



ECHOES

Adult Student Book
Comprehensive Bible Study
March–May 2023



Jesus Calls Us
Studies in the Gospels and Acts

ECHOES

Adult Student Book Comprehensive Bible Study A Bible Study Quarterly for Adults

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T A B L E O F Contents

Jesus Calls Us

March, April, May 2023
(Studies in the Gospels and Acts)

Unit 1: Called from the Margins of Society

Mar. 5	Lesson 1	The Prodigal Son	p. 5
Mar. 12	Lesson 2	The Greatest in the Kingdom	p. 12
Mar. 19	Lesson 3	Jesus Talks with a Samaritan	p. 19
Mar. 26	Lesson 4	Jesus Overpowers Legion	p. 26

Unit 2: Experiencing the Resurrection

Apr. 2	Lesson 5	The Empty Tomb	p. 33
Apr. 9	Lesson 6	Disciples Believe the Resurrection (Easter)	p. 40
Apr. 16	Lesson 7	Jesus Cooks Breakfast	p. 47
Apr. 23	Lesson 8	Jesus Reinstates Peter	p. 54

Unit 3: The Birth of the Church

Apr. 30	Lesson 9	Jesus Makes a Promise	p. 61
May 7	Lesson 10	The Day of Pentecost	p. 68
May 14	Lesson 11	Jumping for Joy	p. 75
May 21	Lesson 12	An Ethiopian Is Baptized	p. 82
May 28	Lesson 13	Saul of Tarsus	p. 89

Special Features

What's Ahead	p. 4
Personal Pages	p. 96
Lesson Cycle	p. 97
Coming Up Next Quarter	p. 98

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What's Ahead

Quarterly Preview

This quarter looks at Jesus' resurrection and how He calls us to serve Him, no matter who we are.

Unit 1 shows Jesus disregarding societal barriers and reaching people on the margins. He tells the parable of the prodigal son, says a child is the "greatest" in the Kingdom, welcomes a Samaritan woman, and heals a man possessed by a legion of demons.

Unit 2 centers on Jesus' appearances to His followers after the Resurrection including the women at the tomb and the disciples.

Unit 3 highlights the birth of the early church with the empowering of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and Peter and John demonstrate the Spirit's power when they heal a lame man. The Spirit directs Philip to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch, and Jesus calls Ananias to minister to the newly converted Saul.

In this quarter, here are some biblical principles you will study that can apply to your own life situations:

- God's love is *always* greater than your unworthiness.
- Reject everything that causes stumbling.
- Step across any barriers to share the Gospel.
- Tell of the mercy and release you've experienced through Christ.
- Explore your questions about Jesus' resurrection.
- Jesus will open your eyes to who He is.
- Jesus invites you to fellowship with Him.
- You are not beyond God's love.
- Witness everywhere—starting where you are.
- Call on the name of the Lord and be saved.
- What can you offer others in the name of Jesus Christ?
- Depend on the Spirit when sharing the Good News.
- Will you minister to your enemies in Jesus' name?

The Prodigal Son

“Thank you,” Keenan said with a smile that was neither faked or forced. It had taken almost a year to get to this place.

Keenan’s sin had been well hidden, or so he thought. Only the Lord had known the depths of the anger and jealousy he had toward his younger brother, Jacoury.

In Keenan’s mind, Jacoury had been the favored child. So, when Jacoury got “caught up” in a life of drugs and crime, Keenan had secretly felt vindicated. Keenan knew Jacoury would one day break his parents’ hearts.

Still, their parents prayed and held out hope that one day their son would repent of his sins and return to the Lord. Two years ago, Jacoury had done just that, to much fanfare of his parents. Then some 11 months later, Jacoury said he was called to the ministry.

Keenan had expressed his skepticisms to his parents, along with his views of their inequities toward their two sons. His anger and hurt were met with patience, which Keen found patronizing.

It was during his private times with Christ that Keenan came to see his sin of jealousy was just as bad, if not worse, than the sins he had tallied against Jacoury. It had softened and strengthened him—the rebuke and the love of Christ.

“Your brother preached today,” said another church member to Keenan.

“Yes, he did!” Keenan beamed again.

1. *How would you characterize your faith life—are you a younger son or an older brother?*

2. *In what ways does your faith life affect how worthy, or unworthy, you feel before God?*

3. *Why is the word lavish a good adjective to describe God?*

LESSON FOCUS: God’s love is always greater than our unworthiness.

A Rebellious Son

Luke 15:11-16, KJV

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

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

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

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

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

Luke 15:11-16, NIV

¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them.

¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."

When Jesus had a group of "tax collectors and sinners" listening to Him, as well as religious leaders, He told three parables showing He came to seek and save the lost—"the one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7, 10). In the third parable, He told about two sons. The younger son demanded his share of the father's estate before the usual time to settle the inheritance, which was when the father died. This not only "divided" (vs. 12) the estate, but it divided the younger son from the family.

The younger son then went off to “a far country” (vs. 13, KJV), a Gentile area where he did what he wanted with no Jewish moral restrictions until he had “squandered his wealth in wild living” (NIV). He was financially—and morally—bankrupt. When a famine came, the son found a job with a pig farmer, as demeaning a job as a Jew could have. He longed to eat the pigs’ food because he was starving—but “no one” would give him “anything” (vs. 15). Many people still reject the heavenly Father because He has too many “rules” to follow. But like the prodigal son, they may suddenly find themselves “in need” (vs. 14) of everything, hungry and homesick, ready to return to the Father.

4. *Why did the younger son want his inheritance?*

5. *What did the younger son do when he received his inheritance?*

A Wake-Up Moment

Luke 15:17-20, KJV

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.

Luke 15:17-20, NIV

¹⁷“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

A moment came when the younger son realized who and where he was—the son of a man wealthy enough to have servants now longing to eat pig’s food to keep from starving. He wondered if he could go back to his father and ask to at least be one of his father’s servants. The son’s actions showed he was no longer “worthy” to be his father’s son, but he could be “like one of [his] hired servants” (vs. 19)—if his father would even have him back. The son practiced a speech he would make to his father confessing his unworthiness. He had not only broken the traditions of family relationships, but the moral rules set forth in God’s Word.

But when the son “was still a long way off” (vs. 20), his father ran to meet him. For older men to run meant pulling up their long tunics and exposing their bare legs, something shameful to do. The listening religious leaders and sinners would have expected the father to shame the son, but the father “was filled with compassion” for his lost son (as Jesus was—see Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 20:34; Mark 6:34). The father kissed his son to show how accepted he was and back with the family he had disowned.

6. *Why was the son ready to try to go home again?*

7. *What would he tell his father when he returned?*

8. *What was the father’s initial reaction to seeing his son?*

A Welcoming Father

Luke 15:21-24, KJV

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

Luke 15:21-24, NIV

²¹“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring

robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fattened 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.

the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So, they began to celebrate."

The son began to give his speech about wanting to be treated like a servant. The father, however, interrupted the speech and called for his servants to bring a robe, a ring, and sandals. The "best robe" (vs. 22) would likely have been the father's robe, showing the son's acceptance into the family. The signet ring was a symbol of authority in the family. The son wearing sandals would have distinguished him from the slaves in the household because slaves went barefoot.

Beyond giving his son new clothing, the father ordered the "fattened calf" (vs. 23) be killed—a "lost" son as good as "dead" (vs. 24) had returned. Like the tax collectors and sinners who originally listened to this story, lost children who feel they have no place in the Father's house because of the lives they have led are celebrated when they return.

Jesus continued the story with the older brother, who resented everything his father did for his wayward brother while the older brother stayed home and worked (vss. 25-32). The parable ends without the older brother deciding if he will join the celebration. The religious leaders also scorned sinners like the younger brother, while refusing to see they too were "lost" in self-righteousness.

9. *How did the father celebrate that his son had returned?*

10. *What does the parable show us about God and His forgiveness?*

Prodigal Father?

Barcelona, Spain, is home to a Michelin-star restaurant. The goal of the three owners is to provide a gastronomic experience where one is amazed and stimulated with creative Mediterranean food. They create multi-course tasting menus. Each menu tells a story. Not only must it be good, each course contributes to the whole, and gives the diner a sense that the dish is something unique and beautiful. It could take diners four hours to experience a 30-course tasting menu! One could certainly call it a lavish meal!

The younger son is often labeled “prodigal” because of his wasteful spending along with returning after an absence. But the first definition of prodigal adds profuse or extravagant spending to the definition. *Lavish* is a synonym of prodigal.

Could *lavish*, or prodigal, also describe the father in the story? Even though the son had morally rejected his family, the father still loved him. When the son returned, the father acted in a way that was shocking and unexpected. The father was full of forgiveness. His gifts showed acceptance back into the family, and the father hosted a huge feast to celebrate the return of his “dead” son.

We see another picture of *lavish* (the Greek word means to abound or overflow) in Ephesians 1:3-8. Paul talks about the prodigality of our heavenly Father. Just like the younger son was cut off from his family, all people (through sin) are cut off from being sons and daughters of God. But God sent Jesus to redeem us through His death and resurrection. Through God’s lavish grace we are each adopted into His family and can call Him “Father.”

11. *In what ways are you an unworthy “younger son” who deserted his father at some point?*

12. *How much has the heavenly Father lavished on you in blessings?*

13. *How has the knowledge of His grace affected your relationship with the Father?*

Picture This

It can be easy to wallow in unworthiness. When we spend all our time looking down, we may miss seeing signs of God's love. A recent traveler to another country shares pictures of dramatic sunrises that she took on her trip. She tells how seeing the vibrant colors in the morning made her want to shout, "Alleluia! Alleluia!" She was reminded of God's great love as she watched the sun rise.

► *Think of a picture, either real or in your imagination, that helps you know and see God's love. How can you remember to focus on this picture to help you realize how great God's love is—especially when you are feeling unworthy?*

My picture:

KEY VERSE

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.

—Luke 15:21, KJV

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "

—Luke 15:21, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSONS

Week of March 6 through March 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

Mon. Matthew 15:21-28—Jesus Heals a Gentile Girl.

Tues. Matthew 19:13-22—Let the Little Children Come.

Wed. Proverbs 1:7-16—Learn Wisdom, My Child.

Thurs. Deuteronomy 4:7-14—Teach Your Children God's Laws.

Fri. Jeremiah 1:1-10—Consecrated from the Womb.

Sat. Matthew 21:12-17—The Praises of Children.

Sun. Matthew 18:1-9; Mark 10:15—The Greatest in the Kingdom.

The Greatest in the Kingdom

“Have you heard Sister Audre sing?” asked Karah. “She sounds like CeCe Winans!”

The Bethany Peace women’s ministry had proposed a singing contest for the new church choir. Members would vote on the best voices, and those people would be considered for the choir, which would go into the community to build a reputation and help bring people to Bethany Peace.

“But I don’t know how I feel about a ‘talent contest’ at the church,” added Karah. “It can create stumbling blocks for people. Feelings can get hurt, pride can get involved, or other negative things you shouldn’t have in a church. People don’t like to lose or think they have no chance to win. Bitterness may break out and stay a long time.”

The two women stopped talking when Audre came into the church’s coffee shop. “Sister Audre,” Brianna called out.

“I hear you can really sing,” said Brianna smiling. “Are you going to be in the talent competition?”

“No,” Audre said. “I’m going to help with childcare.”

“Why, with your wonderful voice?” asked Brianna.

“I do love to sing,” Audre said, “but I also love helping with the nursery and children’s church.”

“You are good with children,” added Karah. “And we never have enough volunteers for the nursery. Besides, the list of contestants for the talent contest is very long.”

Audre said, “I do like helping with a great need.”

- 1.** *Describe what it means to stumble spiritually.*
- 2.** *What is your reaction when someone causes you to stumble spiritually? How do you handle that reaction?*
- 3.** *In what ways have you caused others to stumble spiritually—for example, setting a poor example to others?*

Humbling Oneself

Matthew 18:1-5, KJV

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

Matthew 18:1-5, NIV

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

²He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

⁵And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

Jesus' focus was increasingly on His upcoming crucifixion and resurrection (Matt. 17:23-24), but the disciples asked who He thought was the greatest in the Kingdom. In response, Jesus called a very small child and had him stand among the gathered group, which must have been larger than just the Twelve. In that day, children were an important part of the family. Even so, they were considered to be the property of their parents, had few legal rights, and their opinions were not sought out.

However, the children Jesus saw were humble, trusting, innocent, and lacking in any pretensions, as well as unconcerned with their status in society. Such children were naturally inclined to depend on and receive from others what they were unable to provide for themselves.

Jesus used the little child as an object lesson to stress the

eternal importance of being unassuming and unpretentious. His sacrificial death at Calvary became the ultimate demonstration of what He declared to the Twelve. Unless people “change” (vs. 3), become like a small child, Jesus said they would never enter God’s kingdom.

According to Jesus, those who were “lowly” (vs. 4) among the disciples were the “greatest.” Likewise, such a great person would not hesitate to welcome “one such child” (vs. 5) in Jesus’ “name.” He meant that anyone showing hospitality to such a seemingly insignificant person as a child did so on His behalf. In first-century culture, older people were revered, especially distinguished elders, rabbis, and scribes. In contrast, children were considered of lesser value than adults. Some might even consider daughters a disadvantage. Along with the dismissive attitude shown by Jesus’ disciples, the religious leaders called on Jesus to silence children who praised Him as He rode into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:15-16). Jesus repudiated such dismissive views toward children.

4. *What question did Jesus’ disciples ask Him?*

5. *What analogy did Jesus make from the “little child” (Matt. 18:2)?*

6. *How did Jesus describe the nature of greatness in the Kingdom?*

Causing Others to Stumble

Matthew 18:6-9, KJV

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Matthew 18:6-9, NIV

⁶“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”⁷Woe to the world because of the things that cause

7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.

9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell."

Jesus pronounced judgment on anyone who offended any of the small children within the group as well as any "little ones" (any disciples). The focus of Jesus' observations was those who trusted in Him. So Jesus' words conveyed the idea of misleading others to compromise their faith and spiritually fall away.

Jesus vividly illustrated His point by referring to people having a huge "millstone" weighing hundreds of pounds to be placed around their "neck" and then be thrown in the sea. In Jesus' day, a mill used two extremely heavy stones to pulverize grain (such as wheat) into flour. A laborer would pour grain through a hole in the upper, rubbing stone (which was either flat or convex). Then, a donkey tethered to a wooden handle (on the stone's outer edge) would turn the object. In this way, the kernels were ground against the rough base stone. Jesus said it would be better for offenders to experience a premature death with the millstone than to live long enough to lure and entrap believers in wrongdoing.

Jesus used the interjection rendered “woe” (vs. 7) to draw attention to the sorrow that awaited anyone, such as the religious leaders, who tripped up His followers. Those who abuse God’s children will have to deal with Him. Unless they repent, their eternal doom is inevitable.

Next, Jesus talked about another kind of influence—that of the sinful nature on our spiritual welfare. The world system around us is filled with many stumbling blocks, so temptations are a fact of life, but He declared that unending sorrow awaits those who entice other people to sin.

Jesus used blunt language to emphasize His point. He said that if one part of our body—a hand, a foot, an eye—makes us fall into sin, we should eliminate that part. It would be far “better” to be “maimed” (vs. 8), “crippled,” or lose an eye in this life than to remain physically intact and suffer “the fire of hell” (vs. 9).

Regrettably, some have taken Jesus’ statements literally and mutilated themselves. Yet, doing so totally misunderstands Jesus’ use of hyperbole (intentional exaggeration). After all, cutting off one hand will not keep you from sinning with the other hand, and what one eye can see, the other eye can see as well. At issue were not body parts. Jesus taught that we must resist all forms of sinful enticements. These have less to do with external attractions than with our inner sinfulness.

Jesus was urging us to willingly deprive ourselves of any physical pleasure that might draw us away from wholehearted devotion to Him. Denying ourselves is not easy, but doing so is far better than to gratify illicit desires now and end up being an outcast from God’s kingdom.

7. *What did Jesus say about causing someone to stumble and millstones?*

8. *How did Jesus use intentional exaggeration to make His point?*

9. *What dire end awaited those who failed to heed Jesus’ warning?*

From Stumbling to Recovering

The Bible is full of examples of people who stumble in their walk with God. Many people dedicated to the Lord slipped in their faith—from Abraham to David in the Old Testament, to Peter and Paul in the New Testament. Nevertheless, despite their failings, God's grace to them raised and steadied them in their spiritual journey.

One of the most startling descriptions of sin in God's Word is the account of the golden calf (see Exod. 32). Moses' brother Aaron succumbed to the demands of the rebellious Hebrews and molded a golden calf for them to worship while Moses was away receiving spiritual instructions from God. When Moses confronted Aaron for his sacrilege, Aaron tried to lay the blame on the people, but he recognized how he had failed God. So, he sided with Moses and the faithful, and the Lord spared him. Moreover, God Almighty continued to use Aaron in an exalted position among God's people.

Each of us will have moments when we stumble spiritually. Those moments may not be as shocking as Aaron's, but they still have a profound effect on our relationship with the Lord. And in our contrition and grief, God will always be present to embrace us with His love and compassion. Indeed, His grace will guide us to loftier peaks in our service to Christ. Therefore, "let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith" (Heb. 12:1-2).

10. *How do you help your sisters and brothers in Christ not to stumble spiritually?*

11. *When they do stumble, how do you aid them to recover?*

12. *How do you keep yourself from stumbling spiritually?*

A Confession or a Request

In this week's Scripture, Jesus tells the disciples that He wants His followers to be as innocent as the little child He called before them and to protect their fellow believers from stumbling. Such teaching is still applicable today.

► *Write a short prayer letter to God, asking Him to give you the wisdom and the strength not to stumble spiritually because of a particular problem that you are currently confronting. Or if you have stumbled, ask Him to help you recover to continue your walk with Jesus. Or if you know someone who is about to or has stumbled spiritually, ask Him if He wants you to help that person and, if so, ask for the grace required to fill that role. In any case, praise Jesus for His caring presence and constant willingness to forgive and restore.*

KEY VERSE

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. —Matthew 18:4, KJV

"Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." —Matthew 18:4, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSONS

Week of March 13 through March 19

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** John 7:37-43—Rivers of Living Water.
- Tues.** 2 Kings 17:24-34—Worship God Alone.
- Wed.** Ezra 4:1-8, 11b-16—Handling Opposition to God's Plans.
- Thurs.** Isaiah 44:1-8—Water on a Thirsty Land.
- Fri.** John 4:1-15—Jesus Offers Living Water.
- Sat.** John 4:16-26—Worship in Spirit and Truth.
- Sun.** John 4:27-29, 31-42—Jesus the Savior of the World.

Jesus Talks with a Samaritan

Here he was again, Orlando thought as he pulled into the gas pump behind the pickup truck with a sizable, offensive flag sticker in the cab back window. Orlando had observed his one-time student, Justin, in that truck at a nearby car wash about 30 minutes earlier. Orlando remembered Justin from his time of coaching as a substitute teacher. He recalled him being moody, troubled at home, and not liking that Orlando was Black.

Justin was now at the pump, searching in his pockets.

"Hello. Justin, right?" Orlando said, approaching.

Justin turned with a surprised look, mingled with a frown.

"I'm Mr. Lewis," said Orlando, "the substitute assistant football coach at your high school."

Justin looked back, the surprise was gone, and the frown relaxed into stern passivity.

"Are you OK?" Orlando asked, his voice compassionate.

"I've misplaced my credit card," Justin said, "and I'm on empty."

"Here," Orlando said pushing his credit card into the reader.

"Why would you do that?" Justin said, astonished.

"Because you need help," smiled Orlando. "How are you doing?" Orlando was surprised at Justin's honesty, but not at the heavy load he was carrying. "Justin, I want you to really listen to this with your heart."

For the next 20 minutes, Orlando spoke about the loving, powerful, and saving grace of Christ.

1. What barriers have been placed in the world to halt the teachings of Christ?

2. In what ways is your church overcoming those barriers?

3. How do you contribute to your church's efforts?

LESSON FOCUS: Step across any barriers to share the Gospel.

The Samaritan Woman's Conversation with Jesus

John 4:7-15, KJV

7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)

9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.

10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

11 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?

12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?

13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

14 But whosoever drinketh of

John 4:7-15, NIV

⁷When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸(His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

⁹The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

¹⁰Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹²Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give them will never

the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

15 The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.

thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

¹⁵The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

It was around noon when Jesus came to Jacob’s well. A low stone wall possibly encircled the spring-fed well and formed a ledge upon which a weary and exhausted traveler such as Jesus could sit (John 4:6). In that culture, it was the job of women to draw water from wells by using jugs or animal skins attached to ropes. Because the heat was probably most intense at this time of the day, women normally drew water at sunset. So this woman may have come to this well then to avoid the other women of the community. The woman might have been shunned by her female peers due to her scandalous character.

Jesus’ disciples had gone into the village to buy food, so this left Him alone at the well when He asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. A Jewish teacher did not speak with a woman in public and would never make himself unclean by drinking from a Samaritan’s cup.

Given this cultural context, it is understandable why the woman at the well was astonished by Jesus’ request. She even noted the centuries-old wall of enmity between the two groups of people. Rather than get drawn into a long-standing racial conflict, Jesus redirected the woman’s attention to her deepest spiritual need. By identifying Himself with the “living water” (vs. 10), Jesus wanted the woman to recognize that He could give the woman water much greater than that from the well.

The woman responded with two questions. How did Jesus plan to get this water, especially since He had no bucket? Also, was He greater than their ancestor Jacob?

Jesus sidestepped the woman's questions by noting that even water from Jacob's well quenched thirst for only a short time (vs. 13). The eternal life Jesus offered, however, would abundantly satisfy the spiritual thirst of people forever (John 10:10). God's gift of salvation was comparable to a fountain of water that vigorously welled up inside believers in an unending, overflowing supply (vs. 14).

This idea intrigued the woman, who pictured it as something that would replace her daily trips to and from the well. She took Jesus literally and thought of personal convenience rather than anything spiritual (vs. 15).

4. *In what way did the Samaritan woman respond to Jesus' request?*

5. *At first, what prompted the Samaritan woman to doubt Jesus' claim?*

6. *What was the nature of the "living water" (John 4:10) Jesus promised to give?*

7. *What comparison did the Samaritan woman make between Jacob and Jesus?*

The Belief of Many Samaritans in Jesus

John 4:28-30, 39-41, KJV

28 The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men,

29 Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

30 Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

39 And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that

John 4:28-30, 39-41, NIV

²⁸Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹"Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" ³⁰They came out of the town and made their way toward him. ...

³⁹Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's

ever I did.

40 So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.

41 And many more believed because of his own word.

testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹And because of his words many more became believers.

Jesus then showed the woman that He knew every detail of her personal life, including her many husbands, and that He could answer her deepest spiritual questions (vss. 16-24). She started to wonder if He was more than just a prophet, and Jesus directly told her that He was the Messiah. Just then His disciples returned, surprised to find Him talking to a Samaritan woman in public (vss. 25-27).

Meanwhile, the woman abandoned her jug of water at the well and hurried back to the village. In her effort to tell others in the village about the newcomer, she forgot about her initial reason for going to the well. Instead, she seemed thrilled that Jesus was able to tell her "everything [she] ever did" (vs. 29) and still talk with her and accept her. The woman did not say, "I have found the Messiah," but asked if Jesus "could... be the Messiah."

The woman's excited testimony and question generated considerable interest. Verse 30 gives the impression that many residents of Sychar responded to the woman's invitation to come and see this man who had such incredible insight into the life of the woman they knew so well. As a result of her testimony, many Samaritans put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and they even insisted He remain with them, so Jesus stayed for two days. As more villagers heard Jesus, they believed in Him for eternal life.

8. *What prompted the Samaritan woman to change her mind about Jesus?*

9. *What was the basis for the Samaritans' belief in Jesus?*

Barriers No More!

There are numerous barriers in the world in which we live: borders between countries, fences among neighbors, even walls within homes. The psychological barriers between people, however, can be even more difficult to scale, and one of the most formidable is that barrier between Jews and Gentiles.

From the day God marked the Hebrews as His own, a barrier stood between Jews and Gentiles until Jesus came to tear down that barrier. For Jesus “is our peace,” wrote the apostle Paul, “who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14). What that also means is that within the fellowship of believers no barrier should exist among believers.

Probably the most daunting barrier is the one between God and humans. Jesus, however, bridged the gap: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). And, since Jesus has extinguished the barrier between God and us, He can remove the barrier between God and unbelievers.

Although Jesus has torn down all barriers, it does not mean that Christians can stand back and be passive observers. Each of us is called to be His ambassador in this world, conveying the Good News to those He brings into our lives: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20). Therefore, let no barrier stop us from sharing the Gospel with those who have not received God’s grace.

10. *What barriers do you encounter when you know that you need to share the Gospel with someone who needs to hear it?*

11. *How does prayer and Scripture help you break through those barriers?*

12. *What blessings occur when you do share the Gospel?*

Sharing the Gospel

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well was not by chance. God brought the two together, and their conversation had a profound effect first on her life and then the lives of many of the townspeople who heard Jesus. He shows us we must cross any barrier that stands between us and those who need to hear the Gospel.

► *Write the name here of someone you feel led to share the Gospel with this coming week. Pray about the lifting of any barriers that may keep you from sharing.*

KEY VERSE

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. —John 4:39, KJV

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." —John 4:39, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSONS

Week of March 20 through March 26

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** James 4:1-10—Resist the Devil.
- Tues.** 2 Corinthians 10:1-6—The Weapons of Our Warfare.
- Wed.** Psalm 106:1-7, 36-41, 47-48—Lord, Remember Your People.
- Thurs.** Psalm 34:1-15—The Lord Delivers the Fearful.
- Fri.** Numbers 10:29-36—Let God's Enemies Be Scattered.
- Sat.** Mark 5:1-13—Jesus Sets a Demoniac Free.
- Sun.** Mark 5:14-20—Sent to Bear Witness.

Jesus Overpowers Legion

I'm glad you let me edit it," said Kamala. "I've known you for a long time, but I was still surprised at the dark chapters in the book."

Kamala, the mother of De-Andra's old friend, Laila, was a professional writer. The woman had agreed to edit De-Andra's book at a "family rate."

The Lord had redeemed De-Andra from a terrible and messy life that had been full of darkness. There was a time when De-Andra thought she would die in the deep pit that held her captive. But the prayers of loved ones had pierced the darkness long enough for De-Andra to cry out to the Lord.

And He rescued her with a strong and mighty hand. De-Andra shared her miraculous salvation to people far and wide. She didn't stop spreading her good news as the Holy Spirit began to disciple her and conform her into the image of Christ.

Along the way, De-Andra realized she had a talent for motivational speaking. The more she spoke, the more engagements she received. Then, at the urging of the Holy Spirit, she began writing down her story.

"I have dark places, too," said Kamala, who had met De-Andra at a coffee shop to talk more about the next steps for the book.

"Ms. Richardson," said De-Andra, "the Lord would love for you to call out and grab hold of Him. Trust me, I know!"

1. *What burdens in life prevent people from enjoying the blessings of God?*

2. *How have some of these burdens affected your life?*

3. *Why does the compassion of Christ liberate you from the effects of these burdens?*

LESSON FOCUS: Tell of the mercy and release you've experienced through Christ.

The Demon-Possessed Man

Mark 5:1-5, KJV

1 And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

2 And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit,

3 Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:

4 Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.

5 And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

Mark 5:1-5, NIV

¹They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. ²When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. ³This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. ⁴For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. ⁵Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

After Jesus and the Twelve reached the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, they were in “the region of the Gerasenes,” where people lived in cavern tombs among the dead. Mark 5:2 says that this man had “an impure spirit,” and because he was so violent, the villagers tried to secure chains to his wrists and shackles to his feet. However, he always snapped the chains and broke the shackles. “Night and day” (vs. 5) he wandered among the tombs and throughout the hills, howling in distress and slashing himself with jagged stones.

4. *What took place when Jesus exited the boat?*

5. *What was distinctive about the man whom Jesus encountered?*

The Messiah's Authority over Demons

Mark 5:6-13, KJV

6 But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,

7 And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.

8 For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.

9 And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

10 And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.

11 Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding.

12 And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.

13 And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.

Mark 5:6-13, NIV

⁶When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. ⁷He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" ⁸For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

⁹Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."

¹⁰And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

¹¹A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. ¹²The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." ¹³He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

When the demoniac spotted Jesus, he ran to Him and fell on his knees in front of Him. When the evil spirits

realized they were in the presence of the Messiah, they cried out something like, “Why are you bothering me?” They personally addressed Jesus by name in a failed attempt to gain control over Him. In that day, it was popularly believed that knowing and declaring the name of others gave one authority over them.

The evil spirits first referred to the itinerant rabbi as “Jesus,” then as the “Son of the Most High God” (vs. 7). In an ironic twist, the host of demons invoked God’s name as a form of protection. The Greek text of Mark 5:7 can be literally translated, “I adjure you as God.” The evil entities were imploring Jesus for mercy, rather than being tortured by Him. When Jesus asked the demon-possessed man to identify himself, the demons replied, “My name is Legion” (vs. 9). A horde of wicked entities were living in the man.

The mob of demons did not want to be sent “out of the area” (vs. 10). In Luke’s version, they feared the prospect of being cast into the “Abyss” (Luke 8:31), the place where Satan will be confined (Rev. 20:1-3). Instead, they begged to be sent into a large herd of swine not far off. The evil spirits implored that after Jesus expelled them from the man, the Messiah permit them to go into the pigs. In turn, He consented to their request. As a result, the legion of demons abandoned their human host, entered the herd (which numbered around 2,000 animals), stampeded down the side of a steep cliff, and plunged into the lake (the Sea of Galilee), where the pigs drowned.

It is unclear from the context exactly why the demons wanted to enter the swine, but the episode puts a fine point on the destructive force of these demons—regardless of whether they exploited people or animals.

6. *What did the tormented man do when he saw Jesus?*

7. *What answer did Jesus receive after asking His question?*

8. *How did Jesus respond to the demons’ request?*

The Good News of God's Mercy

Mark 5:18-20, KJV

18 And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.

19 Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.

20 And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

Mark 5:18-20, NIV

¹⁸As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.

¹⁹Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you." ²⁰So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

After being freed by Jesus, the man was seen sitting peacefully, clothed properly, and in his right mind (vs. 15). He was so grateful for being healed that he pleaded with Jesus to allow him to accompany the Savior in the boat.

Jesus, however, urged the healed man to return home to his own people and declare to the residents how much the Lord had blessed him. The townspeople would learn the way in which God showered the man with "mercy" (vs. 19).

Previously, after Jesus had cleansed a man of leprosy, He told the man not to tell anyone what had happened (Mark 1:43-44), perhaps because He did not want to then announce He was the Messiah, with the title's implications. However, the former demoniac lived in mostly Gentile territory where the aspirations for a Messiah were not so pronounced. Jesus instead sent the man as a Gentile evangelist of the Lord's healing and mercy in his homeland, the Decapolis (literally, the "Ten Cities").

9. *What did Jesus direct the healed man to do?*

'If the Son Sets You Free'

"Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin," Jesus noted, but then He assured His followers: "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34, 36). Of course, "the Son" is Jesus, and so He was referring to Himself. Therefore, we can only know true freedom when we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

In terrible distress because the prison cells had opened, the Philippian jailer was about to kill himself with his sword, but the apostle Paul intervened. Subsequently, when he realized that Paul had not escaped and that a miracle had occurred, the jailer asked how he could be saved. "Believe in the Lord Jesus," Paul replied, "and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Because the jailer and his household believed in God, they "rejoiced" (verse 34). Though he was a jailer of people, evil had spiritually imprisoned him until the Son liberated him.

Similarly, everyone is in their own self-created and self-imposed prison unless Christ Jesus has freed them. But we have been redeemed in the sight of God. Our former prison, whose bricks comprised our fears, anxieties, addictions, depression, and arrogance, is vacant. Each of us has our own unique story of how the Lord liberated us, a story that can provide hope and encouragement and guidance to others who still dwell in their own dark dungeon.

Just like the Philippian jailer and the healed demoniac, we rejoice whenever we comprehend how wondrously Jesus has poured His compassion upon us and released us from the chains that once enslaved us. When others hear our joy they are drawn to Jesus because of it.

10. *Why is Jesus the only one who can release us from evil?*

11. *Why is the mercy of Christ important to you?*

12. *How do you convey Jesus' love to the people in need of God's compassion?*

Our Merciful Lord

Jesus' power over demons was evident when He cast the evil spirits out of a man who dwelled among the tombs in the region of the Gerasenes. Such power indicates that Jesus can release us from any bondage if we surrender our lives to His Lordship. Moreover, this act of liberation is so joyous that we can't help but tell others what Jesus has accomplished within us, especially those who are enslaved to the evil within and outside them.

► *How mindful are you of how Christ has liberated you from a life of darkness and how His light in you can be shown to others? Pray about and write here some ways you can pass Christ's mercy on to others in this coming week.*

KEY VERSE

And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.

—Mark 5:20, KJV

So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

—Mark 5:20, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 27 through April 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 19:28-40—The Stones Would Shout.
- Tues.** Luke 19:41-48—Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem.
- Wed.** Job 14:1-15—As Fleeting as Shadows.
- Thurs.** 1 Corinthians 11:23-34—This Is My Body.
- Fri.** Psalm 22:1-2, 7-19—Why Have You Forsaken Me?
- Sat.** Psalm 22:20-31—Deliver Me, O Lord.
- Sun.** Luke 24:1-12—A Surprising Encounter.

The Empty Tomb

D'Angelo groaned and rolled over. His head was throbbing with a hangover. It was Sunday morning, and his family was preparing to go to church. Although he was home from college on semester break, he would be expected to go, too.

He had left for school three years ago with a reasonable grasp on his faith in Christ. Now D'Angelo found himself questioning the validity of some of the theories that sought to debunk the bodily resurrection of Christ—the women went to the wrong tomb, Jesus didn't really die on the Cross but "swooned," the disciples stole the body, or it was a "spiritual" resurrection, not a physical one.

D'Angelo's thoughts were interrupted by the knock on the door. "Good morning, son," Mr. Martin said. D'Angelo tried to smile, but even his face seemed to hurt.

"I wanted to make sure you are OK, and say we'd like for you to join us at church." During his break, D'Angelo and his dad had spoken at length about D'Angelo's doubts, questions, and the new direction of his life.

D'Angelo loved his dad. He could always count on his father and his love. And he said as much.

Mr. Martin smiled. "My love for you is only a fraction of how much Christ loves you. You can come to the Lord with your questions and setbacks. But you won't find hope and eternal life by embracing dead ideologies and deceptive people."

- 1.** *How can we know the resurrection of Jesus actually happened?*
- 2.** *What might you say to someone who says, "You don't have to believe in the Resurrection to believe in Jesus"?*
- 3.** *How does believing in the resurrection of Jesus help us answer hard questions in life and give us hope?*

The Women Encounter the Angels

Luke 24:1-8, KJV

1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.

3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

8 And they remembered his words.

Luke 24:1-8, NIV

¹On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷"The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" ⁸Then they remembered his words.

It was now early Sunday morning, the third day after Jesus had been crucified and placed in a tomb. Some of the women who had followed Jesus (some of whose identities would soon be revealed) came to Jesus' tomb that morning, bearing "spices they had prepared" (vs. 1) to

anoint His body, perhaps because they wanted to express their personal devotion to Him. As they approached, they asked themselves, “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” (Mark 16:3).

However, upon arriving at the tomb, they discovered to their surprise that the immense stone had already been rolled away—and the tomb was empty! And yet, at this stage the women did not appear to be frightened, only confused. “While they were wondering about this, two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning” (Luke 24:4)—angels—appeared beside them. Now the women were frightened, and “bowed down with their faces to the ground” (vs. 5).

The angels, on the other hand, seemed amazed by the women’s surprise and lack of understanding: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!” (vss. 5-6). They reminded the women that what they were observing had, in fact, already been promised to them by Jesus: “Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again’” (vss. 6-7).

Thus, this section closed with a simple statement: “Then they remembered his words.” The women had an a-ha moment. Although they had not yet seen Jesus resurrected in the flesh, they knew His words to be true—and the empty tomb had proven that those words had been fulfilled. Therefore they believed, even now, that Jesus was risen indeed.

4. *Why were the women at Jesus’ tomb? What did they find?*

5. *How do the women react to the angels—and how do the angels react to the women?*

6. *What is the significance of Luke’s statement in verse 8?*

The Disciples Doubt the Women

Luke 24:9-12, KJV

9 And [they] returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.

10 It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.

11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Luke 24:9-12, NIV

⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹²Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

After this amazing turn of events, the women returned from the tomb, and told “the Eleven” (“the Twelve” chief disciples minus Judas Iscariot) and “all the others” present what had happened—that Jesus had indeed conquered death. It is here that the identities of at least some of the women were revealed: “Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James.” However, it is clear from verse 10 that other women were present as well. Several of these women—at least Mary Magdalene and Mary—had been on the Mount of Olives and witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion as well (Matt. 27:55-56). All these women told the apostles what they had seen.

And yet, the disciples “did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11). Perhaps the women’s excitement overpowered their message; perhaps the men’s grief overpowered their

ability to accept this new information. Very possibly, the men of that day struggled to accept the women's word over what they already "knew" to be true. And after all, the women hadn't actually seen Jesus—but they'd seen angels? The Greek word translated "nonsense" here, *leros*, was a medical term that could also be translated "delirium." Put in modern, if unflattering, terms, the men likely thought the women were crazy.

To his credit, and despite his doubt, Peter determined to check out this report for himself. He ran to the tomb with the apostle John (John 20:3-4) and saw the stone rolled away, Jesus' body gone, and "the [burial] strips of linen lying by themselves" (Luke 24:12). Peter "went away, wondering to himself what had happened." John, however, "believed" (John 20:28). Peter likely wanted to believe—otherwise, why run to the tomb? Something amazing had clearly taken place there. Yet Peter still could not bring himself to believe at that moment that Jesus had truly come back from the dead. Something more would have to happen in his heart to finally bring him to that point.

7. *What did the women do after returning from the tomb? What else are we told about these women?*

8. *How did the disciples, as a group, react to the women's report?*

9. *How did Peter respond?*



A first-century tomb with a rolling stone in Nazareth.

The Wonder of the Resurrection

At first the women took their observations of the empty tomb at face value. Only when the angels appeared with news of much greater significance were they frightened. In their fear, perhaps they wondered if they could truly believe what they had seen. Not only was the tomb empty—which perhaps could be explained away—but the angels gave them a message straight from God. Jesus had risen, just as He said.

Once they accepted this wonderful news, the women ran to tell the other disciples. They had witnessed the reality of Jesus' crucifixion, and now the truth of His resurrection. But the disciples had their own questions. Peter and John went to the tomb to check out the story for themselves. They saw the same tangible evidence: an empty tomb and "the [burial] strips of linen lying by themselves" (Luke 24:12). John believed (John 20:8), but Peter still wondered. The other disciples had only Peter, John, and the women's word.

Often we see evidence of God's hand at work, but still we wonder, *How can this be? Are we deceiving ourselves? How is it that Jesus lives again, here and now?* We believe God with our whole hearts and trust Him with our lives, but we want detailed answers. We want to know the how and why in the great disappointments and uncertainty of life here on earth. Even without having all our questions answered now, through Jesus' resurrection we have hope in our inheritance of eternal life.

10. *Why did the disciples at first doubt reports of Jesus' resurrection?*

11. *Why do people today doubt Jesus' resurrection?*

12. *What is the significance of Jesus' physical, bodily resurrection from the dead and later appearances?*

13. *In what other types of circumstances do we doubt or question God's actions? Why?*

Sharing God's Truth

The angels at the empty tomb reminded the women of Jesus' promise to rise from the dead. Scripture records that more than 500 people witnessed Jesus' bodily resurrection. Today we believe the truth and power of the Resurrection through faith.

► *What questions about the Resurrection have you had answered? How could you help answer others' questions and lead them to accept not only the truth of Jesus' resurrection, but also its relevance for their eternal salvation?*

KEY VERSE

They said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen. —Luke 24:5b-6a, KJV

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!" —Luke 24:5b-6a, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 3 through April 9

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. John 20:11-18—I Have Seen the Lord!

Tues. John 20:19-31—Blessed Are Those Who Believe.

Wed. Psalm 118:1-14—The Lord Is My Strength.

Thurs. Psalm 118:15-29—I Shall Not Die, But Live.

Fri. Luke 24:13-24—Jesus Meets Two Disciples.

Sat. Luke 24:25-35—Jesus Opens the Disciples' Eyes.

Sun. Luke 24:36-49—You Are Witnesses of These Things.

Disciples Believe the Resurrection

Is that Diamond?" Latrina asked Kyla.

"Where?" Kyla replied.

"The usher over there," Latrina said pointing to a section of the large church. Kyla and Latrina were at the joint community worship service in the megachurch.

"It kind of looks like her," Kyla said skeptically.

Kyla had lost track of Diamond. The two women had not been exceptionally close, but had been friends or friendly since high school. Diamond was a highly intelligent and good person. A potentially deadly combination, Kyla realized, when the person was solely depending on their own merits to attain heaven.

Kyla had spoken in depth about the plan of salvation, but Diamond didn't seem to nor want to get it. She would be just fine on her own. "Besides, how can you intelligently believe in a virgin birth and a Resurrection?"

After service, Diamond approached Kyla and Latrina.

"I thought that was you guys," Diamond said embracing each woman.

"Oh, my goodness, Diamond!" Kyla gushed.

After visiting in the church's coffee shop for more than 45 minutes, the women exchanged numbers.

"I've been praying that I would reconnect with you, Kyla," said Diamond. "You witnessed to me and prayed for me over the years. I wanted you to know that Christ opened my eyes to who He is. Thank you!"

1. *What are some reasons people experience blindness to who Jesus really is?*

2. *Why may it be easy for us as Christians to look but never see, listen but never hear, and be motivated but never respond?*

3. *What things hinder us from experiencing Jesus' presence along our journey?*

LESSON FOCUS: Jesus will open your eyes to who He is.

Two Men Walk with Jesus—and Don't Know It

Luke 24:13-24, KJV

13 And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.

14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened.

15 And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.

16 But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.

17 And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?

18 And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

19 And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:

20 And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.

Luke 24:13-24, NIV

¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.

¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and

21 But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done.

22 Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre;

23 And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.

24 And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.

they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.

²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

After the events at Jesus' tomb, two of Jesus' followers traveled "to a village called Emmaus. . . talking with each other about everything that had happened" (vss. 13-14). Although they did not yet believe that Jesus had returned from the dead, they were trying their best to process the account the women had given them that morning. Something remarkable had clearly occurred—but back from the dead? They couldn't accept it. Yet.

As they walked and talked, trying to figure it all out, Jesus Himself appeared and walked along with them! And yet, the two men "were kept from recognizing him" (vs. 16). When Jesus asked them what they were discussing, for a minute, "They stood still, their faces downcast" (vs. 17). They were both distraught and a bit perturbed that this man couldn't understand their sadness. Then one of the men, Cleopas, finally asked Jesus, ironically, how He could not know the "things" (vss. 18) that had happened that week.

The men then told Jesus what had happened to Jesus: His powerful words and works, His condemnation by the religious leaders, and His crucifixion. They ended with an account of that morning's events: "some of our women" (vs. 22) went to Jesus' grave, found the tomb empty, and said angels spoke to them. The men even reported that "some of our companions" (vs. 24) had gone to the tomb, found it empty, and verified Jesus was not there. In the middle of their story, the men revealed both their hope and their lack of faith to Jesus: "we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (vs. 21). Their hope was now walking right alongside them, but they did not comprehend it. Yet.

4. *What did the two men discuss, while on the road to Emmaus?*

5. *How did the men react when Jesus came alongside them and why?*

6. *What did the two men tell Jesus . . . about Jesus? What did they reveal about their own hearts?*

Jesus Reveals Himself

Luke 24:25-27, 30-31, KJV

25 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:

26 Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

30 And it came to pass, as he

Luke 24:25-27, 30-31, NIV

²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"

²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

³⁰When he was at the table

sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.

31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.

with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

After allowing the men to tell their story, Jesus now corrected them—and did not mince words while doing so: “Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (vs. 26). As Jesus would make clear, the men had been given all the evidence they needed to believe. And yet, the visible events had shut their eyes to the truth. Like many in Jesus’ time, they had likely expected a conquering Redeemer who kicked out the Romans, not a suffering one.

This time, it was Jesus’ turn to explain the past few days’ events: “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (vs. 27).

Something had already taken place in the men’s hearts, for once they reached their destination, they begged Jesus to stay with them (vss. 28-29). He sat down with them, “took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them” (vs. 30). The men’s eyes “were opened and they recognized him” (vs. 31)—and then, almost immediately, He disappeared. The living Word in their hearts had opened the way for the Living Word to appear to them in the flesh.

7. *How did Jesus react to the men’s account of the events of the last few days?*

8. *How did Jesus correct the men’s view of those events, and why they had taken place?*

9. *What happened after Jesus and the men sat down to eat?*

Open Our Eyes, Lord

In this lesson, we read the story of Jesus appearing to two men as they walked on the road to Emmaus. As they traveled, the men discussed recent events that had taken place in Jerusalem—Jesus' ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection. Jesus came alongside them and asked them what they were discussing. They expressed surprise that Jesus didn't know what had happened, so they told Him the whole story.

At this time, the men didn't believe the truth of the Resurrection; their response revealed their hope along with their current lack of faith. Even though they had the facts straight, they did not yet see Jesus for who He really is. In spiritual matters, how much more important is it for us to look deeper than what's evident on the surface?

Jesus listened to their story and then rebuked them. He corrected their misguided expectation of a conquering hero and reminded them the Messiah would suffer. He went on to explain the fulfillment of prophecy concerning Himself, which was all the evidence they needed to believe Messiah had truly come. Something about His words resonated with the men, and they begged Jesus to stay with them for a meal. As Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, they recognized Him. Jesus opened their eyes to see who He is.

God's Word is living and active (Heb. 4:12) and opens our eyes to see who Jesus is—if we allow it.

10. *What incorrect perceptions do people often have about Jesus today?*

11. *Why is it possible for us to believe all that Jesus said and did and not (yet) have a redeeming faith?*

12. *How does what we say and do reveal what we believe in our hearts about who Jesus is?*

13. *Describe a time when Jesus opened your eyes to allow you to see more fully who He is.*

Encountering Jesus

The story of two men on the road to Emmaus invites us to change our perception of who Jesus is to align more closely with Scripture and who He says He is. In this story, we observe the men “were kept from recognizing him” (vs. 16) and later “their eyes were opened” (vs. 31).

► *Here or on an index card, list one or more action steps you can take this week to respond to Jesus and who He is. Keep the list handy to remember and respond to Jesus’ offer to open our eyes to see Him.*

KEY VERSE

And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. —Luke 24:31, KJV

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. —Luke 24:31, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of April 10 through April 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Luke 7:36-50—Hospitality and Redemption.
- Tues.** 1 Corinthians 15:27-31, 35-44—Raised with Christ in Glory.
- Wed.** 1 Corinthians 15:45-58—Death Is Swallowed Up in Victory.
- Thurs.** Psalm 5—God, Hear My Morning Prayer.
- Fri.** Lamentations 3:21-36—Great Is God’s Faithfulness.
- Sat.** Psalm 30—Joy Comes with the Morning.
- Sun.** John 21:1-14—Jesus Appears by the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus Cooks Breakfast

Lanelle looked at herself again in the mirror. She was nervous. She was also surprised her coworker, Shandra, had invited her a women's church brunch. Lanelle had always been unpopular and somewhat an outsider. She arrived at the brunch 20 minutes early and was greeted warmly by a few people, which put her a little at ease. When Lanelle spotted Shandra, she was relieved, even more so when Shandra sat down next to her.

"Don't be silly," Shandra said. "Of course, I would be sitting with you."

The food was great and plentiful. Shandra introduced Lanelle to the other women at the table and many others at the brunch before it was time for the speaker. The topic, "The Lord Welcomes You," made Lanelle feel even better.

"It seems a small thing to be welcoming," said Evangelist Taylor. "But it is not. The Lord wants His Church to be welcoming, especially to those who are lonely, broken, battered, and feel rejected. We should embrace them, because He does. Those of you who feel like outsiders," he continued, "and those who don't, the Lord invites you to fellowship with Him. He is standing at the door of your heart today, knocking."

Lanelle stood to her feet, along with several other women. Their response was met with spirited "Amens" and applause.

1. *Describe a time when you had a memorable time of fellowship with someone. What made it meaningful?*

2. *Describe a time when you had a memorable time of fellowship with Jesus. What made it meaningful?*

3. *Why is it important to remember that Jesus wants to spend time with you and often initiates the process of doing so?*

Jesus Showed Up

John 21:1-6, KJV

1 After these things Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise shewed he himself.

2 There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.

3 Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

4 But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.

5 Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No.

6 And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.

John 21:1-6, NIV

¹Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ²Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

⁶He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

The events recorded in today’s text came after Jesus’ two appearances to groups of disciples following His resurrection (John 20:19-23, 24-29). Sometime later, the disciples were in Galilee, per His instructions (Matt. 26:32;

28:7–10), and Peter decided to go fishing. Six others agreed to join him. Why, we are not told. Perhaps they decided it was time to get back to their “real” jobs and make some money, or they were not sure what to do next and went back to what they knew best. Whatever the reason, they set out at night to fish and caught nothing.

After a night of unsuccessful fishing, Jesus called out to them from the shore. Why they didn’t immediately recognize that it was Jesus standing there is unclear. It could be that the circumstances in which Jesus appeared were so unusual that they found His presence startling. Jesus told them to throw their net on the other side of the boat, and they took in a net-swelling number of fish. John does not call it a miracle, but it is reminiscent of the miraculous catch of fish that some of the disciples experienced when Jesus first called them (Luke 5:1-11).

4. *Why were the disciples in Galilee fishing?*

5. *What happened after they went out in their boat to fish?*

6. *What other event in the disciples’ life is like this great catch of fish?*

Jesus Cooked a Meal

John 21:7-9, KJV

7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.

8 And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging

John 21:7-9, NIV

⁷Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not

the net with fishes.

9 As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.

far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

With the net heavy with fish, one of the disciples, typically identified as John, recognized that it was Jesus who was hailing them from shore. When Peter heard John acknowledge this, Peter wrapped himself up in his cloak before jumping off the boat and heading ashore. It was a Jewish custom in those days for a person to clothe himself properly before greeting another person, so it would have been considered rude or disrespectful to greet someone wearing only a loincloth or in one's undergarments.

John's reference to a "fire of burning coals" (vs. 9) indicates that the fire Jesus built earlier was now down to coals. This along with the fish cooking on it and bread sitting nearby suggests that Jesus began preparing the meal long before the disciples reached the shore.

7. *How did Peter respond when he heard John acknowledge that it was Jesus who was speaking to them?*

8. *What is the significance that the fire had burned to coals, that there was fish cooking on it, and that there was bread nearby?*

Jesus Invited Them to Breakfast

John 21:10-14, KJV

10 Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.

11 Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was

John 21:10-14, NIV

¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹¹So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹²Jesus said to them, "Come

not the net broken.

12 Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

13 Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise.

14 This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.

and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

¹³Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When Peter "dragged the net ashore" (vs. 11), he likely just took the lead as the seven worked as a team to bring in the heavy load. Jesus' instruction to bring some fish to Him may indicate that what He was cooking on the coals was insufficient to feed all of them and that more fish needed to be added to the fire.

Once the fish were brought in, Jesus invited the seven to share a meal with Him. None of them asked, "Who are you?" Although they may initially have had some doubts regarding who was speaking to them, when Jesus invited them to breakfast, they knew it was the Lord.

They should not have been amazed that Jesus did this. This was the third time Jesus had appeared to some of His disciples following His resurrection. They had also spent three years with Jesus, learning much in the process about His character and nature. Jesus' invitation to fellowship with Him should therefore not have been a surprise!

9. *Why is it unlikely that Peter hauled the net in by himself?*

10. *What may Jesus' instruction to bring some fish to Him indicate?*

11. *Why should Jesus' invitation to the seven to fellowship with Him not have been a surprise?*

Why Are We So Surprised?

I might say I would never be surprised by Jesus' invitation to me to fellowship with Him. Yet I find myself responding more often than not as if I believed that Jesus does not want to spend time with me.

One of those times is when I am down in the dumps as the result of life throwing curves at me that I don't understand or when experiencing troubles that I can't cope with or fix. Rather than turning my attention upward, I often turn inward, wallowing in a pit of uncertainty, wondering where Jesus is in the midst of my problems, feeling that He has abandoned me.

Then there are those times when I'm caught in a cycle of sin. When I know I'm not doing what's right in God's eyes, it's easy to feel that He is disappointed with me and wants nothing to do with me. Guilt may cause me to turn away from Jesus in shame, pushing away the hand He is extending toward me.

But ironically, I also may feel out of fellowship with Jesus when things are going well. I may take for granted the blessings I've received from Him or am slow to acknowledge their source; sometimes I'm so busy with my daily pursuits that I fail to hear or respond to the hailing of Jesus from the shore; sometimes I spend so much time in my boat looking for a fish that I forget how much Jesus wants to be in the boat with me.

Jesus wants to spend time with me no matter the circumstances and is continually inviting me to fellowship with Him. It's critical I remember this, whether I'm in my boat or on the shore, whether I think I deserve it or not.

12. *In what circumstances do you find it difficult to believe that Jesus really wants to spend time with you?*

13. *Why do you think this is so?*

14. *What can help you to accept Jesus' invitation more readily to fellowship with Him?*

Jesus' Invitation to You

Jesus wants to spend time with us. But sometimes we let our daily pursuits or our personal troubles get in the way of recognizing or accepting this. What can help us to overcome this is setting aside some time each day to remind ourselves of Jesus' desire to fellowship with us no matter what we are doing or how we are feeling.

► *Take time each day this week to remind yourself that Jesus wants to spend time with you. Spend time with you; do something specific to accept His invitation to fellowship with Him. Write here or on an index card what you plan to do each day.*

KEY VERSE

Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

—John 21:12, KJV

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

—John 21:12, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 17 through April 23

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Matthew 10:28-42—Jesus Brings Danger and Conflict.

Tues. John 18:13-27—Peter Denies Jesus.

Wed. Ezekiel 18:13-27—Repent, Turn, and Live.

Thurs. 2 Corinthians 7:1-11—Godly Sorrow Produces Repentance.

Fri. Psalm 51:1-9—Blot Out My Transgressions.

Sat. Psalm 51:10-19—Create in Me a Clean Heart.

Sun. John 21:15-25—If You Love Me, Follow Me.

Jesus Reinstates Peter

Collen finished dressing but sat on the locker room bench, piqued by the conversation of the two men several lockers down.

One was saying he was tired of the “game.” His life had been full of disappointment after disappointment. He was empty, even after trying so many things. The other young man offered an occasional, “I know what you mean.”

Collen felt a slight tug in his heart. But who was he to say something after what he had done? He felt like David in Psalm 32:3-4, when he carried the burden of his unrepentant sin.

Because the weight had been too great for him, he called out to the Lord. At church, Mark had come to the altar twice. Later, he talked to one of the elders at the church.

“Brother, God forgave you the first time you repented,” said Elder Paul. “I don’t want to hear any more of the gory details. We should be grieved by our sins, but condemnation is not from God. It’s from the devil. So, pick yourself up and take your place in Christ. He’s got more things for you to do!”

Collen rehearsed Elder Paul’s words of encouragement and turned off the voice of condemnation in his head.

“Excuse me,” Collen said to the two men. “I’m sorry, but I have overheard much of your conversation.”

Then Collen began to witness the good news of Christ to them.

1. *What are some ways you sometimes feel or respond when you’ve wandered away from Jesus or failed Him in some way?*

2. *How does Jesus respond when this happens?*

3. *What should our response to our knowledge of this be?*

A Checkered Past

John 21:15-16, KJV

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.

John 21:15-16, NIV

¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

Peter had acknowledged that Jesus was the "Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16) and said if others fell away from Him, he never would (Matt. 26:33). But after Jesus was arrested, he denied three times that he knew Him (Matt. 26:69-75).

Given this context, it should be no surprise that Jesus addressed Peter after eating as "Simon son of John." Although Jesus once said that Simon would eventually be called Cephas, which when translated is Peter or "the rock" (John 1:42; Matt. 16:17-18), Peter had not yet arrived at the point where this was a valid description of him. He was still Simon and not the rock of faith he was destined to be.

Peter may have harbored some of his own doubts if things could be made right between himself and Jesus. The charcoal fire Jesus built on the shore (John 21:9) may have been a reminder of the fire that burned in the courtyard where he denied knowing Him (John 18:18). And, just as Peter denied Jesus three times, now Jesus asked three times if he loved Him. Peter must have wondered as this happened if Jesus would ever take him back and if so, under what conditions. The three questions Jesus asked

could have been a test to determine if Simon was ready to become Peter. And even though the three questions seem similar, there are some subtle differences.

The first time Jesus asked if Peter loved Him, it was probably to help Peter determine the depth of Peter's love for Jesus compared to other things he loved. Could Peter say that he loved Jesus more than the other disciples loved Him or if he loved Jesus more than he loved the other disciples? Considering Peter's rocky history, Jesus wanted Peter to say what or whom Peter loved more. Peter confirmed that he did love Jesus and said that this was something Jesus should already know.

The second time Jesus asked the question, His goal seems to have been to reinforce in Peter's mind how deep Peter's love was for Him. Some English translations precede the word "love" with "truly" (vs. 16). Did Peter truly love Him? Was Peter willing to put his whole heart into what was required to express his love for Him? Or was his love for Jesus superficial or only a fond affection for Him? Was Peter fully committed to love Jesus in mind, body, will, and spirit? Peter confirmed once again that he did love Jesus and said again that Jesus ought to know this.

What Jesus asked Peter to do as evidence of his love was to take care of His sheep. These sheep would be those who were to become followers of Jesus in the months and years ahead as well as those already following Him. Jesus asked Peter to feed His sheep (vs. 15) and to take care of them (vs. 16). What Jesus was asking Peter to do was to provide spiritual nourishment for His sheep as well as to provide for their physical needs. In short, Jesus was asking Peter to pastor His sheep.

4. *How might the circumstances described in today's passage have been a reminder to Peter of his past failures?*

5. *What did Jesus want Peter to confirm?*

6. *What were some differences between the first two questions Jesus asked?*

7. What did Jesus ask Peter to do if he truly loved Him?

A Challenging Future

John 21:17-19, KJV

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 girdest 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.

19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

John 21:17-19, NIV

¹⁷The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Jesus once again asked Peter if he loved Him. This was the third time Jesus asked the same question, and since Peter had denied three times that he knew Jesus (Matt. 26:69-75), it would now perhaps take three affirmations of his renewed commitment to Jesus to match the sin done earlier.

Peter was hurt that Jesus kept asking the same question. Some of this may have come from remembering how much it must have wounded Jesus when he denied knowing Him. But Peter most likely wanted to get back into a personal and fruitful relationship with Jesus and may

have wondered why Jesus wasn't accepting his answers. Was Jesus unwilling to forgive him? Was Jesus going to continue to hold his past against him?

But Jesus' questions need to be considered in the context of the final verses of today's passage. Jesus said that there was a time in Peter's life that he had control over many things. When he was young, he chose what he wore and could dress himself. As a fisherman, he chose when he went out on the lake and where he looked for fish. But if he truly loved Jesus and was prepared to do whatever came from his commitment to follow Him, he would lose control over many things. Peter would be asked to go to places and people he wanted nothing to do with. And he would end up dying in a horrible fashion, much like Jesus. Was He willing to give up everything to follow Jesus including his own life?

Perhaps that is what Jesus meant when He initially asked Peter, "Do you love me more than these?" (vs. 15). If Peter truly loved Him, he needed to be willing to give up his comfort, his livelihood, and everything he'd devoted his life to; his commitment to Jesus needed to be greater than some others' commitment to Him; and his love for Jesus needed to exceed the love he had for others.

Even though Peter had a history of failure, he was not beyond recovery; he was not beyond God's love. Jesus was ready to reinstate him so that Peter could soon become the rock Jesus said he was destined to be. What this would require from Peter was a commitment to fully and truly love Jesus and to be willing to do whatever Jesus asked, no matter what the cost.

8. *Why may Peter have been hurt by Jesus' repetition of the same question?*

9. *What was going to change if Peter expressed the type of love Jesus demanded?*

10. *What was required so that Peter could be reinstated and become the "rock" Jesus said he was destined to be?*

Jesus Loves You Still

I don't know how many times I've let Jesus down. And every time my faith or character falters, I end up feeling unworthy of the One who saved me. I know that I'm supposed to be salt and light to the world; I know I'm supposed to exhibit what Christ is like. Yet I blunder more often than not in doing this, I'm less like Jesus than I ought to be, and when it comes to sin, no matter how hard I try, I seem to keep on doing many of the things Jesus is urging me not to do.

Sometimes I lay on my bed at night weeping over my inability to live the Christian life in ways that are pleasing in God's eyes. But ironically, sometimes it's in times of grief over my failures that I feel closest to Jesus. It is sometimes in those moments of despair that I end up recognizing that Jesus doesn't hold anything against me and that He's always ready to accept me back into His arms no matter what I've done.

As I think about this and what Jesus did to show He was ready to reinstate Peter, I'm reminded that being restored to a close and fruitful relationship with Jesus can be a one-time event. There can be that dramatic moment when we realize how far we've drifted away from Jesus, understand what is required to be restored to Him, and accept once-and-for-all Jesus' willingness to bring us back into His arms. But it can also be something that happens more often if we've drifted away from Him for a time, experience guilt or shame for doing so, and recognize once again that no matter what we've done that we are never beyond the reach of His love.

11. *Have there been times when you felt worthless in the eyes of Jesus or that what you did was so bad that He would never love or accept you again? Explain your answer.*

12. *How can today's passage be encouraging as you consider times you may have felt this way?*

13. *How does Jesus want you to respond to His promise that you are never beyond the reach of His love?*

You Are Not Beyond His Love

The apostle Paul wrote that “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). These verses as well as what we learned in today’s passage show us we are never beyond God’s love, no matter what we’ve done.

► Write “You are not beyond God’s love” here or on an index card. This week, also write how remembering this sentence helped you recall His love when you wandered away from Jesus or failed Him in some way.

KEY VERSE

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.
—John 21:15, KJV

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”
—John 21:15, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of April 24 through April 30

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20—Go and Make Disciples.
- Tues.** Joel 2:1-15—The Day of the Lord Approaches.
- Wed.** Hebrews 1:1-14—The Son Sits at God’s Right Hand.
- Thurs.** Hebrews 8:1-13—Jesus, Our Great High Priest.
- Fri.** Hebrews 9:8-22—An Eternal Inheritance.
- Sat.** Psalm 24—Lift Up Your Heads, O Gates!
- Sun.** Acts 1:1-11—You Shall Receive Power.

Jesus Makes a Promise

Tamyra sighed deeply when she looked at her number: 56. The large LED sign in the Department of Motor Vehicles read: 35. She took a seat on a window ledge a few feet away from a woman who was staring intently and frowning at her phone.

“They just called 35. I’m number 53. I’ll be there when I get done,” the woman said irritably.

Tamyra looked at the woman and gave a smile and a greeting. Her name was Velinda, and Tamyra gave her reassuring prompts as she overheard the phone conversation. She picked up that not only did Velinda seem irritated about the DMV, but with her boyfriend’s attitude as well.

“I guess I’m frustrated and tired,” said Velinda.

“I know some help for that,” Tamyra said.

“What?” Velinda said suspiciously.

Tamyra began sharing her salvation and conversion story.

“I used to go to church regularly,” Velinda said. “But how can I believe stuff from so long ago?”

“I’m a witness to what God is doing,” Tamyra replied.

“I know the Lord’s heart, and He loves both of us.”

Velinda seemed to relax, and Tamyra continued to share the goodness of God that she had come to know.

“Fifty-three!”

“That’s me,” Velinda said, jumping up. “Thanks for talking to me. I will text you when I get out of here. Let’s keep in touch.”

“That would be great!” smiled Tamyra.

- 1.** *What does it mean to be a “witness” for Jesus?*
- 2.** *What role does the Holy Spirit play as we witness for Jesus?*
- 3.** *Why do we need to be a witness for Jesus wherever we are?*

LESSON FOCUS: Witness everywhere—starting where you are.

Many Convincing Proofs

Acts 1:1-3, KJV

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

Acts 1:1-3, NIV

¹In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ²until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

What is unique about the Book of Acts (and the Gospel of Luke) is that both were written to an individual named Theophilus. Luke addressed him in his Gospel as “most excellent,” which seems to indicate he was a high-ranking Roman official.

The former book Luke refers to, of course, is the Gospel of Luke. So, in a sense, the Book of Acts is a sequel to the story of Jesus revealed in the third Gospel. Luke told Theophilus that Jesus gave many “proofs” (vs. 3) of His resurrection. Among these were the empty tomb and the apostles seeing, touching, and eating with the risen Christ. Hundreds of eyewitnesses saw Jesus after the Resurrection. For 40 days, Luke said, in a sense, Jesus “tied up all the loose ends” for these 11 men, teaching them more about “the kingdom of God,” which they would soon be sharing with the rest of the world.

4. *To whom was the Book of Acts written?*

5. *What time period did Luke cover in Acts 1:3?*

You Will Receive Power

Acts 1:4-8, KJV

4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

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.

Acts 1:4-8, NIV

⁴On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command:

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

On one of the 40 days Jesus was with the disciples, the Lord had a very specific command for them. They were not to leave Jerusalem until they had received a gift from the heavenly Father. And what was this gift to be?

Jesus said that His relative John had baptized with water—but the one to come, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). These are the words Jesus echoed

when He told the apostles what they were to expect. The heavenly Father would give them the Holy Spirit, as He told them about previously (see John 14:15-27). Jesus gave no timeline as to when this promised Holy Spirit was going to arrive, or even what the Spirit was going to look like or do. They were simply to stay put, wait, and watch.

Sometimes old, entrenched beliefs die hard. All of Jerusalem, including these Jewish disciples, cultivated the hope in their hearts that the Messiah would deliver Israel from its oppressors (whoever they happened to be at the time). When that happened, the Messiah would restore Israel to the political and economic power it enjoyed at its peak during the reigns of David and Solomon. Yes, Jesus the Messiah was clearly back with them—but Rome still held an iron fist over their lives. Now that Jesus was back from the dead, perhaps now He would begin the political revolution? At least the disciples could ask.

Jesus does not rebuke their belief that Israel will one day be restored. He did remind them, however, that the timing of this event was entirely in the hands of God—and He had not revealed when or how that would happen. But instead, Jesus gave them global marching orders that reflected His words in the great commission. They were to begin to preach about the kingdom of God where they were most comfortable (Jerusalem), and then to extend their reach into Judea (again, do-able), and then to Samaria (which was very dangerous), and then into the great unknown—the ends of the earth.

As we look at the lives of the apostles, we see that they did this very thing. But they only did that after they had received the strength, fortitude, and courage to fulfill this command by being filled with the Holy Spirit—whenever He arrived.

6. *What did Jesus command the disciples to do?*

7. *What did Jesus promise the Holy Spirit would do for the disciples?*

The Ascension

Acts 1:9-11, KJV

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Acts 1:9-11, NIV

⁹After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Jesus then began to ascend into heaven and eventually disappeared into a cloud. As the disciples watched Him ascend into the sky, they were clearly perplexed as to what just happened; so they kept staring.

To clear up this confusion, two men dressed in white (presumably angels) asked them why they kept staring into the sky. They clarified that Jesus would return to them in the same way He departed—they just did not know when. It’s interesting that the angels used the phrase “taken from you” to describe what happened. They had felt that before, as the Roman soldier arrested Jesus, flogged Him, and then nailed Him to a cross. Now that Jesus was leaving them again, they may have felt something similar. However, this time, they had hope. One day, Jesus would return to earth in bodily form, in the same way that He left.

8. *How did Jesus depart from His disciples?*

9. *What did the messengers of God say to the disciples as they looked into the sky?*

Be the Jesus They See

While searching for her favorite dessert in the grocery store, Charisa heard a screaming toddler. She calmly soothed the toddler and then turned to the young mother and said, "Don't worry. God will strengthen you over this time. Have a blessed day." The mother looked at her in bewilderment and said, "Thank you."

Later that day, Charisa was sitting at the bus stop when she saw an elderly man carrying a package too heavy for him. She took the package from him and walked him to where he was going. When the elderly man thanked her, she simply replied, "God bless you."

While riding the bus home, Charisa sat next to a troubled teenager girl. She smiled at the girl and said, "Jesus loves you." The girl looked confused. Charisa asked her if she could tell her about Jesus' love. The girl nodded her head. Then Charisa simply and briefly explained how Jesus came to live on earth, died and was resurrected that we may experience His love and know Him personally. She concluded by explaining how to accept Jesus through prayer and grow in Him through reading the Bible and Christian fellowship.

When Charisa finished, the girl smiled at her and said, "I needed to hear that today. Thank you."

Charisa listened to the Holy Spirit that lived within her to know how to exemplify Jesus to others. She wasn't a preacher and had never gone to Bible school or into full-time ministry. Yet, she knew that God had called her to be a witness for Him. No matter where Charisa went, she was the "Jesus people could see."

10. *What role does the Holy Spirit play in the lives of the witness and the listener?*

11. *What are some ways you have seen others be a witness for Jesus?*

12. *Are you the Jesus others can see at home, work, and in your community? Explain your answer.*

Lifestyle Witnessing

Is witnessing when you go out with the evangelism team from church, share a Gospel tract with someone, or give a few dollars to a hungry person? All of these are kinds of witnessing. Jesus calls us to a lifestyle of witnessing. The chorus from the old hymn “Lord, Lay Some Soul upon My Heart” by Leon Tucker explains the approach to witnessing with our lives: “Lord, lay some soul upon my heart and love that soul through me; and may I ever do my part to win that soul for Thee.”

► *Ask God to help you be a witness for Jesus in your life. Daily pray and obey the Holy Spirit’s leading. He led the disciples; He will lead you as well. Write here some daily opportunities you have to witness (on social media, when eating out, with a neighbor, etc.).*

KEY VERSE

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. —Acts 1:8, KJV

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” —Acts 1:8, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of May 1 through May 7

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 68:17-19, 24-35—God’s Strength Revealed.
- Tues.** John 14:15-27—The Spirit of Truth.
- Wed.** John 16:1-15—The Spirit Testifies of Jesus.
- Thurs.** Psalm 16—The Lord My Chosen Portion.
- Fri.** Acts 2:1-13—Amazement at the Spirit’s Power.
- Sat.** Acts 2:14-28—The Promise Fulfilled.
- Sun.** Acts 2:29-42—Receive the Gift of the Spirit.

The Day of Pentecost

With a grunt, Niesha wedged a container of shoes into her overloaded car and slammed the passenger door. That was the last of it. She had emptied the small apartment of all her personal items.

Things had started out well enough for Niesha in the small town. The 22-year-old had moved to get away from her family and establish her own rules. Niesha found good work as an administrative assistant at the local community college. She met Keri soon after, and the two became roommates.

Niesha had never been a “party girl,” though she always enjoyed hanging out with her friends. However, Keri quickly indoctrinated her. It got to a place where the two friends’ “night life” was so awful that Niesha thought she would be lost forever.

Niesha wondered if her family had been praying for her because she called her parents and asked if she could move back home.

“Yes, baby,” said her mother. “Your father and I have been praying for you.”

On the drive home, Niesha thought about her upbringing. Her parents raised her in church, but Niesha hadn’t been interested. It had always seemed like her parents’ faith was enough.

“Lord, I never thought I’d be in this awful place,” said Niesha, reaching for the tissue box on the passenger’s seat. “Please help me, Lord. I really need you. I know I’m a mess. Please save me.”

1. *How would you describe sin? How does the Bible describe sin?*

2. *How does sin keep us from knowing God?*

3. *Why is Jesus the only name by which we can be saved?*

The Holy Spirit Arrives

Acts 2:1-8, KJV

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

Acts 2:1-8, NIV

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.

²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

⁵Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. ⁷Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language?"

The day Jesus had predicted before His ascension had arrived. The Holy Spirit came into the house where the disciples were with a roar of wind. As the wind blew, flames hovered over the heads of each believer, then the believers

started speaking “in other tongues” (vs. 4) unfamiliar to them. Because of Pentecost, Jews from many nations were there, bewildered because they were hearing something about the good news of God in their native tongues. This miracle grabbed the attention of the crowd and lent credibility to the heavenly message they were hearing.

4. *What happened to the believers in the upper room on the day of Pentecost?*

5. *What did the pilgrims of Jerusalem hear when this event happened?*

The Spirit Poured Out

Acts 2:14-24, KJV

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:

15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

18 And on my servants

Acts 2:14-24, NIV

¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

¹⁵These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:

21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

¹⁹I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

²²"Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."

Peter told the crowd they were not drunk this early. They were hearing the Gospel in multiple languages and the fulfilling of Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of God's Spirit during the "last days" when the Messiah would appear (Joel 2:28-32). But rather than seeing this as

God's work in Jesus, they "put him to death" (vs. 23). Still, this was a "deliberate" part of God's plan. Salvation comes from what Jesus did for us on the Cross.

6. *What Old Testament prophet did Peter quote to explain what had just happened?*

7. *How did Peter explain and apply this prediction of the Old Testament prophet?*

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:37-39, KJV

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

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.

Acts 2:37-39, NIV

³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

³⁸Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

When some listeners were "cut to the heart" (vs. 37) and asked Peter what the next step was, he said they needed to repent, be forgiven of their sins in Jesus' name, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter made it clear that all who call upon the Lord will be saved.

8. *What was the convicting response of those who heard Peter preach?*

9. *What do all new believers receive (that they did not have previously)?*

Only Jesus Can Save Us

Derrick and Jerome were serving five years in prison for assault charges. Prison brought many challenges. Neither Derrick or Jerome thought they would make it through the five years.

Then, one day a group of Black men visited their prison. The men started to share how they had once been in the same prison and understood their fears and hopelessness. At the end of each man's short talk, they shared how calling on the name of the Lord to be saved and having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ made a difference in their prison time and helped them re-enter society. The men also challenged them to read the Gospel of John and gave them a copy in a small pamphlet.

Both Derrick and Jerome heard the same talks and received the same pamphlets. Jerome left the meeting with no interest in learning more about Jesus. But, Derrick pondered what he had heard and chose to start reading the Gospel of John each night. When he read John 3, his eyes were opened to what it meant to know Jesus.

The next time the men came to visit the prison, Derrick requested to meet with one of them privately. The man simply and truthfully answered Derrick's remaining questions. He explained that calling on the name of the Lord and being saved wouldn't shorten his time in prison or make the challenges go away. He explained that belief in Jesus would change Derrick inwardly and give him hope.

During the men's next visit, Derrick stood up and shared how he had called on the name of the Lord and been saved. Jerome heard Derrick's story but showed no interest in knowing Jesus.

10. *What role does God's Word have in someone choosing to be saved?*

11. *Why is it important to understand that Jesus is the only name by which one can be saved?*

12. *Have you ever called on the name of the Lord for your personal salvation? Explain your answer.*

The Most Important Decision in Your Life

Decisions, decisions, and more decisions are required of us daily—from deciding what we will eat, to what clothes we will wear, to where we will live, to who we will marry. Yet, the most important decision any human being will make is, “Where will I spend eternity?” Jesus said in John 5:24, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.” The decision to call on the name of the Lord and be saved is a decision that everyone must make—now, not later.

► *Have you made this decision to be saved through calling on the name of the Lord? If not, why not? If yes, how can you share this truth with others?*

KEY VERSE

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.

—Acts 2:39, KJV

“The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” —Acts 2:39, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS BEFORE NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 8 through May 14

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Luke 10:1-9— Sent to Preach and Heal.

Tues. Luke 10:10-24— Rejoice in Salvation, Not Power.

Wed. Psalm 41— God Protects and Preserves.

Thurs. Psalm 42— My Soul Longs for God.

Fri. Isaiah 35:1-10— Sorrow Will Flee.

Sat. Acts 3:1-11— Walking, Leaping, and Praising.

Sun. Acts 3:12-26— Prophets Foretold, God Fulfilled.

Jumping for Joy

“What are words that give life?” asked the man, reading the back of Elise Oates’ t-shirt in a grocery store.

Elise straightened up from resting on the grocery cart and turned around to see a man with bright, inquisitive eyes.

“Words that Give Life is my website,” she said. “It has Bible study resources for Bible study teachers and those wanting spiritual growth.”

“Really? Then you must be an answer to prayer.”

“How so?” asked Elise. “My name is Elise. What is yours?”

“I’m Tabari. I accepted Christ three years ago, and there is so much I don’t know. I’ve been witnessing to two old friends, and they’ve asked me to do a Bible study! They come to my church when they can. Still, I want to dig deeper into the Scriptures.”

“Oh, wow!” Elise said, not moving up in the checkout line.

“Can you step out of line and talk more?” Tabari asked.

When the two pushed their carts aside, Elise continued. “I have lessons online that are available for children, teens, and adults. All the resources are free.”

“You must have a lot to be able to do this?”

“Goodness, no. I don’t have much,” said Elise.

“So, what do you get out of it?” Tabari asked.

“I get joy in knowing,” smiled Elise, “that I am helping the Body of Christ.”

1. What offers have you seen that are supposed to bring your life satisfaction?

2. What does Jesus have to offer people that the world doesn’t?

3. Why is it important that you give to others in the name of Jesus Christ?

An Expectant Heart

Acts 3:1-5, KJV

1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Acts 3:1-5, NIV

¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ²Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!"

⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

In Acts 3, two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and John, went to the temple at the hour of prayer. The Jews prayed at three times during the day: 9:00 A.M. (the third hour), 3:00 P.M. (the ninth hour), and sunset.

When approaching the temple gate called Beautiful, the two came upon a man who had been lame from his birth. His condition was so severe that he had to be carried to the temple, where he would ask for alms from those enroute to the temple courts, a method by which God provided for those who could not work and provide for themselves. To give alms to someone in need was a commendable act of compassion. As the Lord said, "Give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you" (Luke 11:41, KJV).

Upon seeing Peter and John approach, the man did what he had always done to people while there at the

temple gate: he asked them for alms. However, instead of giving the man some money and simply continuing on their way with hardly a glance, the disciples stopped and looked directly at him with a fixed gaze. Then Peter demanded that the man do the same. Something truly wonderful was about to happen, and it was important for the lame man to understand fully who was responsible.

The man's heart was expectant and open to what Peter and John had for him. The Scripture does not say what he expected, but it was likely money, and perhaps significantly more than usual, considering the somewhat unusual nature of the disciples' interaction with him.

4. *Where were Peter and John headed and why?*

5. *Whom did they find there, and what was he doing?*

6. *How did the disciples get the man's attention, and what did he expect?*

An Unexpected Gift

Acts 3:6-8, KJV

6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

Acts 3:6-8, NIV

6Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

Having gotten the lame man's full attention, Peter began by telling him that they did not have what he was expecting, which was silver or gold. Rather, they had something

far more valuable to offer the lame man than what he was expecting.

Though the lame man may have been disappointed after hearing the first part of what Peter said, what came next was absolutely amazing. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, Peter commanded the man to walk.

No sooner had the man gotten to his feet with Peter's help than he knew that he had been healed—his feet and ankle bones instantly received full strength from the Lord. Having jumped up, he was immediately able to walk, as well. If walking were not enough, the once-lame man also began to jump with joy and to praise God as he accompanied the disciples into the temple courts. The man did not simply limp along with the help of a crutch or by leaning on Peter and John. Rather, his jumping for joy clearly showed that he was fully healed. And since the man had never walked in his life, not only were his feet and ankles healed, but the ability to maintain his full balance, even while jumping around, had also been miraculously bestowed upon him. When our Lord acts on our behalf, He does so with absolute perfection and in full measure.

7. *What did Peter have to offer the lame man?*

8. *How did Peter help the man?*

9. *What was the man's response?*

An Astonished Crowd

Acts 3:9-11, KJV

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God:
10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.
11 And as the lame man

Acts 3:9-11, NIV

⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

¹¹While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.

As the man entered the temple courts walking, jumping, and praising God, it did not take long for others to notice. Furthermore, it soon became clear to the crowd that he was the man who had sat at the Beautiful Gate asking for alms. And with the recognition came a sense of wonder and amazement. Such is the case when God acts on behalf of His people. We are filled with joy, awe, and wonder when the Lord answers our prayers for the terminally ill person who is declared cancer free by a baffled oncologist. But we should also be just as awed and joyful when God answers the prayer for salvation of the hardened sinner who after many years finally trusts in Christ for forgiveness.

Once the people had come to grips with the wonder of what had happened, they came running to the three men, joining them at Solomon's Colonnade. This awe-inspiring event opened wide the door for Peter to present the Gospel to the amazed crowd with great success. As later noted, "many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). This, in turn, pushed the religious authorities to the point of arresting Peter and John and hauling them off to an impromptu trial. Those in charge understood that preaching in the name of Jesus of Nazareth was becoming a direct threat to their power and way of life so they commanded the apostles to stop speaking in the name of our Lord, but to no avail. Peter and John were committed to continue ministering in Jesus' name (vss. 5-22).

10. *What did the people observe and recognize about the man?*

11. *What were the people then filled with?*

12. *How did the people approach Peter, John, and the healed man?*

Like the Good Samaritan

The story of the good Samaritan reminds us that as Christians, we have much to offer the world in Jesus' name. When the man going down to Jericho from Jerusalem was viciously attacked by robbers and left to die, a priest and then a Levite—fellow Jews who should have been concerned for the man—passed him by without helping. Instead, a hated Samaritan took pity on the man, bandaged his wounds, and took him to a nearby inn for rest and recuperation. The Samaritan even offered to pay all the man's bills for his stay.

Like the Samaritan, as Christians, we have much to offer others in the name of Jesus Christ. And it is a great blessing and privilege to be able to minister to others in His name. Furthermore, considering the example of Peter and John, money need not play a big role, if any, in that ministry. We can provide a meal, give a ride to church or the store, visit a shut in, pick up a prescription, spend a little time on the phone, send a card or text, etc. God's people have so much to offer others in Jesus' name when we put our minds and hearts to it. And when we do, we will find that we are blessed as much or more than the ones to whom we minister.

Clearly what happened to the once-lame man was very important to him and those who cared for him. However, it runs a distant second to a far more important outcome, namely bringing glory and praise to the name of Jesus Christ. It is good to be a blessing to others, but it is far better to be a blessing in the name of Jesus.

13. *What led the good Samaritan and Peter and John to help those they did?*

14. *What are some simple ways you can offer Jesus to people and bring glory to His name?*

15. *Why should we not take credit for blessing someone in Jesus' name?*

God's Glow

How is your light shining for Jesus in the world? Supernatural healings such as the healing of the lame man are wondrous, but there are other ways we can offer Jesus to others. As He said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16, KJV).

► *Where can you be shining a light for Jesus today? For example, you can offer a listening ear in Jesus' name to someone who may be suffering from the death of a loved one, loss of employment, divorce, or any of life's tragedies.*

KEY VERSE

And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

—Acts 3:8, KJV

He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

—Acts 3:8, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 15 through May 21

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Acts 6:8-15—The Witness of Stephen.

Tues. Acts 7:48-8:2—The First Martyr.

Wed. Isaiah 60:9-14—The Far Countries Wait for God.

Thurs. Zechariah 8:1-8, 20-23—Many People Will Come.

Fri. Psalm 139:1-10—God Is Present Everywhere.

Sat. Acts 8:4-17—Samaritans Embrace the Gospel.

Sun. Acts 8:26-40—The Spirit Guides Us.

An Ethiopian Is Baptized

Zyaire's pastor's voice had receded to the background of this mind. He was focused on his shortcomings. Pastor Coleman had called the men together to go out and witness Christ in the church's neighborhood. They had been divided into groups of twos and Zyaire was paired with Rashard, whom he knew a little bit.

"I'll just let you do the talking," Zyaire said as they made their way on their route.

"Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, and let Him guide you," answered Rashard. "God has worked in your life, and you have valuable things to share."

During their canvassing, Zyaire and Rashard greeted a man in his driveway washing a 1975 Ford Mustang.

The two men ended up standing around the vehicle, introducing themselves to the man whose name was Demont. Zyaire and Demont exchanged vintage car talk for a while. Demont said he wanted to sell the classic car but was having trouble getting it in topnotch running order.

Zyaire felt it was the time to turn the conversation but didn't know quite how.

"I'm glad we don't have to get ourselves fixed up first," offered Zyaire. "We are priceless to God just as we are."

"Man, I don't know," Demont said. "I may look good on the outside, like this Mustang, but I've got a big mess going on inside."

"It's nothing God doesn't already know," Zyaire said. "The Lord loves you, and He is the great mechanic."

1. *In what ways has the Holy Spirit helped you in your life?*

2. *Why do we need to depend on the Spirit?*

3. *How could the Holy Spirit help you share the Gospel?*

Led by the Spirit

Acts 8:29-31, KJV

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readeſt?

31 And he ſaid, How can I, except ſome man ſhould guide me? And he deſired Philip that he would come up and ſit with him.

Acts 8:29-31, NIV

²⁹The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

³¹"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Having preached in Samaria with good success, Philip was instructed by the Spirit to head south past Jerusalem to the road to Gaza. When Philip arrived on the road he observed a man from Ethiopia, a eunuch, the treasurer to the Ethiopian queen, sitting in his chariot and reading out loud, as was typical practice, from the Book of Isaiah. He had gone "to Jerusalem to worship" and was "on his way home" (vss. 26-28).

After Philip approached the eunuch, he asked if the man understood what he was reading; the queen's treasurer indicated that he could not unless someone explained it to him. With that acknowledgement, the man invited Philip to join him in the chariot to provide the needed explanation. Philip promptly accepted the invitation.

4. *After arriving on the road to Gaza and observing the Ethiopian in his chariot, what further instructions did Philip receive from the Holy Spirit?*

5. *Upon complying with the Spirit's instructions, what did Philip hear and then ask?*

6. *How did the queen's treasurer respond to Philip's question?*

Enlightened by the Spirit

Acts 8:32-35, KJV

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:

33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Acts 8:32-35, NIV

³²This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Having joined the official in the chariot, Philip saw the Scripture passage was from Isaiah, specifically Isaiah 53:7-8 (with some differences because the Ethiopian was reading from the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament). This was a divine appointment between these two men—the Ethiopian was led by the Holy Spirit to read one of the clearest Messianic prophecies in the entire Old Testament. The man then asked Philip to whom was the prophet referring, himself or some other person? This gave the evangelist the blessed opportunity to help the man understand that the prophecy was about the suffering and exalted Messiah, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. It is from that very passage of Scripture that Philip began to tell the man about Jesus and the way of salvation from sin.

Since the text says that Philip “began” (vs. 35) with these two verses from Isaiah, it is very likely that he went on to cover the rest of Isaiah 53, along with other passages that foretold the Messiah. Like a spotless lamb, the Messiah was led to the slaughter as the perfect sacrifice for sin (Isa. 53:3-7). Though perfectly innocent, our Lord died as a criminal for the transgressions of His people and was buried in a rich man’s tomb (vss. 8-9). By His obedience unto death, Jesus carried out the will of His heavenly Father. Therefore, with His resurrection from the grave and ascension into heaven, our Lord saves and justifies all who come to Him in faith by bearing their iniquities upon Himself (vss. 10-12).

7. *From which passage of Scripture was the Ethiopian reading?*

8. *What question did the Ethiopian ask Philip?*

9. *How did Philip respond?*

Rejoicing in the Spirit

Acts 8:36-40, KJV

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

39 And when they were come up

Acts 8:36-40, NIV

³⁶As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”

³⁸And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but

out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Whether stated explicitly as in the KJV (vs. 37), or implicit as in the NIV, the context of the passage shows the Ethiopian understood Philip's explanation of who Jesus is from Isaiah and any other Old Testament passages Philip used. And based on that understanding and the leading of the Spirit, the treasurer trusted the Lord for forgiveness of sins. Furthermore, he had an understanding of the concept of baptism, perhaps from personal observation while worshiping in Jerusalem, or from Philip's teaching, or some combination of the two. Therefore, when they approached a body of water, the man indicated that he wanted to be baptized.

After commanding the chariot to stop, the Ethiopian and Philip went down into the water, and Philip baptized him there. And when they came out of the water, Philip's work was finished, so the Spirit of God took the evangelist away for work elsewhere. Though he would not see his benefactor again, the Ethiopian's joy was not abated in the least, for our passage says that he continued on his way rejoicing. The Ethiopian's newly found faith in Christ was a great source of joy for him as he traveled back to his homeland.

10. *As they were approaching some water, what did the Ethiopian ask Philip?*

11. *What happened after the Ethiopian official gave the command to stop the chariot?*

12. *What was the Ethiopian's heart condition after continuing on his way?*

Our Friend, the Holy Spirit

We have been commissioned by God to share the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the world. We have the Spirit's help when we share the Good News (see Mark 13:11). We can trust the Holy Spirit to do what Scripture says He will always do:

-The Holy Spirit teaches. He teaches the ways and thoughts of God. He knows all and sees all. Psalm 143:10 confirms, "Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."

-The Holy Spirit guides. He knows which way to go and not to go. He leads and guides to all truth and righteousness. "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever" (John 14:16).

-The Holy Spirit comforts. He comforts the broken and those suffering and in pain. The Spirit reminds what God said. As John 14:26 says, "But the Advocate, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

-The Holy Spirit intercedes. He prays for us and champions our success. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God" (Rom. 8:26-27).

If we are to help lost souls find Christ, we must depend on the Spirit.

13. *What comfort do you have knowing the Spirit is always with us?*

14. *Why would we be reluctant to share the Gospel when we have the Spirit to help and guide us?*

15. *When is the Spirit available to help us share the Good News?*

Say 'Yes!'

The Holy Spirit will let you know the will of God. He will let you know the plans and purposes of God. Be open to His leading and guidance. You will be surprised who He leads and guides you to share the Good News with. Someone is waiting for your obedience and your “yes” to the leading of God.

► *Write a big “Yes!” and sign your name in the space below to let the Holy Spirit know that you are ready for Him to guide you to someone who needs to know Jesus and you will depend on His help in sharing the Good News.*

KEY VERSE

And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. —Acts 8:38, KJV

And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. —Acts 8:38, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 22 through May 28

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Psalm 19—The Heavens Tell God's Glory.
- Tues.** Galatians 1:10-24—Responding to the Gospel.
- Wed.** Philippians 3:1-14—Only Christ Matters.
- Thurs.** Philippians 3:15-21—Our Citizenship Is in Heaven.
- Fri.** Acts 9:1-9—Blinded by the Light.
- Sat.** Acts 9:10-22—Saul Preaches Jesus.
- Sun.** Acts 9:23-31—Saul Escapes to Jerusalem.

Saul of Tarsus

Tyesha hates you,” Courtney said to her friend Alicia. “You’re pretty, with a great husband and kids, you have a wonderful job.”

The two women were talking about their coworker Tyesha, who had spread lies and ugliness about Alicia—Alicia was an ineffective, bossy manager, and she thought she was better than everyone else with her “Christianity.”

But when Alicia heard one of Tyesha’s children had been in the hospital with a serious illness and had recently come home, she wanted to do more than pray.

Tyesha was surprised when Alicia called to express her concern and asked if she could deliver a gift basket from work. Tyesha was pleased with the Edible Arrangement bouquet. But her mouth dropped and stayed opened as she opened all four gift cards—a \$100 grocery card, \$100 gas card, and \$50 each to two nearby restaurants.

“All of this couldn’t have come from our small unit,” Tyesha said candidly.

“We care about you and your daughter Makesha,” replied Alicia.

“I’ve been so hateful to you,” Tyesha said, looking down.

“You are dear to me because you are dear to Christ,” smiled Alicia. “Whatever pain you may have, the Lord wants to heal it and renew you.”

1. *What kinds of people have you met who seem like they would never be interested in Jesus? Why do you think that?*

2. *Do you know anyone who had a poor reputation before giving their life to Christ? How would you describe their Christian witness today?*

3. *What are some ways you can build closer relationships with people who are far from the Lord without being tempted into sin yourself?*

God Calls Ananias—and Ananias Protests

Acts 9:9-14, KJV

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

Acts 9:9-14, NIV

⁹For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹²In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

At a house in Damascus, for three days after encountering the risen Jesus on the road to the city, Saul remained blind; furthermore, he "did not eat or drink anything" (vs. 9). His encounter with Jesus had shaken him to the core; he now realized that he had not only sinned against the Church but against Jesus Himself, who Saul now

recognized as Lord (vs. 5). In modern terms, Saul literally could not function like a normal human being. And yet, as verse 11 tells us, Saul had still been actively seeking the Lord in prayer. He certainly had much to pray about now.

In verse 10, the scene shifted to elsewhere in Damascus, to the disciple Ananias. Ananias is one of those unsung heroes of faith—men and women who do what they have to do, without recognition or reward. We know practically nothing about Ananias, yet God used this faithful disciple to lead Saul into the Kingdom.

Just as he had to Saul, Jesus “called to [Ananias] in a vision.” Ananias too recognized the Lord, who then instructed Ananias to go to the house of a man named Judas, “on Straight Street”—which extended lengthwise through the city—where he would find Saul, praying (vs. 11). The Lord further explained that not only had Saul been prepared for Ananias’s arrival, but that he had been told the reason for his imminent coming: “In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight” (vs. 12).

Ananias did not hold back from expressing his reservations, telling the Lord of the reports he had heard about Saul “and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem” (vs. 13). Furthermore, Ananias knew Saul had come to Damascus “with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name” (vs. 14). Therefore, before going to meet this (now former) enemy of the Church, Ananias needed to be certain. Despite the fact that Jesus Himself had given the instructions, Ananias had little confidence that this mission would end well for him. Of course, the Lord already knew better.

4. *What was Saul’s condition at the beginning of this passage?*

5. *What did Jesus instruct Ananias to do?*

6. *What was Ananias’s initial response?*

God Responds—and Ananias Obeys

Acts 9:15-17, KJV

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Acts 9:15-17, NIV

¹⁵But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

While Ananias' reservations were understandable from a human perspective, the perfect, risen Lord would have none of it. He first gave Ananias an imperative—"Go!"—although He then gave Ananias a fuller explanation for his mission: "This man" who had so vigorously opposed the Church would become an even more vigorous advocate for Jesus. In Jesus' own words, Saul ("who was also called Paul," Acts 13:9) was "my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel" (vs. 15). At a time when the Church was largely still in its infancy and often underground, Jesus told Ananias in no uncertain terms that Saul would be taking His message throughout the Roman world, even to kings.

However, Jesus also made clear to Ananias that Saul's mission would not simply be filled with triumph after

triumph—as if in some way the rest of the early church’s suffering would somehow be for nothing. Indeed, Jesus would show Saul, maybe above all others in the early church, “how much he must suffer for my name” (vs. 16). That suffering would in fact commence almost immediately after Saul’s spiritual and physical restoration.

Ananias was convinced, and obedient; as verse 17 states, he “went to the house and entered it.” Perhaps there was still a bit of human reservation, but he did exactly as Jesus commanded. He went to Saul, and shared what Jesus had shown him: “Placing his hands on Saul, he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here. . . .’” This was confirmation of the Lord’s work in both of them—they had both been witnesses of the risen Jesus, giving the same orders to both. Saul, the enemy of the Church, was indeed now a “Brother.” Ananias then reiterated the rest of his mission: Jesus had “sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” This statement would be fulfilled immediately (see vss. 18-19). Saul would not just be healed—he would be filled with the Holy Spirit for the work that lay ahead of him.



A Roman arch on Straight Street in modern Damascus.

Photo: Bernard Gagnon

7. *How did Jesus respond to Ananias’ reservations?*

8. *What did Jesus tell Ananias about Saul and his future mission?*

9. *How did Ananias respond to Jesus’ call?*

Forgiving the Unforgiveable

In 2006 an unspeakable tragedy occurred at a one-room schoolhouse in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. An unstable man took a group of young Amish girls hostage, injuring five and killing five others with gunshots before taking his own life. School shootings have become all too common, but this particular event carried an added layer of tragedy because of the peaceful rural religious lifestyle of the Amish community.

This was not the only remarkable facet of the story, however. On the very day of the shooting, the grandfather of one of the murdered girls warned his relatives, "We must not think evil of this man." Similarly, an Amish father said, "He had a mother and a wife and a soul and now he's standing before a just God." Members of the Amish community comforted the shooter's widow, parents, and parents-in-law, attended his funeral, and invited his widow to the funeral of one of the victims. These acts of forgiveness and love drew international attention.

Forgiveness such as this doesn't occur in a vacuum. In a tragedy, most people react viscerally and instinctively. Imagine the years of practice these brothers and sisters had at forgiving daily offenses, large and small, to create such a profound community response of Christlike love!

When we are tempted to hold a grudge, maybe the story of this gentle Amish community could inspire us to live a life free from hatred and revenge. What kind of a world would it be if we all lived like that?

10. *Discuss an example of a time when you forgave someone (no names) for a great offense against you. How did you do it? What did you feel like afterward?*

11. *Who in your life right now needs to be shown love even though they have hurt you? Pray for them with a trusted partner.*

12. *What counsel would you give someone who is having difficulty forgiving another's offense and expressing love for them?*

Loving Like Jesus

An old saying goes, “You may be the only Bible some people read.” Since one of the most central messages the Bible communicates is love—God’s love for us and His desire that we love one another—how can we communicate that message to those who resist reading His Word?

► *What are some specific examples of how God has shown His love for you (what He has provided for you such as forgiveness, etc.). How can you show these things to others?*

Examples of how God has shown love for you:

Ways you can show that same kind of love to others:

KEY VERSE

And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

—Acts 9:17, KJV

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” —Acts 9:17, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of May 29 through June 4

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Isaiah 42:1-7—God’s Servant Will Establish Justice.

Tues. Galatians 2:16b-21—Live by Faith, Not Works.

Wed. Isaiah 49:1-13—My Servant Shall Restore Israel.

Thurs. Isaiah 49:14-23—God Will Not Forget You.

Fri. 1 Thessalonians 3:11-4:8—God Desires You Live in Purity.

Sat. Colossians 3:8-17—Clothe Yourselves with Love.

Sun. Isaiah 52:1-12—You Shall Be Redeemed.

COMPREHENSIVE BIBLE STUDY

Lesson Cycle

FOR 2021-2024

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2021/22	<p>Celebrating God (Studies in Exodus, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Mark, Acts, Revelation)</p>	<p>Justice, Law, History (Studies in the Pentateuch, 2 Samuel, Ezra, Job, Isaiah, Nahum)</p>	<p>God Frees and Redeems (Studies in Deuteronomy, Ezra, Matthew, John, Romans, Galatians)</p>	<p>Partners in a New Creation (Studies in Isaiah, John, Revelation)</p>
2022/23	<p>Chosen, Not Choice: God's Exceptional Choice (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians)</p>	<p>Chosen, Not Choice: From Darkness to Light (Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter)</p>	<p>Chosen, Not Choice: Jesus Calls Us (Studies in the Gospels, Acts)</p>	<p>*The Righteous Reign of God (Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)</p>
2023/24	<p>God's Law Is Love (Studies in Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians)</p>	<p>Faith That Pleases God (Studies in Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews)</p>	<p>Examining Our Faith (Studies in the Gospels, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude)</p>	<p>Hope in the Lord (Studies in Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John)</p>



Coming Up Next Quarter

June, July, August 2023

The Righteous Reign of God

Unit 1 studies God's reign as depicted in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, and Zechariah: His powerful and peaceful reign, the promised Messiah, and the concept of God's appointed king.

Unit 2 presents Jesus' kingdom-teachings in Matthew. His miracles show God's kingdom is in our midst, and His parables of the Kingdom show the urgency of understanding its message, the enemy who undermines the work of the Kingdom, the unseen growth of the Kingdom, and the precious joy of finding the Kingdom.

Unit 3 explores the implications of life under God's authority: the fruit of life according to the law of love; the righteousness, peace, and joy to be found in God's economy; the power of God at work within us; and Christ as our exalted ruler.

Comprehensive Bible Study lessons are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible following the International Sunday School Lessons series. In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes through studies of books in both the Old and New Testaments.

EXPERIENCING THE RESURRECTION



The Miraculous Draught of Fishes by Konrad Witz. Jesus meets the disciples catching fish at the Sea of Galilee.
Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève



The women see the empty tomb and run to tell the disbelieving disciples the good news of the Resurrection.
Arwork: Irma Martin (1814-1876) Public Domain

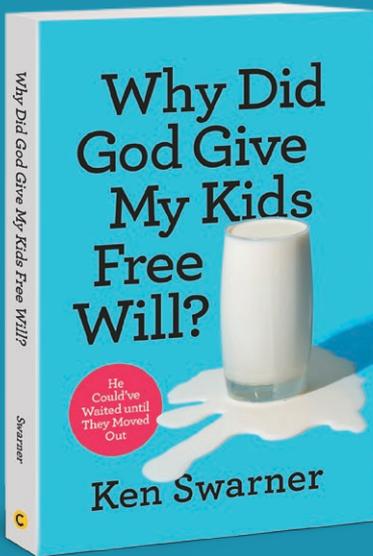


Jesus reinstates Peter as a worthy disciple.
Engraving: © James Tissot/duncan1890/Getty Images



Two disciples on the way to Emmaus unknowingly meet the risen Jesus.
Arwork: Robert Nind (-1909) Public Domain





Real-World Parenting Reflections, Snot and All

Why Did God Give My Kids Free Will? is a hilarious, spiritual journey through the facets of parenting with anecdotes, prayers, devotionals, and reflections. Parental mishaps may just help us get closer to God. Consider:

- Learning patience while spitwads land in your drink
- Embracing the absurdity of teens wearing shorts in the winter
- Practicing gentleness as you explain (again) why it is important to restock the toilet paper

Regret, humiliation, control ... you can let go of these when you laugh and make peace with the idea that God may just have a sense of humor after all.

Ken Swarner, author of *Whose Kids Are These Anyway?*, has been married to his high school sweetheart for thirty-three years and counting while raising four children and three pets. While on the front lines of child rearing (once constructing a homework jail), Ken has served as a school board member, PTA president, Cub Master, and soccer coach. He is also in the Civilian Hall of Fame at Joint Base Lewis-McChord and one day aspires to complete a full sentence at the family dinner table.

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