants to grant our requests (but see the cautions cited in the Lesson Context at the beginning of this lesson). Christians can pray boldly by aligning their requests with what God has revealed about His desires. Christians also are to pray humbly because we know that God is God, and we are not.

As we pray today, we will do well to follow the examples in this lesson. More important than the physical posture one assumes in prayer is one’s heart posture. Additionally, prayer is an important means by which the human will is conformed to the divine will. The better we know God, the more we seek God, the more our prayers will be answered because they will align with who God is and what God wants to do in the world. Certain circumstances may call for more boldness or more humility depending on the context. Yet humble, confident boldness that is grounded in God’s character should undergird all our prayers.

What Do You Think?

What type of prayer do you find infrequent in your life: bold, humble, or confident?

Digging Deeper

What examples in Scripture might inspire your growth in that area?

B. Prayer

Lord, You are worthy of all praise. We come to You seeking your mercy and knowing that You care to hear and answer our petitions. Conform our wills to Yours. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Pray humbly and boldly with confidence.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write this statement on the board:

*Boldness and humility seldom exist
in the same person at the same time.*

Divide the class into two groups for debate. Give the groups at least five minutes to prepare. Have one group support the statement. Have the other group take the position that the statement is false.

Call the groups together, asking each group to present their best opening argument. Alternate between the groups until both have given the answers they want to share.

Discuss with the class, “Now that you’ve heard both sides, decide whether you agree or disagree with the statement. What makes it possible for both boldness and humility to coexist in the same person? What makes it difficult?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Contrasts Defined” exercise from the activity page, which can be downloaded. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After calling time, ask the pairs to share what they’ve discussed.

Lead into Bible study by telling the class, “Today’s lesson will concentrate on prayer and highlight ways both boldness and humility can be present as we pray. Think about your own prayers as we study.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups: **Bold Prayers Group**, **Humble Prayers Group**, and **Confident Prayers Group**. Distribute handouts of the questions below for in-group discussions.

Bold Prayers Group. Study Genesis 18:16–33. 1–What was God’s intent? 2–How did Abraham respond? 3–What clues do we find for Abraham’s motives? 4–How is Abraham an example here?

Humble Prayers Group. Study Luke 18:9–14. 1–Why did Jesus tell the parable? 2–List contrasts between the two characters in the story. 3–What

made the prayer of one more acceptable than the prayer of the other? 4–How can Christians avoid pride in their prayers?

Confident Prayers Group. Study John 1:5–14. 1–How is the praying described here bold? 2–How is the praying described here humble? 3–How does this passage encourage us to pray? 4–How can we ensure that our prayers align with God’s will?

Allow the groups several minutes to complete their study before asking them to present their findings to the whole class. You may want to put notes on the board about boldness and humility while the groups are sharing.

Summarize by asking the following questions in whole-class discussion: 1–What situations call for bold prayers? 2–What circumstances prompt humble prayers? 3–How can boldness and humility characterize all prayers?

Into Life

Send participants back to the three groups used earlier in the lesson. Ask the groups to brainstorm two lists: *Bold Prayers* and *Humble Prayers*. Invite participants to jot down phrases one might use with either prayer. After a few minutes, bring the groups back together to share their lists. Expand the discussion by asking: “What situations call for each kind of prayer?”

Draw a continuum on the board with the word *bold* on one end and *humble* on the other. Distribute note cards and pencils. Encourage learners to take notes as you discuss. Discuss: 1–Where’s the best place for a Christian to land on this continuum? 2–Where do you fall? 3–What steps can you take to achieve a better blend of the two qualities? 4–How can we be both bold and humble in asking God for things in our prayers?

Option. Distribute copies of the “Prayers Examined” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete the activity during the week and share their conclusions at the start of the next class.

Call and Growth

Devotional Reading: Colossians 2:1-7

Background Scripture: John 1:40-42; Ephesians 4:11-16;
Philippians 3:12-16; Colossians 1:9-11; Hebrews 6:1-3

Matthew 4:18-20

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

Matthew 16:16-18

16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

John 21:15-18

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith

unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.

2 Peter 3:14-15, 18

14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.

18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

Key Text

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. —John 21:17

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 2: Grace and Reconciliation

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List significant events in the life of Peter after Jesus called him.
2. State why Jesus might have continued to express confidence in Peter despite his shortcomings and weaknesses.
3. Write a note encouraging another believer who wants to grow in faith.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. From Fisherman to Disciple
- B. Lesson Context

I. Peter's Call (Matthew 4:18–20)

- A. Two Fishermen (v. 18)
- B. One Mission (vv. 19–20)

II. Peter's Proclamation (Matthew 16:16–18)

- A. Recognized the Son (v. 16)
- B. Revealed by the Father (vv. 17–18)

III. Peter's Ministry (John 21:15–18)

- A. One Question, Repeated (vv. 15–17)
Demonstration of Love
- B. One Future, Predicted (v. 18)

IV. Peter's Teaching (2 Peter 3:14–15, 18)

- A. Living at Peace (vv. 14–15)
- B. Growing in Grace (v. 18)
Free Time for French

Conclusion

- A. The Journey of Discipleship
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. From Fisherman to Disciple

In 1986, a severe drought lowered the water level of the Sea of Galilee, resulting in shorelines once covered in water becoming visible. On its western shores, two brothers discovered the remains of a once-buried fishing boat. Informally dubbed the “Jesus Boat,” the vessel is about 27 feet long and 7 feet wide. Researchers have dated it to within approximately 100 years of the life of Jesus, causing many to hypothesize that it could be the type of boat used by first-century fishermen.

Today's lesson explores the life, call, and ministry of one such first-century fisherman, Simon Peter. He left the waters (and fishing boats) of the Sea of Galilee to become a disciple of Jesus. Peter's discipleship to Jesus was full of ups and downs, yet God used Peter to ensure the growth and spread of the first-century church.

B. Lesson Context

Simon Peter was from Bethsaida (John 1:44), a village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Here, he worked as a fisherman with his brother Andrew (Mark 1:16). Their fishing operation was a partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10). Peter was married (Mark 1:30; 1 Corinthians 9:5). At some point, Peter, his wife, and at least one other family member moved to Capernaum (Matthew 8:5–14), a town approximately five miles southwest of Bethsaida.

The New Testament notes three names for Peter. His Hebrew name is *Simon* or the variant *Simeon* (Mark 1:16; Acts 15:14). Later, Jesus calls him *Peter*, a designation based on an ancient Greek word meaning “rock” or “stone” (Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:16); this is his most frequently occurring name in the New Testament, found over 160 times. The third name is *Cephas*, an Aramaic word for “stone” (John 1:42; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; etc.).

I. Peter's Call

(Matthew 4:18–20)

A. Two Fishermen (v. 18)

18. And Jesus, walking by the sea of Gali-

lee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

The *sea of Galilee* is a large freshwater lake in the northern region of Palestine. The New Testament gives two other names for this body of water: “the lake of Gennesaret” (Luke 5:1) and “the sea of Tiberias” (John 6:1). It was the location of a significant fishing industry. Regarding the designation *Simon called Peter* and his involvement in that industry, see the Lesson Context, above.

Jesus is living in Capernaum at this time (Matthew 4:13). That town is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, so His *walking by the sea* is unsurprising.

B. One Mission (vv. 19–20)

19–20. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

Jesus’ call seems abrupt. Why would these fishermen drop *their nets* immediately for Jesus? We should note that at this time, Jesus was not unknown to the two brothers. During Andrew’s time as a disciple of John the Baptist, Andrew encountered Jesus; after that, Andrew told Simon, “We have found the Messiah, . . . the Christ” (John 1:41).

Jesus’ command to *follow me* is not simply an invitation to join His walk along the shore. Instead, it is a summons to become His student and disciple. This relationship is not initiated by the application of the would-be disciple but by the invitation of the master, as we see here.

As disciples of Jesus, the brothers will take on a new task: they will no longer be fishermen on the lake. Instead, they will become *fishers of men*, seeking other people to become disciples of Jesus. Accepting Jesus’ call, therefore, requires a significant cost. Peter later says that he had “forsaken all” to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:27). The lives of these fishermen will never be the same again.

II. Peter’s Proclamation

(Matthew 16:16–18)

Jesus’ early ministry focuses on the region of

Galilee, where He ministers to crowds and faces testing from religious leaders (Matthew 15:29–16:4). These events form the backdrop of His teaching to the disciples (16:5–12). As this segment of our lesson opens, Jesus and the disciples have traveled to the region of Caesarea Philippi (16:13), about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

In this remote area, Jesus and the disciples experience a retreat-like atmosphere and relief from crowds. While there, Jesus asks the disciples, “Whom say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). What comes next is Peter’s response.

What Do You Think?

In what ways has Jesus called you to follow and trust Him in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

How can you follow that call at work, with your family, or in your neighborhood?

A. Recognized the Son (v. 16)

16a. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ.

Simon Peter answers for the whole group. The title *Christ* is the Greek equivalent of the Jewish title “Messiah.” Both designations mean “the anointed one.” Numerous Old Testament texts point to the Messiah’s arrival and reign (Psalm 110; Isaiah 11; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9; etc.). Many first-century Jews expect the Messiah to be a political figure chosen by God to save their nation, sit on the throne of David, and rule over an earthly empire. But Jesus will be a leader in God’s unique terms (compare John 6:15).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the question, “Who is Jesus to you?”

Digging Deeper

How will your answer to that question affect your daily living?

16b. The Son of the living God.

The second part of Peter’s confession reveals why

he believes that Jesus is fulfilling messianic expectations. Inherent in the two parts of Peter’s confession is a recognition of both Jesus’ power (the ability to do something) and authority (the right to do something) as God the Father confirms these (Matthew 3:17; 28:18; compare Luke 4:36).

B. Revealed by the Father (vv. 17–18)
17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

Peter is *blessed* for having recognized and acknowledged the identity and mission of *Jesus*, although Peter still misunderstands the nature of that mission (Matthew 16:21–22). The phrase *flesh and blood* contrasts created human beings with Jesus’ uncreated *Father which is in heaven* as the source of Peter’s awareness (compare Galatians 1:11–12).

The designation *Simon Barjona* should not be thought of as a first name and a last name as we use personal identifiers today. Regarding the name *Simon*, see the Lesson Context. The first three letters of *Barjona* mean “son of” (compare John 1:42). Putting the two together results in a very formal address, emphasizing the importance of the situation.

18a. And I say also unto thee, That thou

How to Say It

Aramaic	Air-uh- <i>may</i> -ik.
Barjona	Bar- <i>jo</i> -nuh.
Bethsaida	Beth- <i>say</i> -uh-duh.
Caesarea Philippi	Sess-uh-ree-uh Fih- <i>lip</i> -pie or Fil-ih-pie.
Capernaum	Kuh- <i>per</i> -nay-um.
Eusebius	You-see-be-us.
Gennesaret	Geh- <i>ness</i> -uh-ret (G as in get).
Messianic	Mess-ee- <i>an</i> -ick.
Messias	Mes- <i>sigh</i> -us.
Palestine	Pah-luh- <i>stein</i> .
Sheol	She-ol.
Tiberias	Tie- <i>beer</i> -ee-us.
Zebedee	Zeb-eh-dee.

art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.

The interpretation of this verse has been the subject of much discussion throughout church history. The main issue is to determine to whom or what *this rock* refers.

Theory 1: The rock is Jesus Himself. Supporting this proposal is the fact that Jesus refers to Himself as the chief cornerstone (Matthew 21:42). Peter himself acknowledges that fact (1 Peter 2:4–8). However, the word image in the text before us would be odd since Jesus would be referring to Himself as both the church’s foundation (*rock*) and its builder (*I will build*).

Theory 2: Peter himself is the rock. The word *Peter* is Greek for “rock” or “stone.” Thus, the idea is that Jesus is using a play on words. The book of Acts details Peter’s leadership in the first-century church (Acts 2:14–41; 4:1–31; etc.). In this regard, Peter’s leadership is the “rock” on which the growth and expansion of the church was based (10:1–11:21).

Theory 3: Peter’s confession is the rock. The Bible tells us that confessing Jesus as Savior and Lord is vital (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9; 1 John 4:15; etc.). After denying the Lord before the crucifixion, Peter “re-confessed” Christ (John 21:15–18, below).

The Greek word translated *church* occurs only here and in Matthew 18:17 in the four Gospels. Jesus Himself is the one who inaugurates this community of God’s people. They are to be committed to Him. Jesus is and always will be the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22).

18b. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

The meaning of the word translated as *hell* is tricky. The use of the word in Acts 2:31 seems to imply the general location of the dead, similar to the Hebrew word *Sheol* in the Old Testament, often translated “grave” (examples: Psalms 6:5; 89:48). Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word translated “hell” refers to a place of torment as we usually think of this word—the destination of the wicked after they die (Luke 16:23). The phrase *the gates of hell* refers to the domain and power of death. Even death itself cannot permanently hold back the community of God’s people.

III. Peter's Ministry

(John 21:15–18)

Our next section of Scripture takes place following Jesus' resurrection. By this time in the post-resurrection timeline, Jesus has appeared to many of His disciples and followers (John 20:11–29). He appears again to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee (21:2), directing them to a large catch of fish before inviting them to breakfast (21:12).

A. One Question, Repeated (vv. 15–17)

15a. So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?

After breakfast, *Jesus* turns the meeting into an opportunity to teach. *Simon Peter* had previously boasted of his commitment and devotion to Jesus (Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:29; Luke 22:33; John 13:37). He even resorted to violence to prove it (18:10). But his pledge of devotion proved to be bluster. Jesus' question probes Peter's heart and loyalties.

What does the word *these* refer to? Is it the boats and fishing equipment? Is it the other disciples? Or does it mean, "Do you love me more than these other disciples love me?" A definitive answer is impossible to glean from the text as written. We may conclude that Jesus means *these* as a general reference point: "Do you love me supremely, more than anything or anyone else?"

What Do You Think?

What are some "lesser loves" that can distract us from loving Jesus supremely?

Digging Deeper

What diagnostic questions can we ask to ensure these loves do not displace our love for Jesus?

15b. He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.

Peter assures Jesus of his *love*, even reminding the *Lord* that *thou knowest* this fact. However, Jesus had correctly predicted that Peter's previous declarations of commitment would prove false (John 13:37–38).

15c. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus has laid down His life (John 10:15). If Peter loves Jesus, he will lead in the same way, protecting and providing for the *lambs* who are God's people (compare 1 Peter 5:1–4).

16. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

With only slight variation, the exchange is repeated. We imagine Peter is puzzled; he has already answered Jesus' question. But Peter does so once more.

17. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

A third time, Jesus questions Peter's love. For Peter to feel *grieved* at this repetition is understandable. Does Jesus doubt his answer? Or is Peter's distress the result of seeing a connection between these three questions and his three denials of Jesus (John 18:15–18, 25–27)?

Peter's response includes an acknowledgment that not only does Jesus know Peter's inner thoughts, but Jesus also knows *all things*—a recognition of Jesus' deity (compare John 2:25).

Demonstration of Love

My husband and I had been dating for roughly six months before he said, "I love you." I'll never forget the inflection in his voice. We had been talking and laughing when it just seemed to come out of the blue!

His proclamation of love was a turning point in our relationship. It was not the same as our expressing how much we loved reading or eating ice cream. There was a particular weight to that phrase in the context of our budding relationship. Love for each other would require mutual action in terms of selflessness, work, and even sacrifice. Our love has lasted 20 years, but the weightiness of those three words remains.

It wasn't enough that Peter spoke of his love for



Visual for Lesson 8. Display this visual as you ask the discussion question associated with 2 Peter 3:18.

Jesus; Peter needed to demonstrate it. He would show this through his taking care of God's people. Peter's love for Jesus would fuel his life's mission as a leader of the first-century church. How does your love for Jesus motivate your actions? What does His love compel you to do? —B. R.

B. One Future, Predicted (v. 18)

18a. Verily, verily, I say unto thee.

The phrase *verily, verily* is characteristic of John's Gospel, occurring there more than two dozen times (and never in the other three Gospels). It emphasizes the absolute certainty of what is about to be said.

18b. When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not.

Jesus prophesies that the freedom of movement Peter enjoyed while *young* would someday be lost. One interpretation of the phrase *thou shalt stretch forth thy hands* is that it refers to the practice of crucifixion. The phrase thus might allude to how Peter would meet his death. Tradition is unclear regarding that method. In about AD 90, the first-century church leader Clement of Rome states that Peter was martyred (1 Clement 5:2–4). Later tradition from the church historian Eusebius holds that Peter was crucified in Rome during the reign of Nero (AD 54–68). Regardless of the method

of Peter's death, Jesus promised that the apostle would glorify God because of it (John 21:19).

IV. Peter's Teaching

(2 Peter 3:14–15, 18)

Some commentators believe that the apostle Peter composed the letter we call 2 Peter in Rome shortly before his death (compare 2 Peter 1:13–15). Therefore, the epistle serves as his final word to believers. If the word *Babylon* in 1 Peter 5:13 is a code word for Rome, this lends further support to his presence in that city.

A. Living at Peace (vv. 14–15)

14. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

We must back up a few verses to determine the antecedent of *such things*. The answer is found in 2 Peter 3:12, where the word translated *look* for here in verse 14 occurs again as “looking for,” the object being “the coming of the day of God.” While believers *look for such things*, we must remain *diligent* in all aspects of our faith.

What Peter is saying is nothing new. The challenge to live *in peace* is also found in 1 Corinthians 7:15 and James 3:18. *Without spot* of impurity and *blameless* from sin are echoed together in 1 Timothy 6:14. Although nothing new, these imperatives bear repeating!

15. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.

The *longsuffering of our Lord* refers to the delay of the bodily return of Jesus to bring judgment. The Lord is patient, “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Peter calls on the authority of the *beloved brother Paul* to emphasize the harmony of their teachings. We do not know the specific teaching by Paul that Peter has in mind. But we know that Paul wrote to believers in Rome regarding God's patience for salvation (Romans 2:4; 3:25; 9:22;

etc.). He also wrote regarding the need for righteous living in light of spiritual freedom (Galatians 5:1–26; etc.). Peter directs his readers to accept Paul’s teachings since the *wisdom* they contain has been *given unto him* by revelation from God (1:11–12; Ephesians 3:3).

B. Growing in Grace (v. 18)

18. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

The letter ends with words of exhortation and praise. The promise of Christ’s return impels us to use that certainty as a touchstone for how we are to live. We *grow in grace* as we react to God’s unmerited favor given through our faith in *our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (see 2 Peter 1:2).

An increase in the *knowledge* of Him implies more than knowing facts—it includes a relationship with Him as characterized by following His commands for righteous living (2 Peter 1:5–6; compare John 14:15). To be saved is a state of being justified; after that happens, what comes next is the lifelong process of sanctification.

Peter concludes with a doxology—a praise of, and attribution of *glory* to, Christ Jesus. By one count, there are more than a dozen doxologies in the New Testament (Ephesians 3:21; etc.).

What Do You Think?

In which areas of life do you need to grow most in Christ as you await His return?

Digging Deeper

Who is another believer you can ask to support you in this endeavor?

Free Time for French

I am trying to learn to speak French, and I decided that the best (and most fun) way to learn would be through an app on my phone. While it has helped me study parts of the French language, I still have a long way to go before I am fluent.

To give myself more learning opportunities, I’ve made one significant change: I have reduced my social media usage. By removing this distraction,

I’m hopeful that it will help me focus on my studies. I’m using all my free time to learn French!

The letter of 2 Peter reminds us that we are responsible for our spiritual growth and maturity. Just as I face daily choices to study or not to study, we face daily choices regarding how we choose to live. Only by our personal decisions and the guidance of the Holy Spirit will we grow and mature in our Christian discipleship. What changes do you need to make to facilitate further growth? —B. R.

What Do You Think?

In what ways does Peter’s story of discipleship mirror your own?

Digging Deeper

How will you use your own discipleship story to invite others to join you on the journey of discipleship to Jesus?

Conclusion

A. The Journey of Discipleship

Peter’s life of discipleship took him from being a fisherman in Galilee to being a leader of the first-century church. He grew from being “unlearned and ignorant” (Acts 4:13) to being the author of the two letters that bear his name in the New Testament. But his growth process wasn’t a straight line that always trended upward! Neither will ours be.

Even so, Jesus calls all who would claim to be His disciples to grow in His grace and knowledge—there are no exceptions. Peter’s story is encouraging in that regard. And as we grow, we will find it natural to invite others to join us on this journey as well. Expect it!

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, give us a heart for transforming growth in Your Son through Your Holy Spirit! Forgive us for times when we fail You. Empower us to recognize opportunities to invite others to become Your Son’s disciples as well. In His name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Discipleship is a journey of growth.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write the following phrases on the top of the board as headers of three columns: *Favorite Food*, *Favorite Hobby*, *Ambition*. Then, write the following words on the side of the board as labels of three rows: *Child*, *Teenager*, *Adult*. Introduce the activity by saying, “People’s interests often change as they grow up. For example, their favorite food might change as they grow from a child to an adult.” Invite volunteers to share their responses to the various categories to complete the chart. After completing the chart, ask, “What conclusions can you draw about how people change as they grow into adulthood?”

Option. Distribute copies of the “Transformation” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “There are many examples of how people or things change as they grow. In today’s study, let the example of Peter’s spiritual journey cause you to reflect on your journey of discipleship.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 4:18–20. Have participants work in small groups with classmates who have similar careers. For example, all the medical workers should be placed in one group and all the technology workers in another. Instruct groups to rewrite Matthew 4:18–20 using their names, workplaces, careers, and a tool they use at their jobs. Challenge groups to consider how Jesus might refer to their career in His invitation to discipleship. Ask, “What is a phrase, like ‘fishers of men’ that would be specific to your jobs and reflect life as a disciple of Jesus?”

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 16:16–18. Write the following questions on the board as headers of two columns: *Who is Jesus?* *Who is Simon?*

Invite volunteers to list titles Simon used for

Jesus and write those titles in the first column. Then, have the class identify the designations Jesus used for Simon in this passage and write those designations in the second column. Distribute a pen and sheet of paper to each participant. Ask them to work with a partner to write down five titles for Jesus that are personally significant. Encourage them to add Scripture references where appropriate.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 21:1–18. Divide participants into two groups: **Denial Group** (Matthew 26:69–75) and **Confession Group** (John 21:15–18). Invite each group to reenact their assigned text before the whole class. Ensure that each group chooses a narrator to read through the Scripture passages. Direct each group to alternate their reenactment between each denial and each confession. After completing the reenactments, ask the class how John 21:1–18 reveals Jesus’ love for and confidence in Peter.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Peter 3:14–15, 18. Divide participants into groups of three and ask each group to answer the following questions in small-group discussion: 1–List all of the instructions Peter gives in these verses. 2–Why did Peter think it was important for believers to practice these things? 3–What would it look like to follow these instructions today? After five minutes, reconvene the class and ask a volunteer from each group to share insights with the whole class.

Into Life

Distribute a note card and pen to each participant and challenge participants to think of another believer who wants to grow in faith. Invite participants to write a short note to that person. The note should include at least one positive aspect of that believer’s faith journey and one aspect of encouragement for that believer.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Journey of Discipleship” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete during the week as indicated.

The Christian Church

Devotional Reading: Acts 2:42–47

Background Scripture: Matthew 16:13–20;

Ephesians 1:15–23; 2:13–22; 5:22–27

Mark 4:26–32

26 And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground;

27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

30 And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:

32 But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

Ephesians 4:4–6, 11–18

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

Key Text

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

—Ephesians 4:15–16

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 3: The Church and Its Teachings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the parables of Mark 4:26–32.
2. Explain the purpose of unity in the Spirit.
3. Make a plan for seeking reconciliation within the church and between the church and its surrounding community.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Rapid Growth
- B. Lesson Context

I. Parables of the Kingdom (Mark 4:26–32)

- A. Scattered Seeds (vv. 26–29)
- B. Smallest Seed (vv. 30–32)

II. Work of the Kingdom

(Ephesians 4:4–6, 11–18)

- A. Unified under Jesus (vv. 4–6)
- B. Properly Led (vv. 11–13)
United We Stand
- C. Secure in Truth (vv. 14–16)
Tossed Around
- D. Showing Transformation (vv. 17–18)

Conclusion

- A. Recognizing Two Kinds of Growth
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Rapid Growth

My home state, Nebraska, enjoys a worldwide reputation for growing corn. It is estimated that cornfields in the state total nearly ten million acres. For me, moving to Nebraska from California, this was astounding. In central Nebraska, one can drive miles in the summer and see nothing but corn fields.

What was especially impressive to me was how fast this crop can grow. Farmers plant, and seedlings emerge in May. The corn stalks quickly become knee-high, then waist-high, then over-the-head-high. With plenty of moisture and fertilizer, corn stalks can grow an inch a day or more. I was told that sometimes you can hear the corn growing, which is true. If you stand in a corn field during peak growth season in the evening, you will hear popping as leaves emerge from the stalk.

Jesus and the people of His time and place did not have corn as we have it today. But they had other plants that grew rapidly in the fertile and well-watered fields of the Galilee region. Jesus told many parables involving farming and sowing seeds. This lesson reveals one reason why.

B. Lesson Context

Jesus is known for His use of parables when teaching. While Jesus' parables are unique, this teaching method was well-known in the ancient world. For Jesus, a parable is usually an illustration that compares something well-known in the experience of the hearers to less understood spiritual truths. His illustrations were drawn from the everyday lives of His audience.

Many parables teach about the “kingdom of God” (in Matthew, “kingdom of heaven”). We see their comparative nature in their introduction, “The kingdom of heaven is likened unto . . .” (example: Matthew 13:24). Some parables are narratives, telling a little story (example: Luke 15:4–7). Others are observational, giving spiritual application to an easily pictured scenario (example: 6:39).

The kingdom parables often have applications regarding Jesus' intentions for the church. This lesson looks at two such parables in Mark.

I. Parables of the Kingdom

(Mark 4:26–32)

A. Scattered Seeds (vv. 26–29)

26. And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground.

Mark 4:1–34 features four parables, and this verse begins the third. As we read about *a man* who casts *seed into the ground*, we remind ourselves that people of Jesus' day had no mechanical devices to spread seed like we have now. Rather, seed was broadcast by hand. This required skill to minimize wasted seed. After harvest, seed was saved to be ready for the spring planting. What was saved could have been eaten, but farmers knew that without that seed, there would be no future harvest.

27. And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

Once *the seed* is planted, the farmer's job is done for a while. He sleeps and gets up according to his routine. The seed needs no help to spring and grow up. However, while the farmer can observe this, he doesn't know how it works. He just expects it to happen.

In a world before modern scientific advances, there was great wonder about seeds and how they were able to replicate the plants they came from (compare Genesis 1:11–12). For seeds to be sown and then produce a good crop was seen as a blessing of the Lord (26:12). So, too, for Jesus: the growth of the kingdom is accomplished by God.

28. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

In the verse before us, Jesus describes a seed becoming a mature plant. From *the earth* (dirt), the germinated seed becomes *fruit of herself* without help from the farmer. The word *corn* is used in an older sense to indicate grain crops in general. Grain crops produce kernels that can be dried and ground into flour, providing a necessary ingredient for bread until the next harvest.

Plant growth begins with a *blade* emerging from the ground, and sprouts indicate that the planting has succeeded. This becomes a stalk that produces an *ear*, the seed head of the plant. This grain head

matures and, if the conditions are right, will be *full* of grain like the seed from which it came.

29. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

The stalks of grain don't just keep growing on and on, year after year. Their seed has been planted for a purpose: *the harvest*. And so it is with the kingdom of God (compare Isaiah 17:4–6; Matthew 13:1–23; Revelation 14:14–18). And as the ancient farmer didn't understand how a seed could result in a mature stalk of wheat, so too it is with the kingdom of God.

B. Smallest Seed (vv. 30–32)

30–31. And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth.

In these verses, Jesus introduces a new parable. Unlike the previous parable, the one we now consider has parallels in the other two synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13:31–32; Luke 13:18–19). Again, the parable is about *the kingdom of God*. The vital need for such illustrations is seen in the fact that “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15).

Like wheat, the mustard plant grows from seed after being planted (Matthew 13:31). Mustard seeds are tiny, as small as one millimeter in diameter. These were the smallest seeds with which Jesus' hearers would have been familiar, thus symbolic of the smallest item in their everyday world. This imagery is so powerful that Jesus will use it again later (17:20; Luke 17:6).

What Do You Think?

What word image would you use to tell a modern-day parable about the kingdom of God?

Digging Deeper

What truth regarding the kingdom of God would your parable convey?

32. But when it is sown, it groweth up, and

becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

Mustard plants can grow from tiny seeds to large shrubs in a single growing cycle of approximately 90 days. Some people have seen mature mustard plants around the Sea of Galilee that reached 10 feet tall. Though not technically “trees” by modern definition, they have considerable *branches*, giving a tree-like appearance. These leafy branches provide shade and can support the weight of small birds (compare Luke 13:19).

Like the previous parable, this one is about the kingdom of God. These parables refer prophetically to the church and its astounding growth. Beginning with a core of disciples, Jesus’ followers became the church on Pentecost. The book of Acts describes the rapid numerical growth of the first-century church following Jesus’ ascension (Acts 2:41–47; 4:4; 6:7). Today, estimates number those who identify as Christian at more than two billion.

What Do You Think?

In what ways have you seen God work through something small or humble to achieve His will?

Digging Deeper

How has the kingdom of God surprised you? How should it?

II. Work of the Kingdom

(Ephesians 4:4–6, 11–18)

In the first three chapters of this letter, Paul discusses the church’s foundation in the plan of God (Ephesians 1:11–12); Paul explains Christ’s role in breaking down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles (2:14); and he calls his readers to recognize that Christ is the head of His church, and the church is His body (1:22–23). These points are all at odds with a divided church. Therefore, chapter 4 begins Paul’s expression of the vital, unitary nature of the church.

A. Unified under Jesus (vv. 4–6)

4. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.

The church grows as more people are added to the kingdom of God. This growth creates challenges to unity as various cultures interact. Ephesians 4, however, teaches about the doctrines of the church that are to remain unchanging. Neither growth nor unity is to be emphasized at the expense of the other. The apostle Paul stresses unity by teaching on the “seven ones” in Ephesians 4:4–6. These are points of doctrine that cannot be dismissed if the growing church is to be what God intends.

One body speaks of the church (compare Romans 12:4–5; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18). Paul has much to say about diversity within the unified body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31. That passage also tells us how the *one Spirit*—the Holy Spirit—relates to that unified body. Christians are unified in having received the Holy Spirit through faith and repentance (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:14).

The church has *one hope* to which it is called (see Ephesians 1:18; 4:1). Believers have this hope through our belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:19; 1 Peter 1:3) and future eternal life with the Lord in heaven (Romans 6:22). After Paul left Ephesus, he testified to his “hope and resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6).

5. One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

We come now to the fourth, fifth, and sixth of the “seven ones.” *One Lord* refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church (Ephesians 3:11; 5:23). *One faith* involves our common assent regarding the person and work of Jesus (John 20:30–31; Acts 16:31).

Paul emphasizes that the *one baptism* is for both Jews and Gentiles: a baptism into Christ. This emphasis aligns with Paul’s corrective to the Corinthians regarding different baptisms (1 Corinthians 1:12–15; compare 12:13).

6. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

We come to the seventh and final “one.” Paul describes the *one God* by four uses of the word *all*. God is the *Father of all* in terms of creation (see Malachi 2:10; Ephesians 3:14–15). For God to be *above all* speaks to His transcendent nature. He

exists outside of His creation. This means there is nothing above the Lord God in power or authority (see Psalms 97:9; 113:4–6; 1 Timothy 6:16).

As we come to the phrases *through all* and *in you all*, we may be confused about the difference between the two (compare Romans 11:36). The preposition *through* indicates “means,” “agency,” or “intermediacy,” as in “by means of,” in this context (as it does in Colossians 1:20; 1 John 4:9). The preposition *in*, for its part, indicates “location.” This speaks to God’s immanence, or presence everywhere (compare Jeremiah 23:23–24; Acts 17:27–28).

What Do You Think?

Which of Paul’s “seven ones” do you struggle with the most? Why?

Digging Deeper

Which encourages you the most? Why?

B. Properly Led (vv. 11–13)

11. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.

Christ provides servant-leaders for His church. In this verse, Paul is not teaching about spiritual gifting but about Christ’s gifts to the church: *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers*. The gifts are people.

An apostle was appointed by Christ to be authoritative in the first-century church. Transforming Jesus’ followers into a functioning church required strong leadership, and the apostles had that authority. Only apostles or those closely associated with an apostle were recognized as legitimate authors of the books that make up the New Testament.

Prophets speak for God to strengthen the church (Acts 11:27–28; 15:32; 21:10–11). The household of God is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20; compare 1 Corinthians 12:28).

Evangelists are mentioned in the New Testament only here and in Acts 21:8 and 2 Timothy 4:5. They proclaim the good news about Jesus, a

task essential yet today (see Matthew 28:19–20; Romans 10:14).

Regarding the categories of pastors and teachers, there is some debate regarding whether these are two distinct roles or just one role (as in the hyphenated “pastor-teacher”). The Greek word translated “pastors” occurs 18 times in the New Testament (here and in Matthew 9:36; 25:32; 26:31; Mark 6:34; 14:27; Luke 2 [four times]; John 10 [six times]; Hebrews 13:20; and 1 Peter 2:25). In those other 17 instances, the translation is always “shepherd(s).” Pastors are shepherds who attend to God’s people as a “flock” over which they had been made “overseers” (Acts 20:28).

Teachers instruct on how to understand God and how to live a godly life based on the Scriptures (Colossians 1:28; 2 Timothy 3:16). Noteworthy is the fact that the role of teacher is in Paul’s “top three list” in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Paul explains the reason these leadership roles are necessary in the next verse.

12. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

The servant-leader roles complement one another in a common purpose: *perfecting the saints*. The leaders bring the believers in their congregations to spiritual maturity to share in *the work of the ministry* (compare Hebrews 5:11–6:3). *Edifying* means to build (construct an edifice). Church leaders should never be tearing down members, but building them up. Church leadership is about *the body of Christ*, the church.

What Do You Think?

Who has been the most influential in helping equip you to serve Christ?

Digging Deeper

How will you help equip others to serve?

13a. Till we all come in the unity of the faith.

This ministry of edification is not easy. Anyone who teaches in a church knows there will be differences of opinion that can become nasty divisions. Paul’s vision is that the church will be guided by the great “seven ones” of Ephesians 4:4–6, thereby

coming to *the unity of the faith* (compare Ephesians 4:3). We usually understand the word *faith* in terms of words such as *trust*, *assent*, or *belief* *that* as focused on the person and work of Christ Himself (see John 8:24; 20:31; Romans 4:5; etc.). But that is not the sense here. The inclusion of the definite article “the” in the phrase “the faith” has the sense of a body of doctrine to be believed and accepted as true (Acts 6:7; Titus 1:13; Jude 3).

13b. And of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

In addition to being unified in the faith, the goal is to be unified in *the knowledge of the Son of God*. This goal is repeated from Ephesians 1:17. Paul stresses such knowledge also in 2 Corinthians 2:14; 4:6.

United We Stand

“But Mom said I could!” the child yelled at her dad, who had just denied her request. Sound familiar? Children become quite skilled at playing their parents off against each other, lining up a positive response from one parent as ammunition for gaining permission from the other parent as well.

This “divide and conquer” method can turn parent against parent and weaken family relationships. It is not the child’s responsibility to maintain unity, though. Parents are responsible for that. When parents are divided, the children can sense it. The result is a sense of anxious unease and lack of security.

The same thing applies to the church. The spiritually mature leaders have the responsibility to maintain unity. When that doesn’t happen, those who are spiritually immature can sense it; they end up insecure and anxious. What can you do to maintain and strengthen the unity among your congregation? —L. M. W.

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh- <i>losh</i> -unz.
Ephesians	Ee- <i>fee</i> -zhunz.
Pentecost	Pent- <i>ih</i> -kost.
Synoptic	Sih- <i>nawp</i> -tihk.

C. Secure in Truth (vv. 14–16)

14. That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

People seem attracted to teachers who will support preconceived ideas—what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear (see 2 Timothy 4:3). But those who move on to maturity in Christ are less susceptible to deceptive forces (compare 1 Corinthians 14:20; James 1:6). The danger here is not that of sincere but mistaken people. Instead, the threat is from professional tricksters. The descriptions here have a sense of false teachers who are peddling lies in ways that make money for themselves (compare 2 Corinthians 11:12–13).

Tossed Around

When my son was a baby, we tightly buckled him in his car seat. His neck struggled to assert control over his head movements as his head rolled side to side or tipped forward, tossed around by centrifugal and gravitational forces as we drove. We believed that he would soon gain control of his neck and head as he grew.

We were right. He grew up to be a fine young adult despite the wobbly beginning. The boy who could barely hold his head up for more than 15 seconds is now part of a world-class drum corps at college. He carries a heavy set of five drums onto the field and plays while marching. His steady development has resulted in him becoming a man who understands his role on the team and carries it out with excellence.

We were all spiritual infants at some point, subject to being tossed around by the forces of the world. Some of us have grown out of that stage and on to spiritual maturity. Others haven’t. Which category are you in? To find out, read Hebrews 5:11–6:3. —L. M. W.

15. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

Truth is what we are to speak; *in love* is how we

are to speak it. Both must characterize our speech for spiritual growth to occur. The outcome of teaching truth in love is spiritual maturity that results in unity (see 1 Corinthians 3:2; 1 Peter 2:2; etc.).

What Do You Think?

What practical ways can you keep truth and love balanced in your interactions?

Digging Deeper

How will you ensure that such interactions result in the maturity and unity of the body of Christ that is the church?

16. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Paul returns to his metaphor of the church as *the body* of Christ (see expanded metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31; compare Colossians 2:19). Our physical bodies are made up of compatible parts. They are designed to work together as each serves its function. Just as every part is important, so it is to be in the church. This is why divisions—whether based on false doctrines, personal animosity, or whatever—cause the church to self-destruct. Instead, the goal should be edifying, building the church into a community that loves God and others. This will never happen without an overwhelming spirit of love for one another in the church. You cannot work for the destruction of others if you love them.

D. Showing Transformation (vv. 17–18)

17–18. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

Today's text ends with a stark warning: past practices (*walk*) and beliefs (*mind*) must remain in the past. In so doing, they will not allow paganism, the ways of the *Gentiles*, to influence the church.

Paul has more to say about all this in Romans 1:18–32; 6:6; Ephesians 4:19–24; and Colossians 3.

Conclusion

A. Recognizing Two Kinds of Growth

The parables Jesus told give the impression of rapid growth of the kingdom of God. As with seeds to mature plants, this may seem mysterious to us at times. Astounding church growth may be happening in places we don't expect. May we rejoice whenever we hear stories of unbelievers coming to faith in Christ!

But the numerical growth of people brings growth in the number of opinions and interpretations. This can lead to divisions (compare 1 Corinthians 1:10–17; 3:1–9; 11:17–22). The solution is found in the “seven ones” of Ephesians 4:4–6. These still define the basis for church unity.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we confess Your Son to be the head of the church. Use us to raise His name high so that everyone will be drawn to You. Help us not forget that growth of the church means the salvation of more people and their experience of new life in You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Christ intended and designed His church to grow in number and unity.



Visual for Lessons 9 & 13. Display this visual as learners pair up to discuss how they can show love through action.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write the following words as headers on the board: *Season, Emotion, City, Machine, and Insect*. Lead a whole-class brainstorming session by inviting learners to list items in each category. Write responses on the board under the correct header. Then, have participants choose one of the responses listed on the board. Challenge them to describe that response by comparing it to something else. For example, say, “Autumn is like a fresh apple from a tree: colorful and crisp.” After one minute, ask volunteers to share their descriptions.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “Some things are difficult to understand if you haven’t seen or experienced them before. Even for believers, the kingdom of God and the purpose of the church are complicated subjects to grasp. In today’s lesson, pay attention to how Jesus and Paul explain the importance of these concepts.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 4:26–32. Divide the class into two groups: **Growing Grain Group** and **Mustard Seed Group**. Direct the Growing Grain Group to reread Mark 4:26–29 and the Mustard Seed Group to reread Mark 4:30–32. Distribute handouts (you create) to each group containing the following questions for in-group discussion: 1–What are the word images in your assigned verses? 2–What are possible interpretations of these images? 3–In what ways do these verses describe the kingdom of God?

Allow a few minutes for both groups to share their findings. Ask the following question for whole-class discussion: “What symbols or concepts do these parables have in common?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Grow, Grow, Grow” exercise from the activity pages, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete the first two sections as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 4:4–6,

11–13 aloud. Write these headers on the board: *One* and *Many*. Direct participants identify all the things in Ephesians 4:4–6 described as “one” and write those things on the board under the correct header. Then, have learners review Ephesians 4:11–13 and list the roles referenced as “many.”

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–What is the significance of the responses in the first column? in the second column? 2–What would happen to the church if the items in the first column were in the second column and vice versa?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 4:14–18. Instruct participants to work in small groups to rewrite these verses as a modern-day parable. Direct groups to use the following questions to assist in thinking: 1–What is Paul’s main point in these verses? 2–What aspect of the kingdom of God is Paul trying to convey? After calling time, have groups present their parables to the whole class.

Alternative. Have participants complete the third section of the “Grow, Grow, Grow” exercise from the activity page.

Into Life

Group participants in pairs. Have pairs brainstorm a response to this question: “How can focusing on the truths in Ephesians 4 help us resolve or remove disagreement?”

Distribute a sheet of paper and a pen to each pair. Challenge them to develop a twofold strategy for seeking reconciliation. Part one will develop a plan for seeking reconciliation within the church. Part two will develop a plan for seeking reconciliation between the church and its surrounding community. After ten minutes, ask volunteers to share their plans. Ask pairs how they might implement this plan in the upcoming weeks.

Option. Distribute the “Strategy of Unity” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete as a take-home activity.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Devotional Reading: John 1:29–34

Background Scripture: Acts 2:38, 41; Romans 6:1–14;
1 Corinthians 11:23–29

Matthew 3:13–17

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Matthew 28:19–20

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

1 Corinthians 11:23–29

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Key Text

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. —Matthew 28:19–20

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 3: The Church and Its Teachings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the directives found in Matthew 28:19–20.
2. Explain the vital roles of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the Christian community.
3. Make a plan to bring the good news of Jesus to those with spiritual, economic, and social needs.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Table that Unites
- B. Lesson Context

I. Tradition of Baptism (Matthew 3:13–17)

- A. Jesus and John (vv. 13–15)
- B. Father, Son, and Spirit (vv. 16–17)

II. Making Disciples (Matthew 28:19–20)

- A. From All Nations (v. 19a)
Catch the Spirit
- B. By Baptizing and Teaching (vv. 19b–20)

III. Tradition of Communion

(1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

- A. The Bread, Christ's Body (vv. 23–24)
- B. The Cup, Christ's Blood (vv. 25–26)
A Taste of Home

IV. Warning Disciples (1 Corinthians 11:27–29)

- A. Have Proper Motives (v. 27)
- B. Examine Yourself (vv. 28–29)

Conclusion

- A. God's Gifts for God's People
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Table that Unites

A team of American college students and I attended a church service in a village 20 miles outside Mbale, Uganda. The worship band played hand drums and the harp-like *a'dungu*. Children's choirs sang enthusiastic songs. A preacher read from a Bible in the Luganda language.

At the climax of the service, a tray was brought out with a freshly baked loaf of bread and an assortment of glasses filled with red juice. After a time of prayer, we all ate the bread and drank from the cups. Even though we lived thousands of miles apart and spoke different languages, the experience reminded me that we are one body in Christ. It was a precious time of unity as we feasted together and celebrated the promises of our Lord and Savior.

B. Lesson Context

From its beginning, the church has observed two practices that mark its identity: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Both practices have antecedents in the first-century Jewish world.

Christian baptism has its roots in ritual cleansing practiced by Jews, a tradition that predates the first-century church. The Law of Moses prescribes cleansing with water for religious and physical purification (examples: Leviticus 14:8–9; 15:5–13; 17:15). But the Old Testament prophets promised a new baptism, a cleansing from impurity and sin (Ezekiel 36:25; Zechariah 13:1).

In the Second Temple period, washings for purification were a part of Jewish life (compare Mark 7:1–4; John 2:6; etc.). During this time, it is thought that converts to Judaism underwent a “proselyte baptism” for joining the Jewish community. Ritual washing was necessary because Gentiles were considered unclean; rules prevented them from entering the inner courts of the temple or participating with Jews in local worship.

The second practice in today's lesson is the Lord's Supper, also called Communion. The Gospels record the events of a “Last Supper”—the meal Jesus shared with His disciples the night before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:17–

30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–23; John 13:1–30). Although the apostle Paul was not present at that dinner, he shares an account of the same meal (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

Readers are meant to connect the Last Supper to the observance of Passover, a remembrance of God's liberation of the ancient Hebrews from their enslavement in Egypt (see Exodus 12:2–11; Deuteronomy 16:1–8). Celebrants would eat lamb, bitter herbs, and bread without yeast (Numbers 9:11). Likewise, the New Testament describes Christ as a Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7; compare John 1:29; Revelation 5:6). Thus, this meal and Christ's sacrifice on the cross serve as the fulfillment of Passover: through the giving of Jesus' body and blood, freedom and forgiveness of sins are available to all.

I. Tradition of Baptism

(Matthew 3:13–17)

John the Baptist is a prophetic figure preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, where he calls people to “repent . . . for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:1–2). John preaches like the Old Testament prophets: “Prepare . . . the way of the Lord” (Isaiah 40:3, quoted in Matthew 3:3). His ministry presumes that all people need confession and forgiveness, alongside water baptism (3:6). John anticipates that another is coming, one who will “baptize . . . with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (3:11).

A. Jesus and John (vv. 13–15)

13. Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

Because He grew up in Nazareth of *Galilee* (Matthew 2:22–23), Jesus travels south to Judaea and the banks of the *Jordan* River. This is where *John* the Baptist is baptizing and preaching about the coming Messiah (see 3:1–12; Mark 1:1–8; John 1:19–28). Jesus' trip is not a sightseeing journey; He comes *to be baptized* by John.

14. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

John, however, knows Jesus' identity (compare Luke 1:44). John identifies himself—a mere man—as one needing *to be baptized*, but by Jesus. John had predicted the arrival of one “whose shoe's

latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (John 1:27). The words of his question are incredulous: *comest thou to me?* This is not a rebuke but a surprise. John reveals humility, for he considers himself unworthy to baptize Jesus, as God's anointed king.

15. And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

Jesus replies to John's reticence by encouraging the baptism *now*. The word *suffer* reflects old English, “to allow.” The immediacy of Jesus' baptism is necessary because of what it achieves and signifies.

In contrast to other baptisms performed by John, Jesus' baptism requires no repentance of sin. The perfect Son of God has no need for repentance (compare 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). But Jesus' baptism will *fulfil all righteousness* as an act of obedience to the wishes of His heavenly Father.

Jesus' baptism has three implications. First, it initiates His public ministry. Second, Jesus' ministry fulfills messianic expectations and supports John's preaching of repentance. Third, through baptism, Jesus identifies with the people He comes to save: sinful humans in need of repentance (compare Luke 19:10; Hebrews 2:17–18; 1 Peter 2:21–24).

What Do You Think?

How will you explain the necessity of Jesus' baptism?

Digging Deeper

When have you found it necessary to fulfill expectations and obey the righteous requirements of God?

B. Father, Son, and Spirit (vv. 16–17)

16a. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.

The Gospels do not dwell on the method of Jesus' baptism, only that *he was baptized* by John in the Jordan River (Mark 1:9; Luke 3:21; compare John 1:32). Since the Greek word for “baptize” is the same as “wash,” flowing water is a fitting image of cleansing (every other person coming to John was repenting for sins).

What Do You Think?

What makes baptism like and unlike other ways we might “wash” with water?

Digging Deeper

If you are baptized, what details of your baptism show God’s favor and welcome?

16b. And, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.

Scripture speaks of the opening of *the heavens* as a way to indicate divine revelation (Ezekiel 1:1; Acts 10:11–13; Revelation 4:1; etc.). The opening of heaven here leads to two miraculous occurrences.

First, Jesus sees *the Spirit of God descending like a dove*. It is not necessarily the case that any actual bird is present, since the wording does not require one. The Gospel of John recounts the event from the viewpoint of John the Baptist, who also witnesses the descending Spirit (John 1:32). The Spirit is not a bird, but a dove is the most fitting comparison for what Jesus and John see.

The coming of the Spirit *upon* Jesus is a powerful representation of God’s approval. It shows His status as God’s servant (compare Isaiah 11:1–2; 42:1). Jesus receives the Holy Spirit so that He might fulfill the mission of His heavenly Father. Later, Jesus will empower followers to receive the same Spirit (John 20:22; Acts 1:4–5).

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God authorizes a person for a particular task or mission (Exodus 31:1–5; 1 Samuel 16:13; etc.). Jesus is also authorized for a mission, and the arrival of the Spirit in this way is something new.

17. And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

The second miraculous occurrence is *a voice from heaven*—an indication that words come from God. The verse does not say whether others hear or recognize the voice. The proclamation of Jesus as *my beloved Son* shows that the voice belongs to the Father. Therefore, this scene has all three persons of the Trinity: God the Father is *well pleased*, giving approval of His Son and His ministry; Jesus displays obedience and willingness to follow the will of His heavenly Father (compare John 4:34; 6:38);

and the Spirit descends to authorize and empower Christ’s work (compare Luke 4:14, 18–19).

Two texts of the Old Testament, Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, help us to understand Jesus’ identity and what He will do. Psalm 2 looks forward to when the Messiah will defeat God’s enemies and bring God’s rule through an appointed king. Isaiah 42 describes the servant of the Lord, who will make God known to the nations. He will not rule by raising a shout, but he will serve with gentleness (Isaiah 42:2).

The Father’s words identify Jesus by these two themes. Jesus is the promised king. He will establish His rule, not by conquest but by giving of Himself. By submitting to death on the cross, Jesus will make the mercy of God available to all, and He will reign as king (see Revelation 5:12–13).

II. Making Disciples

(Matthew 28:19–20)

Following Jesus’ resurrection, He brings the disciples to a mountaintop in Galilee (Matthew 28:16). Jesus proclaims His universal rule: “All power is given unto me in heaven and earth” (28:18).

A. From All Nations (v. 19a)

19a. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.

Since Jesus possesses all authority, He commands the disciples to *go* and *teach* to continue their ministry of God’s kingdom (compare Matthew 10:7). Their task is disciple-making, teaching others of the resurrected Christ. Jesus had focused His earthly ministry on the people of Israel (Matthew 10:5–6; 15:21–24). But now Jesus expands the ministry of the kingdom to include people from *all nations* (see Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:29).

Catch the Spirit

As a college student, I joined a singing team that partnered with my college’s office of advancement. We traveled nationwide, singing songs, performing skits, and sharing personal testimonies. The school commissioned us to be ambassadors to encourage prospective students and their families to “catch the spirit” of our institution. As audiences “caught the spirit” from our performance, we hoped it would lead them to attend our school.

Jesus commissions His earliest disciples to serve as ambassadors for His kingdom. That same commission stands for us today: share the good news of Jesus with all people. But do your actions reflect your status as an ambassador for Christ Jesus? Consider what creative ways to reach people in conversations about Jesus. You may be surprised when they “catch” new life in Christ! —B. R.

B. By Baptizing and Teaching (vv. 19b–20)

19b. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

In this verse, Jesus does not explain every aspect of baptism but says it should occur *in the name* of the triune God: *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*. Christians through the ages have understood the task of baptizing in various ways, but have always enacted it as a welcome of God for those who would come to Him.

Baptism signifies entry into the community of God’s people and identifies a person as “in Christ” (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Colossians 2:11–12). Paul uses baptism to connect believers to the ancient Hebrews, who “passed through the sea” and were “baptized unto Moses” (1 Corinthians 10:1–2). Baptism accompanies repentance and the gift of the Holy Ghost (see Acts 2:38; 19:4–6). And through baptism, believers obey Jesus and identify with the community of God’s people.

20a. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

Teaching does not end when someone becomes a disciple. Discipleship requires a lifelong commitment to obey Christ. He alone is the foundation of faith (1 Corinthians 3:11). Through teaching one another, disciples receive Christ as Lord and learn to abide by the words, “walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6–7).

What Do You Think?

Why do you think that Jesus mentions the “teaching” of future disciples after He mentions their baptism?

Digging Deeper

In what specific ways could you be more engaged in the teaching of new believers at your church?

20b. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Matthew first presents the birth of Jesus as fulfillment of prophecy: “They shall call his name Emmanuel, . . . God with us” (Matthew 1:23; quoting Isaiah 7:14). Now Matthew concludes his Gospel with Jesus’ assurance that He will always be with followers as they carry out the task of making disciples, *even unto the end of the world*.

III. Tradition of Communion

(1 Corinthians 11:23–26)

Paul plants a church in Corinth during his second missionary journey. However, the church develops problems: factionalism, immorality, rivalry, and false doctrine. At the heart of these is a sense of individual entitlement within the congregation. A lack of concern for one another causes a crisis in how they practice the Lord’s Supper.

Like other early Christians, the Corinthians observe the Lord’s Supper as part of a worship service and fellowship meal. But apparently, their meals begin before everyone arrives, leaving some hungry and others drunk (1 Corinthians 11:17–22). This demonstrates disrespect for the message of unity, which should be evident when celebrating the selfless sacrifice of Jesus.

A. The Bread, Christ’s Body (vv. 23–24)

23a. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.

The apostle provides his source of tradition: *the Lord* (compare Galatians 1:12). Paul communicated with Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem, where he would have learned what Jesus did during His last meal with the disciples.

23b. That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread.

Paul recounts the events of the “Last Supper” of *the Lord Jesus*. He describes it as the *night* in which Jesus *was betrayed*. The memory of Jesus’ betrayal is strong (compare Mark 3:19). It set into motion the dramatic events of the Friday of Holy Week.

This *bread* is unleavened bread consumed during Passover (compare Luke 22:15). Before leaving Egypt, the Israelites ate bread without yeast—



Visual for Lesson 10. Display this visual as you discuss the commentary associated with 1 Corinthians 11:26.

a signal of sudden deliverance—and received instructions to observe this annual festival (Exodus 12:15, 17; see Lesson Context).

24. And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

The Greek word *eucharisteo* is behind the phrase *he had given thanks*. This is why some refer to the Lord's Supper as the Eucharist (a meal of thanksgiving). It is appropriate, when we observe the Lord's Supper, to give thanks to God for the sacrifice of Christ.

Jesus links the bread of this meal with His physical *body*. Although churches may use different versions of communion bread, the symbol of breaking bread points to Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus anticipates this when He calls the bread *broken for you*.

B. The Cup, Christ's Blood (vv. 25–26)

25. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

The cup symbolizes Christ's *blood* shed on the cross. Blood is a token of life and sacrifice throughout the Old Testament (Genesis 9:4–5; Leviticus 9:18; etc.). Blood that is spilled is a sign of death and the seriousness of sin. The spilling of blood can accompany the making of a covenant—a binding agreement between two parties (see Exodus 24:8).

Jesus' words inaugurate this new agreement,

the same covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31. The new covenant restores the relationship between God and His people: instruction shall be written on their hearts and sins forgiven (Jeremiah 31:31–34). Thus, sharing the cup prompts *remembrance* of forgiveness through Christ. Like the group of Israelites who made a covenant with God (Exodus 19:3–8), the Lord's Supper is for a forgiven people, those saved by His blood. This is the essence of *the new testament*, the new covenant.

What Do You Think?

What does it look like when God writes on the hearts of those who receive Christ's sacrifice (Jeremiah 31:31–34)?

Digging Deeper

What are some other ways Jesus has provided new hope for a restored relationship between God and humans?

26. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

When we *eat this bread and drink this cup*, we partake in a meal of remembrance, thanksgiving, and anticipation. We remember *the Lord's death*, give thanks for the new covenant, and anticipate that Christ will one day *come* again.

A Taste of Home

In my work with a local nonprofit, I teach English to asylum seekers. Most students come from African countries. Cultural differences make assimilation full of challenges.

During one class, we discussed favorite foods. One student mentioned that his favorite dish is fufu, a West African cuisine. Others agreed, and one announced that a local grocery store sold the vegetables for making fufu. For these students, fufu is a reminder of the beloved culture of their home countries. In short, it is a “taste of home.”

The Lord's Supper invites us to *remember* Christ's sacrifice and His promise to return. The meal gives us “spiritual sustenance” as we look back at what Jesus has done and look forward to what He will do next. What do you remember when you eat this meal? How might it alter your routine to consider the Lord's Supper a “taste of home”? —B. R.

IV. Warning Disciples

(1 Corinthians 11:27–29)

A. Have Proper Motives (v. 27)

27. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

The rebuke to *whosoever shall eat . . . and drink . . . unworthily* addresses the Corinthians' abuses and mishandling of the meal. Their mishandling had severe consequences (1 Corinthians 11:29–30).

To participate *unworthily* is to become guilty of disrespect for Jesus, the behavior of Jesus' enemies during His trial (Luke 23:11, 13–21; John 19:2–3). The way the Corinthians observe the Lord's Supper makes a mockery of Christ's death, disrespecting *the body and blood* of the crucified Lord.

B. Examine Yourself (vv. 28–29)

28. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

Paul advises self-examination to avoid unworthy participation. Elsewhere, he invites the Corinthians to examine whether "Jesus Christ is in you" (2 Corinthians 13:5–6). This occurs through reflection on actions and attitudes, prompting confession and repentance of selfishness and sin—especially wrongs against other members of the family of faith.

29. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Paul warns against failure to discern *the Lord's body*. This phrase can refer to the elements of the Lord's Supper and also the assembly of Christ's followers—the church (1 Corinthians 10:16; 12:27; Ephesians 4:12). The connection anticipates Paul's usage of the metaphor to represent the church (1 Corinthians 12:12).

To partake in the Lord's Supper is to participate alongside the body of the church (compare 1 Corinthians 10:17; Ephesians 4:4). The meal helps us to contemplate Christ's love, remember our identity as a forgiven people, and celebrate Christ's redemp-

tion. All are sinners in need of a Savior, and there are no privileged diners at the Lord's table.

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure that you are not guilty of treating Christ's sacrifice in an unworthy manner?

Digging Deeper

How is the pursuit of God's wisdom helpful in this regard (see James 3:17)?

Conclusion

A. God's Gifts for God's People

Baptism is the ritual entry to the life of faith. It includes a public testimony of God's gifts of grace and the Holy Spirit. We follow Jesus' example when we undergo baptism, and the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28 challenges us to invite all people to become His disciples.

The Lord's Supper is a meal of remembrance, thanksgiving, and anticipation. Instead of happening once for each person, it is celebrated regularly. The meal beckons us to examine our relationships with God and others. We share the meal with believers as the unified body of Christ, those who remember His sacrifice and look forward to His return.

There are differences among believers when we practice baptism and the Lord's Supper. But neither Christ nor Paul anticipates either to be cause for division. We should carefully study these practices so that, with our church, we might understand their purpose in worship and ministry. We can practice both with an attitude of humility and joy, recognizing that they are from God and for God's people.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gifts of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through baptism, we experience unity with You and other believers. In the Lord's Supper, we remember Your sacrifice. Empower us, through Your Spirit, to participate in a worthy manner. In Your name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are unifying gifts for God's people.

How to Say It

Eucharist You-kuh-rist.
proselyte prahss-uh-light.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class, prepare a grab bag containing small items that symbolize something else. Possible examples include a wedding ring, a red rose, a flag, a cross necklace, and an image of a dove.

Divide the class into small groups and ask a volunteer from each group to grab an item from the bag. Challenge each group to determine what the item symbolizes and whether the symbol accurately conveys the reality it represents. Continue the process until all items in the bag have been selected. Lead a whole-class discussion on the nature of symbols and their limitations.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today we will study two practices of the Christian church. The symbolic elements of these practices help us understand more significant spiritual realities.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups: **Example of Jesus Group**, **Directives of Jesus Group**, and **Communing with Jesus Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) of the following questions for in-group discussion.

Example of Jesus Group. Read Matthew 3:13–17 and answer these prompts: 1–Summarize John’s reaction to Jesus’ request for baptism. 2–Explain the reason Jesus gave for approaching John for baptism. 3–In what ways does Jesus’ explanation apply to us? In what ways does it differ? 4–What happened after Jesus was baptized, and what did it signify?

Directives of Jesus Group. Read Matthew 28:19–20 and answer these questions: 1–What directive(s) did Jesus give His disciples? 2–How does each directive in these verses relate to the next one? 3–What significance is there to the order of the directives? 4–What role does baptism play in your church?

Option. Using a concordance or online Bible search tool, find New Testament references to the

words *baptize* or *baptism*. What do you conclude about baptism after reading these verses?

Communing with Jesus Group. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 and answer these questions: 1–What significance did Jesus give to each element in the Lord’s Supper? 2–What is accomplished in us through participation in the meal? 3–What directive did Jesus give for those who wish to participate in this meal? 4–What role does the Lord’s Supper play in your church?

Option. Review 1 Corinthians 11:17–34; 12:12–30; and 14:1–39. What issues had affected the Corinthians’s observance of the Lord’s Supper?

After calling time, have groups present their findings for whole-class discussion. Summarize findings by developing conclusions on the roles of baptism and the Lord’s Supper in the church.

Into Life

Ask a volunteer to reread aloud Matthew 28:19–20. Lead a discussion on ways your congregation can “go” and “teach” others about God’s kingdom. Say, “One way to introduce people to God’s kingdom is to first address their spiritual, economic, or social needs.” Brainstorm ways your congregation can bring the good news of Jesus to people with spiritual, economic, or social needs. Write responses on the board.

Option 1. Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 10:16–17 and 12:13–15. Direct the class to brainstorm ways in which the celebration of the Lord’s Supper demonstrates the unity of the church as the body of Christ. Write responses on the board.

Option 2. Distribute copies of the “Pictures of Baptism” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Option 3. Distribute copies of the “A Plan for Remembering” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in groups to complete as indicated.

The Lord's Day

Devotional Reading: Psalm 118:19–24

Background Scripture: Genesis 2:2–3; Matthew 12:1–14; 28:1–10

Exodus 20:8–11

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.

Romans 14:4–6

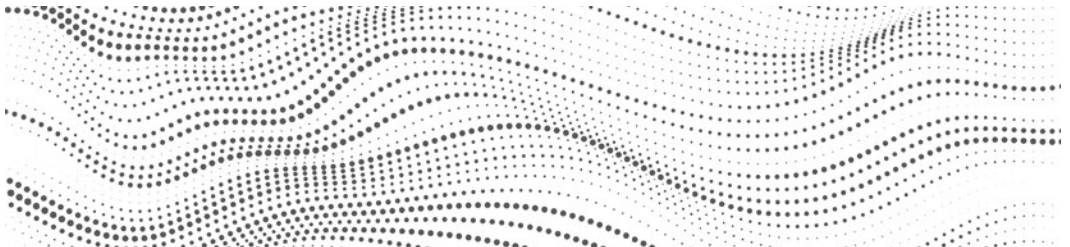
4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

Revelation 1:10

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.



Key Text

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 20:11

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 3: The Church and Its Teachings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize Exodus 20:8–11.
2. Compare and contrast the Old Testament command to honor the Sabbath with the practices of worship in the early church.
3. List ways to bring rest and worship together in the upcoming week.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. The Great Birthday Debate
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Sabbath Day (Exodus 20:8–11)

- A. Keep It Holy (v. 8)
- B. Not for Labor (vv. 9–10)
- C. Created by God (v. 11)

Resting Well

II. Honoring Special Days (Romans 14:4–6)

- A. No Basis to Judge (v. 4)
- B. Needs Reflection (v. 5)
- C. Always for the Lord (v. 6)

Not How, but Why

III. The Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10)

Conclusion

- A. King of Creation, Lord of Every Day
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Great Birthday Debate

I have never liked birthday celebrations. I can't keep track of dates; I can't find the right words for a card; and I don't even like cake.

But when I got married, I learned that my opinion was not popular—not by a long shot. I think I knew that beforehand, but my wife would never let me impose my anti-birthday views on others. In her family, birthdays were a time when a person felt valued, when other priorities could be postponed.

You can probably guess which side my kids chose in the “great birthday debate.” I have to admit, it gives me pause to see our birthday traditions evolve each year. I witness that the simple acts of *remembering* and *doing something* change my son or daughter's perspective. They wake with abundant joy to face a day of attention, and I think they've started to chip away at my indifference. I suppose we could honor one another on *any day*, but it sure helps when it's on the calendar.

B. Lesson Context

The giving of the Sinai covenant comes at a key point in the history of Israel. The Ten Commandments or *Decalogue* (which means “ten words”) convey wisdom from God. By following these commands, the Israelites were invited to live at peace with one another and with the God who had just freed them from servitude in Egypt (Exodus 19:4–6).

The fourth of these commandments, Sabbath, describes a practice of refraining from work on the final day of each week. It is without any precise equivalent in other ancient Near Eastern cultures. The distinctiveness of Sabbath practice became especially apparent when inhabitants of Judah went into exile and later returned to the land after it had been repopulated with other groups (sixth century BC). Alongside infant circumcision (Leviticus 12:3) and restrictive food laws (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14), Sabbath became a mark of Jewish identity in the Persian, Greek, and Roman periods and the centuries before the birth of Jesus.

But as Christianity, which began as a Jewish movement, grew to include many Gentiles, a ques-

tion that the earliest of churches had to answer was, *When shall we meet?* Christian “voluntary associations,” which is how churches were seen by Romans, chose to meet before dawn on the first day of the week (Sunday rather than Saturday). Outsiders noticed the habit of Christians to gather on Sunday mornings. For instance, Pliny the Younger—a second-century Roman authority trying to root out the Christians in his region—reports to the emperor Trajan that Christians gather before dawn on a particular day, when they sing hymns to Christ.

I. The Sabbath Day

(Exodus 20:8–11)

A. Keep It Holy (v. 8)

8. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The Ten Commandments are a concise summary of Israel’s covenant obligations. Israelites would speak of the Mosaic Law as a blessing and a gift, not as an onerous set of expectations. And Israel’s poets, the psalmists, find “delight” in keeping God’s law, for the statutes of God are a guide and a fount of understanding, not a burden (Psalms 1:2; 19:7–11; 119:70, 77; etc.). Much later, a Pharisee-turned-ambassador of Christ, the apostle Paul, will write, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Romans 7:22).

“Keep the sabbath” is wording that will appear in Exodus 31:14, 16; but the main verb of the verse before us is *remember*. Since something that is *holy* is set aside for God’s use, the Israelites must give attention to *the sabbath day* for the purpose of reserving it for God to use. Other things can be set aside for sacred use: a space for God’s presence to manifest, parts of a sacrifice designated for God, or even the altar for sacrifices (Exodus 19:23; 29:27, 36–37).

But exactly what does it mean to remember a day and, in so doing, consecrate a day for God? We find the answer from the origin of Sabbath, which is explained by two related contexts. First, Sabbath, the last of a seven-day week, caps off and concludes the activity of God’s creation of the universe (Genesis 2:1–3; compare Exodus 20:11, below). Second, Sabbath observance recalls God’s

rescue of the Israelites from oppression in Egypt, where rest was not allowed (see Deuteronomy 5:15). Thus, the imperative *remember the sabbath day* invites people to credit God for His supreme work of bringing order to creation and His deliverance of His people from “rest-less” oppression. Only God can give order, purpose, and freedom, both to the cosmos and to the covenant people with whom He dwells.

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you set aside a day of the week for sacred use and worship?

Digging Deeper

What challenges do you face when doing so? What barriers keep you from remembering and setting aside a day?

B. Not for Labor (vv. 9–10)

9. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work.

The kind of remembrance that retains Sabbath for God’s use is not just “remember that Sabbath exists” or “remember that Saturday comes after Friday.” God provides a framework that will require active preparation during the *six days* before each Sabbath. Each of the six days that are not Sabbath are also set aside, but for *labour*. As in the collection of manna, which required extra *work* before the Sabbath, the Israelites must prepare (Exodus 16:21–30).

To the ancient audience, an incentive to work is already obvious. For tribal nomads, work is always at hand. And to anyone who does not tend livestock or work in an agrarian economy, the labor of ancient Israelites would seem endless: tarry long enough, and animals will suffer; fail to gather firewood, and your family might freeze; stop producing fabric, and you will soon have no clothes. But because the work of living is endless, the radical invitation of this verse is to restrain from work so that each day is not the same.

The invitation is a generous gift. For a group who had just emerged from slavery and unrelenting labor, God demonstrates that faithfulness to His command and His rule will not result in want.



Visual for Lesson 11. Ask learners to consider their own habits of rest. How can this lesson inform their weekly practices?

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.

To be deliberately unproductive for a day each week is an act of trust. It requires extra work in advance so that the Sabbath is not a day without food or water. Yet God knows that humans will look for loopholes. God prevents the redistribution of duties onto others (children, servants, even animals), a temptation to maintain the mere appearance of personal observance while making everyone else's life harder. The call is for a total cessation of labor, from the highest to the lowest, even during the busiest seasons of harvest (Exodus 34:21).

The concern for any *stranger that is within thy gates* is explained later in Exodus 22:21, which recounts the experience of God's people as foreigners in Egypt. The inclusion of the foreigner is an extension of the gift of Sabbath. Whereas Pharaoh oppressed the Hebrews (foreigners to the Egyptians), the Israelites shall invite foreigners to share in Sabbath and find respite from work.

The regular cessation of work might be healthy for people and animals, or it might even lead to greater productivity during the workweek, but the text cites none of these rationalizations for Sabbath. Neither do the instructions cite human enjoyment, for the Sabbath belongs to *the Lord thy God*. Yet by ordering working lives before God

and keeping the agreement struck at Sinai, the Israelites shall be promised a series of abundant blessings (see Deuteronomy 28:1–14). The blessings that only God can bring are far more important than the lost labor of a day.

C. Created by God (v. 11)

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.

This verse explains the basis for Sabbath: God's ordered cosmos began with an ordered creation. The very first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, describes the creation of *heaven and earth* (compare Genesis 2:4). God is the creative maker who separates, orders, and gives purpose to each domain: *earth, the sea, and all that in them*.

God *rested the seventh day* from the work of creation, not because He had grown tired or needed a break from strenuous activity. That might be why humans rest, but not why God rests. God rests because creation is His kingdom, and He sits enthroned above it all. Just as God finds rest in His temple on Mount Zion (Psalm 132:13–14), God rests on the seventh day as the grand finale to creation.

Thus, Israel shall remember the Sabbath and celebrate God's role as the Creator. By placing God at the center of their lives—which is the only way to accommodate a recurring day without productive work—Israel can be shaped by the habit of observing Sabbath and setting it aside for God's purposes.

What Do You Think?

How might God's decision to rest after His act of creation affect your understanding of a weekly day of rest?

Digging Deeper

Compare Deuteronomy 5:15; how does this verse contribute to your understanding?

Resting Well

One summer, I worked in a vineyard in France. Each workday began at sunrise and continued

until sunset. By the time the sunlight faded, our hands were bruised from picking, our fingers were red from grape sap, and our legs were tired from lifting heavy buckets of the season's bounty.

At dusk, we set down our tools, climbed into a three-wheeled cart, and went for a hot meal. We spent evenings enjoying one another's company, giving thanks, eating local food, and, on occasion, enjoying the fruit of our toil: freshly pressed juice!

Instructions about work and Sabbath remind me of the delicate work-rest balance of the vineyard. We worked hard; we also rested well. What do your current rhythms of work and rest look like? How are they honoring God and His creation? —N. V.

II. Honoring Special Days

(Romans 14:4–6)

A. No Basis to Judge (v. 4)

4. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

Many centuries after the giving of the Sinai covenant, the apostle Paul writes to Christ-followers who gather within households in the city of Rome (Romans 16:5). He faces a new situation. Instead of speaking to an exclusively Jewish audience (who would be included under the Sinai covenant), Paul writes to Jews and Gentiles—those who have given their allegiance to God's Messiah, Jesus. The Gentile Christians have neither become Jews nor adopted all the same practices.

Paul cannot point to stipulations of the Sinai covenant as if these are agreed-upon foundations for universal behavior, but neither shall

Paul say that any part of Scripture is irrelevant or outdated. To that he would say, "God forbid" (Romans 3:4, 6, 31). When necessary, Paul is unafraid of demanding strict adherence to a code of conduct (13:13; 1 Corinthians 5:1–5; etc.). But is that how Paul should regulate the observance of sacred days for mixed-ethnic communities of early Christians?

Paul asks a rhetorical question: *Who art thou that judgest?* We know that Paul wants his audience to avoid a particular kind of judging here since there are other times when he speaks of judging in a positive sense (1 Corinthians 5:12; 6:1–6; etc.). Paul does not say to give up discriminating right from wrong. But he wants his audience to give up acting like a final authority over matters that call for individual discernment, certain topics he calls "doubtful disputations" (Romans 14:1). If we condemn others for these—write people off as hopeless—we risk condemning ourselves when we fall short (2:1–4). Specifically, Paul describes food laws and calendar observances as requiring individual scrutiny (14:2, 5).

Only one person can be our ultimate judge: Christ Himself. Paul uses an example from his audience's everyday experience: for any *man's servant*, what the *master* deems appropriate is what really matters (*he standeth or falleth*). In other letters, Paul speaks of perseverance for the last days as standing "fast in the Lord" (Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:8), standing "by faith" (2 Corinthians 1:24), or standing "fast in one spirit" (Philippians 1:27). Just earlier in Romans 5:2, Paul mentions the "grace wherein we stand." Thus, the fuller meaning behind *make him stand* is "make a person fit to be judged favorably on the last day." God can do that, but not us.

How to Say It

Decalogue	<i>Dek-uh-log.</i>
Deuteronomy	<i>Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.</i>
Galatians	<i>Guh-lay-shunz.</i>
Gentiles	<i>Jen-tiles.</i>
Leviticus	<i>Leh-vit-ih-kus.</i>
Patmos	<i>Pat-muss.</i>
Sinai	<i>Sigh-nye</i> or <i>Sigh-nay-eye.</i>

B. Needs Reflection (v. 5)

5. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul first mentions diet as a matter of personal decision (Romans 14:2), and here he adds calendar observances as another way that individual habits may dif-

fer. Observance of special days would, naturally, include the Sabbath (as explicitly specified in Colossians 2:16). The word translated *esteemeth* is the same as the word translated “judgest” in the previous verse. The difference is, whereas Paul is against judging people by these matters, here he presumes that his audience will judge the days—judging days, not people.

Paul does not specify the identity of those “weak in the faith” or “strong” (Romans 14:1; 15:1). These labels do not appear to neatly divide Jewish from Gentile Christians, since only Jewish Christians would have any history of Sabbath practice and observing food laws. Instead, Paul generalizes: some have set aside Sabbath and food laws while others keep them. But the standard is the same for all, Jewish or Gentile. Each is accountable before God (compare Ephesians 4:4–6).

The phrase *let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind* speaks to individual discernment and confidence before God, no matter the choice in such cases. Paul permits differences within the churches. God will accept both the weak and the strong.

What Do You Think?

How can we determine which beliefs are essential (no room for compromise) and which are nonessential?

Digging Deeper

How does this quote inform your approach: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity”?

C. Always for the Lord (v. 6)

6. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

Because all servants should be submitted before their mutual *Lord*, Paul precludes any from issuing judgments or blanket demands on other faithful servants, those who maintain a different religious calendar or diet. If a person *regardeth*

one *day* as sacred to the Lord, the decision comes by heartfelt devotion. Because honoring Sabbath means respecting God’s rule over space and time, Paul allows that some may deem “every day alike” (Romans 14:5, above), thereby signaling devotion to the creator of each day. The repetition of *(un)to the Lord* conveys the sole criterion for faithfulness in these matters.

Paul’s allowance for individual discernment is harmonious with Christ’s words: “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath” (Mark 2:27–28). Jesus defends a freedom for His disciples to go about their mission without hindrance, at His command. Because Jesus is Lord and ruler of creation, He is free to judge the manner in which His disciples shall honor Him.

Paul pairs together the issues of revering days and observing dietary restrictions, showing that he has a greater goal in mind. Paul’s desire is for the peace and unity of Christian communities—and unity does not mean uniformity. He advises selfless consideration before others, giving no reason for any to find offense (Romans 14:13–15). In the end, what matters is life together under the rightful king’s rule, for “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (14:17).

Not How, but Why

Our Christmas Eve meal is a long-standing tradition. Several generations of my family gather around a large table to eat honey-roasted ham, farm eggs, and thick-cut fries—a feast lovingly prepared over several days. It has been this way for as long as I can remember.

However, when I was six I realized that a decadent meal is not a universal habit for Christmas Eve. Some families enjoy a full roast dinner, but others prefer something far simpler. It finally made sense when my mother explained that what matters most is not *how* something is celebrated but *why* it is celebrated—and *for whom*.

The Old Testament goes into great detail regarding the *how*, *when*, and *where* of celebrations and observances, yet Paul downplays those in favor of the *why*. We do not celebrate certain

days because we think it's necessary for everyone else to follow our lead. We celebrate them because they are important to us, our families, and for our personal relationship with God. —N. V.

III. The Lord's Day

(Revelation 1:10)

10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

Another early Christian writer—John, while on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9)—uses a phrase that comes to distinguish the weekly observances of Christians: *the Lord's day*. On this occasion, John describes being *in the Spirit*, meaning a trancelike state of prayerful meditation before God.

The phrase *the Lord's day* appears here alone in the entire New Testament. But elsewhere, Christians are already said to be gathering on “the first day of the week” for the sharing of a meal (Acts 20:7). The same wording is repeated in the texts of all four Gospels (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19). The Evangelists all say that Jesus' resurrection occurred on “the first day of the week”—that is, Sunday.

Christians of the first and second centuries developed a reputation for meeting before dawn on Sunday, the resurrection morning that began God's new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). Because the Sabbath is a practice that honors the Creator, it is only fitting that Jesus—who was with the Father from the beginning, coequal, and responsible for all that was made (John 1:1; Colossians 1:15–17)—is honored in this observance.

What Do You Think?

In what ways do your congregation's Lord's Day services honor God as Triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Digging Deeper

How do the service's various practices lead you into a deeper worship of God?

today? Answers to this question have needlessly divided congregations and families who seek to devote time and space to God. A consistent thread runs from the gift of Sabbath, to the discernment of early churches, to the earliest Christians who designate Sunday for celebratory songs: God is king of creation, and Christ the Lord is worthy of praise.

For those who worship the Creator in reverent submission, the fitting response is to place God at the center of all life, to orient everything else around a mission to serve the king. Sabbath honors the rhythms of God's productive creation, even as God's people join Him in productive work on days that are not Sabbath. According to Paul, we now have the freedom to act with confidence, as Christ's own servants. Perhaps we may find that a particular day should be reserved for prayer, and we clear space for God by setting aside all distractions. Perhaps, like the earliest Christians, we find that rising early to gather on Sunday will make us peculiar.

But whatever our king expects of us, our duty is not to go about asserting ourselves as the final judge. We can anticipate that, in the splendor of God's kingdom, there are servants of Christ whose “orders from the king” differ from ours. If we seek peace together, as Paul teaches, we shall communicate best through humble actions, the kindnesses that point back to Christ as Lord of our lives.

What Do You Think?

How will you seek peace with believers who may have different interpretations of the significance of Sabbath?

Digging Deeper

In what ways has this lesson informed your interpretation of God's gifts of rest and worship?

B. Prayer

Lord, You order time and space. We worship You as Lord of our lives. Show us how to devote our time to Your kingdom's purposes in both work and rest. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

All our time should be devoted to God.

Conclusion

A. King of Creation, Lord of Every Day

What does the Sabbath mean for Christians

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write on the board the following letters, with each letter being the header of a column:

R E S T

Ask, “What does it mean to rest?” Divide the class into four groups and assign each group one letter from the word *rest*. Distribute a sheet of paper and pen to each group and ask them to write down words or phrases beginning with their assigned letter that describe the meaning of *rest*. After calling time, ask volunteers to share their responses and write them on the board.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “Today we’re going to study what God has taught His people regarding the need for rest. We’ll review how that teaching connects with our practices of worship.”

Into the Word

Begin this section with a brief background on the history of Sabbath observances in the church. If possible, ask a learner to prepare this five-minute report before class.

Divide the class into three groups: **Exodus Group**, **Romans Group**, and **Revelation Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following questions for in-group discussion.

Exodus Group. Read Exodus 20:8–11. 1—What did God command of His people? 2—What rationale did He give for this command?

Romans Group. Read Romans 14:4–6. 1—Does Paul forbid making one day of the week special? Why or why not? 2—What rule does Paul give for observing a particular day? 3—What hint in this text suggests Paul is speaking to a controversy between Jewish and Gentile Christians?

Revelation Group. Read Revelation 1:10. 1—Which day of the week is John referring to in this verse? 2—How, if at all, does this help us determine our day of worship?

Option. Distribute copies of the “First Day”

exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Ask a volunteer from each group to report on their findings, augmenting their reports with information you have prepared based on the lesson commentary. Then, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—What are the significant differences between the Old Testament command to honor the Sabbath and the practice of Lord’s Day worship in the New Testament church? 2—What are the significant similarities between the two? (Option: Write the following headers on the board: *Differences*, *Similarities*. Write responses on the board as participants respond.)

Conclude the section by asking, “What do these texts teach us about how we should approach rest and worship?” Direct the class to work together to define the words *rest* and *worship*. Write definitions on the board.

Into Life

Write the following phrases on the board:

Ways We Like to Rest
Ways We Like to Worship

Ask volunteers to respond to each phrase. Write responses on the board. Then, ask, “In what ways is our rest a form of worship, and how can we bring these two needs together?”

Place participants into pairs and distribute an index card and pen to each person. Ask participants to write down ways they can combine rest and worship. Direct them to share results with their partner. Have participants choose one item on their list that they will accomplish in the upcoming week.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Some Christians Say” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Stewardship and Mission

Devotional Reading: Zechariah 8:18–23

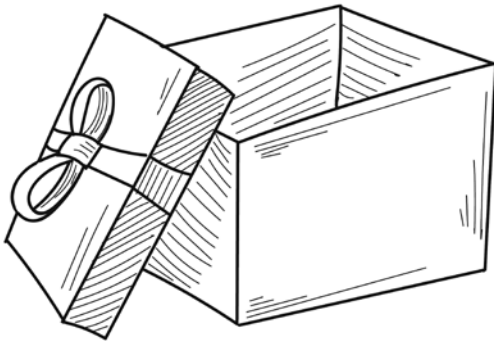
Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:17–18; Acts 26:12–20;
2 Corinthians 8:1–15; 9:1–15

Acts 1:6–8

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.



2 Corinthians 8:3–9

3 For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;

4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

6 Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

7 Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

8 I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Key Text

Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. —2 Corinthians 8:9

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 3: The Church and Its Teachings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify characteristics of the generosity highlighted in 2 Corinthians 8:3–9.
2. Explain the context of Paul’s financial collection among Gentile churches of the first century.
3. State one way he or she will practice generosity in the upcoming week.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Epic Generosity
- B. Lesson Context

I. Jesus and the Apostles (Acts 1:6–8)

- A. Disciples’ Question (v. 6)
- B. Jesus’ Response (vv. 7–8)

II. Paul and the Church (2 Corinthians 8:3–9)

- A. Facts (vv. 3–4)
- Giving Gladly*
- B. Results (vv. 5–6)
- C. Challenge (v. 7)
- D. Test (vv. 8–9)

Excelling in Generosity

Conclusion

- A. More than Money
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Epic Generosity

One of the world’s favorite stories is Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*. First as a novel and later as a musical stage play, it has fascinated audiences for generations.

Les Misérables is the story of Jean Valjean, a poor man imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread. Finally released from prison, he is given refuge by a bishop of the church. Valjean repays the man’s generosity by stealing his silverware! But when the police capture Valjean, the bishop says that the silverware was a gift to the man. Stunned by the bishop’s gracious generosity, Valjean becomes a changed man—a person of humble, heroic generosity.

Perhaps what makes *Les Misérables* so beloved is that it illustrates the grace of God. Though we have rejected God’s generosity, He still offers us forgiveness by His grace. Having received that forgiveness, a person can never be the same. God’s gracious generosity begets the same generosity in His people.

B. Lesson Context

The two texts for today’s lesson are dated almost three decades apart. Jesus was crucified during the Passover observance of AD 30, rose from the dead, and appeared physically to His followers for some 40 days thereafter (Acts 1:3) before His ascension. A few years later, Saul (also named “Paul”; see 13:9) met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (9:1–19). That interaction led to Paul’s mission trips across the Roman Empire as an apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8; 1 Timothy 2:7).

Paul was a native of the commercial hub of Tarsus of Cilicia. That city was the capital of a Roman province; therefore, Paul was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:22–29). At some point in his younger days, he decided to move to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel (22:3). After Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus, he founded churches in various Roman cities. As people responded to his gospel message, Paul found himself continually needing to bridge the cultural gap between Christ-followers of Gentile background and those of Jewish descent.

We might say, then, that as the first chapter of the book of Acts features the apostles being given their mission and preparing for it, the chapters that follow reveal how that mission was carried out. There were issues regarding aspects of the Law of Moses concerning doctrine and practice as Jews and Gentiles came together. This struggle is most evident in the famous Jerusalem Council in about AD 51 (Acts 15).

The consensus reached at that council served to welcome believers of Gentile background into the church on the basis of the grace of Jesus Christ, not on adherence to the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5–11). This acknowledgment of God’s plan was vitally important for establishing the inclusive nature of the church. The importance of that acknowledgment became apparent as certain events unfolded over the following years. One such event is the subject of today’s lesson.

I. Jesus and the Apostles

(Acts 1:6–8)

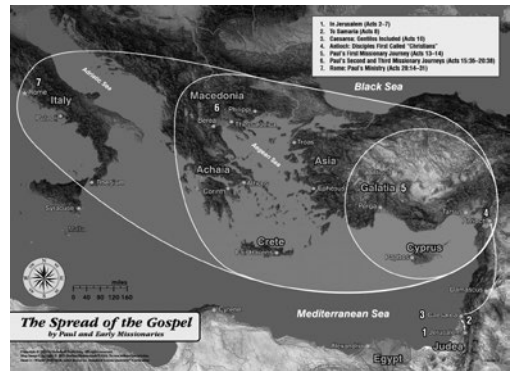
The book of Acts begins with a dialog between Jesus and His apostles at the Mount of Olives before He ascends to heaven. Within the 40-day time period of His appearance to His disciples (see Lesson Context), Jesus directs them to remain in Jerusalem and “wait for the promise of the Father,” the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). But as the conversation continues, the disciples reveal a misunderstanding they hold and a desire for something they should not have.

A. Disciples’ Question (v. 6)

6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

After hearing Jesus’ directive to remain in Jerusalem, the disciples *come together* to ask Him the question we see here. They are convinced that He is the promised Messiah (Matthew 16:16; John 1:41). Their question reflects the expectations of many first-century Jews regarding the timing and nature of the Messiah’s task.

Several Old Testament texts likely are the primary drivers of these expectations: Genesis 49:10;



Visual for Lesson 12. Display this visual as you discuss the events surrounding the spread of the gospel in the first century.

Numbers 24:17–19; and Isaiah 11:1–6. These texts can be interpreted in one sense to lead the reader to conclude that the Messiah would overthrow the Roman occupiers as He ascended to the throne of David (compare Luke 24:21; John 6:14–15). Thus God is expected to *restore again the kingdom to Israel*.

The disciples, therefore, mistakenly anticipate that Jesus will lead a political and militaristic revolt. What better leader could they hope for than the one who has overcome death?

B. Jesus’ Response (vv. 7–8)

7. And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Jesus responds, but not in the way the disciples hope. He does not address their concern for Israel’s restoration. Instead, Jesus tells them that they are not to be concerned with knowledge of *the times* and *the seasons* of such things. This privileged knowledge is for God *the Father* only (Mark 13:32). Earlier, Jesus exhorted the disciples to keep watch, but not to the point of becoming distracted by setting dates for His return (Matthew 24:36–44; 25:13). God is omniscient, meaning that He is all-knowing, including knowledge of things hidden from human understanding.

8a. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.

Jesus redirects the disciples’ focus and

highlights their unique task as they wait for His return. The Gospel of Luke ends with Jesus’ command that the disciples remain in Jerusalem until they receive “power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The verse before us moves from the abstract to the specific: the source of that *power* is to be *the Holy Ghost*. One cannot help but see parallels between Jesus’ prediction here and the message of John the Baptist regarding a forthcoming baptism “with the Holy Ghost and with fire” intimated by Jesus (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). Both messages echo events on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–3).

8b. And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The Holy Spirit’s empowerment becomes the starting point for the church. The noun *witness* can be interpreted in at least two ways, depending on context. In one sense, the word *witness* refers to someone who has observed something—a spectator, observer, or eyewitness. In a second sense, the noun *witness* can refer to someone who testifies to something, as in a deposition. Jesus’ disciples are already witnesses in the first sense, having seen firsthand His ministry, crucifixion, and Him personally after His resurrection. But now they are to be witnesses in the second sense as they take the gospel to *Jerusalem, . . . Judaea, . . . Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth* (compare Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 8:1–25).

Many commentators have noted that this sequence of places outlines the gospel’s geo-

graphic growth as recorded in the book of Acts. Peter first preaches the gospel *in Jerusalem* on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The movement then expands into *Judaea*, the region in which Jerusalem is located, and then to the region of *Samaria* to the north (8:1). Initially, only those believers who were not apostles left Jerusalem. But those believers took the gospel message with them (8:4–8; 11:19–21).

The phrase *uttermost part of the earth* emphasizes that Jesus wants His disciples to take His message of salvation to all people and all the world. To do so would be a significant undertaking. Further, Jesus gave them no specifics regarding how they would work to complete this task. The instructions would come on an “as needed” basis (examples: Acts 8:26; 10:9–20; 16:6–10; 18:9). For the disciples and witnesses to follow through on this task, they must show each other care, hospitality, and financial generosity.

What Do You Think?

What practical steps will you take in the week ahead to become a more effective witness for the Lord?

Digging Deeper

What training and resources will you need to assist you in this endeavor?

II. Paul and the Church
(2 Corinthians 8:3–9)

The next segment of Scripture to study takes us into the middle of a relief project being managed by the apostle Paul. This fundraising initiative is mentioned several times in the New Testament. In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church (written about AD 56), he instructed his readers to make weekly contributions to the fund so that it would be ready when he visited (1 Corinthians 16:1–4). Paul wrote 2 Corinthians about a year later. The collection of this gift provides the backdrop for Paul’s teachings on stewardship found in 2 Corinthians 8. The timeline indicates that the relief project was a plan spread over several years, given that Paul did not arrive back in Jerusalem until AD 58 (Acts 21:17; 24:17).

How to Say It

Achaia	Uh-kay-uh.
Berea	Buh-ree-uh.
Corinth	Kor-inth.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Gamaliel	Guh-may-lih-ul or Guh-may-lee-al.
Macedonia	Mass-eh-doe-nee-uh.
Macedonians	Mass-eh-doe-nee-uns.
omniscient	ahm-nish-unt.
Philippi	Fih-lip-pie or Fil-ih-pie.
Tarsus	Tar-sus.

A. Facts (vv. 3–4)

3. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves.

To make his case to the church at Corinth that they should complete the gift, Paul presents the example of the churches of Macedonia in 2 Corinthians 8:1, which is the antecedent of the words *their* and *they* in the verse before us. Macedonia is the region located directly north of Corinth, and it includes the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (Acts 16:12; 17:1, 13; etc.). When Paul writes to the church in Rome a short time later, he mentions Achaia as well on this same subject (Romans 15:26); this is the province where Corinth is located.

The Macedonian churches had been experiencing “a great trial of affliction” and “deep poverty” (2 Corinthians 8:2; see 1:8), which might have included persecution (see 7:5). But amazingly, the relief collection is not *for* them, but *from* them! Despite their suffering, those congregations have demonstrated joy that has yielded a gift of rich generosity (8:2). In effect, Paul uses the example of the Macedonian Christians to set a standard.

Paul does not give the specific financial amount offered by the Macedonian churches. Instead, he classifies their giving into two categories. First, their giving was *to their power*, an amount to be expected (compare 1 Corinthians 16:2). The second category, however, goes above and beyond the first: their giving was *beyond their power*. This giving level reveals that God was at work in and through their sacrificial generosity.

Further, the fact that they *were willing of themselves* indicates that they gave without coercion from Paul. Their generosity was a free response to having received God’s gift of grace (see 2 Corinthians 8:1).

What Do You Think?

Who has been, for you, an example of sacrificial generosity?

Digging Deeper

Which of that person’s habits of generosity would you like to implement?

Giving Gladly

When I think of my parents, I think of their radical generosity. From my perspective, it feels like their financial giving outweighs their income! They give gladly, and the Lord multiplies their gifts for a powerful effect on the church. I frequently ask the Lord to develop in me a generous heart, a heart like my parents’.

The power of financial generosity is not the amount given but the status of the giver’s heart—one that offers willingly and joyfully in service to the Lord. How will you cultivate such a heart? As you ponder that question, think of your generosity as a direct response to the gift of grace that you have received!

—N. V.

4. Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Not only do the Macedonian churches give freely, but they also plead with Paul and his companions to *receive* the churches’ generous financial *gift*. As used here, the word *praying* refers to requests not to God but to other people—in this case, to Paul and his traveling companions (*us*). For believers in one area to provide aid to believers in other provinces is not without precedent (Acts 11:29–30).

The key theme in this verse and this chapter is the *fellowship* of God’s people. This refers to a complete sharing of life with another and the unity God’s people experience as they abide in Christ, receive God’s gift of grace, and freely respond to that gift for the mission of the church (examples: Philippians 1:3–6; 4:14–18). Similar terminology is used to describe the earliest life of the church in Acts 2:42–47. There, we see the believers worshiping, sharing meals, and providing for one another’s needs.

One way to demonstrate unity and fellowship among God’s people is through *ministering* through financial giving. As believers experience unity, they are willing to meet the financial needs of others. In doing so, God’s people embody Jesus’ commands to follow Him and care for other believers in Christ (Matthew 25:34–40).

Both the recipients and the givers of the gift are

the saints—the people of God set apart by His grace (compare 2 Corinthians 9:1). Although Paul does not here identify the recipient(s) of this gift, they are poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25–28; 1 Corinthians 16:3).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you practice fellowship with other believers?

Digging Deeper

Does unity result in fellowship, or is it the other way around? Why?

B. Results (vv. 5–6)

5. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

The phrase *not as we hoped* should be understood to signify a mismatch between what Paul and his traveling companions (*us*) expected and what happened. Knowing of the precarious situation of the Macedonians, Paul's expectations of their ability to give had been in line with that reality. Therefore, he is truly surprised by their overwhelming generosity—one that happened because they *first gave their own selves to the Lord*. That initial commitment was not to the offering but to Christ. The Macedonians had experienced Christ's love and grace, which, in turn, led them to give their whole lives in service to Him and to His people. Their commitment was both the prerequisite and motivating factor for their sacrificial giving to support the mission of the first-century churches. This level of commitment comes only *by the will of God*, as modeled by Jesus, who gave Himself on the cross.

6. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

Having summarized the generosity of the Macedonian church, Paul now challenges his Corinthian readers. The challenge is based on the fact that the Macedonian churches have already finished their giving project, but the Corinthians have not.

A key player in helping the Corinthians do so is *Titus*, a “partner and fellowhelper” of the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 8:23). He is mentioned by

name nine times in this book—more than in all the other New Testament books combined. Collecting funds for the poverty-stricken Jerusalem church seems to be a primary task for Titus (8:16–9:5).

Paul refers to the anticipated financial gift from the Corinthians as *the same grace*. Their gift is not being coerced (more on this below). Instead, it will be their response of grace for having received the grace of God themselves.

C. Challenge (v. 7)

7a. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us.

Paul has much to say elsewhere about *faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence, and love*. Regarding just the Corinthians, we can list 1 Corinthians 1:5; 12:8; 13:1–2, 13; 14:6; and 16:1–2 on those topics.

7b. See that ye abound in this grace also.

Even though the Corinthians excelled in several qualities, completing the offering was an opportunity for them to still *abound* in one more quality—*grace*. Growing in this regard involves the tangible *grace* of financial giving.

What Do You Think?

How is the term *grace* a suitable descriptor of the gift of giving?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can believers grow in the grace of giving?

D. Test (vv. 8–9)

8. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

Regarding certain situations, the apostle Paul gives commands to the Christians in Corinth (examples: 1 Corinthians 5:7, 13), and sometimes he merely advises (example: 7:6). The imperative “See that ye abound in this grace also,” just studied in 2 Corinthians 8:7b (above), seems like a command at first. But Paul hastens to ensure his exhortation is not misconstrued: *I speak not by command*. Perhaps the clarification is because previously, he had been much more direct to them regarding their giv-

ing (1 Corinthians 16:1–2). Paul desires that the Corinthian believers be generous to other believers in need, but he wants the Corinthians to give out of cheerful love, not compulsion.

Paul notes the reason for his bringing up the example of the Macedonian churches. The word translated *forwardness* is also translated as “diligence” in 2 Corinthians 8:7, above, and that is the sense here. The Macedonians’ *diligence* in showing financial generosity was the *occasion* for him to use as an example to the Corinthians. If the Corinthians are similarly diligent, they will *prove the sincerity of their love* (compare 2 Corinthians 8:24).

Excelling in Generosity

My congregation regularly contributes to a fund to meet the needs of families in the community. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been donated to this fund to address housing, food, and education needs.

However, not all acts of generosity are related to money. On the first Sunday of each month, a “repairs café” appears in our neighborhood where people can bring broken household items to be repaired. Those having fix-it skills generously share their time and talents to help others. Generous communities are powerful witnesses, and I’m encouraged to see my neighbors excel in the art of showing generosity through their time, skills, and labor.

Financial giving is one way we can respond to the gift of God’s grace. But in addition, how can you excel in other forms of generosity? If you need a biblical example, see Acts 9:36, 39. —N. V.

9. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Paul appeals to the example of the *Lord Jesus Christ*. Before the incarnation, Jesus *was rich* in ways we cannot grasp. As the divine Son, He is equal with God from eternity (John 1:1–2). These eternal riches did not stop the divine Son from becoming a servant, humbling Himself and becoming *poor* for the sake of humanity (Philippians 2:5–8). Through His self-sacrifice, Jesus inaugurated the

riches of the Father’s salvation by making atonement for sin (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 2:17).

Conclusion

A. More than Money

The Bible reveals God’s expectations regarding how people are to treat each other. One such expectation concerns meeting the needs of the poverty-stricken. The Law of Moses had clear rules in this regard (examples: Leviticus 19:10; Deuteronomy 15:11). And the issue is no less present under the new covenant (examples: Matthew 25:34–46; Galatians 2:10).

Even so, money and its giving are touchy subjects at church, causing many to avoid discussing the topic. The oft-heard complaint, “They’re always asking for money!” has soured many people away from church. Perhaps we should take a different approach to giving, one that acknowledges financial generosity as, first and foremost, a privileged response to God’s grace.

Our generosity results from first acknowledging the generosity of God. Our God is a giving God, demonstrated through His gift of salvation. When we show generosity to others, we are following God’s lead. Our acts of generosity are acts of worship, bearing witness to our testimony of Christ and His great love for us.

What Do You Think?

How will you be generous with your time and resources in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

How does the example in Acts 2:42–47 inspire you in this regard?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, You showed us generosity when You gave us Your gift of grace through Your Son, Jesus. May our thankfulness for this gift be revealed in our heartfelt gifts in return. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Generosity is our response to God’s grace.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Distribute five small items to each participant. Possible items include pennies, clothespins, or individually wrapped candies. Lead into the activity by explaining that the whole class will play a game with these items. Participants should try to give away all five items in their possession to other participants by the end of three minutes. However, each participant can only give one item at a time to another person. When everyone is ready, say, “Go!” Call time at the end of three minutes. Reconvene the class and ask participants to assess the number of items they still possess. Ask, “Why was it difficult or nearly impossible to win this game?”

Lead into the Bible study by saying, “Generosity is much easier when we realize how much we have been given! In today’s lesson, we will study the chain of generosity—one that begins with God in Christ Jesus and extends to all His followers.”

Into the Word

Divide participants into groups of three and distribute a pen and sheet of paper to each group. Direct groups to read Acts 1:6–8 and imagine themselves as Jesus’ first-century disciples and write down a five-to-six-sentence testimony that recounts their time and experience as “witnesses” to Jesus. (Option: Challenge groups to read 1 John 1:1–4, then consider what the disciples had seen, heard, and touched as they followed Jesus.) After five minutes, ask groups to share with the class what they have written. Conduct a whole-class discussion regarding how this passage can help Jesus’ disciples define *mission*.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Gospel Effect” exercise from the activity pages, which you can download. Have participants work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to prepare and present a three-minute presentation on the historical context of the church in Corinth and the financial offerings

of the Macedonian congregations. The presentation should address the following questions: 1—What part of “Jerusalem, . . . Judaea, . . . Samaria, and . . . the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8) does Macedonia belong to? 2—How is the example of the Macedonians a testimony to the faithfulness and generosity of the disciples? Encourage the presenter to use the material from the Lesson Context.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 8:1–5. Invite participants to identify words in these verses that reflect the abundant and exceptional giving from the Macedonians. Write these words and phrases on the board.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 8:6–9. Divide participants into three groups: **Self Group**, **Others Group**, and **Jesus Group**. Direct the **Self Group** to study verse 7 and discuss the strengths that Paul recognized in the Corinthian church and why these are good qualities. Have the **Others Group** read verse 8 and discuss why it is sometimes appropriate to compare ourselves to others. Assign verse 9 to the **Jesus Group** and ask them to discuss Jesus’ example of a generous life.

After calling time, let each group summarize their conclusions to the class. Then, as a whole class, discuss how these verses help to define Christian stewardship and mission.

Into Life

Write the word *Generosity* as a header on the board. Lead a brainstorming session to determine ways to practice generosity every day. Distribute an index card and pen to each learner. Direct them to write down how they will practice generosity throughout the upcoming week. Allow time at the beginning of the next class for volunteers to share their experiences.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Pass It On” activity from the activity page. Challenge participants to complete as indicated throughout the coming week.

Loving God, Loving Others

Devotional Reading: Proverbs 28:18–22

Background Scripture: Romans 15:1–7; Philipians 2:1–8;
Colossians 3:12; 4:1

Mark 12:28–34

28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

James 2:14–17

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.



Key Text

To love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. —Mark 12:33

Enduring Beliefs of the Church

Unit 3: The Church and Its Teachings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the two greatest commandments according to Mark 12:28–34.
2. Give examples of practices inspired by James 2:14–17 that embody these commandments.
3. Make a plan to see and address the immediate needs of your surrounding community.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Keep the “Main Thing” the Main Thing
- B. Lesson Context

I. Right Belief (Mark 12:28–34)

- A. Inquiry for Jesus (v. 28)
- B. Explanation of the Law (vv. 29–31)
All In
- C. Expansion of the Reply (vv. 32–33)
- D. Evidence of Wisdom (v. 34)

II. Right Action (James 2:14–17)

- A. Rhetorical Question (v. 14)
- B. Obvious Example (vv. 15–16)
- C. Confident Assertion (v. 17)
More Than Just Bumper Stickers

Conclusion

- A. The Most Important Thing
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Keep the “Main Thing” the Main Thing

When I was in college studying theology and biblical studies, it was common for me and my peers to get into discussions about matters of biblical interpretation. Occasionally these got rather heated, with advocates on either side of an issue growing vehement as they tried to convince the others of their position. While we continued to see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, I would be lying if I said it wasn’t a struggle to remember to “keep the main thing the main thing.” Learning lots of exciting things about our faith each week through various readings and lectures, it was all too easy to fall into “majoring on the minors” when we got into discussions. Often we were tempted to see each other as opponents to shoot down with arguments and ideas, rather than as fellow believers worthy of love and kindness. But love should always take first place in our thoughts, words, and actions.

Today’s lesson texts remind us how to live out our faith from a center of love for God and others.

B. Lesson Context

The setting of Mark 12:28–34 is the temple in Jerusalem during Jesus’ final week. He spends much of that week teaching in the temple environs (Mark 11:15–17, 27; 12:35; etc.). Earlier, Jesus expressed His opposition to the economics of temple practices when He drove out the moneychangers who had turned the temple into a commercial center rather than a place of prayer (11:15–17). This, along with His teaching, enraged the temple authorities (11:18).

Consequently, those authorities sought to undermine Jesus’ credibility with the people by questioning His allegiances and debating Him publicly. Should His popularity wane by being discredited, the authorities could act against Jesus without incurring the people’s anger. If His answers questioned the authority of Rome, He could be handed over to the Romans for execution. Either way, the authorities wanted to undermine Jesus’ credibility because they perceived Him as a threat to their own powerful positions (compare John 11:48).

Concerning the book of James, there are four or five men named James in the New Testament. The author of the book that bears his name is the James of Matthew 13:55. Thus, he is the half-brother of Jesus. We see the influence of this James in Acts 15:13–21.

James writes his letter to the “diaspora”: religiously and ethnically Jewish people who are dispersed and scattered, many of whom have come to see Jesus as the fulfillment of the hope of Israel (James 1:1). He is evidently concerned with his readers’ actions. In providing a solution to the areas of concern, he exhorts his readers to live in light of the gospel they profess (James 1:21–22, 27; 2:8, 24). James’s identification of the “royal law” is the same that Jesus quoted in Mark 12:31: love your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8).

I. Right Belief

(Mark 12:28–34)

Just prior to our lesson passage, a succession of inquisitors had peppered Jesus with questions in order to cast doubt on His authority and discredit His ministry (Mark 11:27–33; 12:13–27). These opponents represented all elements and levels of Jewish religious authority in Jerusalem—chief priests, scribes, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees.

A. Inquiry for Jesus (v. 28)

28. And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

One of the scribes seems impressed with how Jesus has been answering His interrogators. The man approaches Jesus with respect; the parallel account in Matthew 22:36 includes the use of the title “master” (compare Mark 12:32, below). He wonders how Jesus might answer a question often debated among the rabbis: Of all the commandments, which is the *first* one of *all*?

Traditionally, rabbis counted over 600 commands in the Law of Moses. It is not surprising, then, that a debate might arise concerning which ones were the most important. If one were to cre-

ate a “top ten” list, the task might seem easy: the most important ones are the Ten Commandments, of course! Some Jewish scholars, like the first-century Philo of Alexandria, thought those 10 summarized all the commands in the law. He believed they articulated two primary responsibilities: one pertaining to God (piety) and the other pertaining to people (justice).

Categorizing those commandments in this twofold way is not uncommon at the time. But does the Law of Moses suggest a hierarchy of importance whereby one commandment can be singled out as being *the first commandment of all*?

B. Explanation of the Law (vv. 29–31)

29. And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.

Given His straightforward reply, Jesus recognizes that this is not a trick question designed to trap Him (compare Mark 12:15). There is no hesitation in identifying the *first of all the commandments* as Jesus quotes the opening words of Deuteronomy 6:4. This is often called “the Shema” (the Hebrew word for “hear”). This is ancient Israel’s foundational confession. As evidence of its centrality, some devout Jews in Jesus’ time recited the Shema twice a day.

Just before voicing the Shema to the Israelites, Moses charged them to follow God as they entered the promised land. This included fearing God and keeping His commands, so that things might go well with them (Deuteronomy 6:1–3). The Shema proclaims God’s singularity.

How to Say It

<i>Adonai</i> (Hebrew)	Ad-owe-nye.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Diaspora	Dee-as-puh-ruh.
<i>Elohim</i> (Hebrew)	El-o-heem.
Herodians	Heh-roe-dee-unz.
pantheon	pan-thee-on.
Pharisees	Fair-ih-seez.
Sadducees	Sad-you-seez.
<i>Shema</i> (Hebrew)	Shih-mah.
<i>Yahweh</i> (Hebrew)	Yah-weh.

Following the Shema, Moses reminded the people of how God had delivered them from Egyptian bondage. This deliverance emphasized the importance of remembering the Lord their God and keeping His commands (Deuteronomy 6:12–15).

The Shema is the foundation of obedience to God's commands. There is not a multiplicity of gods (a pantheon; compare Deuteronomy 6:14). The one, true God has more than one designation in the Hebrew language (*Elohim*, *Yahweh*, and *Adonai*), but He alone is God.

30. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

Jesus continues the quotation as He moves to Deuteronomy 6:5. We note that this is not a second commandment since the phrase *this is the first commandment* serves as the second bookend to the one that began Mark 12:29. The word *mind* is not in the original “with all” list, and so it has been added by Jesus (compare Matthew 22:37; Luke 10:27). While each of these aspects of the human person is distinct and unique, they also overlap in various ways. These terms collectively emphasize the whole person. This realization is more important than carefully defining each one to distinguish it from the others. The primary theme of Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; and Luke 10:27 is just this: we are to devote our whole selves, everything we are and have, toward loving God.

What Do You Think?

What examples in your life point toward a life wholly devoted to loving God?

Digging Deeper

Name characters from Scripture whom you admire for their devotion.

All In

Before I met my husband, I went on a few dates with a guy in college. I worked at the college bookstore at the time, and he would often come in to talk to me while I worked. Sometimes, he'd purchase a piece of chocolate and slip it to me before he left. I thought he was wonderful.

Before long, I realized it had been quite a few days since he'd called me or stopped by my work. Just as I began to think the relationship was over, he came into the bookstore to chat and slip me another piece of chocolate. I was enthralled once again. Soon, however, the pattern of silence continued. The roller-coaster ride of emotions involved was difficult to navigate, and I finally told him it was over. It became evident that he was not “all in.”

Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to be all in regarding our love for God. In the past, I have been like that college guy, stopping in to talk to God and slip Him a little praise once in a while. But He is worthy of all the love of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength! Are you “all in” in your love for the Lord? How will you show Him today that you are? —B. R.

31. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

The scribe asks which commandment is first. But Jesus provides two answers. While distinct, the second commandment is intrinsically connected to the first. One cannot truly *love thy neighbour as thyself* without first loving God. In practice, they form one commandment. The intrinsic connection is seen in the fact that our fellow human beings have been created in the image of God, just as we have been (see 1 John 4:7–12, 20).

Jesus' statement here matches Leviticus 19:18. Within the book of Leviticus, this commandment appears as part of the Holiness Code, which is found in Leviticus 17–26. Some commentators suggest that Leviticus 19:18 serves as a kind of summary statement for the Holiness Code. To love one's neighbor is to treat them with the respect and holiness demanded in the legislation recorded in Leviticus 17–26.

Together, these two commandments provide the foundation for the rest of God's commands. Those who fail at keeping these two have no hope of fulfilling the rest of the law. An anecdote notes an occasion when a Jew known as Hillel the Elder (lived about 40 BC–AD 10) was challenged by a Gentile to summarize the entirety of the Law of Moses in a single sentence. His reported response

was, “What you yourself hate, do not do to your neighbor; this is the whole Law, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.”

Inherent in the command of love toward our neighbors is to love them as we love ourselves. Rather than grounds for selfishness, love of self here carries the sense of seeking our own good (compare Ephesians 5:28–29). We don’t harm ourselves; we take care of ourselves. Just so, we ought to treat others as we would want to be treated (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). When Jesus gives this charge in His Sermon on the Mount, He adds that this is a summary of the law and prophets (Matthew 7:12).

What Do You Think?

Which part of Jesus’ twofold answer do you find most difficult to obey?

Digging Deeper

In what ways are the two parts of the greatest commandment interconnected?

C. Expansion of the Reply (vv. 32–33)

32–33. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

While agreeing with and restating the answer Jesus gives, the scribe adds something to what Jesus said: the man claims that loving God and neighbor is more important than *all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices* of the Levitical system. Jesus’ declaration, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13; 12:7, quoting Hosea 6:6), wasn’t intended to suggest doing away with the Levitical system but to ensure that people understood which command was relatively more important.

A relativizing of the sacrificial system makes sure that it doesn’t take precedence over loving God and loving neighbor. There was always a danger of inappropriately prioritizing the temple and its sacrifices (Isaiah 1:11–17; Jeremiah 7:4–11;

etc.). During Jesus’ final week, He condemns the Pharisees and scribes for missing “the weightier matters of the law” (Matthew 23:23).

What Do You Think?

How does one’s motive affect the meaning of one’s actions?

Digging Deeper

Whose actions in Scripture came from poor motives? Whose came from good motives?

D. Evidence of Wisdom (v. 34)

34. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

Jesus is apparently impressed with the scribe’s answer and affirms what the man perceives. As Jesus informs him that he is *not far from the kingdom of God*, Jesus is not saying that the man is *in* the kingdom of God. He is near to it but not yet there. This implies that he still lacks something. He has grasped something essential, and he very well may be closer to the kingdom than others within earshot.

The series of questions the religious leaders asked Jesus comes to an end with this dialogue. Jesus’ response is profound and unassailable. Those looking to undermine Him are silenced.

II. Right Action

(James 2:14–17)

Verses prior to our printed passage tie this section of the lesson to the passage above from Mark 12. James 2 begins with a discussion of favoritism. James indicts his readers for showing preference for the rich over the poor, even citing the “royal law” as Jesus did in Mark 12:31 (Leviticus 19:18). James claims his readers will do well to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (James 2:8). On the contrary, if they show favoritism, they are lawbreakers, failing to love their neighbors as themselves (2:9). This discussion continues as the writer digs deeper to drive home the points just made in 2:1–13.

A. Rhetorical Question (v. 14)

14. What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

James raises two rhetorical questions that introduce the larger question of when faith becomes ineffective. When is faith unable to save? James says there is no profit in *faith* when it does not have works—when it lies inactive. As Paul says in Galatians 5:6, the highest priority is faith working through love. A faith without works is a faith that is failing to love God and our neighbors. Examples of such works follow.

What Do You Think?

In what ways does this passage from James challenge your understanding of faith?

Digging Deeper

How does Hebrews 11 inform your understanding of James 2:14?

while ingratiating themselves to the rich (James 2:6–9).

The apostle John writes similarly (1 John 3:17–18). James calls the second commandment as noted in Mark 12:31, above, the “royal law” (James 2:8). Honoring the royal law means loving others enough to include feeding and clothing brothers and sisters in need. When we fail to do so, we fail to love our neighbors. Faith that does not result in such works does not *profit*. Another way to say that comes next.

What Do You Think?

Where is your faith, or your community's life of faith, characterized by a lack of action?

Digging Deeper

What specific opportunities exist to shift in the direction of a more active faith?

B. Obvious Example (vv. 15–16)

15. If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food.

This verse begins a second hypothetical example in this chapter. In the first one, in James 2:2–4, the writer condemned favoritism based on economic status. His second example focuses on someone in abject poverty. More specifically, this is someone in the congregation—a *brother or sister*—who is without adequate clothing or food. What does saving faith do in such a situation?

16. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

James highlights the sort of callousness of heart that neglecting the poor entails. The example is so embarrassing; it's difficult to imagine such a reality being an issue among believers. Yet this seems to be the situation among those to whom James writes his letter. The rich are honored, but the poor are despised. The rich are loved, but the poor are neglected. Instead of showing love as they ought, certain people have become lawbreakers

C. Confident Assertion (v. 17)

17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Here, James offers an initial concluding statement in response to his rhetorical question in James 2:14, above. Faith that is void of good *works* is not authentic faith. Such a faith, *being alone*, is *dead*.

It is important not to misread James here. He is not contradicting what is affirmed elsewhere in the New Testament, namely, that we are saved by grace through faith—not by works, as the apostle Paul establishes in Ephesians 2:8–9. Christianity is not based on salvation by faith plus works, but is instead a system that requires a faith that produces (or results in) works. In other words, salvation is not “F + W,” but is “F → W.”

We were created to do good works, “which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). What Paul stresses in this passage to the Ephesians is that our salvation is not of our own doing, but a gift of God. Rather than contradicting this, James adds clarity to what that faith entails. It is a faith that is alive (rather than *dead*) and united to good works (not *alone*). James 2:26 restates these ideas, driving home this

point as crucial: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

Having an active faith is a theme throughout the book of James. He charges his readers to be not just hearers but doers (James 1:22–25). He expresses that wisdom and understanding are evident in deeds done in humility and characterized by mercy and good fruit (3:13, 17). Failing to do the good we know we ought to do is sin (4:17). He highlights prayer as an example of faith working itself out in action (5:13–16).

More Than Just Bumper Stickers

Our church in Mississippi gives out bumper stickers to all of its members. The bumper stickers include the church’s name and this declaration: “We love people.” I have one on the back of my car. It’s easy to spot other members of our church out on the roads when we all proudly display the same sticker on our vehicles.

That phrase “We love people” is a mission statement for our church. But the statement alone does not mean anything unless it is followed by action. The way our church loves people is by serving them. For example, we feed hundreds of food-insecure children every summer through our lunch initiative. We find ways to love the service members of our community by showing up with meals and gifts of appreciation. We clean the bathrooms in our local schools and offer snacks and treats to the teachers several times a month. Our hope is that our neighbors will know we love them as we seek to love them well.

Just displaying the bumper stickers on our cars is not enough; a hollow, inactive faith is a contradiction in terms. We have to prove the validity of our faith with meaningful, loving action. —B. R.

Conclusion

A. The Most Important Thing

The Law of Moses established many specific things that God desired of His people living under that covenant. But the people were pleasing to God only when those required actions were motivated and accompanied by love for God and love for those created in His image. Having these pri-



Visual for Lessons 9 & 13. *Point to this visual as you conclude, tying together both Scripture passages in this lesson.*

orities rightly aligned enables us yet today to live rightly in other, subsidiary matters. Jesus made this abundantly clear in Mark 12.

Similarly, James 2 reveals that as critical as faith is, it means nothing if it is void of proper action. Bringing these passages together, true faith and right response to God comes down to love lived out daily.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He gave a twofold reply. That’s because one cannot be the case without the other. The two replies are interlinked in an inseparable way. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor, and we cannot love our neighbor properly without loving God first (1 John 3:16–17). True faith is expressed in such good works.

To love God and neighbor is the best sacrifice we offer to God; it is the gift of our whole selves to God and to others. We offer ourselves as living sacrifices worked out in love for God and others—even our enemies (Romans 12:1, 9–11, 20–21).

B. Prayer

Blessed are You, Father, for pouring Your love upon us through Jesus’ payment of sin’s price on the cross. Fill us with Your love that our whole selves might love You and love our neighbors. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Love God and love others.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Write the words *Love* and *Faith* as headers on the board. Ask participants what comes to mind for each word and write their responses on the board. Lead a whole-class discussion on love and faith and the relationship between the two for a believer. To encourage discussion, ask, “How has your faith been strengthened by loving others?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Faith and Love” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. After calling time, discuss answers as a whole class.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “Today, we will study Jesus’ teaching regarding the most important commandments: the directives to love God and love others. Then we will turn to the book of James to see how our actions demonstrate our faith in and love for God.”

Into the Word

Distribute a handout (you create) with the following questions for a true/false pre-test. Allow one minute to complete with closed Bibles:

- 1—One of the scribes approached Jesus with a question.
- 2—The “first” commandment is “Love thy neighbour as thyself.”
- 3—Jesus said that loving God and one’s neighbor as oneself is not more important than burnt offerings and sacrifices.
- 4—James says that if faith lacks works, it is “dead.”

[Answers: 1—true; 2—false; 3—false; 4—true]

After the minute is up, ask a volunteer to read Mark 12:28–34 and James 2:14–17 aloud so that participants can check their responses.

Divide the class into two groups: **God and Neighbor Group** and **Faith and Works Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) of the following prompts and questions to each group for discussion.

God and Neighbor Group. Read Mark

12:28–34. 1—What is the significance of God’s people being commanded to love the Lord God with their heart, soul, mind, and strength? 2—Summarize the relationship between loving God and loving others.

Faith and Works Group. Read James 2:14–17. 1—What is the significance of James’s description of faith without works as “dead”? 2—Summarize the relationship between faith and works.

After calling time, reconvene the class and ask a volunteer from each group to summarize their group’s response. Conclude by asking volunteers to summarize the connections between faith, love, and good works.

Into Life

Write on the board the following questions:

1. *What are the immediate needs of our surrounding community?*
2. *What groups or organizations in our community are already addressing these needs?*
3. *How can our congregation join with those groups or organizations?*

Place learners in small groups and distribute a sheet of paper and pen to each group. Ask them to discuss each question and write their answers on the paper. Then direct each group to write a proposal for how the class can see and address the immediate needs of the surrounding community.

After 15 minutes of group work, ask a representative from each group to present their proposal to the class. After each group has presented, have the entire class vote on which proposal the class should pursue in the upcoming weeks. Nominate a representative to bring the proposal before the congregation’s leadership for support and guidance.

Alternative. Distribute the “Plan of Action” exercise from the activity page. Have class members work on it in pairs. If time is short, use the exercise as a take-home activity.

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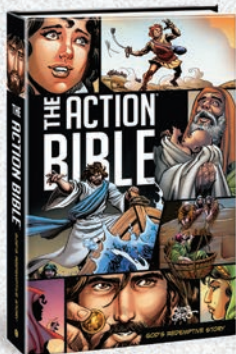


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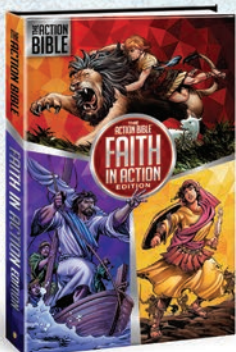


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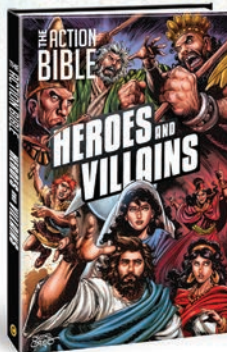
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