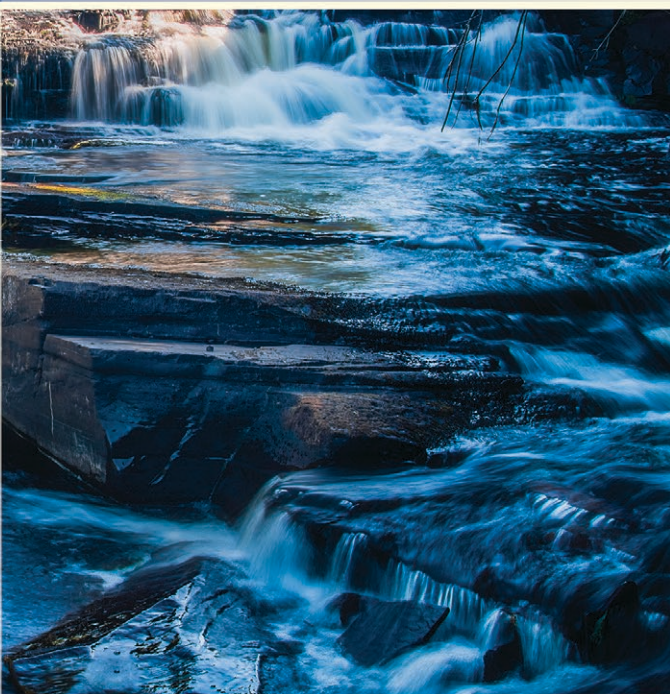




# ECHOES

Adult Student Book  
Comprehensive Bible Study  
March–May 2024



## Examining Our Faith

Studies in Jude, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter,  
Acts, the Gospels, Romans

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# 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

## Examining Our Faith

March, April, May 2024

(Studies in the Gospels, Acts, Romans,  
2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude)

### Unit 1: Faith-FULL Versus Faith-LESS

Mar. 3	Lesson 1	Sustaining Our Faith	p. 5
Mar. 10	Lesson 2	Testing Our Faith	p. 12
Mar. 17	Lesson 3	Defending Our Faith	p. 19
Mar. 24	Lesson 4	Living in Faith	p. 26
Mar. 31	Lesson 5	The Resurrection: Key to Faith	p. 33

### Unit 2: The Measure of Faith

Apr. 7	Lesson 6	Faith of Four Friends	p. 40
Apr. 14	Lesson 7	Faith of a Centurion	p. 47
Apr. 21	Lesson 8	Faith of a Woman Who Loved Jesus	p. 54
Apr. 28	Lesson 9	Faith of a Canaanite Woman	p. 61

### Unit 3: Standing in the Faith

May 5	Lesson 10	Justified by Faith in Jesus	p. 68
May 12	Lesson 11	Reckoned as Righteous	p. 75
May 19	Lesson 12	Reconciled to God	p. 82
May 26	Lesson 13	Who Has Believed?	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

In this quarter, we explore the fullness of faith as a response to God's desire to be in relationship with us. To be faith-less is to turn away from God to put trust in something, or someone, other than God. The lessons of this quarter ask: Is your faith steadfast? Are you contending for the faith? What can today's Christians draw from these ancient accounts that will help us grow more deeply in faith?

Unit 1 has lessons drawn from Jude, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Acts, and Mark that invite learners to turn the challenges of life into opportunities for nurturing a vibrant faith instead of giving up, turning away from God, or rejecting faith. It includes the Easter lesson.

For Unit 2, lessons from Luke and Matthew discuss the range of Christian faith.

The lessons in Unit 3 from Romans encourage believers to continue standing in the faith.

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

- Trust Jesus to sustain your faith.
- Encourage each other in examining your faith.
- Repay evil with blessing.
- Trust the Spirit when your faith is opposed.
- Do not fear! Christ is risen!
- Do you have friends who encourage your faith?
- Have faith to call out to Jesus.
- How do your actions express your faith and love?
- Be bold in your requests to Jesus. Great faith brings great blessings.
- Know that God's forgiveness is for all people.
- Trust that God can and will do what He has promised!
- Understand and rest in Jesus' costly reconciliation.
- Believe and declare that Jesus is Lord.

## Sustaining Our Faith

I don't know how Ericka does it," said Kiyana.

"Does what?" asked Rozina.

"Get by like she does. And it doesn't even seem to bother her that Marcel left her practically destitute, with three small children, and under shameful circumstances," said Kiyana.

More than five years ago Marcel professed his love for his younger office coworker and refused any counseling or intervention and couldn't "take the ongoing anguish any longer but wanted to be happy." So, Marcel moved out of his home and marriage of eight years."

Ericka was devastated. She took all of her broken pieces to the Lord and believed, hoped, prayed, He would make her whole. And that is exactly what God had done! She had thought about giving up when times were dark, but God's love had been a constant balm—healing, soothing, nurturing, strengthening her.

Ericka had wrapped herself so tightly around the Lord during this time of turmoil in her life, and it seemed her faith had grown stronger. She had become stronger.

"Sisters, do you need help with these tables?" Ericka asked Kiyana and Rozina. The two were attacking leftover scraps of construction paper and other assorted arts and crafts materials left from the young girls' breakfast and fun day at the church.

"Yes, Sister Ericka," Rozina said, "We could use some help. You are just such a blessing."

**1. What are some life situations that have tested and tried your faith?**

**2. Who are some of the examples in Scripture that most inspire you to persevere in challenging times?**

**3. What are some ways you've tried to keep your own faith strong? How well have these worked for you?**

## Keep Yourselves

*Jude 17-23, KJV*

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

*Jude 17-23, NIV*

<sup>17</sup>But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.

<sup>18</sup>They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." <sup>19</sup>These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

<sup>20</sup>But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup>keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

<sup>22</sup>Be merciful to those who doubt; <sup>23</sup>save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Prior to verses 17-19, Jude reminded his audience that long ago, the people of Israel had to deal with those "who did not believe" (vs. 5) in their midst. He linked the current "scoffers" (vs. 18) to those who followed "the way of Cain" (vs. 11) and rebelled against God like Korah did during the Exodus (Exod. 16). In fact, the apostles had already predicted that divisive people would come, and Jude says such people had slipped into their churches unnoticed. Jude was concerned that his audience would

give in to the teaching and lifestyle of these unbelievers.

Jude told the people that while these teachers may look like Christians, they were not the real deal. In reality, they were worldly people “who do not have the Spirit” (vs. 19), meaning they are not true followers of Christ. This reminder warns Christians to disbelieve teaching that is contrary to the faith that was delivered to them. These false teachers would “divide” the congregations because they followed their own desires and not the ways of God.

In verses 20-21, Jude encourages his readers to live in a way very different from the mockers. Their goal is to “keep [themselves] in God’s love” (vs. 21). This expression is similar to Jesus’ words to His disciples in John 15:9-10: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” Jude is likely also encouraging his audience to “remain” in God’s love by keeping his commandments.

Jude does not expect his readers to accomplish this by merely human effort and force of will. Jesus told His disciples in John 15 that they would produce fruit if they remained in Him, the true vine (vss. 4-5). Likewise, Jude says his readers will be sustained and strengthened in their work by “building [themselves] up in [their] most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit” (vs. 20). Jude calls them to delve deeply into the true faith rooted in the Scriptures and the teaching of the apostles and to pray in accordance with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Finally, Jude fixes his audience’s gaze on their ultimate goal: the coming of Christ that will bring them into life eternal. By focusing on Jesus’ coming, they will find motivation to cling to true teaching and God’s love in the midst of deceptive and immoral people.

Verses 22-23 bring the letter full circle to summarize how the people were to engage compassionately with those led astray by scoffers. They were to carefully strive to persuade people who were sympathetic to false teaching. Jude encouraged the believers to persuade two

categories of people.

First, they were to have “compassion” (vs. 22, KJV) for those who were sympathetic to false teachers. By being merciful, they should seek to make a “difference” in their lives by helping them to understand the holy faith.

Second, the beloved is to strive to “save” those who are more indoctrinated in false teaching by “snatching them from the fire” of judgment. Nevertheless, Christians must have “fear” or carefulness when interacting with proponents of false teaching to avoid being persuaded to join the scoffer’s side.

Christians must contend for the faith by putting their trust in Jesus and helping others to put their trust in Him. He is the only hope for those who are being led astray, and believers must point wayward people to Him.

**4. What are the warnings found in verses 17-19?**

**5. What are the three ways Christians keep themselves in the love of God?**

**6. How should Christians interact with false teachers and mockers?**

## God Keeps You

*Jude 24-25, KJV*

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

*Jude 24-25, NIV*

<sup>24</sup>To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— <sup>25</sup>to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Verses 24-25 are a final assurance and doxology. These



two aspects of the end of this book serve as a perfect conclusion to a letter filled with warning and admonition. It would be easy for Jude's audience to become overburdened with the exhortation to watch out for false teachers and keep themselves in the love of God. If the beloved is not careful, they may think that the power to obey God comes from within rather than coming from God alone. Therefore, Jude is sure to summarize his letter with an ending filled with hope.

Verse 24 reminds believers that God is their final assurance. Jude's exhortation to "keep" yourselves fits seamlessly with the reminder that God is the one who has the power to keep them. Jude's audience must remember that the key to keeping themselves is to keep themselves in the one who has the power to keep them. Basically, the only work that they do in keeping themselves is empowered by God's grace that keeps them. Paul reiterates the same truth when he writes, "I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. 15:10, KJV).

There is a forward-looking hope and the assurance that God will keep them. According to Jude, Christians must be careful to watch out for false teachings that lead to ungodly living. Yet, God will ensure Christians remain steady, so they might be presented on that final day as faultless before the presence of His glory. God's power to present as faultless comes only through the Savior Jesus Christ who shed His precious blood for all who trust Him. In this way, the believer can have an assurance that he will stand with "great joy" before God on that final day.

The greatest work Christians can do to sustain their faith is to put their trust in Christ.

**7.** *Who has the power to keep Christians from stumbling?*

**8.** *What will Christians experience in God's presence?*

**9.** *What attributes of God are listed in verses 24-25?*

## When People Bring You Down

Jude writes about scoffers who will come in among the church members and create division among them. Maybe you can think of some situations like that today, when the church becomes divided over different doctrinal interpretations or various stands on social or political issues.

What do we do in those types of situations? Should we confront the people involved? Should we leave that fellowship and find another one?

Jude's advice focuses first on what we need to do for ourselves: remember that this has been prophesied, and we must build up our faith, particularly with prayer and patient endurance. But Jude also wants us to care about others who are being misled by destructive people and their teaching. He encourages us to try to save them while remaining careful not to be led astray ourselves. It's too easy to follow the crowd, especially when the crowd is large.

Jude doesn't suggest this is a problem we can solve, and we know historically this has always been an issue in the church. Rather than being discouraged about that, we can take care of our own responsibilities and look forward to the day when Jesus will sort it all out for good. Our task is to keep ourselves in God's love and be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

**10.** *Have you felt discouraged by the mockery of other people's convictions we sometimes see in the church, not only out in the world?*

**11.** *How can individual Christians and church leaders best manage these types of issues?*

**12.** *Give some examples of how you would approach someone whom you believe is being led astray by false teaching or un-Christlike behavior.*

## How Prepared Are You?

The world is filled with those who don't believe in Jesus and even laugh at believing in Him. Even those who believe may be drawn away to false teachings that compromise biblical truths to accommodate society. Holding to the Savior can, as Jude says, "keep [us] from stumbling" and "present [us] before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 25).

► *Finish these sentences:*

*When my faith is laughed at, I will\_\_\_\_\_.*

*When someone I know believes false teachings, I will\_\_\_\_\_.*

### KEY VERSES

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

—Jude 20-21, KJV

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

—Jude 20-21, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of March 4 through March 10

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

**Mon.** James 1:2-12—The Testing of Faith Produces Endurance.

**Tues.** James 1:13-18—The Sources of Temptations.

**Wed.** Psalm 139:1-12—God Has Searched and Known Us.

**Thurs.** Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24—God Knows All Things.

**Fri.** 2 Corinthians 11:22-33—God's People Boast in Weakness.

**Sat.** 2 Corinthians 12:1-10—Strength through Christ Alone.

**Sun.** 2 Corinthians 13:1-10—Live by Christ's Power in You.

## Testing Our Faith

Are you questioning if you are saved?" Elvan asked Antonne.

Antonne had been walking with the Lord for almost two years. He came to know Christ after Elvan shared the Gospel with him and invited him to church.

"It's not church that saves you," Elvan had said. "It's Christ. But the church is the Body of Christ, and it's important to be a part and stay connected."

"I was gossiping about Brother Richard a while back," Antonne said. "I did tell the Lord about it. I told Him I was so sorry. I didn't have any right to do it."

Elvan looked up from his coffee and stared at his friend.

"I tell you, brother, I've been staying on my knees in prayer," Antonne continued. "I've been asking God what more do I need to do."

Elvan sat the coffee cup down and smiled. "Sounds like you're on a good road, brother, in examining yourself in the faith—and there's nothing wrong with that. The Bible tells us to do that. The fact that you have an aversion to your sin is a sign that your salvation is genuine. There are some other things we can talk about as well; but know this, the Lord doesn't do anything halfway. Our salvation in Christ is secure."

**1.** *Have you ever felt the need to self-examine where you stand in relation to what Scripture teaches to assess if you are truly living a life of faith in Christ?*

**2.** *Have you ever been in a situation where you were asked questions about your faith by an unbeliever? How did you handle it?*

**3.** *Do you think it is necessary at times to gather with other like-minded Christians to encourage one another in what the Bible teaches? Why?*

## Passing the Test

*2 Corinthians 13:5-7, KJV*

5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

*2 Corinthians 13:5-7, NIV*

<sup>5</sup>Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? <sup>6</sup>And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. <sup>7</sup>Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed.

Paul began the final “chapter” of his letter with a warning, in anticipation of his next visit to Corinth: “This will be my third visit to you. . . . I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me” (2 Cor. 13:1-3). While many in Corinth had challenged Paul’s authority, Paul instead appealed to the authority of Christ who sent him. In essence, challenging Paul meant challenging Christ Himself.

This warning set up Paul’s following instructions: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (vs. 5). Especially given their behavior during Paul’s last visit, were those critical Corinthians really Christians? Was Christ truly in them—the only real criteria of a Christian? And if He was truly in them, should they not change their

behavior, regardless of how much authority Paul did or didn't have? Paul trusted that even if some failed this test, the larger church he had already spent so much time with and wept for would not fail it.

Furthermore, Paul added, "I trust that you will discover that we have *not* failed the test" (vs. 6). As the Corinthians got right with God, they would not only recognize Christ more clearly but also the authority He had given Paul and his associates. Self-examination would enable the Corinthians to better understand both their own spiritual condition and that of others.

Paul then exposed his heart for the church at Corinth and explained the reason for this "test": "Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong . . . so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed" (vs. 7). The true issue was not Paul's authority; it was the condition of the Corinthians' hearts. Even if Paul's authority or abilities should come into question, the more important matter was that on examining themselves, the Corinthians should repent and "do what is right."

**4.** *What did Paul instruct the Corinthians to do?*

**5.** *What did Paul say the Corinthians would discover, according to verse 6?*

**6.** *What did Paul pray for on behalf of the Corinthians?*

## Truth and Restoration

2 Corinthians 13:8-11, KJV

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong; and this also we wish, even your perfection.

10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness,

2 Corinthians 13:8-11, NIV

<sup>8</sup>For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. <sup>9</sup>We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored. <sup>10</sup>This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come

according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

<sup>11</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Regardless of the perception others may have had of him and his associates, Paul asserted, “We cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (vs. 8). They had examined themselves and were certain that they were in the faith—and that their actions reflected their faith. Weak and imperfect as they may have been, they were confident that they were reflecting Christ and His truth to the best of their abilities. And they would continue to stand “for the truth” no matter what, without concern for how others perceived them.

Therefore, their weakness was not the important thing; rather, it was their actions, however feeble others thought them to be, that would somehow strengthen the church: “We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored” (vs. 9). The phrase translated “fully restored” (“perfection,” KJV) is a Greek word that suggests the idea of fixing something that is damaged or restoring what has been lost. Paul’s desire was not to be drawn needlessly into a power struggle with his adversaries. His prayerful concern was only for the well-being of the church.

Sadly, many churches today are torn apart because their leaders care more about exercising power than about the spiritual well-being of the people in the pew. While Paul could be rigid in regard to crucial doctrinal errors and unrepentant sin, his toughness arose from his love for the believers, not from a desire to establish his authority. We

need to remember that the spiritual well-being of others is more important than our having power over them.

Weakness was a huge theme in 2 Corinthians, but Paul didn't view weakness in the human sense of the word. Rather, the human insufficiency of Paul and his associates became a means of revealing God's infinite power. What they could not accomplish on their own, God would through them. Through both their weakness and God's power, the church at Corinth would "be fully restored."

In verse 10, Paul explained his reasons for writing the Corinthians one last time: "I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority." Once more, he asserted that whatever authority he possessed was "the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down." Paul's reasons for writing, regardless of tone, were always for the good of the church he loved and had invested so much time in. Sometimes he was "harsh"; sometimes he was "building you up, not . . . tearing you down." Always, he acted and wrote out of his love for this church. As the members of this church examined themselves and turned

back fully to God, even they could not fail to recognize that.

**7. What did Paul declare about himself and his associates in verse 8?**

**8. What did Paul say about his "weakness," and what it was good for?**

**9. What reasons did Paul give in verse 10 for writing 2 Corinthians?**



*The ruins of the Temple of Apollo in Corinth (with the Acrocorinth in the background), one of many pagan temples in the city that put believers' faith to the test.*

*Photo: Rabe!*



## Churches Examine Their Faith

Paul gave a call to action to the Corinthians to examine themselves and test their faith in Christ, as some were questioning Paul's authority. There are times when Christians, whether as individuals or as a collective body, need to have a time of soul-searching, or testing, to ensure that their beliefs and actions align with God's Word.

The world around us is pushing Christian denominations to accept things that society now finds acceptable, no matter what the Bible says. Some denominations have begun blessing same-sex marriages. Others have ordained practicing homosexuals as ministers or church elders. Some churches have rewritten hymns to include more "inclusive" language. Whole denominations or individual churches have split over these issues or tried to reach some kind of shaky truce. Every church must examine where it stands and decide if it will stay biblical or not?

Debates among Christians are not new. For example, Christians have disagreed on what kind of music can be sung in worship and on what instruments (if any) should be allowed. But these new debates again strike at the heart of who we claim to be as Christians. Will a church decide to redefine what the Bible calls sin in the name of progress, acceptance, and inclusion?

Many Christians are now going through a testing of their faith. They must seek God's guidance, choose where they stand on the issues, decide whether they need to make a change, and keep their focus on God's truth.

**10.** *What kinds of challenges does a church congregation face when it's told to be "progressive" on biblical issues?*

**11.** *How can Paul's advice to the Corinthian Church to examine your own faith help?*

**12.** *What are some ways that congregants could encourage one another in the faith, while avoiding infighting over differences of opinions?*

## Heaven Helps Those Who Help Each Other

The first-century Christians were persecuted on all sides for their faith. It was vital for these believers to rely on one another for support in the midst of trial and tribulation. We should understand that God calls us to a life of dependence not only on Him, but on each other. We should make it a practice to encourage each other in the faith.

► *Take some time this week to reflect on where you are at in your faith walk. Assess if there are any behaviors you exhibit that need changing or areas that need work. Brainstorm ways that you can be a voice of encouragement, not only for your brothers and sisters in Christ but also for unbelievers.*

► *Areas that need improvement:*

► *Strategies for encouraging others in the faith:*

### KEY VERSE

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. —2 Corinthians 13:5a, KJV

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. —2 Corinthians 13:5a, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of March 11 through March 17

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

**Mon.** 2 Timothy 4:1-8—Proclaim God's Message at All Times.

**Tues.** Psalm 67—Let All the People Praise God.

**Wed.** Mark 5:1-2, 6-7, 11-20—Proclaim What Jesus Has Done.

**Thurs.** Acts 9:10-22—A Powerful Defense of the Faith.

**Fri.** Isaiah 1:16-20—Come, Let Us Argue It Out.

**Sat.** 1 Peter 2:4-12—Live Honorably among Unbelievers.

**Sun.** 1 Peter 3:8-17—Be Ready to Speak for Christ.

## Defending Our Faith

Is that her natural sister?" Jada whispered to Daloris. "Yes," said Daloris. "I grew up around them. I've just gotten used to the passive aggressiveness of Laquitta toward her sister."

"Well, it's not real passive," said Jada. "She considers those jokes?"

"She does," said Daloris.

Serenity has a master's, and Laquitta never went to college. Serenity has accomplished things in the professional world that Laquitta hasn't. Laquitta seems to kick her whenever she can and uses humor to do it. A small crowd was gathered at the home of the sisters' cousin for a party celebrating Serenity's newest self-published book, *Reaching Past the Pain*.

Laquitta had just finished her remarks about her sister's new book—how the book jacket photo would have looked better had she been consulted on the proper attire and color to wear to bring out Serenity's dark skin.

"Thank you, Laquitta," Serenity said, hugging her sister, following the awkward pause in the room. "And thank you to everyone for coming to support me! Please get your fill on our wonderful cuisine, made by our wonderful chef, my beautiful sister, Laquitta. She is a woman of many, many talents. Cooking is only one of them. She prepared our entire spread this afternoon, including our baked treats. Thank you so much, Laquitta!"

**1.** *Why is it so much easier to repay evil with evil instead of evil with blessing?*

**2.** *When did you bless someone who did you wrong? What happened?*

**3.** *Have you been on the receiving end of a kindness when you didn't deserve it? What happened?*

## Repaying Evil with Good

*1 Peter 3:8-12, KJV*

8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

*1 Peter 3:8-12, NIV*

<sup>8</sup>Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. <sup>9</sup>Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.

On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup>For,

“Whoever would love life and see good days

must keep their tongue from evil

and their lips from deceitful speech.

<sup>11</sup>They must turn from evil and do good;

they must seek peace and pursue it.

<sup>12</sup>For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous

and his ears are attentive to their prayer,

but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

With the word “finally,” Peter began to wrap up the directions he had begun at 1 Peter 2:13. After describing the church as a “spiritual house” (2:5), Peter taught how this “household of faith” should conduct itself. He now ended this section as it had began—with instructions that “all of you” in the church, regardless of social or marital status, could follow: “Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble” (vs. 8). The King James version translated the first instruction even

more vividly: “be of one mind.” This did not mean that everyone should think exactly the same thoughts. Each part of the body would express the mind of Christ in the ways God had gifted them—in loving, compassionate, and humble ways.

Peter then called his readers to something even more difficult: to not “repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing” (vs. 9). After all, Jesus had taught these same things even more explicitly (Matt. 5:38-48). In the midst of opposition and persecution, believers were not to retaliate but to bless, following His example. By doing so, they will “inherit a blessing” of eternal life (vs. 9).

Peter concluded this section of teachings by quoting Psalm 34:12-16. David, too, had preached/sung to the people of Israel to “keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech . . . turn from evil and do good . . . seek peace and pursue it” (1 Pet. 3:10-11; cf. Ps. 34:13-14). And again, those who did so would enjoy God’s blessings: “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12; cf. Ps. 34:15-16). God would see to it that evil was punished and the righteous rewarded. By “repay[ing] evil with blessing,” Peter’s readers affirmed their trust in a righteous, sovereign, and just God to take care of His creation.

**4.** *What instructions did Peter give the churches in verse 8?*

**5.** *What harder things did Peter call the churches to do?*

**6.** *How did Peter use David’s words in Psalm 34 to affirm his message?*

## Better to Suffer for Good

1 Peter 3:13-17, KJV

13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of

1 Peter 3:13-17, NIV

<sup>13</sup>Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do

that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." <sup>15</sup>But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup>keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup>For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

After instructing his readers on how to live, Peter then shifted his focus to the suffering Christians should expect from living differently—and the blessings that would emerge from doing so despite their present suffering. He began with a seemingly rhetorical question: "Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?" (vs. 13). While the obvious answer was "no one," Peter understood that the presence of evil in the world didn't guarantee that answer, especially in the times in which he and his readers lived. Therefore, he addressed the possibility of persecution, quoting Isaiah 8:12: "But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. 'Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened'" (vs. 14). God would see to it that any wrongs would ultimately be righted.

Peter then counseled his readers on how to confront evil. Again, they were not to return evil in kind but rather, "in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared

to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” Bible commentator Warren Wiersbe says, “Our English word *apology* comes from the Greek word translated ‘answer,’ but it does not mean ‘to say I am sorry.’ Rather, it means ‘a defense presented in court.’ ‘Apologetics’ . . . deals with the defense of the faith. Every Christian should be able to give a reasoned defense of his hope in Christ, *especially in hopeless situations*. A crisis creates the opportunity for witness when a believer behaves with faith and hope, because the unbelievers will then sit up and take notice.”

As Christians honor Christ and respond in ways that reflect His love, their nonviolent responses will naturally evoke questions from unbelievers. Therefore, Peter told Christians to be ready to give a response as to why their hope in Christ caused them to react differently. Once more, their answers were to be given “with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience” (vss. 15-16).

By responding in such an unexpected manner, the hope was that “those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (vs. 16)—that they might be shocked out of doing what was “normal” in society and begin to consider the higher ways in which both Christ and Peter called believers to behave. But no matter how others reacted, Peter made it clear that blessing others was the path chosen for believers, even if it meant suffering in return: “For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (vs. 17). Even suffering itself was a blessing, if handled in a Christlike manner. Doing good, Peter declared, was always the right choice—no matter what the response.

**7.** *What did Peter ask his readers—and how did he answer his own question?*

**8.** *How did Peter tell believers to confront evil?*

**9.** *What did Peter hope would be the result, if believers followed his instructions?*

## Thank You for the Opportunity

Several years ago, I was working for a company in the communications department. Things were going great as the months went on—the company was growing, we were expanding, stocks were increasing. Our department head was given a promotion, which then promoted my manager, who had been wonderful to me.

When these promotions occurred, however, responsibilities changed/shuffled, and I fumbled trying to adjust to the changes and the new system. I did everything I could as well as I could, but my manager became hypercritical of me and micromanaged everything I touched. After one meeting with her where she berated me and told me how much I was disappointing her expectations, I went to the bathroom and cried.

One morning shortly thereafter, I came in ready for our regular meeting and found the HR representative sitting in with my manager. They promptly informed me that I was being dismissed and I should pack up my desk immediately. I was utterly shocked and couldn't even form the words to ask why or what I had done wrong. I choked back tears as I packed my belongings and loaded my car. I was only past my one-year anniversary with the company.

I've only been fired that one time. I wanted to strike back, but I thought about what a Christian should do. After several days, I decided to send my department head a note with a coffee gift card inside, thanking her for the opportunity to learn under her for the past year and wishing their company success. I don't know how she reacted, but I know I repaid a bad situation with a blessing.

**10.** *What is your typical reaction when someone hurts or betrays you?*

**11.** *How do you respond to “keyboard warriors” and other strangers who mock or disparage you from a distance?*

**12.** *What is an example of taking the high road in your own life?*



## What Might Have Been

The world is not good at turning the other cheek but instead says to get even or get revenge. How might our world look if we made the godly choice instead of the human one?

► *What would the world look like if we all reacted with kindness instead of revenge when we're wronged? What are you doing to contribute to this ideal in your own life?*

### KEY VERSE

For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. —1 Peter 3:17, KJV

For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. —1 Peter 3:17, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of March 18 through March 24

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

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 28:1-14—Blessings of Walking in God's Ways.
- Tues.** Titus 2:1-8—Let Your Life Match Your Words.
- Wed.** Proverbs 1:1-9—Fear God and Gain Knowledge.
- Thurs.** 1 Corinthians 5:1-11—Refrain from Defiling the Church.
- Fri.** 2 Timothy 2:8-21—Vessels Prepared for Every Good Work.
- Sat.** Acts 6:1-6—The Ministry of Caring for Others.
- Sun.** Acts 6:7-15—A Spirit-Empowered Witness.

## Living in Faith

“What makes you think you have the one and only true faith?” asked Ahmed.

“That’s a good question,” joined in Ashley. “It’s pretty egotistical if you ask me. There is truth in all religions and faiths.”

Monika had been working with her college study group—Ahmed, Ashley, and Cayleigh—for the past month on a special project. During down times, like now, conversations ran the gamut. For Monika, mentioning the Lord was natural, which soon got into the topic of “religion.”

She offered the Gospel that included Scripture, her life, and her testimony mixed in.

“If you want to follow Jesus, that’s fine, go right ahead,” Ahmed responded. “Everyone else doesn’t have to in order to go to heaven, and I don’t believe God had any children.”

“I try to see the good in everyone,” Ashley said. “I’m more eclectic. You should try it, Monika, instead of being so judgmental.”

Ahmed and Ashley packed up their book bags, saying their goodbyes to Monika and Cayleigh.

“Do you think you’re ready for the presentation next week?” Monika asked, then smiled at Cayleigh.

“Yes,” Cayleigh said. “But I’d like to hear more about your faith. What church do you go to?”

**1.** *How important is trust in your relationship with God? Explain your answer.*

**2.** *Why do you believe the Christian faith is often opposed?*

**3.** *Complete this sentence: When people oppose my faith in God, I will \_\_\_\_\_.*

## Trust in the Spirit

*Acts 6:7-10, KJV*

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

*Acts 6:7-10, NIV*

<sup>7</sup>So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

<sup>8</sup>Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people.

<sup>9</sup>Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. <sup>10</sup>But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

The church in Jerusalem was growing despite harsh opposition from the religious leaders. Luke wrote that even “a large number of priests” (vs. 7) were starting to put their faith in Jesus. But this young and growing church in Jerusalem was not without its issues. The Greek-speaking Christian Jews disputed with the Hebrew-speaking Christian Jews, saying the Greek-speaking widows were being neglected in the daily food distribution.

The apostles addressed the complaint by leading the church in Jerusalem to choose seven Jewish men with Greek-sounding names “full of the Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). This solution indicates that the problem was due to an expanding church that struggled with a language and culture barrier. Stephen, a Greek name, was

one of the men chosen to fulfill the task of tending to the Greek-speaking Jewish widows. He was qualified due to his reputation, trust in the Spirit, and ability to interact with the Greek-speaking widows.

As Stephen was fulfilling his duties, he also performed many great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6:8). These wondrous works of God done through the hands of Stephen caught the attention of a great number of people, including a group that opposed the faith: Libertines, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia (Acts 6:9).

This group tried to silence Stephen by disputing with him in the public square. But no matter how hard the opposition tried, they could not withstand Stephen's "wisdom" or the "Spirit" whom he spoke with (6:10).

The context reveals that his wisdom and Spirit were gifts from Jesus for the purpose of emboldening the church in times of opposition. He is described as a man who was full of faith and power (Acts 6:8). Therefore, Stephen's faith was in Jesus; and when his faith was opposed, he chose to put his faith in the Spirit of Jesus.

**4.** *What was the complaint that led to Stephen serving the church?*

**5.** *What caused the opposition to Stephen?*

**6.** *Who did Stephen put his trust in amid opposition?*

## Faith Will Be Opposed

*Acts 6:11-15 KJV*

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and

*Acts 6:11-15 NIV*

<sup>11</sup>Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."

<sup>12</sup>So they stirred up the

the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, 13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

<sup>13</sup>They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. <sup>14</sup>For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

<sup>15</sup>All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen's opposition could not overcome him with their words, nor could they persuade the crowd to oppose him, so those accusing Stephen bribed ("suborned" in the KJV) some men to make up lies about Stephen. The lies included two general categories. According to these men, Stephen was speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God. The specific charges against Stephen were that first, he was saying that Jesus would destroy the temple, and second, the customs of Moses were changed.

It has often been said that a half-truth is the greatest lie. With a half-truth, the opposition intentionally skewed Stephen's message to get the crowd "stirred" up. Stephen was indeed teaching that the temple and the law had a different place now that Christ had been crucified, buried, and resurrected. So, their accusations had a flavor of truth; but the accusers failed to mention the whole story regarding how the law and the temple found their fulfillment in Jesus. Stephen was more interested in showing the Jews that Jesus was the fulfillment of the temple and the law,

rather than tearing down customs.

In a sad turn of events, the opposition ended up winning the crowd's ear and persuading them to turn against Stephen. One of the main ways they stirred the people was by placing more liars to make up false claims about Stephen. The false testimonies were intentionally emotionally charged in reference to the most intimate part of their religion, the temple. Further, the false testimonies were intentionally half-told to turn the crowd against Stephen.

After the false testimonies, Stephen's case was brought to the highest authority for the Jewish people, the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a council with 70 elders of Israel. Their job was to make judgments and determinations on difficult cases among the Jewish people.

As these 70 elders looked at Stephen, they saw a man who had the face of an "angel" (vs. 15). The description of Stephen's face resembling an angel is intended to highlight the awe and glory of his ministry. Stephen was obviously innocent of the charges brought before him. His faith in God was demonstrated by the great signs and wonders that were done through him. This was so evident that when the Sanhedrin saw him, the main characteristic that described his countenance was a reflection of the glory of God as seen in the face of an angel.

Stephen's likeness reflecting an angel further indicates that he had a steady trust in the Spirit of God in the midst of opposition. It would have been easy for him to lose heart or give in to the most powerful decision-making body the Jews had at the time. He should have looked like a frightened puppy at this point in the story, but he never wavered. Stephen was able to reflect the glory of God by putting his trust in the Spirit when his faith was opposed.

**7.** *How did the opposition stir the crowd to turn on Stephen?*

**8.** *What was the Sanhedrin?*

**9.** *How did Stephen respond to the opposition?*

## God's Smuggler

Andy van der Bijl is better known by his code name, Brother Andrew, or by the name God's Smuggler, the title of a book he published about being a missionary who risked his life to bring Bibles and the Gospel to people living behind what was called the Iron Curtain. When the Soviet Union took over the countries of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, East Germany, and Bulgaria after World War II, the Soviets set up Communist governments in those countries and banned Christianity.

Born in the Netherlands in 1928, he did not start life as a Christian. When he was shot while serving in the Dutch Army, he started reading a Bible his mother gave him and surrendered his life to Christ. His simple prayer was, "Lord, if You will show me the way, I will follow You. Amen." After missionary school, he went to Poland and Czechoslovakia and found underground churches in desperate need of Bibles. "I promised God that as often as I could lay my hands on a Bible, I would bring it to these children of His behind the wall that men built."

He began to make trips into Communist countries in a blue Volkswagen with Bibles and gospel tracts hidden in it. He would pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance when he met the guards at the border: "Lord, in my luggage I have Scripture I want to take to Your children. When You were on earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see those things You do not want them to see." Always, he and those he recruited to help him followed the Spirit's leading, and none were ever caught.

**10.** *Why do we sometimes not trust the Spirit's leading?*

**11.** *How can praying to the Spirit give us strength when facing opposition?*

**12.** *What opposition have you faced victoriously with the Spirit's help?*

## The Wisdom of the Spirit

Jesus said, “But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (Matt. 10:19-20). The believer is not alone or forsaken.

► *Create a prayer to God asking for His Spirit to rest on you and give you an open ear and open heart to hear what the Spirit of the Lord is saying now and when you face opposition—which you will if you truly follow His leading.*

### KEY VERSES

Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. —Acts 6:9-10, KJV

Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. —Acts 6:9-10, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 25 through March 31

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

- Mon.** Mark 14:1-9—Faith Revealed through Extravagant Love.
- Tues.** Exodus 14:10-20—Faith in God's Deliverance.
- Wed.** Exodus 14:21-31—Faith in God's Protection.
- Thurs.** Mark 14:17-26—Faith Challenged and Encouraged.
- Fri.** Mark 15:25-39—An Unexpected Confession of Faith.
- Sat.** Psalm 22:1-11, 27-31—Faith Despite Pain and Loss.
- Sun.** Mark 16:1-8—Faith in the Risen Christ.



## The Resurrection: Key to Faith

Andres clicked the online donation button. He then ran both his hands up and down his face. It wasn't that he was tense about paying his tithes. He wondered how long he would be able to pay them.

His job had bought him out with a two-month severance package. He did have some good prospects on the line. Still, fear was crouching. He had a wife, four children, a mortgage, and three vehicles. They weren't living lavishly, but they were comfortable.

Just what could he do? What could he do? What could he do!

Running in the back of Andres's mind was 1 Timothy 5:8: "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

He had the tendency to go to extremes sometimes, his wife told him. "You have a servant's heart and have taken good care of us. Have faith," Jarrika had said. "Things will be okay."

So, Andres stopped and prayed, "Lord, I am scared. But as we approach Resurrection Sunday, I'm looking for rebirth in my employment, so I might be able to provide and care for my family as the servant leader of this home. Father God, You have not given me a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. I stand on Your Word now. In Jesus' name. Amen."

- 1.** *What fears could be alleviated if people fully embrace the significance of Jesus' resurrection?*
- 2.** *What other good things can result from this as well?*
- 3.** *Why is the Resurrection the key to understanding who Jesus is?*

## An Empty Tomb

*Mark 16:1-5, KJV*

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

*Mark 16:1-5, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. <sup>2</sup>Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb <sup>3</sup>and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

<sup>4</sup>But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. <sup>5</sup>As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

The Friday before what we now call Easter Sunday was a difficult day for Jesus' disciples and others who followed Him. Before Jesus' crucifixion, they had expected a revolution led by a charismatic leader whom they believed was the promised Messiah. Instead, they got an execution.

Among those witnessing Jesus' crucifixion were Mary Magdalene, whom Jesus had freed from possession by seven demons (Luke 8:2); Mary, the mother of one of the two disciples named James; and Salome, the mother of James and John (Mark 15:40). After Jesus was removed from the Cross on which He was crucified, Joseph of Arimathea and a Pharisee named Nicodemus wrapped Jesus' body in 75 pounds of spices and laid Him inside

Joseph's tomb (John 19:38-42).

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary noted where Jesus was laid (Mark 15:47) and may have wanted to anoint His body at that time but it was likely too late that day to purchase any and the next day was the Sabbath. So, when the Sabbath ended, they purchased the required spices and then early the next morning went to Jesus' tomb.

The women had a legitimate concern as they traveled to Jesus' tomb. They wondered how they were going to gain entrance to it since it was covered by a large stone, one that would require great effort to move. But when the women arrived at Jesus' tomb, they saw the huge stone rolled away and, though undoubtedly shaken by this, entered the tomb. When they did, they found that Jesus' body was missing. Sitting at the place where Jesus' body was supposed to be was a young man dressed in white.

What they expected to find that first Easter morning was a tomb protected by a heavy stone guarded by soldiers (Matt. 27:65). Inside, they expected to find a dead body. What they found instead was an open entry into an empty tomb and a stranger in a white robe.

**4.** *What did the women in today's passage do following Jesus' death?*

**5.** *What did they expect to find when they arrived at His tomb?*

**6.** *What did they find instead?*

**7.** *How did they respond? What contributed to this response?*

## **A Risen Lord**

*Mark 16:6-8, KJV*

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here:

*Mark 16:6-8, NIV*

“Don't be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He

behold the place where they laid him.

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.

is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup>But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

<sup>8</sup>Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

The stranger in Jesus' tomb was an angel whose response to the women's fears was both sensitive and systematic. He first addressed their emotional state. They were afraid and justifiably so. What they were experiencing was unexpected, in some ways shocking, and initially unexplainable. The angel, however, encouraged them not to be afraid, knowing he had something to tell them that would replace their fear with joy.

The angel then affirmed their reason for being there. They were looking for Jesus, and that was a legitimate desire. Jesus had died, and they wanted to pay their respects to Him. The only problem was that Jesus was not where they expected Him to be.

The angel then laid out the facts. Jesus was not in the tomb. That was true. It was also obvious. The explanation for this was less so. For the reason Jesus' body was missing was that He had risen from the dead!

The angel didn't ask the women to take his word for this, however. He told them to look once again on the place where Jesus had been laid and to confirm His body was indeed not there. He then told them where Jesus could be found: He was traveling to Galilee.

The angel then told the women to share what they had seen and heard with Jesus' remaining disciples, including

Peter. He finished by promising the women that they would find the one they were looking for. Jesus was alive, and they would see Him!

The women found this difficult to grasp. Although they could clearly see that Jesus' tomb was empty, they did not understand at that time the significance of what the angel was telling them. They left the tomb amazed by what they'd witnessed, trembling because of the experience, bewildered regarding what it meant, reluctant to speak to anyone about it.

The story of Jesus' empty tomb does not end here. John's Gospel says Mary Magdalene did not entirely believe what the angel told her. After making her way to where Peter and the other disciples were hiding, she said told them someone had stolen Jesus' body (John 20:1-2). Peter and John then went to Jesus' tomb and saw, too, that it was empty (20:3-10). Afterward, Jesus appeared to Mary outside the tomb, first comforting her, then revealing Himself to her (20:11-18). She was the first of many to personally see Jesus after His resurrection and the first to share with others that she had seen Him. We do not have the advantage of experiencing the physical presence of our risen Savior. But His empty tomb provides ample evidence that He has risen from the dead.

**8.** *How would you describe the angel's response to the three women?*



**9.** *What did he promise?*

**10.** *What did he instruct them to do?*

**11.** *How did the women respond?*

*A first-century tomb with a rolling stone in Jerusalem, possibly used by Herod the Great's family.*

## Jesus Is Alive!

Although I grew up knowing that Jesus walked the earth at one time and provided an example of how we are to live, I did not appreciate the significance of His empty tomb until I was about 20. Before then, I often lived in fear that I would fail to do what God demanded of me and suffer the consequences of His displeasure.

My Jesus at that time was a “dead” one. I didn’t understand that He was alive and He could indwell me with His Spirit. I didn’t know what it meant to live as if I were forgiven instead of believing I had to work to earn God’s approval.

That changed when I saw what Jesus had done for some people in a church I’d been invited to. They didn’t treat Jesus as if He were dead. They responded to life’s issues as if He were alive. Rather than fearing they might do something to step on God’s toes and be doomed to eternal separation from Him, they were living with the assurance their sins were forgiven and they had an eternal relationship with God.

I wanted their hope; I wanted their confidence; I wanted the same relationship they had with Jesus. And so I turned my life over to Jesus and invited Him into my life.

Knowing that Jesus is alive, that He wants to indwell us, and that He wants to walk with us should result in hope and not despair, in peace and not anxiety, in confidence and not fear, in the knowledge that we are not walking through this life alone, and that eternal joy awaits us.

**12.** *What are some fears or anxieties you personally have that could be alleviated if you fully understood and embraced the significance of Jesus’ resurrection?*

**13.** *What are some hopes or confidences you have or could have as you consider what happened that first Easter?*

**14.** *What are some other ways you do or could benefit from knowing Jesus is alive?*

## Now What?

Knowing that Jesus is alive should make a difference on how we respond to the challenges we face each day. It should replace the anxieties regarding what we're experiencing now with hope regarding what is to come. The decision to do that sometimes needs to be a daily one, as we pray this prayer: "Dear Jesus, let the knowledge that You are alive and dwelling among us make a difference in my life today."

► *Write out at least one way that Jesus' resurrection can make a difference in your life this week. Then make a commitment to pray about this every day, asking Jesus to help you change your perspective, so your response to His resurrection is real, evident, and meaningful.*

### KEY VERSE

And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. —Mark 16:6, KJV

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him." —Mark 16:6, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of April 1 through April 7

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

- Mon.** John 1:37-42—Come and See.
- Tues.** Jeremiah 17:12-17—Heal Me, and I'll Be Healed.
- Wed.** John 4:4-18—Jesus Provides Living Water.
- Thurs.** John 4:19-29, 39-42—Worship God in Spirit and Truth.
- Fri.** Psalm 66:1-5, 13-20—Tell What God Has Done.
- Sat.** Isaiah 6:1-8—Here Am I; Send Me.
- Sun.** Luke 5:17-26—Jesus Heals and Forgives.

## Faith of Four Friends

Jazmin's heart lifted when she read the text on her phone from her friend Lela. It was Psalm 34:17-19: "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all." The Scripture was accompanied with several brightly colored heart emojis.

Jazmin was dealing with circumstances that found her fighting discouragement. Not overwhelmingly so, but enough that had driven her to special prayer and devotion time. She had shared her struggle with close friends.

Her ringing phone interrupted her thoughts. "Hey girl!" came the friendly voice of her friend Shantice. "I have Renatta on the other end."

"Hello, Jazmin," said Renatta.

"What are you two doing?" asked Jazmin.

"What do you think about going to a prayer breakfast at my church the end of this month?" asked Shantice.

"Sure," said Jazmin, "I don't have anything planned. Thanks for thinking of me, guys."

"We love you, sister," said Renatta. "We're in this together."

"How have you been feeling, Sis?" asked Shantice.

"Better and better," said Renatta, "especially with such good sisters in the faith as you walking with me. Better and better!"

**1.** *What does friendship mean to you?*

**2.** *Do you prefer to have a few friends or a lot of friends? Explain your answer.*

**3.** *Why is forgiveness an important element in every friendship?*



## Jesus Forgives a Paralyzed Man

*Luke 5:17-20, KJV*

17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him.

19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.

20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

*Luke 5:17-20, NIV*

<sup>17</sup>One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. <sup>18</sup>Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup>When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Jesus was staying in Capernaum, and the house quickly overflowed with people. Jesus took advantage of the occasion to proclaim the Word, namely, the message about the coming divine kingdom (Luke 4:43).

As Jesus taught, some religious leaders sat listening to the Savior. By this time in His earthly ministry, the news about Jesus had spread around the country. The religious leaders had every right to investigate Jesus and the claims about Him. One of their jobs was to prevent false prophets from leading the people astray (Deut. 13; 18:15-22).

The stories of God's healing "power" (Luke 5:18) caused

some men to carry a disabled friend to the house with the faith that Jesus would heal him. Even the large crowd did not stop the disabled man's friends; their faith in Jesus' ability to heal prompted them to devise another way.

Most Jews in Jesus' day lived in simple, one-room homes made of stone or brick. Outside, a narrow stairway led to the roof, which was made of branches and dried clay laid over wooden beams. The roof was frequently used for working or sleeping. The paralytic's friends carried him up to the roof and lowered him down through a hole to right in front of Jesus. Impressed by the "faith" (vs. 20) of the friends, Jesus then responded to it, though not (at first) as the men might have expected.

Jesus recognized that the greatest problem faced by the disabled man on the stretcher was not physical immobility, but spiritual paralysis. So, instead of immediately healing the man, Jesus forgave the man's "sins" (vs. 20). From this we see that the paralyzed man also had faith.

**4.** *What indication is there that the religious leaders were interested in Jesus?*

**5.** *What did a group of concerned men do for their disabled friend?*

**6.** *How did Jesus respond to the efforts made by the disabled man's friends?*

## Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

*Luke 5:21-26, KJV*

21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason

*Luke 5:21-26, NIV*

<sup>21</sup>The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

<sup>22</sup>Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked,

ye in your hearts?

23 Whether is easier, to say,  
Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to  
say, Rise up and walk?

24 But that ye may know that  
the Son of man hath power  
upon earth to forgive sins, (he  
said unto the sick of the palsy,)  
I say unto thee, Arise, and take  
up thy couch, and go into thine  
house.

25 And immediately he rose  
up before them, and took  
up that whereon he lay, and  
departed to his own house, glo-  
rifying God.

26 And they were all amazed,  
and they glorified God, and  
were filled with fear, saying,  
We have seen strange things to  
day.

“Why are you thinking  
these things in your hearts?”

<sup>23</sup>Which is easier: to say,  
‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or  
to say, ‘Get up and walk’?

<sup>24</sup>But I want you to know that  
the Son of Man has author-  
ity on earth to forgive sins.”  
So he said to the paralyzed  
man, “I tell you, get up, take  
your mat and go home.”

<sup>25</sup>Immediately he stood up  
in front of them, took what  
he had been lying on and  
went home praising God.

<sup>26</sup>Everyone was amazed and  
gave praise to God. They  
were filled with awe and  
said, “We have seen remark-  
able things today.”

Jesus’ pronouncement of forgiveness angered the religious leaders, for they understood that anyone who claimed to pardon sinners was also claiming to be divine. With respect to Jesus, the legal experts refused to accept that He is God.

Whereas Jesus addressed the paralytic as “friend” (vs. 20), the religious leaders rudely referred to Jesus as “this fellow” (vs. 21). As they did so, they charged Him with “blasphemy,” since only God can forgive sins. This was a very serious charge that could result in stoning (Lev. 24:16).

The legal experts knew that God had the authority to forgive sins and the power to pardon and redeem people. Because they believed Jesus was a mere human being, they assumed He was illegitimately claiming divine authority for Himself.

Jesus could sense what the leaders were “thinking” (Luke 5:22) and discussing among themselves. Which was easier, He asked, to tell the paralyzed man he was pardoned or to enable him to stand up and walk away with his mat? Clearly, the first option was easier, for it could not be verified by any conventional means. Additionally, miraculous healing and the forgiveness of sins both required divine “authority” (vs. 24). One reason Jesus first healed the disabled man was to lend credibility to His declaration of forgiveness. Another reason was to prove that He truly is the “Son of Man.”

Confirmation came when the paralytic, at Jesus’ command, was able to stand up in the presence of the onlookers, pick up his stretcher, and begin walking “home” (vs. 25). There was no hesitancy, either, as he did so. Instead, he responded at once. He also “gave praise to God” for the miracle he experienced that day.

Only a few moments earlier, the religious leaders had planted the seeds of doubt among those who were present in the house. Now, verse 26 states that everyone present was “amazed” at what they saw. They, in turn, praised God for the miracle they witnessed Jesus perform, exclaiming that they had “seen remarkable things” that day. Though the crowd, after watching Jesus heal the paralyzed man, responded enthusiastically to His display of power, they did not yet realize He had not come to only be a miracle worker. The miracles He performed confirmed His claim to be the Messiah and His legitimate authority to forgive and save people.

**7.** *How did the religious leaders respond to Jesus’ statement?*

**8.** *What did Jesus declare for Himself?*

**9.** *How did the paralytic respond to Jesus’ command?*

**10.** *How did the onlookers respond to the healing episode?*

## Friends Forever

What is astonishing about the friends of the paralyzed man is not so much their effort in getting their friend to the Lord but their faith that this teacher could miraculously heal him. Moreover, this man believed as well, and such a faith even moved Jesus to the point that He Himself called the paralyzed man His “friend”!

To be a friend of Jesus is a marvelous blessing! He blesses families and communities centered on Him, and within those relationships He forms intimate friendships, where trust and the sharing of burdens help us thrive as His children.

Helen Keller once said, “Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.” Keller, who was blind and deaf from the age of 19 months until her death at the age of 87, certainly could appreciate the contrast between light and darkness but even more having close friends to guide and inspire her. Her life is a lesson on triumphing over seemingly insurmountable disabilities with the aid of special friends, such as Anne Sullivan, her teacher and companion.

Of course, no one is without faults. That’s why when a friend still loves us despite our faults, we know we have a true friend who will demonstrate his or her love for us with encouragement, loyalty, and empathy, all the same qualities we should show in return. A good friendship takes a tremendous amount of effort as well as the ability to forgive and receive forgiveness to make it work. In other words, to have a good friendship, we must be willing to give of ourselves to that other person.

**11.** *Why is encouragement crucial in a good friendship?*

**12.** *How do your friends encourage you? How do you encourage your friends?*

**13.** *In what ways does Jesus show you what it means to be a good friend?*

## Encouragement Works Both Ways

When the friends of the paralyzed man lowered him to Jesus, they did so because of their love for their friend. Such love should be reflected in our love for our friends, and hopefully such love should be reflected in their love for us. Such friendships are the kind that Jesus wants for us.

► *How can you encourage a friend this week? Write some ideas here and then follow through on them as the Holy Spirit leads you.*

### KEY VERSES

And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. —Luke 5:18-19, KJV

Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. —Luke 5:18-19, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of April 8 through April 14

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

- Mon.** Acts 10:1-15—Accept What God Has Made Clean.
- Tues.** Isaiah 42:1-12—God's Servant Enlightens the Nations.
- Wed.** Malachi 1:10-14—God Is Praised among the Nations.
- Thurs.** Colossians 3:1-11—Christ Is All and in All.
- Fri.** Zechariah 8:18-23—Nations Shall Entreat God's Favor.
- Sat.** Luke 3:1-14—All Flesh Shall See God's Salvation.
- Sun.** Luke 7:1-10—Jesus Helps a Righteous Gentile.

## Faith of a Centurion

Galen clicked his phone off. He was meeting his wife, Alyssa, at home. Neither of them was in the state of mind to finish out their workday. But while his mind was racing, he had one immediate thought when he heard the distressing news.

It had come to him like a life preserver. The only thing he knew for sure that could withstand the tumultuous and encapsulating waves threatening to overtake him was the person he most depended on—Jesus Christ.

Galen had received a call fewer than 30 minutes ago from the head coach at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. “Damitri sustained a back and head injury,” the coach had said. “He’s in surgery now. I don’t have any more information now. I will give the hospital doctors your number, and they and I will be in touch as soon as possible. Stay by the phone!”

The Coopers lived in Tampa. So, they were a long ways away from their middle child, and they could not get to him any time soon.

“Lord, I have trusted You with Damitri,” prayed Galen as he entered his neighborhood. “I trust You with him now. I ask You again to heal my son. I call on the mighty name of Jesus! I do so, knowing You are a good, gracious, and mighty God! Heal our son, dear Lord. And bless the doctors and medical personnel. I ask all of this in Jesus’ precious name. Amen.”

When he pulled into his driveway, Alyssa was waiting. “He’s in the Lord’s healing hands now,” he told her.

- 1.** *What reasons might you have for not calling out to Jesus at hard times in your life?*
- 2.** *How do you overcome that lack of faith in Him?*
- 3.** *In what ways does Jesus reach out to you?*

## The Centurion's Request

*Luke 7:1-5, KJV*

1 Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:

5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

*Luke 7:1-5, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>There

a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

<sup>3</sup>The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

<sup>4</sup>When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, <sup>5</sup> because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

At the end of Jesus' teaching session (called the Sermon on the Plain: Luke 6:17-49), He went to Capernaum (7:1), where He would heal the servant of one of Israel's enemies—a Roman centurion. He commanded a detachment of Roman troops stationed at Capernaum.

The centurion had a male "servant" (vs. 2) whom he greatly esteemed and who had demonstrated his considerable worth on several occasions. The Greek adverb rendered "sick" could be translated "to be in a bad state" or "ill." In the case of the centurion's servant, the text says the servant was "about to die" (vs. 2). The news about Jesus and His ability to heal gave the centurion renewed hope. He believed that Jesus could cure his dying servant.

So, when the centurion found out that Jesus was present in Capernaum, the soldier sent some Jewish "elders" (vs. 3) as his emissaries to Jesus. Perhaps the centurion did



not feel it was appropriate for him, as a Gentile, to make his request directly to such a powerful miracle worker as Jesus. This explains why the officer dispatched the local religious leaders to ask Jesus to come to the centurion's home and heal his slave.

Once the "elders" found Jesus, they began to implore Him "earnestly" (vs. 4). These intermediaries explained that the centurion, while not a full convert to Judaism, was a God-fearing Gentile who loved the people of Judea, admired their culture, respected their worship, and even had sponsored the construction of the local "synagogue" (vs. 5) in Capernaum—something that showed his deep devotion to the God of Israel.

The centurion likely contributed substantially to the building costs out of his own pocket. In either case, the delegation considered the soldier to be a worthy individual who deserved to receive help from Jesus.

**4.** *What prompted the centurion to seek Jesus' help?*

**5.** *Who told Jesus about the centurion's gravely ill servant?*

**6.** *What reason did the Jewish elders give for Jesus' traveling to the centurion's home?*

## The Centurion's Humility

*Luke 7:6-10, KJV*

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:

7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my

*Luke 7:6-10, NIV*

<sup>6</sup>So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. <sup>7</sup>That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the

servant shall be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

<sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." <sup>10</sup> Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Jesus was convinced by what He heard from the Jewish elders. In turn, He accompanied them to the centurion's home. Unexpectedly, the soldier, after first asking Jesus to come to him (Luke 7:3), next asked Jesus not to come (vs. 6).

Jesus was convinced by what He heard from the Jewish elders. In turn, He accompanied them to the home of the centurion. Unexpectedly, the soldier, after first asking Jesus to come to him, next asked Jesus not to come (vs. 6).

The Savior was not far from the centurion's home when he sent some "friends" to say Jesus need not bother personally showing up at the soldier's house—he did not consider himself sufficiently "worthy" (vs. 7) for such an esteemed religious leader to enter his home.

Strict Jews of the day would have agreed with the centurion. They believed Jews became ritually unclean when they entered the home of a Gentile (see Acts 10:28). The irony is that this ceremonially impure Gentile proved to have more faith than his more scrupulous Jewish peers (Luke 7:9).

Instead, the soldier asked Jesus to issue the command for the servant to be cured. The officer believed that when this

happened, his servant would be “healed” (vs. 7).

As a person in charge of others, he leveraged his understanding of how the chain of command worked. For instance, he could use his “authority” (vs. 8) to direct subordinates to come and go whenever it was necessary. The centurion could also order one of his slaves to do this or that, and the command was quickly performed.

While the centurion acknowledged that he had some authority in physical realms, he believed Jesus had power in the spiritual realm that was not limited by distance, time, or even maladies. The soldier believed that if Jesus would “say the word,” the chain of command would go into action and the dying servant would be cured.

The centurion’s grasp of what Jesus could do both pleased and “amazed” (vs. 9) Him. Perhaps to emphasize His point, the Lord turned to face those accompanying Him to exclaim that He had not seen “faith” this great or profound throughout the nation of “Israel.” In accordance with the centurion’s faith, his servant would be “healed” (vs. 7). So when the officer’s subordinates arrived at his home, they discovered the servant had been fully restored to health.



*The ruins of a synagogue at Capernaum, possibly built on the ruins of the one the centurion helped build.*

*Photo: James Emery*

**7.** *What reason did the centurion give for asking Jesus not to come?*

**8.** *In what way did the centurion describe himself?*

**9.** *How did Jesus respond to the centurion?*

**10.** *What was the result of Jesus’ intervention?*

## Reach Out!

“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (Ps. 145:18). In other words, if we call on the Lord in faith and in sincerity, He will be close to us to hear whatever the need we express to Him. Like the centurion, whose faith Jesus commended before His followers, we need to humbly call out to our Lord while recognizing His divine authority. Even when He doesn’t respond to our petitions in the way we want, our trust in His love for us should be ever present and ever firm.

“Resolved, never to count that a prayer,” said Jonathan Edwards, the American revivalist preacher of the eighteenth century, “. . . which is so made, that I cannot hope that God will answer it.”

Furthermore, R. C. Sproul, a modern Christian theologian, confesses, “I don’t always feel His presence. But God’s promises do not depend upon my feelings; they rest upon His integrity.” What both men are noting is that our call to God should rest on who He is—that is, His faithfulness and righteousness.

On the one hand, we know that Jesus listens to us whenever we call on Him. On the other hand, we trust that whatever is His response to our call will be for our best. Jesus did not suffer so greatly even to an agonizing death for our redemption that He would ignore us during our hardships and struggles. Moreover, His triumph over death and evil tells us that He has the power to truly answer our petitions. Therefore, call upon our Lord, for He “richly blesses all who call on him” (Rom. 10:12).

**11.** *Why is faith essential when you call out to Jesus?*

**12.** *Why is the recognition of the Lord’s authority crucial when you offer your petitions to Him?*

**13.** *How does God bless you when you reach out to Him?*

## My Current Petitions

This week's Scripture focuses on the faith that the Roman centurion displayed in Jesus and his humble petition for Jesus to heal his beloved servant. Such faith and such humility of this Gentile are what Jesus highly commended before the Jewish multitude and what the Gospel writer teaches us through God's holy Word. And, as such, we are to call on the Lord in like manner.

► *List some reasons you might call out to Jesus this week. Thank Him in advance for listening to you and beginning to answer your request even before you give it.*

### KEY VERSE

Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. —Luke 7:7, KJV

That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. —Luke 7:7, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 15 through April 21

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

- Mon.** Luke 7:11-17—Jesus' Compassion for the Grieving.
- Tues.** Psalm 92—Sing Praises to God's Name.
- Wed.** James 5:12-20—Confession, Prayer, and Healing.
- Thurs.** Micah 7:7-20—God Pardons Iniquity and Transgressions.
- Fri.** Psalm 86:1-7, 11-17—God is Good and Forgiving.
- Sat.** Romans 8:1-17—No Condemnation in Christ.
- Sun.** Luke 7:36-50—Jesus Forgives a Sinner.

## Faith of a Woman Who Loved Jesus

On their ride back to Deja's house, Aunt Trina observed a homeless man at an upcoming intersection. She pulled her car over onto the shoulder.

"Why did we stop, Auntie?" asked six-year-old Deja.

Trina pulled back a blanket from the floorboard behind the driver's seat to reveal a basket of an assortment of black, gray, pink, and purple pouches. Deja grabbed a black pouch.

"Oooh, purses," said Deja.

Trina started the car and pulled off the shoulder. When she got to the intersection, she slowed to catch the red light. Then she honked her horn, and the man holding the cardboard sign came to her window. Trina rolled it down, smiled, and looked him in the eye. "Hello," she said, handing him the black pouch.

He looked puzzled, but said, "Thank you, ma'am!"

"What's in the purse?" Deja asked. "Toothpaste?"

"Yes," Trina laughed, "and a few other things."

Trina had gotten the idea from one of her Christian friends several months ago around Thanksgiving. Shelia Taylor of Black Jack, Missouri, was commenting on how good the Lord had been to her. She had the idea of making pouches for homeless men and women and filling them with essentials like toiletries, snacks, and money and keeping them in your car to pass out.

**1.** *Why is a person's character expressed in his or her behavior?*

**2.** *Why is the expression of faith and love far more important to God than religious activity?*

**3.** *Is religious faith and love meaningless if it is not in devotion to Christ? Explain your answer.*

## The Pharisee's Indignation

*Luke 7:36-39, KJV*

36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.

37 And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,

38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

*Luke 7:36-39, NIV*

<sup>36</sup>When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. <sup>37</sup>A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. <sup>38</sup>As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

<sup>39</sup>When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

Luke 7:36 states that a Pharisee named Simon asked Jesus to eat a meal with him. Jesus accepted the invitation by accompanying the religious leader to his home and sitting down to eat, evidently as the guest of honor.

Jesus' critics accused Him of being a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (vs. 34). By this the religious elite especially meant those whom they saw as impious.

That would have been the case with the woman "in that town" (vs. 37), who had a reputation for living in a

“sinful” or immoral manner. Despite the stigma she bore, when she found out that Jesus had arrived and was dining at Simon’s home, the woman unexpectedly showed up at the meal. She was carrying a long-necked “alabaster” flask filled with perfumed oil. Because of the product’s rarity and expense (perhaps worth as much as the wages a day laborer earned in one year), only the wealthy could afford to buy and use it to anoint their esteemed guests.

As Jesus reclined at the table with the rest of the guests, the unnamed woman, while crying audibly, stood behind the Savior’s feet. To the shock and amazement of the host and guests, the sobbing woman used her “tears” (vs. 38) to bathe Jesus’ feet. Next, since the woman had no towel, she used her “hair” to dry off Jesus’ feet. Then, as the woman repeatedly kissed Jesus’ feet, she broke the seal on the flask and drenched Jesus’ feet with the perfumed oil.

In the Savior’s day, slaves usually took care of the guests’ feet. So, the woman’s actions were a sign of humility and reverence. The sacrificial aspect of the woman’s action is evident by the the expense of the “perfume” she used to anoint Jesus.

Simon considered the woman only as a local, notorious “sinner” (vs. 39). The objectionable display unfolding before Simon convinced him that despite Jesus’ claims and those made by His followers, He was not really a “prophet.” Otherwise, Simon reasoned, Jesus would have recognized He was permitting an immoral woman to touch Him and make Him ritually unclean.

**4.** *How did Jesus respond to the Pharisee’s dinner invitation?*

**5.** *What unusual event took place during the meal?*

**6.** *What was the Pharisee’s reaction to the woman’s actions?*



## The Woman's Forgiveness

*Luke 7:44-50, KJV*

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.

48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.

49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

*Luke 7:44-50, NIV*

<sup>44</sup>Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup>You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. <sup>46</sup>You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

<sup>47</sup>Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

<sup>48</sup>Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

<sup>49</sup>The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

<sup>50</sup>Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Despite Simon's skepticism, Jesus demonstrated His prophetic powers in a surpassing manner. Rather than show that He knew the woman's heart, Jesus proved He was aware of Simon's thoughts. Jesus did so by stating He

had something to share, and He told a parable (vss. 41-43).

Jesus compared God's forgiveness to the size of a borrower's cancelled debt. Then, Jesus shifted His attention to the woman and asked Simon to notice her (vs. 44). He compared how the woman and the Pharisee treated Him.

For instance, after Jesus entered Simon's house, Simon snubbed his guest by not having Jesus' feet cleaned. In contrast, the woman used her tears to wash Jesus' feet, and she dried them with her hair. Also, Simon did not greet Jesus with a customary "kiss" (vs. 45) on the cheek. Yet, the woman continually kissed the Savior's feet. Simon did not anoint Jesus' head with cheap olive oil, but the woman covered His' feet with a costly "perfume" (vs. 46).

Jesus acknowledged that, on the one hand, the woman's transgressions against the law were numerous. On the other hand, Jesus had "forgiven" (vs. 47) all her trespasses. For this reason, she was filled with gratitude and "love" for being pardoned.

Jesus assured the woman, who was still standing by, that despite her immoral acts, that He had pardoned her. Then Jesus kindly sent the woman away. The pardoning caused quite a stir among the others reclining at the table with Simon and Jesus. After all, they understood that only God could forgive sinners.

Jesus was fully aware of the consternation being expressed by the others present. Yet, that did not stop Him from telling the woman her faith in Him had delivered her from God's wrath and she could now "go in peace" (vs. 50).

**7.** *In what ways did the Pharisee and the woman contrast with each other?*

**8.** *How much forgiveness did the woman receive?*

**9.** *How did the dinner guests respond to Jesus' assertion?*

**10.** *What was at the heart of the woman's forgiveness?*

## The Love We Have

According to Mark 12:41-44, Jesus praised a widow for giving all she had, not the wealthy who donated only a small portion of their riches. Jesus was not demanding that all His followers must give all their material possessions to the church. Instead, He was calling for us to give all of ourselves to Him, and in so doing, we will express how much faith and love we truly have for Him.

“The more we love [Jesus],” said Calvin Miller, “the more we want him to be a part of our affairs.” Miller founded and was the leading pastor of the Westside Baptist Church of Omaha, Nebraska, for more than two decades, was a professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and wrote the best-selling trilogy *The Singer*. Because of this work, Miller was described as a troubadour singing a love song to his Lord Jesus.

It would be a high honor if our lives as Christians were a love song to Christ Jesus. Indeed, how many family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and even strangers would hear our song and be captivated by the deep faith we have in our friend and Savior? We would astound those around us with the love we have for Jesus.

It is never too late to pour our love and our faith into Jesus. And it is never too late to express that love and faith to those around us, particularly to those who are hungry for God’s love. The fruit of the Spirit is always ready to touch the lives of others. Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will always be a blessing to others.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,” said Jesus. “Now remain in my love” (John 15:9).

**11.** *In what ways is your life a love song to Jesus?*

**12.** *How has your faith in and your love for Jesus touched the lives of others?*

**13.** *How can you deepen your faith in Jesus?*

## An Open Heart

When the sinful woman approached Jesus with her tears and sorrow, Jesus received her with compassion and forgiveness, but when Simon the Pharisee muttered his disdain, Jesus rebuked him. When our hearts are truly open to Christ, He responds to bless us, strengthening our faith in Him and deepening our love for Him. For such a love as His so overflows within us that we naturally will express that love and that faith in our actions.

► *Pray about writing a note to a person you know, telling him or her how your faith in Jesus has transformed your character. Moreover, relate how the love of Jesus has been manifested in your life and how you hope His love is touching her or his life as well.*

### KEY VERSE

And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

—Luke 7:50 KJV

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

—Luke 7:50, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of April 22 through April 28

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

**Mon.** 1 Kings 17:8-16—God Provides for a Gentile Woman.

**Tues.** 1 Kings 17:17-24—God’s Authority Over Life and Death.

**Wed.** Luke 4:24-30—God Blesses Whomever God Wills.

**Thurs.** Psalm 61—Hear My Cry, O God.

**Fri.** Psalm 20—May God Grant Your Heart’s Desire.

**Sat.** James 4:1-10—God Gives Grace to the Humble.

**Sun.** Matthew 15:21-28—Jesus Hears a Desperate Mother’s Plea.

## Faith of a Canaanite Woman

I am grateful for the job I have,” said Nakita. “I don’t want to seem boastful.”

“How is it boastful? Aren’t you already doing the work?” asked Raven. “Don’t you want to boast in the Lord?”

It was the last week to file for the executive director of communications. Nakita had been with the company for seven years, serving as an excellent and all-encompassing assistant communications director.

“Don’t you want the job?” asked Raven.

Nakita did want the job. The word was that management wanted a man. And they didn’t necessarily want a person of color. In her number-two role, it was true that she led the way many times when Danielle was not able to make it for whatever reason.

After Danielle announced her resignation, she talked to Nakita as a “friend.” It wasn’t that she didn’t think she couldn’t do the job. It was just a “political thing.” And Nakita worked best somewhat behind the scenes.”

“Forget that!” said Raven. “God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,” partially quoting Ephesians 3:20.

Later that evening at home, Nakita realized her friend Raven was right. And so, in her devotion, she unashamedly asked God for favor in the selection process of executive director of communications and stayed up the rest of the night preparing her resume packet.

**1.** *Do you ask God for impossible things? Why or why not?*

**2.** *What’s the biggest request you’ve ever prayed for? What happened?*

**3.** *On a scale of 1 to 10, what would you rate the size of your faith and why?*

## A Mother's Plea

*Matthew 15:21-24, KJV*

21 Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.

22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

*Matthew 15:21-24, NIV*

<sup>21</sup>Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

<sup>23</sup>Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

<sup>24</sup>He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

In the first half of Matthew 15, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees in Jerusalem for missing the point of the law they taught: heartfelt obedience to God based on faith. The region that Jesus travels to next—the region of Tyre and Sidon (vs. 21)—would have raised the eyebrows of many Jewish readers. It was filled with Gentiles (non-Jews) who seemingly had no interest in the things of God. What was Jesus about to do there?

Suddenly, a local woman burst onto the scene. The passage calls her a "Canaanite," which means she was from a people group that was historically considered an enemy of God's people (vs. 22). Often in the Old Testament, the Canaanites' idol worship had caused the Israelites to stray from the living God (Judg. 3:5; Ps. 106:34-36) Yet this woman spoke to Jesus in a manner very different from what might be expected of a "typical" Canaanite!

First, she calls Jesus “Lord,” (vs. 22) and then, more amazingly, she calls Him the “Son of David” (vs. 22), a title which showed belief that Jesus was the promised Savior of Israel—the Messiah—as prophesied in the Scriptures (Isa. 9:7; Jer. 33:15). Not even many Jewish people were sure that Jesus was the promised Messiah, yet somehow this Gentile woman had learned about these promises and believed in them with radical faith.

This woman wasn’t asking for a miracle on her own behalf. Instead, she pleaded for Jesus to cure her daughter, who was suffering terribly from a demon (vs. 22).

Jesus first chose not to answer her—not even with “a word” (vs. 23). While the text doesn’t explain exactly why He kept silent, His attitude would have been considered normal for the time period: typically, men and women didn’t address each other if they were strangers. But Jesus openly spoke to women and to Gentiles at other times in Matthew’s Gospel, especially when they asked for healing (8:5-13; 9:22)! As scholar R.T. France notes, it’s possible Jesus sensed that this woman was ready to “rise to the challenge” of this situation and courageously pursue His mercy.

Indeed, Jesus’ silence didn’t discourage the woman from boldly asking for help again and again. The annoyed disciples begged Jesus to “send her away” (vs. 24).

Jesus responded with the familiar picture of a shepherd. Echoing passages from the Old Testament prophets, He said He was sent only to the “lost sheep of Israel” (vs. 25).

**4.** *What does the Canaanite woman call Jesus?*

**5.** *What is motivating the woman to cry out and pursue Jesus?*

**6.** *How does Jesus first react to the woman’s pleas? How do the disciples react?*

**7.** *To whom does Jesus say He was sent?*

## Bread for the Faithful

*Matthew 15:25-28, KJV*

25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

*Matthew 15:25-28, NIV*

<sup>25</sup>The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

<sup>26</sup>He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

<sup>27</sup>"Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

<sup>28</sup>Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

The woman did not turn away in discouragement. In fact, she decided that she would no longer simply shout from a distance but boldly approached the Lord herself! Yet rather than storming up to Jesus to make an angry demand, she came forward with reverence, kneeling in front of Him. Her simple cry of "Lord, help me!" (vs. 25) once again recognized Jesus' special position of authority.

Finally, Jesus broke his silence—to refuse the woman's request. Once again, He used a word picture to point out the seeming "problem" of the woman's Gentile background. Comparing God's mercy to bread, He said it was not right to take the mercy that rightfully belonged to the "children" of Israel and throw it to the "dogs" (vs. 26).

His meaning would have been clear to everyone who was listening. In the first century, it was common for Jewish people to call Gentile outsiders "stray dogs" as a serious insult. Although Jesus uses a different (and significantly less harsh) word than the slur people typically used, His



meaning would have been clear. It is as if He was saying that His mercy was intended only for those of Jewish heritage—not for Gentiles like this woman.

Considering Jesus' previous kindness toward those who came to him in faith—including at least one Gentile centurion (Matt. 8:5-13)—His response seems shocking. The text doesn't tell us about Jesus' tone of voice or His facial expression, so we cannot fully tell how He phrased these seemingly harsh words. Some scholars argue that Jesus might have taken the tone of a teacher, waiting for this woman's answer to make a key point to His listeners.

Whatever the case may be, the grieving mother seemed to understand and was ready with an answer of her own. Keeping with Jesus' image of dogs at dinner, she cleverly responded that even dogs can eat the leftovers from their master's table. Even if Jesus was going to consider her a "dog," she indicated she would still acknowledge Him as the master of the table. This would require great confidence in God's goodness. Her argument wasn't primarily based on what she felt she deserved, but about her confidence in what God can give. She had faith that Jesus is without limits, and there would be enough "bread" of mercy for her, no matter what her background is.

As it turns out, the woman's words were absolutely right! After hearing her amazing statement, Jesus warmly commended her "great faith" (vs. 28). He showed no hesitation to give her exactly what she asked for—immediately! God's mercy is clearly for her, and for all who come to Jesus with courageous faith in Him.

**8.** *What is this woman's attitude when she approaches Jesus?*

**9.** *What does Jesus mean when he talks about taking the children's bread and giving it to the dogs?*

**10.** *How does the woman respond to Jesus' statement? What do her words mean?*

**11.** *What is Jesus' final response to this woman?*

## He Will Do It!

When my brother and I were growing up, we attended church and loved Jesus. I knew from a young age that I wanted to be a youth pastor. I've always felt a heart for teenagers and want them to know how much Jesus loves them. I loved being in church, helping out and volunteering. My brother went more out of obligation and only because it's what the family did on Sundays.

When my brother moved away to go to college, he started hanging out with people who liked to party and drink. The more he hung out with them, the more he started behaving like them. He quit attending church altogether. I knew this wasn't the right path for him, so I started praying that he would come back to the Lord. It was heart-breaking for me to watch someone I loved so much be leading this kind of lifestyle and not living up to his full potential. I prayed for years as I listened to his stories of crazy exploits, drunken parties, and other shenanigans.

After several months and years, I was overjoyed when my brother started coming to church with us once more. Slowly but surely, he built back his relationship with Jesus. Now he volunteers on Sundays with the rest of my family and is seeking God's will in all aspects of his life. It took a long time of praying, but eventually the fruit was born. Throughout the experience, my faith was strengthened because I knew that God would hear my prayer, and it would be answered according to His perfect timing. I never gave up on praying, and finally my brother returned to the Lord.

**12.** *What is a situation in your life in which you feel like you're at the end of your rope when it comes to prayer?*

**13.** *What Scripture references support persistence in your prayer life?*

**14.** *How can you encourage others to keep the faith when it feels impossible to do so?*

## Pray Big

We tend to put God in a box. We think if we can't do something ourselves, then God must not be able to do it either. There's this subconscious idea that He is made in our image, instead of the other way around. The fact is God is so much bigger than we can even comprehend and no prayer request is too big or impossible for Him.

► *In the space below, consider what areas of your life need the biggest amount of prayer or miracle at the moment. Number them in order from greatest to least. Put this list somewhere you will see it each day, and remember to pray big, even for the impossible. God is capable of all things!*

### KEY VERSE

Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. —Matthew 15:28, KJV

Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. —Matthew 15:28, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of April 29 through May 5

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

- Mon.** Psalm 35:1-8, 22-28—Vindicate Me, O Lord My God.
- Tues.** Psalm 112—Blessed Are They Who Fear God.
- Wed.** Acts 3:12-26—Repent and Turn to God.
- Thurs.** John 3:1-8, 13-17—God So Loves the World.
- Fri.** Psalm 5—Lord, Lead Me in Your Righteousness.
- Sat.** 1 John 1:1—2:2—Christ Our Atoning Sacrifice.
- Sun.** Romans 3:21-30—Atonement by Christ's Blood.

## Justified by Faith in Jesus

Isn't that Sheldon Abbott?" Latrell asked in shock after the tall, retreating figure.

Sheldon was making his way to the restroom as Latrell and Brayton headed to join C.J. at their restaurant table.

"Yes," said Brayton.

Brayton had met the wealthy Sheldon in high school, after securing a scholarship to attend the private institution. Brayton hated to typecast him, but Sheldon had proven to be the typical privileged, spoiled rich jock. But he wasn't dumb, thank goodness. His family had power and prestige. He had good looks and the adoring eye of most of the pretty girls.

Sheldon Abbott had it all, which is why Brayton was surprised when he bumped into him several months ago, and Sheldon wanted to hang out with him.

Turned out, Sheldon remembered Brayton from high school for his "genuineness and peace." The two started talking now and again, and Brayton spoke about a lifestyle that money couldn't buy.

"I know you've probably heard it all before," Brayton had said, "but really listen with your heart."

"Why would Sheldon want to hang out with you?" asked Latrell, on their way to their seats. "I'm surprised he would agree to come to a restaurant like this."

"He's hungry for the Lord," Brayton said. "You love God, Latrell. Would you deny Sheldon that? God's love and forgiveness is for everyone."

**1.** *Why is it only God can give us forgiveness for our sins?*

**2.** *Why does every person need to experience God's forgiveness?*

**3.** *What role does faith have in receiving God's forgiveness and justification?*

## Justified Freely by His Grace

*Romans 3:21-24, KJV*

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

*Romans 3:21-24, NIV*

<sup>21</sup>But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup>This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Our passage begins with the phrase, “But now,” which indicates a transition from one train of thought to another. Prior to our lesson’s Scripture, Paul had made the argument that everyone stands condemned before a holy and righteous God. No human has an excuse, because all creation declares the truth of a Creator, and God has made that truth plain to each person (Rom. 1:18-20). Worse yet, despite knowing God, people reject Him, which results in a downward spiral of idolatry and immorality, until they are completely given over to sin and depravity (vss. 21-32).

Paul also warned against judgmentalism. For no matter how good one may look on the outside, everyone is guilty of the same thing and will not escape judgment (2:1-5).

Furthermore, no amount of religious activity can make one righteous in God’s eye. Rather, when the religious hypocrite is exposed, dishonor to the Lord’s name is too often the result (2:12-24). So if observing the clear evidence of a Creator found in creation, trying to behave properly, or keeping religious standards cannot make a

person righteous before God, then what can? Our passage answers this question clearly. Righteousness does not come from trying to keep the law of God. Rather, as testified by the Law and the Prophets, which refers to the Old Testament Scripture, the righteousness of God comes only by faith in Jesus Christ.

And, there is no difference in this regard between Jews and Gentiles, for everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard, namely His own glory (vs. 23). Thank God that we do not have to measure up to that, for He freely redeems and justifies us by His grace when we receive forgiveness for our sins by faith in Jesus Christ.

4. *Who witnessed the righteousness of God apart from the law?*
5. *What is the righteousness of God apart from the law?*
6. *Who has sinned, and what is the remedy for sin?*

## Justified Fully by His Blood

*Romans 3:25-26, KJV*

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;  
26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

*Romans 3:25-26, NIV*

<sup>25</sup>God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—<sup>26</sup>he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

God provided the way of salvation from sin. Here, Paul used the technical term “propitiation” (vs. 25, KJV) or sacrifice of atonement. The Greek word used here is *hilastêrion*, and it is sometimes translated as “mercy seat.” This

links us to the temple and the most holy place, where the ark of the covenant resided. The lid of the ark was also called the mercy seat, which represented the place where the presence of God resided among His people. The high priest would enter once a year to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat. This foreshadowed what Jesus would do for us in the holy place of heaven. There in His role as High Priest, He entered in, not with the blood of ceremonially clean animals, but with His own blood to obtain everlasting redemption for sinners (Heb. 9:11-12).

The atoning sacrifice of Christ demonstrated the righteousness of God in two ways. First, Christ's shed blood covered the sins of the Old Testament saints. Second, the atoning sacrifice of Christ demonstrates God's righteousness today by covering the sins of those who now trust in the Savior. Both cases demonstrate God's righteousness because the price of redemption has been paid. Because God is holy and righteous, He cannot overlook sin and transgressions forever. But because God is also merciful and gracious, His Son willingly went to the Cross to pay for everyone's sin for all time.

What a glorious and loving God we have! His righteous, holy anger was satisfied by the shed blood of Jesus, so the gift of salvation is available to everyone.

**7.** *How did God provide for the atonement for sins?*

**8.** *Why did He provide for the atonement for sins?*

**9.** *How do sinners appropriate atonement for their sins?*

## **Justified by Faith, Not by Works of the Law**

*Romans 3:27-30, KJV*

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

*Romans 3:27-30, NIV*

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

of the law that requires faith.

<sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, <sup>30</sup>since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

There is no room for boasting because a person is not justified by law, but by faith. God is not the Lord of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. Since Gentiles were never under the law, if keeping the law was required to be justified, Gentiles would not have been able to be right in God's eyes.

But He is also the God of those who have not been circumcised. At the Jerusalem council where whether Gentile believers in Jesus had to also keep the law was discussed, Peter noted that even the Jews could not keep the law. He asked, "Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10, KJV). So if the Gentiles could not be justified by the law because they were never under the law, and if the Jews could not be justified by the law because it was too great a yoke, then how can people be justified? We have a gracious God who justifies Jews and Gentiles who come to the Savior by faith.

**10.** *Why is boasting excluded from justification by faith?*

**11.** *What plays no role in a person being justified before God?*

**12.** *Who are justified by faith?*



## Forgiveness at the Cross

While sitting at the airport, a little girl gazed up at me and asked, "Why do you wear that cross with the man hanging on it?" I replied, "Because it reminds me of what Jesus did on the Cross for me to know Him." Confusion filled her face. So, I explained that over 2,000 years ago, God sent His Son to die on the Cross for everyone's sins.

"Why?" questioned the little girl.

I asked her, "What happens when you disobey your parents?" She said her parents send her to her room or don't let her do something she wants to do. I said, "When we disobey God's commands for us, it separates us from Him, just like when your parents send you to your room for disobeying them. After you come out your room, what do you do to make your parents happy again?"

She said, "I tell them I'm sorry and won't do it again."

"What happens after you apologize?"

She hugged herself to show how her parents give her a hug.

"Well, that's why Jesus had to die on the Cross, so when we come to God and say, 'I'm sorry,' God can forgive us. Because God doesn't do wrong, someone had to die on the Cross for our wrongdoing. Only Jesus could do it because He never sinned. So Jesus died on the Cross, so that when we do wrong, God can forgive us. When we tell God that we are sorry, He remembers Jesus' death and forgives us and our relationship with God is made new."

The girl said, "Wow, that cross means a lot!"

"I hope one day it will mean a lot to you, too. Because Jesus died on the Cross for everyone to experience God's forgiveness and have a relationship with Him."

**13.** *Why is it important to believe and accept what Jesus did on the Cross to experience God's forgiveness?*

**14.** *What role does "I'm sorry" or confessing our sins play in experiencing God's forgiveness?*

**15.** *Have you experienced God's forgiveness in your life?*

## Spiritual Cleansing

You probably routinely cleanse your body and living environment, but what about spiritual cleansing? Spiritual cleansing involves two steps: confessing your sins and asking for the Holy Spirit to take control of your life again. As 1 John 1:9 tells us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” And Ephesians 5:18 reminds us that we should be filled not with sin but “with the Spirit.”

► *Do you desire to experience sweet fellowship with God through daily spiritual cleansing? If so, start your cleansing right now with a prayer of confession, asking God to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.*

### KEY VERSES

For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. —Romans 3:22b-24, KJV

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. —Romans 3:22b-24, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of May 6 through May 12

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

**Mon.** Matthew 20:1-16—God Is Generous to the Unworthy.

**Tues.** Genesis 13:14-18—A Great and Blessed Nation.

**Wed.** Genesis 15:1-6—A Promise of Countless Heirs.

**Thurs.** 1 John 2:12-17—Little Children, Your Sins Are Forgiven.

**Fri.** Psalm 32—God's Abundant Forgiveness.

**Sat.** Romans 4:1-12—Trust God, Who Justified the Ungodly.

**Sun.** Romans 4:13-25—Christ Was Raised for Our Justification.

## Reckoned as Righteous

Sister Collins gathered her few bills and put a rubber band around them. She knew she was antiquated to still be sending them through the mail, but there were only a few she put in the envelope.

She only had two more years to pay on her mortgage, and she would be done! But her taxes had increased by \$75, and her pension had remained the same. Groceries and utilities were also on the rise. Every time she went to the grocery store, the bill was higher. She had to find a way to cut her costs or earn more money. She could work part-time in the church's office. Or could she see about other work?

Sister Collins didn't want to be a burden to her children. She had been an independent soul all her life. And frankly, her children were struggling to make ends meet themselves.

She went into the kitchen to fix herself some lunch. She was not going to get herself riled up about money! After 69 years, Sister Collins knew one thing. The Lord would take good care of her. She had strived to put the Lord first and trusted in the Word that when she did, God would take care of her. She remembered Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (KJV).

It wasn't that she was expecting tit for tat from God. The Lord was a man of His Word. He was a good, good Father. It's just who He was. He took good care of His children, and He wasn't going to stop now.

- 1.** *What promises have you kept that you are proud to say you did?*
- 2.** *What are some promises you still need to fulfill?*
- 3.** *Why is God the one to trust for keeping promises?*

## Righteousness Is Apart from the Law

*Romans 4:13-15, KJV*

13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

*Romans 4:13-15, NIV*

<sup>13</sup>It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, <sup>15</sup>because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Paul argued that God's promise to Abraham and his descendants did not come by keeping the law but because of the righteousness that was accounted to him by his faith. If the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and his descendants came by keeping the law, then faith in the Lord would be meaningless and the promises ineffectual. But such is not the case, because it is impossible for anyone, even Abraham, to keep the law.

Paul went on to argue that the law was never designed to make a person righteous. It is the agent that brings God's wrath on people. The law took away all excuses because it clearly declared God's standard. Its purpose would be to point people to Jesus.

Whether in Abraham's day or ours, righteousness before God comes by faith.

**4.** *How was God's promise not received by Abraham and his descendants?*

**5.** *How, then, was God's promise received by Abraham and his descendants?*

**6.** *What does the law bring?*

## Righteousness Is by Grace

*Romans 4:16-19, KJV*

16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.

*Romans 4:16-19, NIV*

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. <sup>17</sup>As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

<sup>18</sup>Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>19</sup>Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

As the apostle continued his argument, he introduced God's grace. Whereas the law could bring only God's wrath upon sinners, grace brings His mercy upon all who come to Him in faith. The Greek for grace, *charis*, means favor or a gift liberally bestowed upon a person who does not deserve it. Through no merit of their own, sinners can receive God's favor. By His grace God provided salvation,

and it is by faith that we must receive His gift.

Because salvation from sin is by God's grace through faith, everyone who comes to Jesus can be saved. Not only the Jews, but also Gentiles can receive God's gift of salvation. The latter are said to have the faith of Abraham, who believed God's promise that Sarah would bear the child of promise. Because God said it would happen, Abraham believed, and became "the father of many nations."

We can trust that the Lord will keep all His promises. Before there was the universe, there was God, and in Genesis 1, He spoke things into existence. If God's power as Creator is not enough for us, then consider His life-giving ability. He created plants, sea life, birds of the air, and all land-dwelling life, including people. Considering all we know about our Creator, we too have "hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:19). Though not fathers of nations, those who come to God by faith in His Son will be adopted into His family.

**7.** *What is grace?*

**8.** *Who are recipients of God's grace?*

**9.** *How did Abraham become "the father of many nations"?*

## **Righteousness Is Reckoned by God**

*Romans 4:20-25, KJV*

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

23 Now it was not written for

*Romans 4:20-25, NIV*

<sup>20</sup>Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup>This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup>The words

his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

“it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup>but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup>He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Righteousness is not something a person can attain in his or her own strength. There is nothing that a sinner can present to God to obtain righteousness. God’s standard is perfection, so imperfect human beings have nothing to offer. Thankfully, God knows this and loves us enough to provide the way for us to become righteous, and Abraham is our example.

When God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as innumerable as the stars, he believed that promise (Gen. 15:1-6). Abraham’s faith was contagious, because though his wife was skeptical at first (18:12), “by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise” (Heb. 11:11). It is important to trust that the Lord is faithful to keep His promises.

With faith, Abraham was persuaded that God could and would keep His promise. Therefore, God credited righteousness to him. People today can also be reckoned as righteous by faith in the Gospel (see 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Our Lord was delivered to the Cross for our sins, but three days later, He was raised from the dead for our justification. Now, because Jesus lives, those who are in Him by faith stand in His righteousness, justified in God’s sight.

**10.** *How is Abraham’s faith described?*

**11.** *What did God do because of Abraham’s faith?*

**12.** *How do people obtain righteousness today?*

## Faith Does

For months, Cynthia was frustrated with her job. Her manager constantly belittled everything she did. Cynthia needed a new job, but also needed to pay her bills.

One evening Cynthia was reading her Bible before bed. As she meditated on James 2:14-19, Cynthia realized that “faith does.” If she had faith in God to provide for her, she needed to demonstrate it. Cynthia went to work the next day and submitted her two weeks’ notice.

For two months, Cynthia filled out job applications. She even had a couple of interviews but no offers. Cynthia became anxious as she saw her bank account dwindling below her monthly expenses. Every night she would pray and ask God what she should do next. Often, she felt as if God wasn’t listening, but then someone would bless her with exactly what she needed to make it another week.

Her family and friends supported her faith and helped her during this time. One of her friends filled her car up with gas. Her family invited her to dinner and gave her a package of food to last for the next few days. She even received gift cards in the mail that she used for necessities.

At what seemed like the last minute to Cynthia, she received an email inviting her to an interview. After almost a month process, Cynthia received the offer to her dream job. She knew that she would have never had this opportunity if she hadn’t put her faith to action and quit her previous job.

It was a difficult time, but God fulfilled His promises. He used others to help her when things got tough. God had shown Himself to be trustworthy.

**13.** *What does “faith isn’t faith without works” mean?*

**14.** *What role does knowing God’s promises play when putting faith in action?*

**15.** *Have you ever stepped out in faith and done something that others would think unreasonable? Explain.*



## Standing on God's Promises

We demonstrated our faith in God and His promises by how we live daily. The fifth stanza of the hymn "Standing on the Promises" by Russell Kelso Carter reminds us that we have a good God who keeps His promises: "Standing on the promises, I cannot fall/ Listening every moment to the Spirit's call/ Resting in my Savior as my all in all/ Standing on the promises of God."

► *Are you willing to daily trust God and His promises, even if nothing is going according to your plan? If so, list some promises here you can stand on as you live your life for Him.*

### KEY VERSES

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

—Romans 4:20-21, KJV

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

—Romans 4:20-21, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 13 through May 19

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

**Mon.** Isaiah 26:1-11—Trusting in God Brings Perfect Peace.

**Tues.** Isaiah 40:1-11—The Penalty Has Been Paid.

**Wed.** Acts 2:1-4, 14, 16-24, 36—God's Spirit Poured upon All Flesh.

**Thurs.** Acts 2:37-47—The Firstfruits of Reconciliation.

**Fri.** Genesis 33:1-15—Brothers at Long Last Reconciled.

**Sat.** Psalm 29—May God Bless Us with Peace.

**Sun.** Romans 5:1-11—Peace with God through Jesus Christ.

## Reconciled to God

Rashan?" came a voice behind him.

Rashan turned around in the drugstore to see it was Kalina, a statuesque woman he knew who was 37 years old.

"I haven't seen you in so long. Where did you move to?"

Rashan had moved out of his old neighborhood 12 years earlier. Kalina had always liked Rashan more than he did her, but the two were never a couple. She knew the old Rashan—the hurting, wounded, and fearful Rashan. He was drowning then. He did whatever to fit in and to feel better. Those were times that Rashan did not like to recall, and he used to wonder if he would ever know a sense of freedom.

Rashan and Kalina eventually paid for their purchases and met again on the drugstore's parking lot. It was there that Rashan addressed Kalina's repeated comments of, "You seem so different."

Finally, he told her, "As trite as it might sound, I found the Lord.

"And I wish I had done it sooner, Kal," he continued. "Really. The Lord has been so good to me. He showed His great love for me by dying on the Cross. He has given me freedom from sin and myself. He is my everything. And one of the best things is, I now have peace with God."

**1.** *What two sides of the Christian life might we experience?*

**2.** *Why do we sometimes feel contradictions as believers?*

**3.** *What does life with Jesus offer to help us reconcile questions about our spiritual life?*

## Faith and Peace

*Romans 5:1-5, KJV*

1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

*Romans 5:1-5, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Paul states that believers have been “justified through faith” (vs. 1). Saving faith happens when people realize that their sinfulness has alienated them from God, and there is no human cure for this spiritual condition. Left to itself, the sinned-stained soul will want less and less to do with God, and eventually abandon all desire for reconciliation with Him. But penitent souls who desire to be made right with God ask Him to be merciful and trust Jesus to save them from the consequences of their sin.

Paul then described all the wonderful things in store for the person who has experienced justification through faith. First and foremost, we have peace with God because of His grace in our lives. In addition, our suffering suddenly has a purpose; no longer does the pain we experience in this life seem gratuitous. According to Paul, our suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope.

Perseverance enables us to endure the trials of life. Character is who we're becoming because of our suffering, which we now understand has a purpose. We are becoming more like Jesus. And then, out of this character development comes the hope that will never disappoint, because it's secured by the promises of God.

The one who empowers this is the Holy Spirit, who fills every believer to accomplish God's will. Because of the Spirit's presence, God's love spills into our relationships, calling people's attention to Jesus' compassion and mercy.

**4.** *What is the result of saving faith in the heart of the new believer?*

**5.** *Why does suffering have meaning for those who are in Christ?*

## Perfect Timing

*Romans 5:6-8, KJV*

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

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

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

*Romans 5:6-8, NIV*

<sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul called attention to God's perfect timing in people's lives—when they realize their powerlessness over the sins in their hearts, seeing no hope in sight for their own deliverance. It was at this perfect time that Jesus died for those who were ungodly.

Many Jews felt that as long as the temple was standing, they were fine with God. But the salvation they needed was first and foremost spiritual, and Jesus died to give

them that salvation.

Today, when someone wants to express his or her loyalty to someone, that person might say something like “I’d take a bullet for you.” This is what Paul meant when he said that for a righteous person, one might dare to die.

Imagine the person who was in danger was belligerent, indifferent to the plights of others, and selfish. Not many people would line up to take a bullet for that person.

However, Jesus was willing to die for someone like that because he could see the wonderful things the Spirit of God could do in that person’s heart, transforming him or her into someone beautiful in character and spirit—if that person would experience saving faith and trust in Jesus. That saving faith would be impossible to experience unless Jesus had atoned for sins by sacrificing Himself on the Cross.

**6.** *What does it mean to be spiritually powerless?*

**7.** *What is amazing about Jesus’ willingness to die for those who (at the time) had no interest in salvation?*

## How Much More

*Romans 5:9-11, KJV*

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

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

*Romans 5:9-11, NIV*

<sup>9</sup>Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! <sup>10</sup>For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup>Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Reconciliation after betrayal is difficult. There is so much hurt, it's hard to think about even going down that path. Forgiveness does not mean that reconciliation automatically follows. The person who has been forgiven may be insisting the behavior was justified—worse, fully deserved by the person who was hurt. If the behavior was criminal, the offender needs to be held accountable by the court system.

In the spiritual sense, when a person refuses to accept God's grace, the consequences of their behavior means facing God's wrath and eternal separation from Him.

From a human standpoint, reconciliation demands that our enemies come to terms with the damage they have caused—and take full responsibility for their actions. Even if their attempts to make amends fall short, they can ask for mercy—which should be given by the believer who has forgiven him or her.

This acknowledgement of sin is what happens when a person expresses repentance over what he or she has done and looks to God to be merciful. Once this happens, they are reconciled with Him and enjoy the Lord's compassion.

The result of reconciliation with God through the death of His Son is eternal life, and freedom from sin. We demonstrate this in the compassion we show to others—even those who may not be willing to reciprocate. For the sake of the Gospel, we endure hardship with the hopes that the Spirit of God will give them a sense of receptivity to the Gospel, so that they might experience saving faith.

This is the reason behind our boasting in the grace of God, that those who are far from Him and experiencing spiritual distress can be assured that we will be conduits of God's grace to them, no matter how badly they may have treated us in the past.

**8.** *What does it mean to be reconciled with God?*

**9.** *What is the only God-honoring thing to boast about in regard to our salvation?*

## Peace with God

God's promise of hope and eternal life with Him can be ours when we understand it is possible to be fully reconciled with God. The first step for any kind of reconciliation is to recognize we have done wrong. This includes accepting that we are sinners in need of God's mercy and asking for forgiveness. When we trust Jesus in faith that He will save us from God's wrath, we receive salvation and are justified—made right in God's sight. Reconciliation and peace with God are made possible through Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross.

Paul wrote that Jesus came "when the set time had fully come" (Gal. 4:4). God orchestrated that time in history for Jesus and the Gospel message of peace with God. Even though people were focused on political deliverance, rather than spiritual deliverance, Jesus died for the righteous and the unrighteous alike. His gift of forgiveness came at the great price of Jesus' innocent trial and crucifixion. He experienced separation from God for us (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34), that we might have eternal life. Jesus died in our place to bring us back to God.

We are powerless to save ourselves, and we receive the gift of faith only from God. We step out in faith when we sincerely repent and accept God's mercy. From that place of trust and rest in God's grace, we naturally tell others about the gift of reconciliation and peace with God that is available also for them. The Holy Spirit working in us helps us to offer compassion and grace to others in hope they also will experience saving faith and eternal life with God.

**10.** *Why was Jesus' sacrifice so costly?*

**11.** *How have you experienced reconciliation with God?*

**12.** *How and why does saving faith lead us to show compassion and grace to others?*

## Resting in Right Relationship

Not only do we receive God's grace and forgiveness that lead to reconciliation, we then rest in our right standing with God. We do not try to climb up to Him, so to speak, with good works, so we will be "more" reconciled. He did the work on the Cross, and we can thank Him for what He did and are humbled by what that reconciliation cost.

► *What is your response to the great things God has done through Jesus' sacrifice? One response would be to write your own hymn or poem of praise for God's gift of reconciliation with Him. Start it here.*

### KEY VERSE

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. —Romans 5:1, KJV

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. —Romans 5:1, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of May 20 through May 26

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

- Mon.** Joel 2:28-32—Call on God and Be Saved.
- Tues.** Romans 9:14-16, 25-33—Striving on the Basis of Faith.
- Wed.** Romans 11:1-4, 17-27—All Israel Will Be Saved.
- Thurs.** Deuteronomy 30:11-20—God's Word Is Very Near.
- Fri.** Mark 5:35-43—Do Not Fear, Only Believe.
- Sat.** Isaiah 52—A Beautiful Announcement of Salvation.
- Sun.** Romans 10:1-17—Confession and Belief Lead to Salvation.



## Who Has Believed?

This violence has got to stop,” said an elderly black man whom LaDonna did not know to a woman he was sitting next to. “When are we going to stop killing each other?”

LaDonna was at the funeral of De’Shane Thomas, her friend Regina’s cousin. He was eulogized as having “accepted Christ at a young age.” At the time of his death, the drug dealer was gunned down during an altercation that police are still investigating.

More than a week later, LaDonna visited her friend.

“What’s going to happen to us when we die?” Regina asked. “I know you’ve always walked with the Lord. But I don’t do real bad stuff. I’m a good person. I just wonder sometimes. Will that be enough?”

“No, it won’t,” said LaDonna. “God loves us and has prepared a way for us to be with Him forever in heaven.”

“I know. Jesus. The Cross,” said Regina.

“Yes. Jesus. The Cross,” said LaDonna. “So?”

“So? What?” asked Regina.

“So, have you ever confessed that Christ is Lord and asked Him to be your Savior?”

“Well, no, not really,” said Regina.

“Well, that is the way to Christ and to heaven,” said LaDonna. “But only if you mean it with all of your heart. It’s not a formula or a secret code. God is looking at your heart.”

**1.** *What obstacles do people often voice when hesitating to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior?*

**2.** *Why is the choice to trust Jesus for salvation such a personal decision?*

**3.** *What factors played an important part in your own decision to follow Jesus?*

## Zealous for God

*Romans 10:1-4, KJV*

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

*Romans 10:1-4, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup>For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. <sup>3</sup>Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup>Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Though Paul was a missionary to the Gentiles, his first stop when visiting a town was the synagogue. He felt compelled to communicate the Gospel to Jews.

Paul hoped that one day, his Jewish brethren would accept Jesus and commit their hearts, souls, and minds to Him. While they were zealous for God, they had expectations of a Messiah who would destroy the Romans and restore Israel to the golden age of Solomon.

Paul exceeded most of his countrymen when it came to compliance to the law. It was from this vantage point that Paul reminded his readers that there was no way anyone could attain the righteousness demanded by God. Since Christ represented the total fulfillment of the law, and its demands for sacrificial atonement, only He could be the source of true righteousness.

**4. What was Paul's hope for the Israelites?**

**5. What was keeping the Jews of Paul's day from believing in Jesus?**

## Belief and Justification

*Romans 10:5-13, KJV*

5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)

7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

*Romans 10:5-13, NIV*

<sup>5</sup>Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." <sup>6</sup>But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup>or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

<sup>8</sup>But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: <sup>9</sup>If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. <sup>11</sup>As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." <sup>12</sup>For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup>for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The sacrifices in the temple were to “cover” the Israelites’ failure to keep the law, but even Paul realized the blood of goats could never atone for his sin. After Paul’s conversion, he realized the futility of trying to be holy by keeping the law. Only Jesus could accomplish on Paul’s behalf what he could never obtain on his own.

In our belief after repentance, we are trusting Jesus to do for us what we cannot accomplish on our own. Part of saving faith is believing that the Resurrection actually took place.

Paul goes on to say that when the mouth expresses what the heart believes, that is the evidence a person has experienced saving faith. What results at that moment of belief is justification—the one-time event in the life of the new believer that declares him or her “not guilty” in God’s eyes, not because of works, but by the acknowledgement that they are dependent on Jesus to save them.

Paul states that there was no difference between a Jew and a Gentile when it came to salvation. God’s grace was available to anyone through a commitment of heart, soul, and mind to Jesus. Salvation is the free gift of God, given without hesitation to those who repent and believe.

**6.** *What is unique about the type of righteousness that is obtained through faith?*

**7.** *What does a person have to do to be saved?*

## Faith by Hearing

*Romans 10:14-17, KJV*

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they

*Romans 10:14-17, NIV*

<sup>14</sup>How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup>And how can anyone preach unless they are

preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

<sup>16</sup>But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

<sup>17</sup>Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Paul experienced a major change to his theological narrative when Jesus confronted him on his way to Damascus. But he realized that his fellow Jews would not likely be able to do this without some help. How would they find out what Paul discovered without someone telling them the truth?

The other apostles had Jerusalem covered when it came to proclaiming the Gospel—and then seeing thousands turning their lives over to Jesus. Peter and Paul were spreading the Gospel through the Roman Empire. But the newly established churches must also proclaim Jesus. Those who have been tasked with proclaiming the good news of God to others will do so regardless of the consequences.

The community of believers must convey the Gospel in a way that increases receptivity and addresses the God-shaped hole in a person's heart that he or she is trying to fill. The Holy Spirit softens a person's heart to God's grace, and salvation is found.

**8.** *What was necessary for the Jews of Paul's day to understand the Gospel?*

**9.** *What is the usual means by which people understand the path to salvation?*

## Righteousness and Faith

Many in Paul's audience believed they could achieve righteousness through their historical position as "God's people" and by following the law of Moses. A key part of Paul's message to the Jews was that Jesus was, in fact, the Messiah predicted by God's prophets. The fulfillment of prophecy in hundreds of details forms a convincing argument that Jesus was indeed God's Messiah, the Savior for the world.

We may say we are not bound by extensive Old Testament laws, but Jesus summarized the whole law into only two commands: Love God and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40). If we're honest, it doesn't take long to realize we can't even fully keep these by our own ability alone. Therefore, we cannot stand in our own righteousness before a holy God. But God has made this possible through Jesus' sacrificial death in our place. His resurrection proved He triumphed over death and fully paid the penalty for our sins.

What we need to do to claim this righteousness is to believe in our hearts that Jesus is fully God and Lord of all. Saving faith trusts that Jesus accomplished what we cannot do on our own. We confirm our belief and heart change when we confess Jesus as the living Lord. Our belief and confession work together to bring us to salvation, and we stand righteous (not guilty) before God.

Once we have received God's mercy and gracious salvation, He calls us to share that news with others. Many people come to faith through hearing about Jesus, the Word of God, who freely gives eternal life to all who ask.

**10.** *In what ways do we rely on our perceived righteousness?*

**11.** *Why can our good deeds not save us from the penalty of sin?*

**12.** *In what way(s) is God calling you to share the Good News about Jesus with others?*

## My Story

Some of us already have a testimony to share of when we heard the Gospel, believed it in our hearts, and then confessed Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Others are still searching for Him or perhaps scoffing at the thought of needing a Savior. Sharing your story with such a person may help that person see how much they need the wonderful, life-changing message of Jesus as Lord and Savior.

► *If you are a follower of Jesus, briefly write a few sentences about how believing in Jesus and declaring Him as your Lord and Savior has changed your life. If you are still skeptical about Jesus and the Christian faith, invite someone from your class to share his or her testimony with you and why it's the greatest message they have ever heard.*

### KEY VERSE

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. —Romans 10:9, KJV

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. —Romans 10:9, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of May 27 through June 2

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

- Mon.** Isaiah 43:8-13—God's Witnesses.
- Tues.** Psalm 113—Praise the Lord!
- Wed.** Galatians 3:19-29—God's Children Through Faith.
- Thurs.** Proverbs 10:19-25—The Lord's Blessing Makes Rich.
- Fri.** Matthew 6:19-24—Your Treasure Is with Your Heart.
- Sat.** Matthew 6:25-34—Seek First God's Kingdom.
- Sun.** Colossians 1:24-2:3—Christ, the Most Precious Gift.





COMPREHENSIVE BIBLE STUDY

# Lesson Cycle

FOR 2022-2025

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2022/23	<p><b>God's Exceptional Choice</b> (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians)</p>	<p><b>From Darkness to Light</b> (Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter)</p>	<p><b>Jesus Calls Us</b> (Studies in the Gospels, Acts)</p>	<p><b>The Righteous Reign of God</b> (Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)</p>
2023/24	<p><b>God's Law Is Love</b> (Studies in Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians)</p>	<p><b>Faith That Pleases God</b> (Studies in Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews)</p>	<p><b>Examining Our Faith</b> (Studies in the Gospels, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude)</p>	<p><b>*Hope in the Lord</b> (Studies in Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John)</p>
2024/25	<p><b>Worship in the Covenant Community</b> (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, 1-2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms)</p>	<p><b>A King Forever and Ever</b> (Studies in Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke)</p>	<p><b>Costly Sacrifice</b> (Studies in Exodus, Leviticus, Hebrews, 1 John, Matthew, Revelation, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah)</p>	<p><b>Sacred Altars and Holy Gifts</b> (Studies in Genesis, the Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter)</p>



# Coming Up Next Quarter

**June, July, August 2024**

## **Hope in the Lord**

The summer cycle looks at expressions of Christian hope both in this present age and in the glorious future God is preparing for us.

Unit 1, “Experiencing Hope,” considers Christian hope through the lens of those whose faith in Christ gave shape to the early church. Lessons draw from Colossians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Hebrews, and Acts.

Unit 2, “Expressing Hope,” turns attention to the prayers of ancient Israel as a model for offering to God our praise and petitions. These Hebrew prayers are also expressions of Christian hope. The first lesson of the unit is from a song of lament in Lamentations 3, while the remaining lessons of the unit are drawn from the Psalms.

Unit 3, “Eternal Hope” (1 Thessalonians, 1 John, and Titus) considers facets of the promised future God is preparing for those who call on the name of Jesus.

*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.

# THE MEASURE OF FAITH

The measure of our faith is found in how much we trust Jesus. Four friends of a paralyzed man brought him to Jesus for healing by breaking through the roof of a house. When Jesus found great faith, He healed people without even seeing or touching them. When Jesus was asked to come and heal the servant of a Roman centurion, his friends met Jesus and said if Jesus would just “say the word” (Luke 7:7), the servant would be healed—which he was.

One woman came to Jesus not for physical healing but with the faith He would forgive her sin. She anointed His feet with her tears and perfume, and for her display of faith, Jesus said, “her many sins have been forgiven” (7:46).

In the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon, a “Canaanite woman” (Matt. 15:22) confronted Jesus with a request for the healing of her demon-possessed daughter. Her persistence and “great faith” (vs. 28) caused Jesus to heal the daughter without even seeing her.

Great faith comes with great trust. Those who trusted in Jesus found healing, forgiveness, and hope.



A miniature alabaster jar, possibly like the one the sinful woman used to carry her perfume to anoint Jesus (Luke 7:37).

Metropolitan Museum of Art/  
Public Domain



This reconstructed house in the Nazareth Village in Israel shows a roof like the one the four friends could have broken through to bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus (Luke 5:19).

Ian Scott



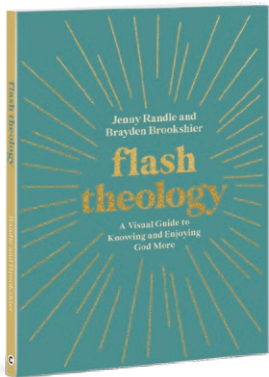
This stained-glass window from a church in North Carolina shows “a woman . . . who lived a sinful life” (Luke 7:37) anointing Jesus’ feet with perfume while a Pharisee watches in disbelief.

Nheyob

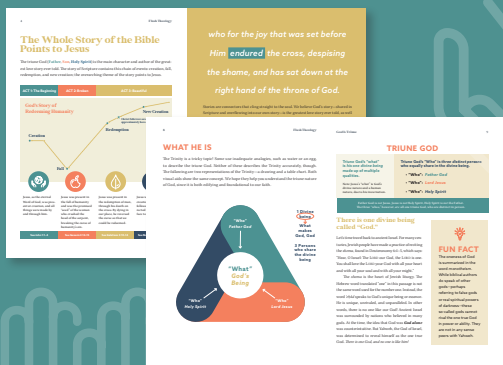


A painting of a Roman centurion by James Tissot. Jesus said of the centurion who asked Him to heal his servant, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel” (Luke 7:9).

Brooklyn Museum, New York/Public Domain



# See the connection between God's character and your identity.



Grow in awe of God as you discover the beauty and depth of him through 31 bite-sized truths of theology. *Flash Theology* offers you stability in your faith so you can endure whatever life (or wrong thinking) throws at you. Through illustrations, Scripture, and approachable teaching, you'll find that theology is not as scary as you may think and is more important in your journey of faith than you realize.



From Hollywood to a small island in Florida, over a period of twenty years **Jenny Randle's** creative ventures have reached millions. She is the cohost of a top-ranked podcast and the author of numerous books, as well as a wife, mom, Emmy®-award-winning editor, speaker, and ministry leader. Jenny is currently working toward a bachelor's of theology at TheoSeminary.



**Brayden Brookshier** serves on the teaching team at Newbreak Church, San Diego. With a master's in New Testament and a bachelor's in Biblical Studies, Brayden is the author of *A Resurrected Cosmos* and teaches biblical Greek at Horizon University. Although he is a pastor and theologian, Brayden's favorite titles are husband and "Dada."

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