

Standard LESSON QUARTERLY®

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

SPRING 2024
EXAMINING OUR FAITH

► International Sunday School Lessons

KJV BIBLE TEACHER

A quarterly publication of **STANDARD PUBLISHING**

SPRING 2024 EXAMINING OUR FAITH

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Examining Our Faith

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Quarterly Quiz

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

Lesson 1

1. Jude tells his audience to remember what had been spoken by the apostles. T/F. *Jude 17*.

2. Jude says to save others by pulling them from what? (fire, pit, persecution) *Jude 23*

Lesson 2

1. Believers should examine themselves to see whether they are in what? (the right, the faith, the church) *2 Corinthians 13:5*

2. Paul commands believers to “live in _____.” *2 Corinthians 13:11*

Lesson 3

1. Responding to certain evils with an equal amount of evil is appropriate. T/F. *1 Peter 3:9*

2. Always be prepared to give an answer regarding the reason for your _____. *1 Peter 3:15*

Lesson 4

1. The false witnesses claimed that Stephen spoke blasphemy against what things? (Choose two: the Sadducees, this holy place, the law, Elijah) *Acts 6:13*

2. The face of Stephen appeared like “the face of an _____.” *Acts 6:15*

Lesson 5

1. Peter had gone with the women to the tomb to help them roll away the stone. T/F. *Mark 16:3*

2. The women were told that Jesus was going to what region? (Judea, Galilee, Samaria) *Mark 16:7*

Lesson 6

1. Jesus forgave the man’s sins before the man stood up. T/F. *Luke 5:20*

2. The Son of Man has _____ to forgive sins. *Luke 5:24*

Lesson 7

1. The centurion sent soldiers to Jesus to ask for healing for the centurion’s servant. T/F. *Luke 7:3*

2. The centurion demonstrated a great _____ not found in Israel. *Luke 7:9*

Lesson 8

1. The ointment was stored in a container made of what material? (amethyst, agate, alabaster) *Luke 7:37*

2. The woman refused to pour perfume on Jesus’ feet. T/F. *Luke 7:46*

Lesson 9

1. The woman called Jesus the “Son of _____.” *Matthew 15:22*

2. Jesus told the woman that she demonstrated great _____. *Matthew 15:28*

Lesson 10

1. “For all have sinned, and come short of the _____ of God.” *Romans 3:23*

2. A person is justified by faith and the requirements of the law. T/F. *Romans 3:28*

Lesson 11

1. Where there is no law, there is no what? (transgression, transfiguration, testimony) *Romans 4:15*

2. Christ was raised to life for “our _____.” *Romans 4:25*

Lesson 12

1. Because of justification by faith, believers have _____ with God. *Romans 5:1*

2. At the right time, Christ died for the _____. *Romans 5:6*

Lesson 13

1. Christ is the end of the _____. *Romans 10:4*

2. Paul quoted from an Old Testament passage that declared the beauty of what body part that proclaims good things? (feet, lips, hands) *Romans 10:15*

Quarter at a Glance

by Jon Miller

The Greek word for *faith* appears over two hundred times in the New Testament. Its usage can refer to at least two different but related concepts. This quarter will explore the significance of faith and how the people of God live with faith.

Community Faith

The expression “the faith” refers to the beliefs and paradigms distinct to followers of Jesus (examples: Acts 6:7; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 13:5; 1 Timothy 3:9; Titus 1:13; Jude 3). The most central belief and the key to the faith itself is the resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Mark 16:1-8, lesson 5). Without Jesus’ death and resurrection, our faith would be in vain.

Following “the faith” consists of being filled with Christ and indwelt by God’s Spirit. The apostle Paul encourages believers to practice self-examination regarding the presence of Christ in their lives and whether or not they are “in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5, lesson 2). The point of this self-examination is not to win an argument or to fill oneself with pride. Instead, it aims to build up the body of Christ, which is the church (13:10-11).

Believers in the faith are likely to face trials and persecutions. Followers of Jesus have experienced these things since the birth of the church (example: Acts 6:7-15, lesson 4).

Additionally, believers are likely to come across the influence of false teachings. Therefore, the writers of Scripture frequently teach how a believer might defend the faith. Jude guards the “most holy faith” against destruction (Jude 17-20, lesson 1). Peter presents the faith as the foundation of the Christian life, worthy of defense (1 Peter 3:8-16, lesson 3). These writers encourage believers to contend for the faith.

Individual Faith

Scripture’s second use of the word *faith* consists of belief in Christ and trust in God. One way

a person’s faith is revealed is through their decisions and behavior. The Gospels provide numerous examples of people who demonstrate faith through their actions. The faith of several men led them to seek healing for their friend (Luke 5:17-26, lesson 6). The faith of a centurion led him to ask Jesus for the long-distance healing of his servant (7:1-10, lesson 7). The faith of a certain woman demonstrated that she believed that Jesus could forgive sins (7:36-39, 44-50; lesson 8). Even a Gentile woman showed faith that Jesus could heal her daughter (Matthew 15:21-28, lesson 9).

The Benefits of Faith

The quarter’s final unit investigates the spiritual benefits of having faith in Christ. Some of the recipients of Paul’s New Testament letters were of Jewish heritage. For this reason, his writings frequently contrast a person’s keeping the Law of Moses with a person’s faith in Christ.

By our faith, we have received the ultimate benefit: becoming children of God.

Paul argues that people do not receive justification through keeping the Law of Moses. Instead, justification and righteousness come through faith (Romans 3:21-28, lesson 10). As an example, it was Abraham’s faith, not his actions, that were counted to him as righteousness (4:13-25, lesson 11).

A person expresses faith after they hear the good news of Christ (Romans 10:14-17, lesson 13). Believers enter the community of God’s people by confessing sin and believing that Jesus is Lord. As a result, believers can rejoice! Because of our faith in Christ, we celebrate a relationship of peace with God (5:1-5, lesson 12). We were once adversaries of God, but by our faith, we have received the ultimate benefit: becoming children of God. This new identity is good news for all who would believe.

Get the Setting

by Jon Miller

During Jesus' ministry, He interacted with Jews and Gentiles. One shocking thing in the Gospels is how many stories highlight people outside of Jewish ancestry exercising faith in Christ. Jesus even told a centurion that his faith was greater than any faith Jesus found in Israel (Matthew 8:10)!

Jews and Gentiles came from very different cultural and religious backgrounds. However, the first-century church evolved from a world under Roman rule and included people shaped by Roman, Greek, and Jewish thinking. Thus, it is beneficial for us to look at how these people groups understood faith with respect to their religious and cultural heritage.

Greco-Roman

Classic Greek religion greatly influenced practice in the Roman Empire as people became interested in the worship of power. This gave rise to an appeal of magic, astrology, and the cult of the emperor. These beliefs led people to think of the least powerful gods as demons and to believe in fate and superstition.

In Greco-Roman culture, the worship of divinities was not exclusive. Even when someone gave devotion to a pagan god, they did not deny the existence of other gods. For example, to ensure no god was lacking adoration, certain people in Athens built an altar for "the unknown god" (Acts 17:23). The apostle Paul took advantage of the open door and introduced the people to the God they didn't know (17:22-28).

Religion was a part of daily life and did not have a separation from the government in Greco-Roman society. Temples to the gods and goddesses were built from public funds, and every city had at least one patron deity (Acts 19:26-28). Religion as the personal issue of one's belief and practice was unheard of in their society. Similarly, morality was not something that people aside from Judaism and Christianity associated with religious belief.

Judaism

Although the Greeks and Romans were hostile toward the Jewish people, the Jews enjoyed a privileged position in the empire. Because the Jewish people had offered help to the Roman rulers during the Maccabean period (second century BC), they received a pass to practice their religion without worshipping the divinities of Rome. Moreover, they were exempted from military service and allowed to live according to their laws within their communities, including the observance of the Sabbath.

"When in Rome" the Jewish people did not "do as the Romans do." Instead, they remained strictly monotheistic, adhering to the Law of Moses, practicing circumcision, and maintaining other rites of ritual purity. They also continued to offer sacrifices in the temple. To Jewish people, faith was based on the covenantal relationship they had as a people through Abraham.

Christianity

Christianity formed around a set of beliefs about Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Initially, Christianity was considered a sect of Judaism and enjoyed the same privileges as Jews in the free exercise of their faith. The appeal of the Christian faith was rational worship, high moral norms, monotheism, strong community, and respect for the Old Testament. This pleased some Gentiles because, unlike Judaism, it did not associate with one nationality or insist on the rite of circumcision or the observance of the Sabbath for inclusion.

These differences quickly established a line between the Christian faith and all other religions, including Judaism. In the Christian community, faith could refer to adherence to an established belief regarding Jesus (Philippians 1:27). Faith was also trusting in the covenantal relationship between God and humanity.

Mon, May 13 Trusting in God Brings Perfect Peace Isaiah 26:1-11
 Tue, May 14 Good News of the Coming Lord Isaiah 40:1-11
 Wed, May 15 God's Spirit Poured Out Acts 2:1-4, 14, 16-24, 36
 Thu, May 16 The Firstfruits of Reconciliation Acts 2:37-47
 Fri, May 17 Brothers Reconciled Genesis 33:1-15
 Sat, May 18 May God Bless Us with Peace Psalm 29
 Sun, May 19 Peace with God Through Jesus Christ Romans 5:1-11

 Mon, May 20 Call on God and Be Saved Joel 2:28-32
 Tue, May 21 Striving on the Basis of Faith Romans 9:14-16, 25-33
 Wed, May 22 All Israel Will Be Saved Romans 11:1-4, 17-27
 Thu, May 23 God's Word Is Very Near Deuteronomy 30:11-20
 Fri, May 24 Do Not Fear, Only Believe Mark 5:35-43
 Sat, May 25 A Beautiful Announcement Isaiah 52
 Sun, May 26 Confession and Belief Lead to Salvation Romans 10:1-17

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 226

Lesson 1—1. True. **Lesson 2**—1. the faith. 2. peace.
Lesson 3—1. False. 2. hope. **Lesson 4**—1. the holy place, the law. 2. angel. **Lesson 5**—1. False. 2. Galilee. **Lesson 6**—1. True. 2. power. **Lesson 7**—1. False. 2. faith. **Lesson 8**—1. alabaster. 2. False. **Lesson 9**—1. David. 2. faith. **Lesson 10**—1. glory. 2. False. **Lesson 11**—1. transgression. 2. justification. **Lesson 12**—1. peace. 2. ungodly. **Lesson 13**—1. law. 2. feet.

This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Feb. 26	The Faith in Which We Stand	1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Tue, Feb. 27	Turn Away from the Wicked	Numbers 16:12-13, 23-34
Wed, Feb. 28	Flee from Sin	Genesis 18:20-22; 19:1-5, 15-17, 22-25
Thu, Feb. 29	Always Do the Right Thing	1 Peter 2:13-25
Fri, Mar. 1	Walk with God	Genesis 5:18-24
Sat, Mar. 2	Contend for the Unchanging Faith	Jude 3-16
Sun, Mar. 3	Remain in God's Love	Jude 17-25
Mon, Mar. 4	Testing Produces Endurance	James 1:2-12
Tue, Mar. 5	The Sources of Temptations	James 1:13-18
Wed, Mar. 6	God Has Searched Us	Psalms 139:1-12
Thu, Mar. 7	God Knows All Things	Psalms 139:13-18, 23-24
Fri, Mar. 8	God's People Boast in Weakness	2 Corinthians 11:22-33
Sat, Mar. 9	Strength Through Christ Alone	2 Corinthians 12:1-10
Sun, Mar. 10	Live by God's Power	2 Corinthians 13:1-10
Mon, Mar. 11	Proclaim God's Message	2 Timothy 4:1-8
Tue, Mar. 12	Let All the People Praise God	Psalms 67
Wed, Mar. 13	Proclaim What Jesus Has Done	Mark 5:1-2, 6-7, 11-20
Thu, Mar. 14	A Powerful Defense of the Faith	Acts 9:10-22
Fri, Mar. 15	Come, Let Us Argue It Out	Isaiah 1:16-20
Sat, Mar. 16	Live Honorably Among Unbelievers	1 Peter 2:4-12
Sun, Mar. 17	Be Ready to Speak for Christ	1 Peter 3:8-17

Mon, Mar. 18 **Blessings of Walking in God's Ways**
Deuteronomy 28:1-14

Tue, Mar. 19 **Let Your Life Match Your Words**
Titus 2:1-8

Wed, Mar. 20 **Fear God and Gain Knowledge**
Proverbs 1:1-9

Thu, Mar. 21 **A Promise for the Future**
2 Corinthians 5:1-11

Fri, Mar. 22 **Vessels Prepared for Every Good Work**
2 Timothy 2:8-21

Sat, Mar. 23 **The Ministry of Caring for Others**
Acts 6:1-6

Sun, Mar. 24 **A Spirit-Empowered Witness**
Acts 6:7-15

Mon, Mar. 25 **Faith Revealed Through Extravagant Love**
Mark 14:1-9

Tue, Mar. 26 **Faith in God's Deliverance**
Exodus 14:10-20

Wed, Mar. 27 **Faith in God's Protection**
Exodus 14:21-31

Thu, Mar. 28 **Faith Challenged and Encouraged**
Mark 14:17-26

Fri, Mar. 29 **An Unexpected Confession of Faith**
Mark 15:25-39

Sat, Mar. 30 **Faith Despite Pain and Loss**
Psalm 22:1-11, 28-31

Sun, Mar. 31 **Faith in the Risen Christ**
Mark 16:1-8

Mon, Apr. 1 **Come and See**
John 1:37-42

Tue, Apr. 2 **Heal Me and Save Me**
Jeremiah 17:12-17

Wed, Apr. 3 **Jesus Provides Living Water**
John 4:4-18

Thu, Apr. 4 **Worship God in Spirit and Truth**
John 4:19-29, 39-42

Fri, Apr. 5 **Tell What God Has Done**
Psalm 66:1-5, 13-20

Sat, Apr. 6 **Here Am I; Send Me**
Isaiah 6:1-8

Sun, Apr. 7 **Jesus Heals and Forgives**
Luke 5:17-26

Mon, Apr. 8 **Accept What God Has Made Clean**
Acts 10:1-15

Tue, Apr. 9 **God's Servant Enlightens the Nations**
Isaiah 42:1-12

Wed, Apr. 10 **God Is Praised Among the Nations**
Malachi 1:10-14

Thu, Apr. 11 **Christ Is All and in All**
Colossians 3:1-11

Fri, Apr. 12 **Nations Shall Seek the Lord**
Zechariah 8:18-23

Sat, Apr. 13 **All Shall See God's Salvation**
Luke 3:1-14

Sun, Apr. 14 **Jesus Helps a Righteous Gentile**
Luke 7:1-10

Mon, Apr. 15 **Jesus' Compassion for the Grieving**
Luke 7:11-18

Tue, Apr. 16 **Sing Praises to God's Name**
Psalm 92

Wed, Apr. 17 **Confession, Prayer, and Healing**
James 5:12-20

Thu, Apr. 18 **God Pardons Iniquity and Transgression**
Micah 7:7-20

Fri, Apr. 19 **God Is Good and Forgiving**
Psalm 86:1-7, 11-17

Sat, Apr. 20 **No Condemnation in Christ**
Romans 8:1-16

Sun, Apr. 21 **Jesus Forgives a Sinful Woman**
Luke 7:36-50

Mon, Apr. 22 **God Provides for a Gentle Woman**
1 Kings 17:8-16

Tue, Apr. 23 **God's Authority over Life and Death**
1 Kings 17:17-24

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

Thu, Apr. 25 **Hear My Cry, O God**
Psalm 61

Fri, Apr. 26 **May God Grant Your Heart's Desire**
Psalm 20

Sat, Apr. 27 **God Gives Grace to the Humble**
James 4:1-10

Sun, Apr. 28 **A Woman of Great Faith**
Matthew 15:21-28

Mon, Apr. 29 **Vindicate Me, O Lord My God**
Psalm 35:1-7, 22-28

Tue, Apr. 30 **Blessed Are They Who Fear God**
Psalm 112

Wed, May 1 **Repent and Turn to God**
Acts 3:12-26

Thu, May 2 **God So Loved the World**
John 3:1-8, 13-17

Fri, May 3 **Lord, Lead Me in Your Righteousness**
Psalm 5

Sat, May 4 **Christ, Our Atoning Sacrifice**
1 John 1:1-2:2

Sun, May 5 **Atonement by Christ's Blood**
Romans 3:21-30

Mon, May 6 **God Is Generous to the Unworthy**
Matthew 20:1-16

Tue, May 7 **A Great and Blessed Nation**
Genesis 13:14-18

Wed, May 8 **A Promise of Countless Heirs**
Genesis 15:1-6

Thu, May 9 **Your Sins Are Forgiveness**
1 John 2:12-17

Fri, May 10 **God's Abundant Forgiveness**
Psalm 32

Sat, May 11 **Trust God, Who Justified the Ungodly**
Romans 4:1-12

Sun, May 12 **Our Justification, Christ's Resurrection**
Romans 4:13-25

Chart Feature

Jesus Includes “Outsiders” in Luke’s Gospel

Jesus and Outsiders

- Jesus eats with outsiders (5:27-32)
- Jesus heals the servant of a centurion (7:1-10)
- Jesus teaches on neighborly mercy (10:25-37)
- Jesus and the tax collector (19:1-10)
- Jesus and the crucified criminal (23:40-43)

Jesus and Women

- A woman anoints Jesus’ feet (7:36-50)
- Jesus heals a bleeding woman (8:40-48)
- Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath (13:10-17)

Jesus and Children

- Jesus heals a boy with a spirit (9:37-43)
- Jesus and the little children (18:15-17)

Jesus and the Unclean

- Jesus heals a man possessed by a spirit (4:31-37)
- Jesus heals a man with leprosy (5:12-16)
- Jesus heals a man with paralysis (5:17-26)
- Jesus heals a man possessed by demons (8:26-39)
- Jesus heals ten men with leprosy (17:11-19)
- Jesus heals a man with blindness (18:35-43)



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12/2006/8

“Discussion Leaders”?

Teacher Tips by Ronald L. Nickelson

Years ago, I overheard a conversation at a church that made me quite uncomfortable. A church leader was trying to recruit a teacher for an adult Bible class. When the leader offered the assignment to a particular individual, the man replied that he didn't feel qualified to be a teacher. However, he was willing to be a “discussion leader.” I breathed a sigh of relief when the offer was gently declined.

I appreciated the man's honesty in recognizing his unqualified status. More than that, I appreciated the leader's decision to keep looking!

The Vital Difference(s)

Secular education theory recognizes some important differences between *teachers* and *discussion leaders*—the latter are usually called *facilitators*. A frequently seen summary of their functions is that a teacher is a “sage on the stage,” while a facilitator is a “guide on the side.”

Much research exists that compares and contrasts the two functions of teacher and facilitator. Although both roles are valued, those who analyze such things in secular contexts tend to conclude that *facilitators* usually produce better results. In the shaded box below are some of some typical assumptions or discoveries.

It is not our task here to explore whether or not such observations are valid in secular contexts. But we certainly should evaluate those conclusions to see where (if anywhere) those distinctions apply in Christian contexts of learning God's Word and putting that learning into practice.

The Biblical Distinction(s)

It's easy to discover what the Bible says about teachers and teaching, both positively and negatively. A quick way to do so is to search for those terms in an online or hard-copy concordance. The massive number of “hits” will leave no doubt about what God expects from teachers and their teaching. Some vital New Testament passages in that regard are Matthew 5:19; 28:19-20; Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 2:12; 2 Timothy 2:2, 24; 4:3; Titus 1:10-14; James 3:1; and 2 Peter 2:1.

Regarding facilitators (discussion leaders), we may initially conclude that the Bible does not discuss that role since the terminology seems absent. But a bit of digging leads us to consider Jesus' parables. Jesus used parables because He wanted listeners to connect His teaching with their experiences regarding weeds, fishing, etc. Outside the parables, Jesus' interaction with Peter in Matthew 17:24-27 is also an example of Jesus' expertise as a facilitator.

We end up drawing this firm conclusion: *A facilitator or discussion leader must first and foremost be a teacher as a subject-matter expert.* To take on the role of facilitator while being unqualified as a teacher will surely result in the blind leading the blind (Luke 6:39). Class sessions are likely to end up being only “what it means to me” sharing. Helping your learners apply Scripture to life is vital, of course. But determining a given passage's meaning, as intended by the original writer, must be the basis for that application.

Teachers . . .

- are (or should be) subject-matter experts
- control the session
- prioritize content and concepts
- add new knowledge

Facilitators (Discussion Leaders) . . .

- are (or should be) learning-process experts
- coordinate the session
- prioritize experiences
- help connect new knowledge with experience

Sustaining Our Faith

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
Background Scripture: Jude

Jude 17-25

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.

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.



Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the doxology in the text.
2. Distinguish between what God promises to do and what He expects us to do regarding personal holiness.
3. Create a plan to implement the imperatives of the Key Text.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Anxious Times
- B. Lesson Context

I. Remembrance (Jude 17-19)

- A. Remembering the Apostolic Word (v. 17)
- B. Revisiting the Warning (v. 18)
- C. Recognizing False Teachers (v. 19)

In a Flash Flood

II. Perseverance (Jude 20-23)

- A. Remain in God's Love (vv. 20-21)
- B. Reflect God's Love (vv. 22-23)

Leading by Example

III. Praise God (Jude 24-25)

- A. God's Work for Us (v. 24)
- B. God's Glory (v. 25)

Conclusion

- A. The Love of God and Loving Others
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Anxious Times

We live in anxious times. Many believers live with doubt. Many often feel like people are mocking their faith from both inside and outside the church. Historic beliefs are under attack. The gospel itself is under attack. Skeptics deny the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His ultimate return. Within the church, abuse and immorality are becoming more known. Some leaders have destroyed their congregations through their own ambition and pride. Social media and newspapers are filled with these kinds of stories. The church has lost its moral credibility and its authority to speak truth in the eyes of many people. While the church and its ministers at one time were ranked high in trustworthiness, that ranking has fallen over the past 30 years. These are perilous times for the Christian faith.

B. Lesson Context

Jude is a brief letter, and it reflects a perilous time similar to our circumstances. Some ambitious and prideful people had attached themselves to congregations, presented themselves as leaders, and practiced an immoral lifestyle. Jude calls them “ungodly” people who turn the “grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4). These intruders exploited their welcome by promoting immorality (v. 4). They mocked the judgment of God and behaved as if God would not hold them accountable for their actions and immoral ethics. They despised authority, spoke evil of others, and sought wealth in their greed (vv. 8, 11). Jude called them “spots in your feasts of charity” who had nothing true or valuable to offer; they were like clouds “without water” and fruitless trees (v. 12). They walked “after their own lusts,” and though they influenced many, their words were filled with their own ambition (v. 16). This was a dangerous time for the churches, and Jude addresses the situation directly with both warning and hope.

Jude, the author of this letter, was the brother of James, and James was one of the elders and leaders of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; 2:9). Since James was a brother of

Jesus, this means Jude was as well. Though both opposed Jesus during His ministry before His death, both became committed believers after the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7; Jude 1).

What we know as the book of Jude was probably a sermon that circulated among several congregations as an open letter. Jude addressed a number of congregations at one time, and they were all endangered by ungodly intruders and leaders. Jude clearly stated his main interest. He encouraged believers to “contend for the faith” that had been delivered to them (Jude 3). He identified the troublemakers, warned that their destiny is the same as that of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7) and the devil (v. 9), and promised God would execute judgment against the “ungodly” for their “ungodly deeds” (v. 15).

But what are believers to do? How do they “contend for the faith” (Jude 3)? How do believers live out their faith in such perilous times? Jude ends his letter with a call to persevere in the faith. That call is our lesson text for today.

I. Remembrance

(Jude 17-19)

A. Remembering the Apostolic Word (v. 17)

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

Remember! That is the main point (compare Jude 5). After describing the characteristics of these false leaders and the judgment that awaits them, Jude reminded his readers that this was not unexpected. *The apostles* warned about the rise of ungodly people who would disturb the church and seek to gain their own followers. For example, the apostle Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus that wolves would arise from among their own leadership (Acts 20:29). Consequently, the situation should not have surprised them. The apostles told them it was going to happen.

By reminding them of this apostolic warning, Jude highlighted the importance of the apostolic voice in the early church. The apostolic word, or teaching, both guides and warns the church. According to Acts 2:42, the disciples of Jesus devoted themselves to the teaching of the

apostles. The church listens to the apostles of *our Lord Jesus Christ*, heeds their direction and warnings, and follows them as they follow Jesus. Their teaching, along with the prophets, is the church’s foundation, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). Jesus sent the apostles with His authority, and the apostles spoke for Jesus.

In the middle of this perilous time, Jude not only reminds his readers of the apostolic warning but also reminds them who they are. They are *beloved*, and Jude called them as such three times (Jude 3, 17, 20). While we need reminders about the dangers of any situation, we also need reminders that we are loved by God and loved by our leaders. Jude, for example, was a leader who wrote forcefully against false teachers but compassionately for those whom those ungodly leaders endangered. Believers have been called by God and kept safe in Jesus Christ (v. 1). Despite the dire circumstances and uncertainties of the times, they are secure in Jesus and loved by God.

What Do You Think?

How do you encourage other believers to remember they are beloved by God?

Digging Deeper

How can those same practices help you remember that you are beloved?

B. Revisiting the Warning (v. 18)

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

What did the apostles say to the church? A time was coming and had already arrived when *mockers* and scoffers would arise within churches, and their only concern would be pursuing their own *ungodly* interests.

When Jude used the language of *the last time* or “last times,” he was not referring to something in the distant future, though it includes that. Rather, he reminded his readers about this warning because it was already happening in their congregations. Often “last time” or “last days” (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; 2 Peter 3:3) refers to the last era of God’s redemptive work in the world. This

is the final era because after this comes the judgment of God and the salvation of God's people. It was important to hear the apostolic warning not only applying to some final moment in the world's future but also to Jude's readers and the whole history of the church. Mockers and scoffers have always been part of the story of the church, and the warning is for all believers throughout the life span of the church. This is a constant danger rather than a unique one.

What drives these false leaders? They mock God's judgment and scoff at any notion of personal accountability. They did not believe God's judgment applied to them, or perhaps that there was any coming judgment at all. Rather, they followed their own desires. They had their own agenda, and they were only interested in indulging their own cravings. Jude emphasized that their motivations were ungodly (see also Jude 4, 15). They were only interested in themselves, whether that greed or ambition was about wealth, power, or sex, among other possible lusts.

The apostles warned that people would come who had no interest in authentic faith. Rather, they would ridicule accountability before God and pursue their interests for their own gain.

What Do You Think?

When have you needed to resist a person who was trying to manipulate faith for their own selfish gains?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you take to guard against any impure motives in your own faith walk?

C. Recognizing False Teachers (v. 19)

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

Jude described these ungodly people in three ways. They (1) are divisive, (2) are worldly, and (3) lack *the Spirit* of God. In essence, Jude identified this ungodly presence by their works or their effect on the congregation. They lacked the fruit of the Spirit. There was no evidence of the Spirit in their lives. They created divisions as they separated

themselves and created their own followers. They lived by the seat of their pants. In other words, they lived by their natural urges and impulses rather than by the mind of Christ. Their interests were rooted in their sensuality and the works of the flesh. They were not led by the Spirit but by their *sensual* compulsions driven by their ungodly agenda.

What Do You Think?

What characteristics suggest that a person does not have the Spirit? Offer supporting verses for your answer.

Digging Deeper

What other verses caution you about declaring this or that person not to have the Spirit?

In a Flash Flood

Stuart's wipers were going full speed, but he could barely see the road. The drumming rain drowned out the radio's warning of flash flooding. Ahead, an SUV inched into the turbulent water running across the road. The car behind Stuart blew its horn. He pressed the gas pedal and inched into the torrent, the water rising around his tires. The car lurched sideways and lost contact with the road! Then the tread found pavement, and Stuart could proceed. By the time he made it home, his heart was pounding, and he was drenched, not from rain but from sweat. Later he learned that two cars had been washed away at that same treacherous spot, with disastrous results.

How often do we follow the example of those who scoff at danger? Scripture's warnings of judgment seem distant, unlikely to affect us. But one day, the consequences could sweep us away. Where in your life do you need to stop and turn around before it's too late? —A. W.

II. Perseverance

(Jude 20-23)

A. Remain in God's Love (vv. 20-21)

20-21. 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 contrasted his readers with these ungodly mockers. While the ungodly mock the faith, believers build their lives on the faith. While the ungodly lack the Spirit, believers pray in the Spirit. While the ungodly scoff at the judgment that accompanies the coming of the *Lord Jesus Christ*, believers joyfully anticipate the mercy they will receive when Jesus comes again. Jude addressed these believers as *beloved*, and this belovedness was rooted in God's love for them. It was not simply Jude's love for his readers but also their relationship with God as people who are beloved *of God*. God loves them.

In the Greek text, the main verb—and the only imperative or command—is *keep yourselves in the love of God* (Jude 21). This was a call to action. Jude thought believers ought to respond to perilous times by persevering in God's love. In other words, as dangers mounted and seemed to overwhelm, believers need to continually ground themselves in God's love. Jude called believers to pursue godly living by remembering that they were beloved.

But what does that look like? Jude gave his readers three cues: (1) by building on the *most holy faith*, (2) by *praying in the Holy Ghost*, and (3) by looking forward to *the mercy of Jesus*. These three cues were means of grace or spiritual practices that could sustain faith during perilous times Jude's readers endured.

First, they can build on the foundation of the faith. The faith for which the Christian community was to contend (Jude 3) is also the foundation for remaining in the love of God. The *faith* refers to the work of God in Jesus by the Spirit to redeem and save the world from its ungodly lusts and practices. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Believers build on an authentic foundation secured by the love of God, the grace of Jesus, and the communion of the Holy Spirit rather than one imagined by the mockers who stirred up trouble among the churches.

Second, they should pray in the Spirit. This includes two important points. On the one hand, Jude thought prayer was a necessary response to perilous times. Prayer calls upon God to act and

deliver. On the other hand, prayer was not simply wishful thinking but addressing God in the Spirit. To pray in the Spirit is probably a rather broad idea that includes almost anything that could be said about prayer. The full meaning of prayer includes not only the work of the Spirit in hearts but also the function of the Spirit in communicating the prayers. We pray in the Spirit when we pray in accordance with God's agenda, pray out of a heart sanctified by the Spirit, and pray by the power of the Spirit who unites us with God's own heart (compare Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 14:15).

Third, they should trust in the mercy of God. The faithful looked forward to the day when the fullness of God's mercy will be poured out on believers to usher them into eternal life with God. The second coming of Christ, though it involves judgment for the ungodly, is mercy for believers who build their lives on the most holy faith and pray in the Spirit.

Importantly, these verses refer to the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Jude recognized the Triune God by naming the love of God, the mercy of Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Jude's language is similar to the final benediction of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 13:14).

What Do You Think?

What do you do to keep yourself in God's love?

Digging Deeper

What encouragement do you find regarding the fruit of imperfect effort in this endeavor?

B. Reflect God's Love (vv. 22-23)

22-23. And of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Jude invited his readers to remain in the love of God, and then Jude turned his attention to how his readers ought to love others with that love. Remaining in the love of God means pouring out that love on others.



Visual for Lesson 1. Discuss human effort and the Spirit's work that goes toward fulfilling this directive (based on Jude 20).

We can imagine Jude's readers were angered by the disturbances within their churches. Indeed, ungodly mockers who divided a church for their own selfish gains deserved anger and exclusion, and they received Jude's condemnation. The damage these mockers left in their wake was probably devastating. It affected many people, and Jude does not forget them. Those who persevered in the love of God needed to love the people who had been damaged by these mockers. How does Jude want believers to love people in anxious times?

First, some were doubting due to the influence of the scoffers. The meaning of the Greek word behind the phrase *making a difference* is difficult to determine in this context. It may refer to a process of discernment, or it may refer to doubting or wavering. It seems the latter is more likely, but whichever is the case, Jude's main concern is the command to show mercy or *have compassion*. Jude commanded believers to have mercy on those who doubt or are evaluating. They should not be mocked or dismissed. On the contrary, just as the Lord Jesus will show mercy when He returns, so believers ought to show mercy and have compassion for those who are struggling with their faith.

How to Say It

apostolic	ap-uh-stahl-ick.
doxology	dawk-saw-leh-jee.
Triune	Tri-yoon.

The mercy Jesus gives to believers is the same mercy believers ought to show to doubters. Jude used the same word (*mercy* or *compassion*) in both verses 21-22.

Second, some needed rescuing from *the fire* stirred up by the mockers. Jude commanded believers to act in ways that would save others from the destructive mess created by the mockers. Rather than contribute to the fire by stoking it or neglecting those who are endangered by the fire, believers, according to Jude, ought to save them from the fire.

Third, some were so entangled in the ungodly patterns of the mockers that Jude commanded believers to act with mercy but also with fear. Again, the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ is a quality Jude wanted shared with others. At the same time, it ought to be shared in a way that one does not become complicit in evil itself. The love of God means evil is hated. Even as mercy and compassion are given, Jude's language respects the danger of evil. The love of God rescues people from evil rather than joining them in their evil.

Jude commanded believers to keep themselves in the love of God, and Jude also commanded believers to show mercy to those caught up in the agenda of the mockers. The beloved are to love others because God has loved them.

Leading by Example

When the doctor diagnosed her as prediabetic, Jeannine wasn't convinced any lifestyle changes were possible for her. She was resigned to developing diabetes. But Jeannine's daughter Morgan knew not only what her mother needed to do but also how to convince her to do it. Morgan led by example. She invited her mother regularly for diabetic-friendly meals and shared the recipes. Morgan took Jeannine shopping to get her walking. Gradually, Jeannine started to make positive lifestyle changes.

A similar approach can help those who are resistant to the gospel. Christians can be merciful and understanding to those who doubt. We can walk alongside them and demonstrate the Christian life. Reaping a harvest takes time, care, and the work of the Spirit. If God is patient, we must be as well. —A. W.

III. Praise God

(Jude 24-25)

A. God's Work for Us (v. 24)

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.

Jude concluded his letter with a doxology, a praise to God. The doxology first identified what God is doing for us (Jude 24), and then it attributed to God what rightfully belongs to Him (v. 25).

While Jude stressed that believers are responsible for keeping themselves in the love of God, he also made it clear that it is God who empowers our perseverance in that love (Jude 1, 24). God keeps us, while believers are also accountable for their own faith as well. Ultimately, believers do not save themselves, nor do they generate their own assurance. Rather, God acts to keep us and causes us to stand in His *presence* without blemish. It is God's loving mercy through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit that redeems us and gives us a righteous and holy standing before the Triune God.

What Do You Think?

What practice could you begin or deepen to be more aware of God's helping you to stand faultless before Him?

Digging Deeper

How can this practice nurture the joy of being in God's presence?

B. God's Glory (v. 25)

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

Because of God's gracious mercy, Jude praised God's eternal *glory, majesty, dominion, and power*. These characteristics or attributes describe God's relationship to the world and, consequently, God's own capacity both to keep us from falling and present us without blemish.

Since this doxology is offered to *God* through Jesus, it constitutes a prayer of praise. As Jude has already told us, believers pray in the Spirit. In effect, then, Jude offered a triune prayer. God is

praised through the Son in the Spirit. That is the most holy faith. God poured out mercy through the Son by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we joyfully return to God the Father our praise through the Son in the Spirit.

Conclusion

A. The Love of God and Loving Others

We live in perilous times, much like the church at the time when Jude was written. So we should recognize and identify the dangers. The church is called to exercise healthy discernment and heed the warnings of the apostles. We ignore them at our own peril.

At the same time, the church does not live in fear but in confidence. We root ourselves in God's love for us, and we pour that same love on those who have been damaged by these perilous times. We confidently live within the love of God as God's beloved, and we mercifully show that love to others in our community. Our response to this divine grace is deep joy and gratitude.

While we practice discernment and contend for the faith, we also show God's mercy to others as we minister to those who doubt, those ensnared in the fire, and those who have soiled their garments. Secured in the love of God by the foundation laid down by apostolic teaching, praying in the Spirit, and looking forward to the mercy of Christ's second coming, we help others and show them the love with which God has loved us.

B. Prayer

God, keep us secure in Your love and enable us to show mercy to others in need of Your love. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Secure in God's love, we are able to love others.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 238) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the Adult Resources packet for the Spring Quarter. Order ISBN 9780784740132 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Group learners in pairs and have them take turns sharing the best advice they ever received. Ask them to discuss whether or not they heeded that advice and what consequences resulted. Bring the class back together and ask for volunteers to share briefly the advice they received.

Then talk together about what factors help us decide whether we have received good advice or bad, and how we decide whether to heed that advice. What factors might cause us to disregard advice even when we believe it to be sound? What might convince us to take advice we think is questionable at best? Ask to what degree a positive or negative outcome might change one's mind about whether advice was good or not.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Beloved” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask learners to pair up to finish as indicated. After about 10 minutes, bring the class back together to discuss their findings.

Lead into the lesson by saying, “It is good to be able to recognize when a good leader has our best interests at heart. Jude’s words in our lesson today encourage us to remember what we know of God and to remain true to Him.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Jude 17-19. Have another read 2 Peter 3:3-7. Keeping these texts in mind, have pairs of learners find New Testament examples of mockers. *Option.* Get the class started with these examples: Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. The learners should explain who, if anyone, acted in keeping with Jude’s advice before answering the following questions: 1–How were the mockers’ actions opposed to God? 2–What harm did this do? Bring the class together to talk about the examples they identified.

Ask a volunteer to read Jude 20-23. Have the

class identify the seven actions mentioned in these verses as you record them on the board. (Expected responses: build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Ghost; keep yourselves in God’s love; look for the mercy of Jesus; have compassion; save others from the fire; hate garments spotted by the flesh.)

Then divide the class into seven small groups and assign an action to each group. Give the groups a couple of minutes to discuss their action further and answer: 1–How does this action reflect the heart of God? 2–What New Testament examples show Jude’s directives in action? 3–What were the results of acting in keeping with Jude’s advice? After several minutes, invite groups to share their insights with the whole class. Take notes on the board as they discuss.

Ask a volunteer to read Jude 24-25. Talk about how these verses are an expression of praise. Have the same small groups from the previous activity review the points listed on the board considering these two verses and discuss: 1–How are believers able to resist living like the world? 2–How are believers able to live sustainably in faith and holiness? (Expected response: through the grace and mercy of Jesus.)

Into Life

Divide the class into pairs to discuss which of Jude’s directives they feel most comfortable trying to carry out and which they feel least equipped to do. Have them talk about the examples brought up in previous exercises for any insights or encouragement as they seek to heed Jude’s direction in the upcoming week. Encourage the pairs to conclude with a concrete plan to live out Jude 20-21. *Option.* Distribute the “Build Yourselves Up” exercise from the activity page to facilitate creating a plan for implementing Jude 20-21. Pray for the learners as you wrap up class time.

Testing Our Faith

Devotional Reading: Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24

Background Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11



2 Corinthians 13:5-11

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.

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, 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.

Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify criteria for being “in the faith.”
2. Explain how the imperatives of 2 Corinthians 13:11 are interrelated.
3. Create a test question that reflects Paul’s challenge in the Key Text.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Self-Testing
- B. Lesson Context

I. Examination (2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

- A. Imperative (v. 5)
Dangerous Spots

- B. Result (v. 6)

II. Expectation (2 Corinthians 13:7-10)

- A. Paul’s Request (v. 7)
- B. Paul’s Values (vv. 8-9)
The Value of Weakness
- C. Paul’s Purpose (v. 10)

III. Exhortation (2 Corinthians 13:11)

- A. Invitation to Community (v. 11a)
- B. Assurance of God’s Presence (v. 11b)

Conclusion

- A. Taking Inventory
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Self-Testing

Social media is filled with opportunities to test ourselves. We can test our knowledge of history, the Bible, government, and even our personalities and tastes. Self-testing is part of modern culture.

We test ourselves to gain insight into our capabilities. Such testing is sometimes quite valuable. At other times, however, we may focus on such tests narcissistically by interpreting personality defects as strengths. And some self-evaluations are designed to form or influence us as consumers.

Despite these potential problems, testing can often serve productive and valuable ends. We all take tests, need tests, and benefit from tests. This includes, as we will see, the benefits of Christians and churches testing themselves.

B. Lesson Context

Paul had established the church in Corinth during a personal visit to that city in about AD 52 (Acts 18:1-18). We are not certain how many letters he wrote to that church, but there were at least two—the ones we call *1 & 2 Corinthians*.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in preparation for a return visit (2 Corinthians 10:2; 12:20-21; 13:10). While the church in Corinth had, in general, responded favorably to Paul’s previous letter (see chapter 7), he knew some problems remained (12:20-21).

At least part of the reason for those problems was that some doubted that Christ was speaking through Paul; they wanted proof (2 Corinthians 13:3). Was he a true apostle of the Lord Jesus, or was Paul a con artist? Some Corinthians thought that Paul’s weaknesses—his weak presence and suffering-filled ministry—meant that the answer was *no*. But Paul proved earlier in the letter that such weakness and suffering proved the opposite (much of chapters 6, 10, and 11).

Weakness was how Jesus came into the world, and He suffered on the cross to display God’s power (2 Corinthians 13:4). Paul’s apostolic ministry had been (and was being) tested and verified through suffering rather than by avoiding it. The power of God seen in Paul’s suffering was also seen in the life

of Jesus. In like manner, through Paul's suffering and weakness, God's power gave life through Paul's ministry. Therefore, it wasn't Paul's credibility that was on the line. Instead, it was the credibility of the naysayers in the church at Corinth that was at issue.

I. Examination

(2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

A. Imperative (v. 5)

5a. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.

This is the second time that Paul has challenged the believers in Corinth to *examine* and *prove* themselves (the first time was in 1 Corinthians 11:28). The challenge was for the readers to undergo a season of spiritual self-discernment. This self-examination required the readers to stop questioning Paul's credibility and instead look to their credibility as Christian believers.

We note how the word *faith* is used in this context. This word usually refers to one's personal belief (assent) in Christ (John 20:31; 2 Corinthians 4:13; etc.). Included in that understanding is the concept of trust. Therefore, the word *faith* in Scripture typically means belief plus trust (Psalms 78:22; 86:2; Romans 4:5; 2 Timothy 1:12). But that is not the sense here. Instead, the phrase *the faith* refers to the body of doctrine to be believed and practiced (compare Acts 6:7; Ephesians 4:13; Titus 1:13; Jude 3). Thus, Paul's challenge is not to examine oneself to determine how much faith (belief plus assent) his readers have in Jesus but rather to determine whether the readers accept his doctrinal teaching regarding the nature of the Christian faith. The stress on the importance of

being *in the faith* is highlighted by the bookend phrase *examine yourselves* and *prove your own selves*.

What Do You Think?

How can believers "examine" their beliefs and actions to ensure they are "in the faith"?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can an accountability partner or a small group help a believer complete this examination?

5b. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

Testing, both self-imposed (Galatians 6:4) and imposed by others (James 1:12; 1 Peter 4:12-13; etc.), is necessary for evaluating one's status regarding whether *Jesus Christ is in* him or her. The test is not graded in terms of letter grades, such as an A- or a C+. Neither is it graded on a "curve." Instead, it's simply Pass/Fail. Either Jesus is in you, or He is not; there's no in-between. To fail in this regard is to *be reprobates*. As Paul uses the underlying Greek word elsewhere, it is translated "unjust" (1 Corinthians 6:1) and "unrighteous" (6:9).

While this pointed question challenged the church in Corinth, it seems intentionally focused on those who were dismissive of Paul and unconvinced of his authority. Thus, we detect a bit of "verbal judo" by Paul: those who find fault with him are revealing a fault of their own. They ought to test themselves rather than test Paul. They should be concerned about whether they had failed the test rather than whether Paul had failed it.

Paul's hope, of course, was that the readers would realize the seriousness of the issue. To fail the self-evaluation would be to reveal a life without Jesus.

How to Say It

apostolic	ap-uh-stahl-ick.
Corinth	Kor-inth.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).
epistle	ee-pis-ul.
Philippians	Fih-llip-ee-unz.
Thessalonians	Thess-uh-lo-nee-unz (th as in thin).

Dangerous Spots

Recently I went to the doctor to have a strangely shaped mole examined. Peering closely at it, she said, "It's good you came in; this could be cancerous." She then proceeded to freeze it with liquid nitrogen (cryotherapy). Should the mole reassert itself, its removal by surgery would be needed.

The doctor went on to identify more than 20 spots on my skin that she decided to treat

preventively. She explained, “Once I had a patient with a spot only a couple of millimeters across, really easy to miss. It was cancer, and if we hadn’t caught it, he could have died within a year.” Dangerous spots are easy to miss, especially if our attention is unduly distracted by spots that exist only in our imaginations. As the “problem people” in the church at Corinth were misdiagnosing Paul, he did them a great service by pointing out that (1) the spots they saw in him were imaginary and (2) they had very real spots of their own—spots they should have seen but could not due to their focus on him.

Jesus himself addressed this problem of wrong focus (Matthew 7:3-5). It’s an issue of self-imposed spiritual blindness (23:16-34; etc.). We all tend to have one or more spiritual blind spots. Some such spots are more serious than others, but the goal is to eliminate them all (1 Timothy 6:13-15). Will you be proactive in searching for them and enlisting others to help? Or will you simply assume you don’t have any? —A. W.

B. Result (v. 6)

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

Here, Paul does two things to the phrase “except ye be reprobates?” from the previous verse: (1) he changes the question to a statement, and (2) he changes “ye” to “we.” These indicate that Paul was confident that his proposed self-examination on the part of the Corinthians would cause them to realize who had the presence of Christ (Paul himself and most members of the church at Corinth) and who did not (the minority of troublemakers in that church).

The key to reaching the correct conclusion was ensuring that the proper criteria were applied to the assessment. Paul sprinkles these criteria throughout this letter (examples: 2 Corinthians 10:2, 7, 12) and includes the general criteria noted in the next verse in our lesson.

II. Expectation

(2 Corinthians 13:7-10)

A. Paul’s Request (v. 7)

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.

As Paul prepared for his third visit to Corinth (2 Corinthians 13:1), he prayed *to God* regarding the state of the church there. The nature of the prayer, which we see in the verse at hand, is neither that of simple-minded wishful thinking nor one of mere psychological encouragement. Instead, Paul’s prayer calls upon God to strengthen the readers against *evil*.

In this light, we keep in mind that a significant theme of this letter is a defense of Paul’s ministry and apostolic authority. The two main pieces of evidence that validate that ministry and authority were God’s power that shone through Paul’s weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9; 13:4) and the moral transformation of the members of the church at Corinth (3:2-6). For those believers to *do no evil* would maintain their growth with regard to that transformation. Paul hastened to add that this was *not that we should appear approved* (that is, for the sake of his reputation), but *that ye should do that which is honest* (that is, for the reputation of his readers). Thus, Paul is principally concerned that his readers bear the fruit of their transformation and be less concerned with his credentials as an approved apostle.

B. Paul’s Values (vv. 8-9)

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

The epistle of 2 Corinthians has been called the least organized of Paul’s writings. That’s because he often seems to jump from topic to topic in a stream of consciousness. But here we detect an important and well-organized chain of thought: the confidence in 2 Corinthians 13:6 combined with the prayer in 13:7 leads to the certainty that gospel *truth* will prevail. Indeed, the importance of truth is a theme of this letter (see 4:2; 7:14; 11:10; 12:6). One truth was that Paul had not failed any test regarding the validity of his message and authority, though some Corinthians thought he had.

9a. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong.

Paul uses accusations from his critics (2 Corinthians 10:10) and transforms them into an asset.

Unlike the apostolic pretenders of 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11-12, Paul had neither sought wealth nor had tried to deceive. He was not a manipulator but one who lived authentically and without guile (2 Corinthians 4:1-4). Paul conformed his ministry to the gospel, which included his willingness to suffer and place himself in a position of weakness for the sake of others. He was willing to suffer the hardships and persecutions of gospel ministry if it meant strengthening the faith of the Corinthians (6:3-10; 11:23-29). Paul willingly worked with his hands to be self-supporting so that the Corinthians would not be distracted by requests for financial support (11:7-9; 12:13-17; compare Acts 18:2-3). This was Paul's joy. He gladly lived in weakness so that the Corinthians might live in strength (2 Corinthians 12:19).

What Do You Think?

How can believers embrace their perceived weaknesses in order to encourage the spiritual growth of others?

Digging Deeper

How will you respond to the lie that believers must be "strong" in the eyes of the world?

9b. And this also we wish, even your perfection.

We may wonder what exactly is entailed in Paul's desire for the Corinthians' *perfection*. The Greek word being translated occurs in its noun form only here in the New Testament. But in its verb form, it appears five times in Paul's letters. In four of the five cases, it refers to movement from one state of being to a better one (1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:10). In the remaining case, it refers to the opposite (Romans 9:22). Using the two passages from the Corinthian letters as touchstones, the idea is one of church unity that results from the repentance of rebellious believers.

Paul prayed that God would sufficiently equip them for life in the gospel. Paul prayed that God would move their hearts toward good and away from evil and fully equip them to participate in the ministry of reconciliation with Paul rather than



Visual for Lesson 2. Ask students to silently contemplate this question before you pose the questions associated with verse 5a.

oppose Paul. This is parallel to the kind of preparation Paul described in Ephesians 4:12 or what Scripture supplies to the people of God so that they are fully equipped for every good work (see 2 Timothy 3:17). The perfection described here is one where the people of God are sufficiently equipped to live out the gospel in their lives faithfully.

In essence, Paul prayed that the Corinthians would grow up in their faith. As they went about doing good and avoiding evil, God would equip them for greater participation in the ministry of the gospel as the church became ever more unified.

The Value of Weakness

Linda had been a missionary and church planter for 16 years when she and two female coworkers made their way to a remote tribe. That tribe was highly patriarchal, placing little importance on women. On the plus side, this meant female missionaries were not seen as a cultural threat in the way males would have been.

The arrival of these outsiders was a matter of significant curiosity to the tribe. When Linda began to tell stories of Jesus to the women and children, several men stood on the periphery to "supervise." They acted disinterested initially, but the men began listening intently as the days passed.

One day, a bold young warrior strode to the front and announced that men were in charge. Therefore, he would tell the story, not Linda. He repeated her most recent story, getting some

details wrong. However, other men remembered the story better and corrected him. The whole tribe became interested and engaged.

Had this happened in her own culture, Linda may have been offended. But here, she saw this turn of events as a significant breakthrough: the gospel was being accepted and claimed by the “gatekeepers” of the tribal culture. In this situation, Linda had ministered in the role of one who was “weak” so that others might become “strong.” When was the last time you did so as well? —A. W.

C. Paul’s Purpose (v. 10)

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

The opening *therefore* introduces Paul’s expanded explanation of why he wrote this letter rather than waiting to deliver the message in person. Paul wants the Corinthians to listen to the letter’s sharp words so that he does not have to exercise his apostolic authority when he visits. The responsibility of those who occupy leadership positions in the church includes giving an account to God for the souls of those they served (see Hebrews 13:17). Sometimes, this responsibility requires reproofing and rebuking those who oppose the truth (see 2 Timothy 4:2).

Spiritual health is essential, and some Corinthians had lost their sense of the gospel. Some continued their divisive practices, and others had not repented of their sexual immorality (2 Corinthians 12:20–21). If the church allowed such behavior to go unchallenged, the result would be a spreading spiritual cancer, as some would see such toleration as permission. Thus Paul’s sharp tone.

What Do You Think?

How do believers discern whether or not a rebuke is necessary for the health of their congregation?

Digging Deeper

How do Scriptures like Matthew 18:15–17; Luke 17:3–4; Galatians 6:1; and 1 Timothy 5:20 inform believers’ approach to carrying out a rebuke?

10b. According to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

Even so, Paul’s purpose was not to destroy the Corinthians but to edify them (compare 2 Corinthians 10:8). Again, he states the ultimate validation of his apostleship: *the power which the Lord hath given* him. God’s goal was and is the making of disciples who grow in maturity (Matthew 28:19–20; 1 Corinthians 3:1–2; Hebrews 5:11–6:3). But when disobedience abounded, and the gospel was subverted, Paul intended to use his authority to tear down evil in the congregation. Yet, that was and is a last-ditch solution, and it was not the response that Paul desired. Therefore, he wrote this letter to prepare the Corinthians for his visit, call them to self-examination, and remind them of his desire for their growth in the gospel.

III. Exhortation

(2 Corinthians 13:11)

A. Invitation to Community (v. 11a)

11a. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace.

Paul concluded by reaffirming his relationship with the Corinthian audience. They were his siblings (*brethren*) in Christ. He had not given up on them. On the contrary, he remained connected to them as part of the family of God. Paul loved the Corinthians not only as spiritual siblings but also as their spiritual father (1 Corinthians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 6:13; 12:14).

With such familial affection, Paul concluded this section with five brief and pointed challenges. The first of his challenges is found in the word translated *farewell*. The underlying Greek also occurs in its identical form in Philippians 3:1 and 4:4 (twice). There the translation is the imperative “rejoice,” and that is the sense here.

The second challenge, to *be perfect*, translates the verb form of the noun translated “perfection” in 2 Corinthians 13:9, above. This command echoes Jesus’ imperative to “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), although a different word

is translated there. We know, of course, that perfection in this life is unattainable since all have sinned (Romans 3:23). But that doesn't mean that the standard should be lowered!

The third command, *be of good comfort*, seems to be a condensed version of 2 Corinthians 1:4-6 (see also 2 Corinthians 2:7; 7:6-7). The fourth command, *be of one mind*, stresses the importance of church unity (also Philippians 2:2, 5; 4:2). This can speak to doctrinal unity, but also essential is a shared humility that lives worthy of the gospel. Such unity will achieve the fifth imperative: *live in peace* (see Mark 9:50; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).

What Do You Think?

How can believers eliminate hindrances that prevent life with "one mind" and "in peace" with other believers?

Digging Deeper

What Scriptures come to mind in this regard?

B. Assurance of God's Presence (v. 11b)

11b. And the God of love and peace shall be with you.

Paul writes of the God "of peace" several times in his letters (Romans 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:16). But this is the only time he writes of *the God of love and peace*. The practice of the five imperatives would shape the Corinthian church along those two lines. God had not given up on the Corinthian church, nor had Paul. On the contrary, both were committed to the church.

Conclusion

A. Taking Inventory

Many congregations are in turmoil, and the times in which we live are perilous. Faith is under attack from within and from without. In such times it is important to take inventory and examine ourselves. The contents of Paul's prayer indicate the sort of life that passes the test. Avoiding evil is not enough in and of itself. Evil must be replaced with doing what is right. To avoid evil without replacing it with good is to leave one open to the situation

described in Matthew 12:43-45. An unexamined faith, some have said, is not worth living. Paul calls us to submit to a process of discernment by which we try our hearts (compare Psalm 139:23-24). Are we seeking to do good? Are we seeking to avoid evil? Are we pursuing maturity in Christ? Are we seeking to be equipped to do good and participate in the ministry of reconciliation?

This process will be painful but will build us up, not destroy us. We pursue this self-examination with the confidence that we are loved by God and with the assurance that the gospel is true. God is for us rather than against us. We pursue love and peace because God is the God of love and peace. Some have called this goal "the ability to think God's thoughts after Him." God responds to the prayers that ask for the strength to do good, the courage to avoid evil, and the power to participate in the ministry of the gospel as fully equipped disciples of Jesus.

This necessary self-examination requires a familial bond, a desire for maturity, a striving toward perfection, mutual encouragement, a shared commitment to live out the meaning of the gospel, and peaceful practices. An examined faith can flourish in that kind of church. Without such a community, faith will suffer and perhaps die spiritually. The process begins by asking whether we know ourselves. Do we?

What Do You Think?

What aspect of spiritual self-examination seems the most difficult for you in your current season of life?

Digging Deeper

How will you remember that you are a beloved child of God as you take up the practice of spiritual self-examination?

B. Prayer

O God, we ask You for the courage to examine ourselves with unvarnished honesty so that we may discern Christ in us. In the name of Your Son, who gives resurrection life, we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Testing yourself is not optional.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Create activities to test physical strength, focus, problem-solving abilities, and knowledge. Ensure that all activities are appropriate to the age and skills of the learners. (Examples: To test strength, place a weight, such as a whole bag of flour, on top of a seated volunteer's ankles and have them raise their feet until their legs are parallel to the floor. To test agility, put a 6-foot line of masking tape on the floor and have a volunteer walk down the line without deviation. To test problem-solving skills, give a volunteer a riddle or brain teaser. To test knowledge, ask volunteers to answer a trivia question.)

After every volunteer has the chance to test, ask the following question for whole-class discussion: "How does it feel testing your different abilities?"

Lead into the Bible study by saying, "It is usually fun for us to test our abilities, but not as fun when we realize personal limits or weaknesses. In today's lesson, identify what is being tested, how it is being tested, and why that test is necessary."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 13:5-6. Divide the class into four small groups: **Matthew 7:18-20 Group**, **John 13:35 Group**, **John 14:15 Group**, and **Romans 10:9 Group**. Instruct groups to read their Scripture passage and discuss how it informs self-examination regarding whether a person is "in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). After three minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to share their group's insights.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Fruit of the Spirit Test" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in pairs.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 13:7-9. Distribute a note card and pencil to each learner. Invite learners to write down the names of two or three influential spiritual mentors. Prompt learners

to consider family members, church members, and community members of all ages. After one minute, have learners explain to their partner why that mentor has been influential. Have pairs pray for the growth and encouragement of their mentors.

Option. Distribute copies of the "My Prayer for You" activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in one minute or less.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 13:10-11. Divide the class into four small groups: **Perfect Wholeness Group**, **Comforting Encouragement Group**, **One Mind Group**, and **Living Peaceably Group**. Have the groups answer the following questions in small-group discussion: 1—How does 2 Corinthians 13:10-11 address the concept or attitude described in your group's name? 2—How does this concept or attitude build others up? 3—What do you need to do to develop this attitude?

Reconvene the class and have a volunteer from each group share their answers.

Into Life

Write this question on the board:

How did my actions and attitudes during the last week demonstrate my faith in Christ?

Ask the class how this question can help guide them throughout the week as they discover Christ in their lives and grow in faith.

Distribute three sheets of blank letter-size printer paper to each learner. Ask them to stack the sheets and fold them to make a pamphlet. Invite learners to write the question on the board at the top of the booklet's first page. On the bottom of that page, ask them to write down the lesson's Key Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5a. Challenge participants to set aside a daily time to examine their faith. Encourage learners to create a "test question" like the one above that reflects Paul's challenge in the Key Text. Before the next lesson, invite volunteers to share what they learned from this daily examination.

Defending Our Faith

Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 4:1-8
Background Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

1 Peter 3:8-17

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.

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



Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the Old Testament text quoted.
2. Compare and contrast the things he or she “must do” with what he or she “must not do.”
3. State one “must do” and one “must not do” for personal focus in the week ahead.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Man’s Search for Meaning?
- B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Apostle
- C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

I. Right Behavior (1 Peter 3:8-12)

- A. Be a Blessing (vv. 8-9)
Which Route?

- B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10-12)

II. Confident Believers (1 Peter 3:13-17)

- A. Do Not Fear (vv. 13-14)
- B. Give an Answer (vv. 15-17)
Faith to the End

Conclusion

- A. Finding Meaning
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Man’s Search for Meaning?

Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Shouldn’t we “get even” with those who do us wrong? Anyone with life experience will inevitably ask these questions. We want to make sense of our suffering and find a way to deal with the resulting despair, if not eliminate it entirely.

Viktor E. Frankl’s 1946 book *Man’s Search for Meaning* details his attempts to find meaning and purpose in his experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. By the end of the book, Frankl acknowledges human evil and the capacity of suffering humans to find meaning in their experiences.

Many individuals described in Scripture suffered persecution. The various ways they reacted are timeless in their ability to instruct all future generations.

B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Apostle

Peter was one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples (also known as “apostles”; Luke 6:13). Peter (also called Simon or Cephas; John 1:42) was known for being impulsive (examples: Matthew 14:22-28; 16:22; 26:35; Mark 9:5-6; John 18:10). In spite of that fact—or perhaps because of it—he seems to have held a special place among the Twelve. He is named first in all four listings of those Twelve (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). Jesus conferred on him “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19). After Jesus’ ascension, Peter was a leader of the first-century church (see Acts 1:15-17; 2:14-40; 15:6-29). His ministry focused mainly on Jews (see Galatians 2:8). In that position, he experienced persecution (example: Acts 12:1-4), which informed his outlook regarding suffering and trials.

C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

First Peter 5:13 reveals the likely location of where the letter was written: the city of Rome. That verse says “Babylon,” not “Rome,” but there is widespread agreement that *Babylon* is a code word for *Rome*. Historic, literal Babylon had been the great oppressor of the Jews in the sixth century BC (2 Kings 24–25). This served as Peter’s analogy to

Rome of the first century AD (compare Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; etc.), particularly under the evil Emperor Nero (reigned AD 54–68).

The letter’s positive attitude toward government (1 Peter 2:13-17) may indicate that Nero’s state-sponsored persecution had not yet reached full intensity (but see 4:12). In any case, Peter was not shy about confronting ruling authorities when necessary (Acts 4:19; 5:29). As one writer notes, 1 Peter is “one of the earliest Christian documents reflecting on the problem of the relation of the Christian to the state.”

The letter of 1 Peter is one of two existing letters by that apostle (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1). The recipients of both letters were the various churches found in an area of northeastern Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 3:1). The first letter was likely intended to be circulated among the regions, perhaps by way of Silvanus, an assistant to Peter (1 Peter 5:12). Were the intended recipients primarily of Jewish background, primarily of Gentile background, or a roughly even split? The letter’s dozen or so quotations from the Old Testament could indicate that the intended audience was primarily of Jewish background. A stronger case can be made, however, for seeing the audience as primarily Gentile in background as Peter addressed their former lives of “ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14; compare Paul’s use of this same word in Ephesians 4:17-19 to refer to Gentiles).

The occasion for Peter’s letter was primarily a response to the suffering of believers, particularly since more was yet to come (see 1 Peter 1:6-7; etc.). Peter could address whatever suffering his audience had or would experience because he had been “a witness of sufferings of Christ” (5:1); Peter himself had suffered for that name (Acts 12).

I. Right Behavior

(1 Peter 3:8-12)

A. Be a Blessing (vv. 8-9)

8a. Finally, be ye all of one mind.

Verse 8 as a whole is only nine words in the original language. Five of those nine words are adjectives that describe behavior fitting for believers facing a hostile world.

The first adjective, translated as *one mind*, describes the desired unity of believers. Unity is a gift from God (Romans 15:5-6). The frequency of New Testament references to unity speaks to its importance (John 10:16; 17:11, 21-22; 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3, 13; Philippians 2:1-4; 4:2).

What Do You Think?

Why might Christians not experience God’s gift of unity?

Digging Deeper

What scriptural evidence gives you confidence in unity as a gift, even if believers seem divided?

8b. Having compassion one of another.

This is the translation of the second of the five adjectives. Were we to take the individual letters of the underlying Greek word and flip them to their sound-alike letters in the English alphabet, we would hear the word *sympathy*. The word appears in its verb form in Hebrews 4:15; 10:34.

8c. Love as brethren.

Repeating the procedure from verse 8b, converting the individual letters of the underlying Greek word to their sound-alike letters in English results in hearing the word *Philadelphia*—the city of brotherly *love*. Believers are described as part of God’s household or family (Matthew 12:50; John 1:12; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19; 1 John 3:1-2). Therefore, the third adjective describes the love that family members are to have for one another.

8d. Be pitiful, be courteous.

This verse’s fourth and fifth adjectives elaborate on how believers can live with love and compassion. The word translated *be pitiful* is also translated “tenderhearted” in Ephesians 4:32, and that is the sense here. To have heartfelt concern toward others is a crucial part of the life of a believer

How to Say It

anthropomorphism	an-thruh-pu-more-fih-zm.
Polycarp	Paw-lih-karp.
Silvanus	Sil-vay-nus.
Smyrna	Smur-nuh.

(compare Colossians 3:12). Its presence reflects a life transformed by God's love (see 1 John 3:17).

To *be courteous* is probably an umbrella term that includes deference, kindness, and thinking of others more highly than oneself (compare Romans 12:16; Philippians 2; 1 Peter 5:5).

9a. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing.

The command regarding *not rendering evil for evil* can be found in several other passages (examples: Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; Matthew 5:39, 44; Romans 12:17, 19; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). An aspect of evil treatment the original readers had suffered or were suffering was *railing*. The idea is that of slander, reproach, or insult. Jesus himself had faced mocking and insults leading up to and during His crucifixion (Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 22:63-65). However, He did not respond to His abusers in the manner in which He was treated (see 1 Peter 2:23).

What Do You Think?

In which situations is it most difficult not to respond to verbal assaults?

Digging Deeper

In those situations, how can you lean on the Holy Spirit to guide your responses?

9b. But contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

It's not sufficient merely to refrain from rendering evil for evil. Rather, potential evil reactions are to be replaced with actual holy reactions (Matthew 5:44). This should not be confused with a salvation based on works, for Peter has already established salvation as God's work (1 Peter 1:3, 23). As a result of our salvation, we are to be conduits for God's blessing in the world.

Which Route?

He was a new Bible college professor. He knew his teaching skills needed much improvement, and negative student feedback wounded him deeply. In one feedback evaluation, a student said he should find a different line of work.

An especially painful incident occurred one

day during the college's chapel service. A student had organized a skit in which the actors mocked a clueless professor who was obviously modeled after this man. After chapel, students watched as he went up to the stage to speak to the student who had instigated the mockery. Smiling, he shook the student's hand firmly and pulled him into a side-hug. Looking the student in the eyes, the professor said, "You're a brilliant actor, Jim. God's given you a great talent. I'm glad you're my student."

Jim managed to stammer a "thanks" and went back to moving stage props. Although the skit had been mortifying, the man was confident that he had chosen the route of Jesus—the route of love, compassion, and blessing. Had you been that professor, would you have done the same? —A. W.

B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10-12)

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.

This verse begins with a quote from Psalm 34:12-16, supporting Peter's point regarding the right kind of behavior amid trials and difficulty. According to this psalm's superscription, David wrote this psalm during a time of personal suffering and trials, as recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. Therefore, it was an appropriate psalm to cite to an audience of believers who themselves were undergoing trials (see Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter). With this quote, Peter switches back to the negative, what-not-to-do imperatives but with greater specificity: *evil* as it comes from one's *tongue* (compare James 3:1-10).

The feature of Hebrew poetry known as *parallelism* is quite evident here. Note that the words *tongue* and *lips* are synonyms in the sense of being instruments of speech. The *evil* and *guile* they can produce are also parallel in meaning. The parallelism continues in the next verse.

11a. Let him eschew evil, and do good.

Perhaps you recall from previous lessons that when Hebrew parallelism is present, then only one idea is in view, not two. Thus to *eschew evil, and do good* are to be seen as a single action. The way to avoid evil is to replace those impulses with

doing good as one action. To avoid evil without replacing it with doing good introduces the danger noted in Luke 11:24-26.

11b. Let him seek peace, and ensue it.

More Hebrew parallelism presents itself in this continuing quote from Psalm 34:14: to *seek peace* is the same thing as to *ensue it* (compare Matthew 5:9). God's people have peace with Him (Romans 5:1), and we are expected to seek peace in relationships with others (14:19). This is not peace "at any cost," but is peace "as much as lieth in you" (12:18). We don't yield or agree to unholy viewpoints merely to keep the peace (Matthew 10:34-36; Luke 12:51-53). God is indeed a "God of peace" (Romans 15:33; 16:20), but He also wages war (Revelation 2:16; 19:19; etc.).

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.

This verse features a literary tool called *anthropomorphism*, which is seeing God in terms of human characteristics and behavior. "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24) and, therefore, does not have a physical body. However, Peter describes the Lord figuratively as having *eyes*, *ears*, and a *face*. Peter does this to help his audience better understand the Lord's character. This technique is nothing new, being used dozens of times in both Old and New Testaments (examples: Genesis 6:8; Exodus 33:10, 20, 23; Amos 9:8; James 5:4).

II. Confident Believers

(1 Peter 3:13-17)

A. Do Not Fear (vv. 13-14)

13. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

Another literary tool presents itself: that of the rhetorical question. Such questions are not intended to elicit an answer because the answer is obvious. The rhetorical question here contrasts an ideal situation with what was likely already being experienced by Peter's audience, per the next verse, below.

14a. But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye.

While Peter hoped to see good behavior receive proper recognition (see 1 Peter 2:13-14), this would not always be the case. Oppression is not inevitable for believers, but it is a possibility that all believers must prepare themselves to face—and not be surprised when it does (4:12; 1 John 3:13).

The underlying Greek word for *happy* is elsewhere translated as "blessed" (Matthew 5:3-11; James 1:12; etc.). This clarifies that Peter was not suggesting those who suffer experience a masochistic enjoyment of their own pain. Blessing comes when people hear God's word and obey His commands (Luke 11:28). The ultimate blessing comes when a person receives forgiveness for sin through faith in Christ Jesus (see Romans 4:4-8).

What Do You Think?

What blessing have you experienced during or following suffering for righteousness' sake?

Digging Deeper

How can you communicate the hope of blessing while not ignoring the pain another is currently experiencing?

14b. And be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.

This half-verse alludes to Isaiah 8:12. That section of the book where it is located details a conflict between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. When Ahaz, king of Judah, was faced with the destruction of his kingdom, the Lord promised that Judah would be protected (Isaiah 7:3-9). Even though Ahaz and his people faced destruction, they were commanded not to be afraid. They were to fear the Lord rather than earthly opponents (8:12-15).

B. Give an Answer (vv. 15-17)

15a. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

Again, the challenge was (and is) to replace what is not to be done with what should be done instead. To *sanctify* means to designate someone or something being set apart as holy (John 10:36). The underlying Greek word is also translated as "hallowed" in verses proclaiming the holiness of

God's name (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). Given the imperative tone of the verb *sanctify* as used here, we may wonder how we mere humans can possibly *sanctify the Lord God* more than He already is sanctified! Indeed, this verb is used in its imperative tone only five times in the New Testament: here and in Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:12; John 17:17; Revelation 22:11.

The key to understanding all this is context. Words take on definite meanings only within the contexts used. Take, for instance, the word *fine*. By itself, it has no fewer than seven potential meanings! Which of the seven is intended is discovered only in the context of that word's use in a sentence and paragraph. The context of the imperative in the verse before us is found in these three words: *in your hearts*. Humans certainly do not sanctify God by literally making Him holier than He already is! What we are to change, rather, is how we view Him.

15b. And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.

Colossians 4:6 says much the same thing as this verse. "Readiness" in a general New Testament sense has two aspects: we are to be ready to do good (Titus 3:1) even as we remain ready for the Son's return (Matthew 24:44; Luke 12:40). We err when we focus on either of those at the expense of the other. One error is reflected in the old description of someone who was "so heavenly minded that he was no earthly good." The other error lets a Christian's responsibility to be a change agent for social justice eclipse the need to evangelize for the life to come in eternity.

There are various areas in which Christians are to be ready. Peter specifies one of these: one's readiness to *give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you*. Notice that this isn't addressing what preachers and Bible teachers are to do on Sunday morning to people who are already saved by the blood! Rather, it applies to all Christians as they (we) interact with unbelievers in everyday life.

Notice also that Peter's imperative isn't dealing with a Christian's initiative in bringing up the subject of salvation in Jesus. Rather, the imperative

here deals with how to react when an unbeliever asks about our hope. But before the unbeliever asks about our hope, he or she needs to see that hope reflected in how we talk and behave differently from the ways the world does (1 Peter 4:3-4).

15c. With meekness and fear.

Any response that believers provide will be as effective only as the attitude with which it is given. In that light, the phrase *with meekness and fear* speaks to a low-key response. Such a demeanor is to characterize followers of Jesus (see Matthew 5:5; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12).

What Do You Think?

How do you remain ready to testify about the hope you have?

Digging Deeper

How would someone hearing you speak about your hope describe your attitude?

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.

The New Testament has much to say about the importance of one's *conscience* as it uses that word about 30 times. The conscience can be a marvelous guide to proper thought and behavior if it is properly informed in doing so (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Romans 9:1; etc.). When functioning as God intended, it is a moral alarm system (Romans 2:15). But one's conscience can be overridden by evil desires (Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 4:2).

The word *conversation* requires a bit of attention because it does not mean today what it did when the *King James Version* was published in 1611. Today, we use that word in a narrow sense of people engaging in verbal communication. But in the *KJV* it refers more broadly to the way one lives, one's lifestyle (compare Ephesians 4:22).

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

Proper conduct (*well doing*) in all situations is an important theme in this letter (see 1 Peter 2:15, 20; 4:19). When believers *suffer* for such conduct, the result is a powerful witness for unbelievers.

The ultimate example of suffering in this regard is Christ (see 3:18, not today’s lesson text).

This verse also reveals another aspect of believers’ suffering: *the will of God*. We should approach this topic with much caution because *the will of God* in some contexts means that He *causes* something to happen, but in other contexts, it means that He *permits* it to happen. God exercises His sovereign control by permitting what He does not cause. Some relevant passages to help understand the difference are Job 1:12; 2:6; Lamentations 3:32-33; Acts 14:16; 16:7; 1 Corinthians 16:7; Hebrews 6:3; 12:4-11; James 1:13-15; 4:15.

In any case, God is able to bring good out of suffering—indeed, that is His intent (Romans 8:28). God does not enjoy seeing people suffer, but He does allow it (example: Exodus 3:7-9) at times. A believer’s suffering leads to faithful endurance (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:3) and a deeper relationship with Christ (Philippians 3:8-10).

Faith to the End

According to church history, Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John. Polycarp became the leader of the church of Smyrna (compare Revelation 2:8-11). At age 86, he was put to death by the Roman government for refusing to pray to the emperor. Given the chance to save his own life by recanting his faith, Polycarp said, “86 years have I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” Polycarp was burned at the stake in AD 155.

Polycarp didn’t do anything to deserve this death. And in facing it, he set apart Christ as his Lord to the very end. He died with a clear conscience. If those who took his life were not ashamed of their slander in this life, they will be at the final judgment. In your last days, will you have so clear a testimony of faithfulness to Christ? —A. W.

Conclusion

A. Finding Meaning

Few of us will experience the level of suffering endured by the martyrs of Christian history. However, that does not make Peter’s directives any less applicable—quite the opposite! When faced with



Visual for Lesson 3. Allow learners to ponder this question before moving to those associated with verse 15c.

suffering, we may search for meaning in that experience. The question asked relentlessly is, *Why?*

That question is natural and understandable. But it must also be temporary because ultimately the *Why?* needs to change to *What’s next?* This is a way that our response to suffering can also serve as a way to point people to a life of faith in Jesus. God wants the best for people. When such suffering occurs, believers should remember to be unified in demonstrating trust in God.

What Do You Think?

What is your main takeaway from this lesson?

Digging Deeper

What will do you this week in response to that takeaway?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for being with us in all situations. Help us be unified with other believers. Show us how we can be attentive to the working of Your Spirit. Fill us with peace and humility in all the trials that we might face. We trust that You will work through us to complete Your will in the world. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Let suffering strengthen your faith.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Divide participants into three small groups: **Beach Group**, **Crowded Subway Group**, and **Movie Theater Group**. Based on their assigned locations, instruct groups to write two lists of appropriate behaviors and discouraged behaviors. Challenge them to include at least three do's and three don'ts.

After several minutes, ask the groups to write some guidelines for appropriate behavior in their setting, based on the behaviors they have already discussed. After a few more minutes, have the small groups share their rules with the whole group. Discuss what they discovered about rules and expectations.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, "Whether we realize it or not, everything we do is governed by rules or expectations. As we study the passage of Scripture today, consider what rules and expectations God has for His children."

Into the Word

Have participants return to their previous groups. Assign each group one of the following texts: Matthew 5:43-48; John 13:12-17; and John 17:20-26. Have groups compare their text with 1 Peter 3:8-9 and answer these questions:

1. What is the common theme between the two passages?
2. What did Jesus do in His ministry that shows this theme in action?
3. What "must do" and "must not do" actions did you find in the passages?

Allow time for small group discussion, then ask groups to share their insights with the whole class. Based on the group discussion, create a list of *Must Do* items on the board as well as a second list of *Must Not Do* items.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "To Do

and Not to Do" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated before coming together as a whole class to discuss.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 3:10-12. As a class, discuss what these verses reveal about why we ought to follow the commands of verses 8-9. Ask volunteers to read Psalm 34 out loud. Then assign the previous three small groups these sections: Psalm 34:1-7; 34:8-14; 34:15-22. Have each group make a list of all the reasons why believers should strive to live godly lives, as indicated in their verses and 1 Peter 3:10-12. After bringing the three groups back together, create a third list titled *Why* on the board. Have the groups provide answers to fill in this new list.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 3:13-17. Have participants pair up. Ask the pairs to share between them examples of when they have suffered in the past, and how God turned that suffering into a blessing.

Into Life

Review the lists written on the board earlier in the lesson. Challenge participants to choose one "must do" and one "must not do" from the verses, which they will put into practice in the week ahead. Distribute an index card and pencil to each person. Have participants write their chosen "must do" and "must not do" on the card. Invite participants to refer to their cards throughout the week. Ask participants to bring their cards and an assessment of their progress to share at the beginning of the next lesson. *Option.* If you used the alternative above, allow learners to work from their activity page.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "With Meekness and Fear" exercise from the activity page. Allow learners one minute to complete as indicated before pairing up to give their answers.

Pray with learners before dismissing class.

Living in Faith

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 28:1-14
Background Scripture: Acts 6

Acts 6:7-15

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.

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 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.



Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. State the charge against Stephen and its basis.
2. Critique the “ends justify the means” tactic used by Stephen’s opponents.
3. Evaluate various ways of responding or reacting when he or she faces opposition to Jesus today.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Sacred Space
- B. Lesson Context: First-Century Church
- C. Lesson Context: The Jerusalem Temple

I. The Growing Church (Acts 6:7-10)

- A. Disciples and Priests (v. 7)
- B. Power and Wonders (v. 8)
Full of Power
- C. Wisdom and Spirit (vv. 9-10)
A Grandma’s Wisdom

II. The Emboldened Opposition (Acts 6:11-15)

- A. The Conspiracy (vv. 11-12)
- B. The Witnesses (vv. 13-14)
- C. The Steadfast Man (v. 15)

Conclusion

- A. Divine Service
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Sacred Space

In the building of my childhood church, there was a room that we called the “sanctuary.” It contained pews, a high ceiling, a choir loft, a pulpit, and an organ. Each week, that room served as the location for worship services. While we infrequently used that space, certain behaviors were deemed unacceptable there. For example, holding a water balloon fight in the sanctuary was out of the question for our youth group!

The congregation established these expectations as a way to honor God. We knew, however, there was nothing holy about that room in and of itself. We believe that God dwells in His people (1 Corinthians 3:16), not buildings (Acts 17:24). But we wanted to set aside that room as a sacred space to honor and worship Him nonetheless.

Violation of the sacred space of the temple in Jerusalem was a severe matter to first-century Jewish leaders. An accusation of such a violation would lead to harsh consequences.

B. Lesson Context: First-Century Church

After Jesus’ ascension, the number of believers increased and were “added” to the numbers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:47b; 5:14; 6:1). The expanding number of believers led them to develop habits for their gatherings and expectations for how they would treat each other (see 2:42-47a; 4:32-35).

During that time, almost all believers were ethnically Jewish. However, not all had the same cultural upbringing. Some had lived in the Greek-speaking (Hellenistic) portions of the Roman Empire, while others lived in Jewish regions of Palestine. The differences between these groups of first-century Jews led to conflict regarding the treatment of widows (Acts 6:1). As a result, the apostles faced challenges while trying to oversee the church (6:2).

To ease the load for the apostles, they selected seven men to handle specific tasks (see Acts 6:3-4). The book of Acts mentions two of these seven men in further detail: Philip (8:4-40) and Stephen (6:8-8:1). In some ways, the role of these seven men was analogous to the position of deacon (see 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The word *deacon* comes from the Greek

noun *diakonos*, which is not used in Acts 6. However, a variation of that word does appear in Acts 6 and is translated as “ministry” (Acts 6:4). The term describes some aspects of the work of the apostles.

C. Lesson Context: The Jerusalem Temple

For first-century Judaism, the temple in Jerusalem served as the faith’s physical and spiritual center. The temple complex was the focus of the people’s worship and served as the headquarters for religious leadership.

Several versions of the Jewish temple existed. Construction on the first began in about 966 BC during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 6:1). After 13 years, Solomon’s Temple was completed (7:1) and dedicated (1 Kings 8). During his reign, the temple became a place to worship God and store valuable artifacts. As such, it was a notable place for enemy forces to plunder (example: 14:25-28).

In 597 BC, the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem, took the people into exile, and looted Solomon’s Temple (2 Kings 24:10-14). In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s Temple and took the remaining artifacts from the temple (25:8-17).

There would be attempts to rebuild this place of worship. In 538 BC, the Persian king Cyrus allowed Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (see Ezra 1:1-4; 6:1-12; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23). Under the oversight of Zerubbabel (see Ezra 3:2, 8; 4:2), construction faced delays. Eventually, it was finished, and the temple was dedicated in 515 BC (see 5:1-6:22). That temple—sometimes called Zerubbabel’s Temple—was smaller and less impressive than the temple of Solomon’s day (see Haggai 2:3).

Over time, Zerubbabel’s Temple experienced harsh treatment. Greek king Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes (reigned 175–164 BC), desecrated that temple and took its treasures (see nonbiblical 1 Maccabees 1:20-28). His actions led the people to revolt to free Jerusalem and the temple from foreign powers.

Their freedom was temporary. In 63 BC, Roman general Pompey desecrated the temple and its sacred artifacts. Although in shambles, the temple was not entirely demolished. It needed renovation and restoration.

The temple mentioned in the Gospels was the one renovated by Herod the Great (reigned 47–4 BC). Work on that temple began in around 20 BC (compare John 2:20). Construction on the temple complex was completed in about AD 64. The first-century Jewish leaders were not about to let anyone else again defile their holy place. They were especially not going to allow anyone to speak harshly against the building and its associated customs.

I. The Growing Church

(Acts 6:7-10)

A. Disciples and Priests (v. 7)

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.

This verse reveals two important aspects regarding the growth of the first-century church. First, the church’s development was caused by the dramatic spread of *the word of God* (see also Acts 12:24; 19:20). As the influence of the gospel message *increased* among people, so did *the number of the disciples*. When the gospel falls on willing hearts, spiritual fruit will result, often in multiples (see Luke 8:8, 15).

Second, that their number *multiplied . . . greatly* implies that the *Jerusalem* church underwent rapid numerical growth. Comparing the number of

How to Say It

Alexandrians	Al-ex-an-dree-unz.
Antiochus	An-tie-oh-kus.
Cilicia	Sih-lish-i-uh.
Cyrenians	Sigh-ree-nee-unz.
<i>diakonos</i> (Greek)	dee-ah-ko-nawss.
Epiphanes	lh-piff-a-nee-z.
Hellenistic	Heh-lah-nih-stik.
Herod	Hair-ud.
Josephus	Jo-see-fus.
Sadducees	Sad-you-seez.
Sanhedrin	San-huh-drun or San-heed-run.
Zerubbabel	Zeh-rub-uh-bul.

believers in the first chapters of the book of Acts reveals this expansion (see Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4).

Counted among these believers were *priests*. These men served in the temple when their lot was chosen (example: Luke 1:5, 8-10). They differed from the elite religious ruling class of the Sanhedrin. Instead, these priests would have been relatively poor. They would not have profited much from the wealth created by the temple.

The text does not indicate how many priests numbered in a *great company*. The first-century historian Josephus estimated that there were 20,000 priests at the time. We can assume that the number of believers among the priesthood numbered at least in the hundreds. Only a short time had passed since Jesus' ascension, but the gospel message found fertile soil for growth in Jerusalem.

What Do You Think?

How do you follow the Spirit's leading in helping make disciples in your neighborhood?

Digging Deeper

How can your congregation be a conduit for the spread of the gospel in your neighborhood and town?

B. Power and Wonders (v. 8)

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

Great wonders and miracles had been attributed to Jesus (examples: John 2:11; 11:46-47; Acts 2:22) and the apostles (examples: 2:43; 5:12). When the apostles did these things, it confirmed the presence of God's grace and the empowerment of His servants (see 2 Corinthians 12:12).

The book of Acts does not reveal the kind of miraculous work that Stephen did *among the people*. The apostles healed and restored people suffering from both physical and spiritual ailments (examples: Acts 3:1-10; 5:14-16). Therefore, it is likely that Stephen did similarly. Although Stephen was not an apostle, he had been chosen by God to give witness to salvation (compare Hebrews 2:3-4). Stephen was "full of *faith* and of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:5). His life demonstrated the spiritual *power* that had been promised by Jesus (1:8).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can believers develop spiritual power?

Digging Deeper

How can mature believers leverage their power to encourage the spiritual growth of newer believers?

Full of Power

Bodybuilder Ethan Andrews triumphantly lifted his arms in celebration. He had broken his personal bench press record. A commentator proclaimed afterward, "Andrews is a man who is full of power." This power came through hard work and dedication to the sport. Andrews developed strength and power through grueling hours in the weight room.

The book of Acts describes Stephen as being full of power. However, his power differed from that of a bodybuilder. The athlete attains *physical* power through many hours in the weight room. Stephen, however, received *spiritual* power through his faith in Christ Jesus.

Because of God's grace, we are "full of power" to proclaim the gospel. Christ is the source of that power. We're simply "earthen vessels" to express it (2 Corinthians 4:7). Whose notoriety do you seek to enhance through an expression of your power?

—D. D.

C. Wisdom and Spirit (vv. 9-10)

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.

After the exile that began in 586 BC, the need arose for synagogues among the Jewish people. These were locations for prayer and teaching of Scripture (examples: Matthew 4:23; Acts 13:14-15; 15:21). For more information on synagogues, see the commentary on Luke 7:4-5, lesson 7.

The underlying Greek text is unclear regarding the number of synagogues mentioned in this verse. One proposal is that this verse describes one *synagogue* attended by different groups of Jewish people.

Another option is that the verse describes multiple synagogues, each frequented by a different

group. Paul tells of the existence of more than one synagogue in Jerusalem (Acts 24:11-12). Therefore, it is possible that the groups mentioned in this verse each attended different synagogues. They all, however, had a certain dispute with Stephen.

Libertines were Jewish people who had been liberated from slavery or who were descendants of those freed. These people were different from free-born citizens of the Roman Empire who had never experienced enslavement. Other groups included *Cyrenians* from northern Africa, *Alexandrians* from Egypt, and people from *Cilicia* and *Asia*, both located in modern-day Turkey.

Stephen's teachings gave these groups a reason for *disputing*. If he had only performed miracles and served food (compare Acts 6:2-3), it is unlikely that these groups would have had any dispute. However, what led to conflict with the synagogue members were his words.

Stephen undoubtedly followed Peter and John in proclaiming God's salvation in Jesus the Messiah (compare Acts 3:12-26). However, the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem did not want anyone to preach that message (4:13-18). Jesus' promises to His followers regarding opposition (Luke 21:12-15) were coming true.

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

That the synagogue members *were not able to resist* Stephen does not mean that they agreed with that message. Rather, they had no answer to his teachings. They had opposed the leading of God's Spirit. They were "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:51).

Stephen had been chosen because he was "full of the Holy Ghost and *wisdom*" (Acts 6:3). His irrefutable words were a direct fulfillment of Jesus' promises to His disciples (Luke 21:15).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to ensure that your speech is filled with wisdom?

Digging Deeper

How do Proverbs 15:1-2; Ephesians 4:29-32; Colossians 4:5-6; and James 1:19; 3:13-18 inform your answer?

A Grandma's Wisdom

Eliana loved to sit in Grandma Sophia's living room and inquire about her grandma's life. The elder had 77 years' worth of entertaining and educating stories. She had been an active member of a local church congregation for her entire adult life. As Eliana grew and faced life's difficulties, she could always count on her grandma to offer biblical wisdom. Grandma Sophia's wisdom came because she had spent her whole life studying Scripture and seeking God.

It's no wonder that Stephen's opponents could not answer him. God's Spirit had filled Stephen with the wisdom of God. If the thought of speaking about Jesus makes you uncomfortable, be encouraged! The all-wise God can (and will) give you wisdom regarding how and when to speak as you have prepared yourself to do so. What progress are you making in that regard? —D. D.

II. The Emboldened Opposition

(Acts 6:11-15)

A. The Conspiracy (vv. 11-12)

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

Stephen's wisdom did not sit well with the religious leaders. Unable to win an argument with him, they took a different approach to quiet him. Certain *men* were secretly persuaded (*suborned*) to speak up against Stephen regarding his teachings.

The charge of *blasphemous words* came from their understanding of Stephen's teaching regarding the Law of *Moses*. Their accusation had severe consequences for Stephen. The Law of Moses prohibited blasphemous language *against God* and the leaders of Israel (Exodus 20:7; 22:28).

12. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.

The council refers to the Sanhedrin, a 70-member "supreme court" for matters regarding Jewish law. The group consisted of chief priests, *elders*, and *scribes* (Mark 15:1). Members of the Sadducees and Pharisees were also likely part of the council to some extent (see Acts 23:6). The group carried



Visual for Lesson 4. *Point to this visual as you ask the class to consider how God's Spirit provides faith for them to stand out to the world.*

significant influence in first-century Judaism. They had the power to level consequences for offenders of the law (examples: John 9:22; Acts 15:17-40). Any claim that would have *stirred up the people* and the religious leaders would have been significant.

B. The Witnesses (vv. 13-14)

13. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.

A *false* testimony would have been scandalous. The Law of Moses states, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20:16; compare Deuteronomy 19:16-18). Luke does not say whether the Sanhedrin encouraged these *witnesses*. If they had, the council would have been guilty of supporting the attacks on Stephen.

The Sanhedrin met in a chamber connected to the temple. The charge that they heard was that Stephen was preaching threats *against this holy place*. In the view of the Sanhedrin, this was a *blasphemous* act by Stephen. Blasphemy was a severe offense with serious consequences (see Leviticus 24:10-16). A similar accusation was brought against the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:7-11).

14a. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place.

Their claims had a grain of truth. *Jesus* had indeed prophesied regarding the destruction of *this place*, the temple (Luke 21:5-6). He had also proclaimed, “Destroy this temple, and in three

days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). The apostle John, however, interpreted this statement as a metaphor for Jesus’ body (2:21).

Jesus never claimed that He himself would be the one to destroy the temple. However, He had faced charges similar to the ones brought before Stephen (see Matthew 26:60-61; 27:40; Mark 14:57-58). The point of Jesus’ teachings was to serve as prophetic reminders regarding the temporary nature of the temple (see Matthew 24:25-18). In AD 70, Jesus’ prophecies regarding the temple were fulfilled when Roman commander Titus destroyed the temple.

14b. And shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

Some of the *customs* described in the Law of *Moses* included circumcision (Leviticus 12:3) and dietary practices (see Leviticus 11; 17). These things were a way for the Jewish people to separate themselves from Gentiles. Therefore, any teachings regarding a *change* to these things would affect their unique identity as a people.

Jesus’ teaching transformed or set aside these customs. One way is found in His teaching on food and spiritual defilement. The Law of Moses indicates that consuming certain foods makes a person unclean (Leviticus 11; 17). However, Jesus taught that what a person eats does not lead to defilement (Matthew 15:17-20; Mark 7:14-23).

Jesus did not seek to abolish the Law of Moses. Instead, His teachings and entire ministry fulfilled the law and the other writings of Scripture (Matthew 5:17). All parts of Hebrew Scripture—the writings of Moses, the prophets, the psalms, and the wisdom literature—served as guideposts that point people to Jesus. Rather than nullify these Scriptures, Jesus fulfilled them through His life, death, and resurrection (see Luke 24:27, 44).

The charges regarding Stephen’s teachings (see Acts 6:14a-14b, above) were intended to unify the factions of the Sanhedrin against him. The temple was the primary economic engine of Jerusalem. It provided wealth for many people (example: Matthew 21:12). Because Sadducees were elite members of the priesthood, they benefited from the wealth created by the temple.

The Pharisees, however, were on board for dif-

ferent reasons. Their interpretations of the law depended on their traditions (example: Mark 7:3-4). The prospect of the temple's destruction and the law's annulment threatened the power and influence of these parties. This threat to vested interests was what motivated the arrest of Jesus as well (John 11:48).

C. The Steadfast Man (v. 15)

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

The New Testament describes angels as appearing like men (examples: Luke 24:4; John 20:11-12). However, no other instances regarding the angelic countenance of a human are provided in the New Testament. The phrase *the face of an angel* highlights the supernatural nature of the expression on Stephen's face. His facial expression should have been a clue to the divine approval of his teachings.

The description also reveals the intimacy that Stephen had with God. Other people in Scripture experienced a change in their countenance after they had a personal experience with the glory of God (examples: Exodus 34:29; Luke 9:29).

Stephen began his speech to the Sanhedrin by referring to "the God of glory" (Acts 7:2). As he concluded, Stephen's first view of Heaven would be to see "the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (7:55). That vision was the final straw for the Sanhedrin as he was stoned to death by mob action (7:56-8:1a).

What Do You Think?

How do your actions, attitudes, and expressions indicate to others that you are a follower of Christ?

Digging Deeper

What are the limitations to judging spiritual status based on outward markers?

Conclusion

A. Divine Service

What should the Christian's response be to attacks and insults to faith? Such attacks might include name-calling, harsh remarks, or judgment

regarding our use of time, energy, and resources. These abuses might even come from coworkers, friends, or family members.

The verbal attacks on Stephen led to a physical attack that resulted in his death. It is unlikely that we will experience the same end as Stephen. However, his manner of living can inform our behavior—whether or not attacks on our faith result.

Stephen was a student of Scripture, demonstrated by his speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:2-54). Not only did he know the *facts* of Scripture, but he also knew how Jesus *fulfilled* all of Scripture. This knowledge led him to display confidence and hope during his interaction with the Sanhedrin. He proclaimed the gospel with the hope that they would believe in Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Most of all, Stephen faced his final crisis with peace and poise. He displayed a sense of peace that comes from a knowledge of God's will and power. The false accusations did not deter Stephen; he trusted that it was all a part of God's plan.

Consider the example of Stephen the next time you pray. Ask the Lord for wisdom, power, and peace. When we practice and display these attributes, we can better serve the Lord, especially in the face of criticism or attacks from the world.

What Do You Think?

How does today's lesson inform your thoughts and behaviors for the upcoming Holy Week?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to seek God's wisdom, power, and peace as you invite someone to Easter services?

B. Prayer

Lord, You are the God of wisdom, power, and peace. Give us the wisdom to know how to navigate a world that increasingly despises You. Show us the power of Your Spirit at work in and through us. Fill us with peace to face whatever circumstances we might face. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's wisdom, power, and peace will overcome the harshest opponents.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask learners to suggest incidents about people falsely accused. Write a sentence on the board summarizing each incident. After volunteers share, ask the following questions in a whole-class discussion: 1–How did the accused respond to the accusation? 2–How did the accused respond when the accusation was revealed to be false?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Worst-Case Scenario” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in groups of three to complete as indicated.

Lead into the lesson by saying, “There may be times when we face a situation that seems unjust or unfair. Our response reveals the nature of our faith in the Lord. Consider Stephen’s response to accusations and how you might have responded.”

Into the Word

Before class, recruit a volunteer to present a three-minute presentation on Stephen’s life, death, and ministry. Encourage the volunteer to read Acts 6:1–8:3. The volunteer can also use online resources in preparation. Ensure the presentation covers the following questions: 1–How was Stephen chosen for ministry? 2–What were the main points of his speech before the Sanhedrin? 3–What resulted from his death?

Announce a Bible-marking activity. Provide copies of Acts 6:7-15 for those who do not want to write in their Bibles. Provide handouts (you create) with these instructions:

- Underline any words or phrases that describe Stephen.
- Double underline the accusations brought against Stephen.
- Draw a question mark around any words or phrases you would like to study further.
- Draw a circle around any mention of or allusion to the Jerusalem Temple or the Law of Moses.

Slowly read the Scripture aloud (or ask volun-

teers to do so) at least twice and as many as four times. As the Scripture is read, class members should mark their copies in the ways noted.

After the final reading, divide the class into pairs to discuss the following questions: 1–What are some words or phrases that describe Stephen? 2–What were the main points of the accusations brought against him? 3–What elements of truth might have been in the accusations?

Option. Divide the class into four groups and have each group read the assigned Scripture text: **Joseph Group** (Genesis 39:1-20), **Daniel Group** (Daniel 6:1-24), **Mordecai Group** (Esther 3:1-14), **Jesus Group** (Mark 14:53-65). After each group reads the assigned Scripture, have each answer the following questions: 1–Who was the accused? 2–What was the accusation? 3–Who was the accuser? 4–What were the results of the accusation? 5–What does this story have in common with the account of Stephen?

Into Life

Divide learners into groups of three and have them answer the following questions: 1–Who are the people you will interact with in the upcoming week? 2–What opportunities will you have to boldly share the gospel with them? 3–What are possible worst-case scenarios that could result from your gospel presentation? 4–How would you respond to these results? 5–How should believers respond when facing opposition to the gospel?

Distribute an index card and pen to each learner and have them write their evaluation of their group’s response to question 4. Encourage learners to consider biblical standards and examples in their evaluation. Conclude by having group members pray for courage and boldness to share the gospel.

Alternative. Distribute the “Responses and Reactions” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in small groups.

The Resurrection: Key to Faith

Devotional Reading: Exodus 14:10-14, 21-23, 26-31
Background Scripture: Mark 16

Mark 16:1-8

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?

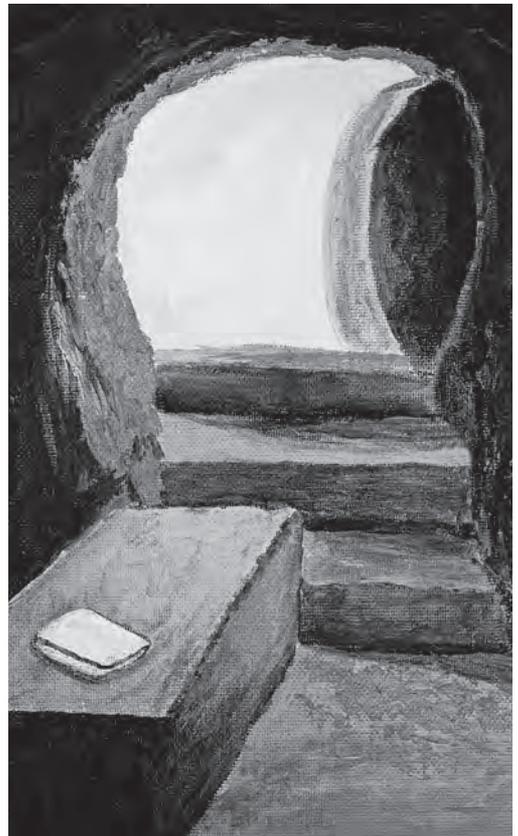
4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

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.

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

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

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



Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the women's encounter with the man at Jesus' empty tomb.
2. Explain the significance of the time elements of the text.
3. Make a commitment not to allow fear to result in failure to speak up when doing so is necessary.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Abrupt Endings
- B. Lesson Context: Mark, the Man
- C. Lesson Context: Mark, the Gospel

I. The Women (Mark 16:1-4)

- A. Intention (v. 1)
- B. Timing (v. 2)
- C. Trouble (vv. 3-4)

II. The Messenger (Mark 16:5-8)

- A. Angelic Appearance (v. 5)
- B. Remarkable Report (vv. 6-7)
Great Expectations
- C. Fearful Flight (v. 8)
Fleeing or Faith?

Conclusion

- A. Singular Event
- B. Vital Reality
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Abrupt Endings

My wife had just finished reading Beatrix Potter's classic *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* to our children. Surprised by its ending, my wife exclaimed, "That's it? That's the end?!"

The book tells the story of Peter, a playful and disobedient young rabbit who decides to steal vegetables from the garden of Mr. McGregor. Peter is discovered but flees before Mr. McGregor can catch him. In Peter's hurry to escape, he leaves behind his jacket and shoes.

Once Peter returns home, he doesn't tell his mother about his escape. Instead, he goes straight to bed. Peter's mother wonders why her son lost his jacket and shoes. In the book's closing pages, the reader learns that Mr. McGregor used Peter's jacket and shoes to create a scarecrow, and the story ends at that point. The story's abrupt conclusion leaves the reader wondering whether Peter faced any consequences for his mischievous actions.

Abrupt endings can both frustrate and entice audiences. Clever storytellers use these endings to their advantage because audience members can be challenged to imagine the outcome. As you read today's Scripture, think about why the writer of this Gospel might have decided to end his account the way that he did.

B. Lesson Context: Mark, the Man

Tradition tells us that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, an associate of Peter and Paul (see Acts 12:12; 1 Peter 5:13). This man was not an apostle. But he was a close relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), who probably convinced Paul (Saul) to take John Mark on that apostle's first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). John Mark abandoned the trip before its conclusion (13:13). This put him in disfavor with Paul (15:36-39), although the two later reconciled (2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Students propose that Mark's Gospel account is based on Peter's firsthand experiences with the person and ministry of Jesus, given the closeness of Mark to Peter in light of Peter calling him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13).

C. Lesson Context: Mark, the Gospel

Although Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four, its narrative packs a punch! Students frequently call it "the Gospel of action." This designation stems from the fact that Mark jumps quickly from scene to scene to chronicle Jesus' ministry.

The Gospel's description of the last week of Jesus' ministry highlights its inclination toward action. Of the nearly 700 verses of the Gospel, 241 of them—more than one-third of the Gospel—recount events from that week (Mark 11:1–16:8). In describing scenes from that week, the Gospel jumps quickly between scenes. Mark tells us how Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Sunday (11:1-11) and taught others regarding righteousness (11:12-25; 12:28-34). On that Thursday, He ate a final meal (14:12-31) before He was arrested (14:43-52) and tried (14:53-65; 15:1-15). Finally, on that Friday, He was crucified and killed at the hands of Roman soldiers (15:16-41).

Friday evening of that week, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, approached Pontius Pilate to ask for Jesus' body (Mark 15:43). Before granting the request, Pilate wanted confirmation that Jesus was truly dead (15:44-45). There was to be no doubt on the part of Pilate that Jesus was indeed dead. Once Pilate received this verification, Joseph took Jesus' body and prepared it for burial.

To begin the burial proceedings, Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in linen (Mark 15:46a). The Gospels do not indicate whether or not Jesus' body was washed as was customary at this time (example: Acts 9:37). Joseph then placed the body in a rock tomb sealed with a stone (Mark 15:46b). After the burial, two women observed the burial location (15:47). They would return after Sabbath to finish caring for Jesus' body.

Some students believe that the original ending to this Gospel came at Mark 16:8 and that Mark 16:9-20 was a later addition in the decades after Mark wrote. Much of the information in verses 9-20 is reflected in the other Gospels (Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 24:13-43, 50-51; John 20:14-18). In this lesson, we will engage in a *what-if*. What if Mark did end at verse 8? What could that abrupt ending teach us today?

I. The Women

(Mark 16:1-4)

A. Intention (v. 1)

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.

Jesus died on a Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath (Mark 15:37-42). The Law of Moses prohibited work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:3). Therefore, the burial process (see Lesson Context) would have to wait until *the sabbath was past*. The task of treating the body of Jesus would fall to the women, some of whom were at the crucifixion (Mark 15:40; John 19:25) and subsequently had seen the tomb's location (Mark 15:47; compare Matthew 27:61; Luke 23:55-56).

The name *Mary* was common in the first century AD. By one estimate, one in four women in Palestine was so named at that time. The Gospels mention several women named Mary, so it is easy to confuse them.

One of the women with that name was *Mary Magdalene*, who became a devoted follower of Jesus after He freed her from spiritual oppression (see Luke 8:1-2). The designation *Magdalene* was not a family name. Instead, it indicates that she likely came from the town of Magdala (compare Matthew 15:39).

The second *Mary* is unknown to us. One possibility is that she is "*the mother of James the less and of Joses*" (Mark 15:40, 47). Another possibility is that she was "*the wife of Cleophas*" (John 19:25).

Matthew's account of the burial mentions a woman who is "*the mother of Zebedee's children*" (Matthew 27:56). This woman could be *Salome*, thus making her the mother of James and John (compare 4:21; Mark 15:40).

Sweet spices combated the stench of decaying flesh (compare John 11:39). These treatments were an essential part of the burial process (19:39-40). The women prepared these things before the Sabbath (Luke 23:55-56). They waited for the conclusion of that day of rest to return to the grave and *anoint* the remains of Jesus.

What Do You Think?

In what ways will you show devotion to the Lord, even if doing so requires personal discomfort?

Digging Deeper

How can you encourage that level of devotion among other believers?

B. Timing (v. 2)

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

The phrases *very early in the morning* and *at the rising of the sun* reveal the eagerness of the women to complete their tasks. We assume that they set out just before sunrise, in the dim, pre-dawn light (compare John 20:1). The women were confident of their destination, having been there two days earlier (see comments on Mark 16:1, above).

C. Trouble (vv. 3-4)

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

What the women seemed to have forgotten up to this point is that a massive disk-shaped *stone* sealed the entrance to the grave (Matthew 27:60-61; Mark 15:46-47). Several strong individuals would be needed to *roll it away* from the entryway. The women's question reveals that they belatedly realized that they would not be able to move it.

The women's question also reveals the attitudes and behaviors of Jesus' followers. The disciples fled at Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:50). Peter, in particular, denied having known Jesus (John 18:15-18, 25-27). Others likely hid out of fear for what might happen to them (compare 20:19). Because of their grief, shame, or fear, some of Jesus' followers had distanced themselves from being associated with Him (contrast 19:38-42). They would not be of any help in removing *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.

The Gospel accounts of Mark, Luke, and John do not reveal how *the stone was rolled away*. They only report that the stone was no longer blocking

the tomb's entrance when the women arrived (here and Luke 24:2; John 20:1). Matthew, however, discloses that "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door" (Matthew 28:2). The massive nature of this *very great* stone is also noted in Matthew 27:60.

What Do You Think?

In what ways has your faith been strengthened by an experience during a funeral service or at a cemetery?

Digging Deeper

How can your acts of comforting a grieving person strengthen your faith?

II. The Messenger

(Mark 16:5-8)

A. Angelic Appearance (v. 5)

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's Gospel does not provide further identifying information regarding the *young man sitting in the sepulchre*. However, we can determine his nature from the other Gospel accounts.

Matthew 28:2 describes him as an "angel of the Lord." Luke identifies "two men . . . in shining garments" (Luke 24:4) who are "angels" (24:23); John 20:12 is similar. Scripture often describes heavenly beings in terms of the brightness of their garments (examples: Matthew 17:2; 28:3; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29-30; Acts 1:10).

The women came to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus. Instead of seeing His body, they saw an unknown visitor. The sight of this mysterious person would have been a valid reason for the women to feel *affrighted*.

B. Remarkable Report (vv. 6-7)

6a. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified.

Fear is a common reaction to seeing an angelic messenger (examples: Judges 13:21-22; Matthew 28:4; Acts 10:3-4) or a supernatural occurrence

(examples: Mark 4:41; 5:15; 9:4-6). When this occurs, a form of the reminder to *be not affrighted* usually follows (examples: Judges 6:21-23; Daniel 10:10-12, 19; Luke 1:11-13, 30; 2:9-10).

The angel's designation *Jesus of Nazareth* referred to the location of Jesus' upbringing. The village of Nazareth was located about 70 miles north of Jerusalem in the hilly region west of the Sea of Galilee. Residents of that village were likely impoverished. As a result, others held them in low regard (see John 1:46). Jesus' parents were from Nazareth (Luke 2:4), and the family returned there after Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:21-23). Jesus remained in Nazareth until He began His public ministry (4:12-13).

6b. He is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

The angel's proclamation that Jesus *is risen* does not mean that His spirit went to Heaven, leaving behind His dead body. The empty tomb reveals that His physical body was resurrected from the dead. His post-resurrection appearances provided further evidence of this reality (see Luke 24:37-39; John 20:27).

The resurrection should not have come as a surprise to His followers. Jesus had prophesied to them numerous times regarding His death and resurrection (examples: Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:33-34). However, His disciples rarely understood His teaching on this topic (see 9:10, 32).

Burial customs during Jesus' day began with washing the body (example: Acts 9:37). Then the body was wrapped with cloths, treated with fragrant spices and ointments, and *laid* upon a flat surface in the grave. The command to *behold* that *place where* Joseph had *laid Him* indicated that the tomb no longer contained the body of Jesus.

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the claim that belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is nonessential for Christians?

Digging Deeper

How do John 20:24-25, 29; Acts 2:22-24; Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15; and 1 Peter 1:3-4 inform your response?

Great Expectations

As one of the world's last remaining rainforests, the Amazon River Basin is home to an unparalleled diversity of plant and animal life. By one recent estimate, the region contains over 40,000 plant species, nearly 1,300 bird species, roughly 430 species of mammals, and approximately 2.5 million species of insects. And these numbers are only estimates; scientists discover new species each year!

When visitors to this region learn of this diversity, they expect to feel fear. A habitat with such a variety of species will indeed be overwhelming to the unfamiliar! While some threats do exist in the untamed rainforest, it is not complete chaos. Instead, the rainforest can be surprisingly peaceful. Most visitors leave the rainforest and remark on its serenity. It is a balanced and ordered ecosystem of interdependent plants and animals.

The women at the tomb expected to see Jesus' body. Their expectations changed when they were told that Jesus was no longer there. At that moment, the lives of these women began to change radically. How has your life changed because of your relationship with the risen Lord? What has not changed that should have? —O. P.

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.

The command to *go* and *tell* of the risen Lord indicates a change in emphasis for Mark. In his Gospel, he frequently mentions times when Jesus urged others to be silent regarding His identity

How to Say It

Arimathaea	Air-uh-muh- <i>thee</i> -uh (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Barnabas	Bar-nuh-bus.
Cleophas	Klee-o-fus.
Magdala	Mag-duh-luh.
Magdalene	Mag-duh-leen or Mag-duh-lee-nee.
Pontius Pilate	Pon-shus or Pon-ti-us Pie-lut.
Salome	Suh-lo-me.
Zebedee	Zeb-eh-dee.

and work (Mark 3:11-12; 5:42-43; 7:36; 8:29-30; contrast 5:18-20). Now that Jesus' resurrection had occurred, His followers would not need to remain silent about Him (see 9:9).

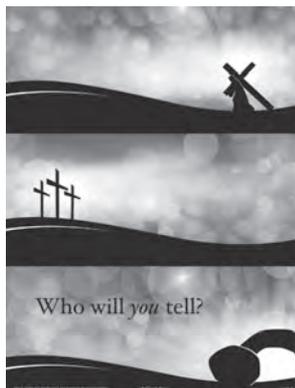
Jesus' *disciples* had fled at His arrest (Mark 14:50). On that occasion, they were concerned for their safety. Rather than punish the disciples for leaving Jesus, the angel's message offered them a chance to reunite with their Lord.

The angel showed particular attention to *Peter* by naming him specifically. This apostle is known for his position of prominence, being named first in all listings of the apostles (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13-14) and for his impulsive behavior (examples: Mark 9:5-6; John 13:1-11). He had confidently proclaimed fidelity to Jesus, even if it led to death (Mark 14:29-31). Later that same night, however, Peter thrice denied knowing Jesus (14:66-72). Later, after Peter received the women's report, he still had to see the empty tomb for himself (Luke 24:11-12).

Before Jesus' arrest, He had prophesied that His disciples would be "offended" and "scattered" (Mark 14:27). In the same breath, however, He promised, "After that I am risen, I will go before you into *Galilee*" (14:28). The angel's message to the women indicated the pending fulfillment of Jesus' promises.

The selection of Galilee as the location of this promised reunion was made with intent. Jesus began His public ministry there (see Mark 1:9, 14).

Visual for
Lesson 5



Before closing with prayer, encourage the class to reflect on this question throughout the week.

It was in that region that He called His first disciples (1:16-20). The angel's message sent the apostles back to where their relationship with Jesus began.

C. Fearful Flight (v. 8)

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.

Three strong emotions overwhelmed the women as they *went out quickly* and *fled from the sepulchre*. Their feelings were decidedly mixed; this is the only verse in the New Testament where the Greek words for *trembled*, *amazed*, and *afraid* occur together. The picture was one of uncertainty as the women found themselves in an in-between state: the empty tomb was initial evidence of a miraculous occurrence, but they had not yet seen the risen Jesus personally.

What Do You Think?

What is the significance of living in an "in-between" state when we have evidence of Jesus' resurrection but have not yet seen Him personally?

Digging Deeper

How does John 20:24-25, 29 inform your answer?

Fleeing or Faith?

A *cenote* is a limestone sinkhole that connects to pools of water underground. Many cenotes are so deep that their exploration requires scuba equipment and training. While serving as a missionary in Mexico, I visited one such cenote. Before arriving, our guide gave us very few details about the sinkhole. When we finally arrived, we were amazed by its magnitude and beauty. Smooth, shiny rock revealed a seemingly bottomless pool of water. As I approached the edge of the cenote, I became afraid and wanted to turn and leave.

After receiving the angel's message, the women were afraid and fled from the tomb. Does fear ever prevent you from serving the Lord? When that occurs, remember the words of our resurrected Lord: "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am

he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen” (Revelation 1:17-18). Believe this and have great faith! —O. P.

Conclusion

A. Singular Event

Today’s Scripture abruptly ends with a declaration of the women’s fear. If this were all we knew of the story, we would wonder what happened next. Praise God that we know the conclusion to this story—a story that continued with Jesus’ ascension to Heaven (Acts 1:1-9) and will culminate with His promised return to earth (Revelation 22:20).

The resurrection of Jesus is a singular event in history. It is distinct from other resurrections in the Bible (examples: 2 Kings 4:32-37; Luke 7:11-15; 8:49-56; John 11:38-44). Those were instances of the temporary restoration of physical life—temporary because all those people died again later. The resurrection of Jesus, by contrast, is permanent (Revelation 1:18a).

That permanence has vital implications. Death is God’s penalty for sin (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12), but now the risen Jesus holds “the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:18b).

Another characteristic that sets Jesus’ resurrection apart from the others noted above is that His body was transformed, not merely resuscitated. After His resurrection, He appeared and disappeared in ways He had not done previously (Luke 24:31, 36, 51; John 20:19, 26), although He still had a physical body that other people could touch (Luke 24:37-43; John 20:27). The transformation of Jesus’ body prefigures the promised transformation of those who belong to Him when we are raised on the last day (1 Corinthians 15:42-57).

B. Vital Reality

From our vantage point some 2,000 years later, the empty tomb is the universal image of Christ’s victory over death. The women who found the open tomb that morning had prepared themselves to be confronted with death. Instead, they were confronted with the announcement of life.

The reality of death confronts all, and we make preparations for it. We help friends and family

members with funeral planning. We purchase cemetery plots. But the best spiritual preparation is to let our thoughts dwell on resurrection life.

Jesus has promised that what was accomplished in Him on that third day will also be accomplished in us when He returns. The power of life over death that He demonstrated for himself is the same power that will instantly and forever transform us (see Philippians 3:21). Jesus is Lord over death, having conquered it. That makes Him Lord over eternal life—our eternal life.

Therefore, as we prepare for death, we keep in mind that “the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death is our enemy, but it is ultimately a defeated enemy. When Jesus returns, we all will be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, death will be no more.

Consider the abrupt ending to verse 8 as an invitation to proclaim the good news of the resurrected Christ. The women at the tomb that morning ran in fear; our task today is to run in joy with the message of the empty tomb. May we ever proclaim Christ’s victory over death; may we never lose sight of the fact that His victory is ours as well—for eternity. Death could not permanently silence Jesus or obstruct God’s plan. Will fear silence you from sharing this good news?

What Do You Think?

How do you deal with feelings of fear that may arise when sharing the news of Jesus’ resurrection?

Digging Deeper

Who can you recruit as an accountability partner to encourage your faith?

C. Prayer

God of resurrection, where there is death, You bring life. We hope for the day when we will experience resurrection and new life. In the meantime, encourage us when we feel we cannot proclaim this good news. When fear overtakes us, keep us from forgetting that You are the source of life. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Fear not—Jesus has risen!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask the following question for whole-class discussion: “What’s the best news you’ve heard this week?” Allow three minutes for volunteers to give their responses as you write them on the board. Evaluate the responses by asking the following questions: 1–Why are these things considered good news? 2–To whom did you tell this good news? 3–How did others respond to this good news?

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today’s Scripture recounts the best news the world has ever received. But this news was initially not received joyfully.”

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 16:1-8. Divide the class into equal groups. Distribute handouts with the following questions (you create) for in-group discussion: 1–Who went to the tomb? 2–Why did they go? 3–When did they go, and what was the reason for their timing? 4–How did they respond to the message they received?

Option 1. Before class, find a recording of the song “Was It a Morning Like This?” on an online streaming platform. After playing it for the class, ask them to list the song’s lyrics that retell the events from Mark 16:1-8. Ask the following question for whole-class discussion: “How does the song help you understand this Scripture better?”

Option 2. Divide the class into four groups and give each group a handout (you create) with the following headers: *Question | Mark 16:1-8 | Luke 24:8-20.* Write numbers one through five vertically in the Question column. Have groups compare the two Scripture passages by writing their answers to the following questions next to the appropriate question number in column one: 1–What was the good news, and who delivered it? 2–What is surprising about who received the good news? 3–How did they react to receiving that news? 4–What did the recipients of the good

news do with it? 5–How did the news change the lives of the people who received it?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Rest of the Story” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated before sharing conclusions with the whole class.

Into Life

Write the following prompt on the board:

Sometimes I’m afraid to talk with a nonbeliever about Jesus’ resurrection because . . .

Distribute two slips of paper and a writing utensil to each learner. Have them anonymously complete the prompt on one of the slips. After one minute, collect the slips and redistribute them. Ask volunteers to read aloud responses.

Say, “Fear is one possible reason believers are afraid to talk about Jesus’ resurrection. That’s understandable; fear was a response of the first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb.”

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–What would have happened if the women remained silent regarding the empty tomb? 2–What happens when believers today remain silent regarding Jesus’ resurrection? 3–Why do believers often fail to tell others about our resurrected Savior? 4–How can we overcome fear or apathy in this regard?

Write the following prompt on the board and have learners complete it on their second slip of paper:

In order not to allow fear to result in failure to speak up when doing so is necessary, I will . . .

After one minute, have volunteers share what they wrote.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Notes for a Letter” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Faith of the Persistent

Devotional Reading: John 4:4-18
Background Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

Luke 5:17-26

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.

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 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, glorifying God.

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

Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit II: The Measure of Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the correct and incorrect conclusions of the scribes and Pharisees.
2. Explain the connection between the plural “their” and the singular “thy” in verse 20.
3. Brainstorm modern helping situations analogous to that of the text.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Imposter Friends
- B. Lesson Context

I. Faith That Seeks (Luke 5:17-20a)

- A. Teaching a Gathering (v. 17)
- B. Finding a Way (vv. 18-19)
A Lesson in Persistence
- C. Seeing Their Faith (v. 20a)

II. Faith That Finds (Luke 5:20b-26)

- A. Man Is Forgiven (v. 20b)
- B. Jesus Is Disparaged (vv. 21-22)
Part of the Solution or the Problem?
- C. Man Is Healed (vv. 23-25)
- D. Crowd Is Amazed (v. 26)

Conclusion

- A. Authentic Friends
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Imposter Friends

Words and their definitions seem to change all the time. In recent years, discussions on blogs and opinion pieces have focused on defining the word *friend* in the age of social media. Is it possible for a person to have thousands of “friends”? Is it possible to be friends with someone you have never met in person? Many so-called friends on social media are criminals hiding behind fictitious names! They are imposters.

I have found a simple way to identify one’s genuine friends: announce that you are moving and see who volunteers to help. My wife and I have moved more than 20 times during our 22 years of marriage. Surprisingly, we have had no more than five people who have helped us pack and load the trucks. By contrast, I have over 300 “friends” on social media. Today’s lesson allows us a first-century look at the results of authentic, Christ-honoring friendship.

B. Lesson Context

The third Gospel and the book of Acts were written by a man named Luke. He was a traveling companion of the apostle Paul and a physician by profession (see Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Because Luke was not an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus, he gathered his information from those who had been so he could write a detailed account (Luke 1:1-4). Most students believe that the Gospel of Mark was written first and, therefore, could have been one of the sources used by Luke. The scene in today’s lesson is worded quite similarly to Mark 2:1-12 (but see Luke 5:17, below; compare Matthew 9:1-8).

Today’s lesson locates Jesus in Galilee, early in His three-and-a-half-year ministry. His popularity was rising, and He was drawing crowds. The news of Jesus’ teaching and miracles was spreading rapidly (Luke 4:37), and attempts to keep things under control in that regard didn’t work (5:14-15). As a result, Jesus had to make a conscious effort to carve out some “alone time” for prayer with His heavenly Father (4:42; 5:16).

Luke 5:12 states that the healing miracle just prior to the one in today's text occurred "in a certain city" of Galilee. Mark 2:1 is more specific in indicating that the events of today's lesson took place in Capernaum. This town, located on the northwestern bank of the Sea of Galilee, became something of a headquarters for Jesus during His tours of Galilee (Matthew 4:13).

I. Faith That Seeks

(Luke 5:17-20a)

A. Teaching a Gathering (v. 17)

17a. 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.

The phrase *on a certain day* indicates that the events that follow probably occur on a day other than a Sabbath. Recognizing that this supposition is an argument from silence, we note that there are no complaints from Jesus' opponents concerning a Sabbath violation, as we see in Luke 6:1-11 and 13:10-16.

This verse includes the first of 27 mentions of *Pharisees* in the Gospel of Luke. Two factors indicate their presence to have been an ominous turn of events. The first is that they were accompanied by *doctors of the law*. This rare designation (a Greek word of 14 letters) is found only here, in Acts 5:34 (applied to the renowned Gamaliel), and in 1 Timothy 1:7 (regarding misguided aspirations). Much more often, Pharisees are said to be accompanied by "scribes" (examples: Luke 5:30; 15:2), a different Greek word being translated. Pharisees opposed Jesus (examples: Luke 11:53-54; John 11:45-57), with a few exceptions (examples: 3:1; 19:39). On the distinctive beliefs and practices of the Pharisees, see Matthew 23:1-36; Mark 7:3-5; Luke 18:10-12; and Acts 23:8.

The second ominous factor is that these religious leaders are not merely "local yokels" *out of every town of Galilee*. Instead, they include individuals from *Judaea* and *Jerusalem*. It's a long walk from Jerusalem and its temple to Capernaum—approximately 80 miles! For these religious lead-

ers to commit to such a trip reveals a determined intent that the person and work of Jesus required a thorough investigation.

17b. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them.

With this phrase, Luke unites this event with Isaiah 61:1-2, which Jesus had read concerning himself when He was in Nazareth a short time before (Luke 4:16-21). The healings, both physical and spiritual, fulfill messianic prophecy.

The reference to healing *them* raises a question of antecedent: Who does the pronoun "them" refer to? The problem lies in the fact that the word being translated differs slightly in spelling across some ancient manuscripts.

In any case, the focus is on the source of the power: *the Lord* (compare Micah 3:8; etc.).

B. Finding a Way (vv. 18-19)

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.

The helping action of the friends of *a man which was taken with a palsy* is selfless and authentic. In their effort, the friends show what Jesus called the second greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31). This account does not specify how many men are carrying the bed, but Mark 2:3 does: there are four. This makes sense when we imagine something like a medical stretcher with one person at each corner.

The Greek verb to describe the man's disease is in the tradition of other ancient medical writers, and Luke's books feature four of its five occurrences in the New Testament (here and in Luke 5:24; Acts 8:7; 9:33; compare to the fifth occurrence

How to Say It

Capernaum	Kuh-per-nay-um.
Galilee	Gal-uh-lee.
Messianic	Mess-ee-an-ick.
Nazareth	Naz-uh-reth.
Pharisees	Fair-ih-seez.
Synoptic	Sih-nawp-tihk.

in Hebrews 12:12, there translated “feeble”). If spoken in Greek, the word would sound very much like our English word *paralyzed*. The affliction made it impossible for the man to come to Jesus without assistance.

What Do You Think?

How will you demonstrate the second greatest commandment (see Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31) toward a friend in need in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

Who might you recruit to help you in this regard?

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.

The religious leaders’ determination to investigate Jesus (Luke 5:17a, above) was matched by the determination of four men to have the suffering man healed by Jesus. This verse reads quite similarly to its parallel in Mark 2:4, except for Luke’s phrase *into the midst before Jesus*, which Mark did not include.

First-century Palestinian houses typically had flat roofs with exterior steps or a ladder providing access. Roofs were built with beams resting on the outer walls, with smaller posts crossing the beams and covered with thatch and mud. The rooftop was a place for household activities, drying laundry, and getting fresh air. It was also where people sometimes hid, conferred, mourned, and prayed (Joshua 2:6; 1 Samuel 9:25; Isaiah 15:3; Acts 10:9, respectively). Roofs were also places where bad things could happen (2 Samuel 11:2; 16:22; Deuteronomy 22:8; Jeremiah 19:13).

Even with outside access readily available, for the four men to climb the stairs or ladder while transporting the man was undoubtedly quite difficult—another sign of their faith and commitment. And lowering the man *down* would probably have required ropes, possibly an indication of advance preparation.

What Do You Think?

How can perceived physical or spiritual obstacles become an opportunity to demonstrate your faith and trust?

Digging Deeper

How is your faith strengthened by the examples from Scripture of people who faced and overcame obstacles to faith (example: Paul, 2 Corinthians 11:23–33)?

A Lesson in Persistence

I was a college student visiting Europe, foolish enough to wear a belt pouch with a single, inviting zipper. It attracted thieves like chum attracts sharks.

In Paris, a man held open a door for me while he tried to sneak the zipper open. In Rome, a trio of young women jangled bells in my face while they did likewise. In both cases, I clamped my hand over the zipper.

It was an older woman in Rome whose persistence paid off. She begged in a loud voice as she pushed a swaddled baby against me. A moment later, I felt her rummage in my belt pouch.

I stepped back. “Did you take something from me?”

The woman’s failed burglary didn’t faze her one bit. She pointed to the water bottle in my hand and cried out, “For the baby! For the baby!”

I gave it to her.

Lord, help us to seek You with that persistence as we do so with godly motives! —N. G.

C. Seeing Their Faith (v. 20a)

20a. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him.

The four Gospels mention *faith* a total of 24 times (in Greek), and Luke features 11 of those instances. The verse before us is the first (earliest) of those 11. Faith, being a mental and spiritual state, cannot literally be seen in and of itself by us ordinary humans. That limitation does not apply to the Son of God, however. He knows people’s spiritual and mental states (see Luke 5:22, below). But even though we lack the divine ability to see the faith (or lack of faith) in someone’s heart, we can certainly

see evidence of faith in one's actions or inactions (James 2:17). What the crowd saw in the actions of the men Jesus *saw* in both heart and action.

We must not assume that the phrase *their faith* refers only to the man's friends to the exclusion of the paralyzed man. There is no indication that he opposed others' carrying him to Jesus. It's likely that he was more than willing to seek out Jesus.

What Do You Think?

In what ways do a believer's actions reveal his or her faith in God?

Digging Deeper

How do Hebrews 11:1–12:3 and James 2:14–26 inform you of the connection between faith and action?

II. Faith That Finds

(Luke 5:20b–26)

A. Man Is Forgiven (v. 20b)

20b. Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

How Jesus addresses the man varies across the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the synoptic Gospels). Luke uses the generic Greek word for *man*, while the other two Gospels use the Greek word that can be translated as “son” (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5).

B. Jesus Is Disparaged (vv. 21–22)

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

Not (yet) finding anything in Jesus' teaching to criticize, *the scribes and the Pharisees* focus their attention on His actions and implied identity. They are not correct in an absolute sense when they say that *God alone* can forgive sins—people are encouraged to forgive sins committed against one another (Matthew 6:14; 18:21–22; Luke 11:4; 17:3–4; Colossians 3:12–13). But the scribes and the Pharisees are correct in the sense of a person sinning against God (Exodus 34:6–7; Psalm 103:2–3; Isaiah 43:25; 1 John 1:8–9). According to Jewish writings in the period between the Old and New Testaments, the Jews expected a righteous Messiah to overthrow

foreign invaders. They did not expect a Messiah who would be God-in-the-flesh, able to forgive sins.

This unspoken question of the religious experts goes to the heart of understanding the person and work of Jesus. The experts actually had a good grasp of what was happening: Jesus was speaking and acting in a manner reserved for God. For a mere human to forgive sins committed against God would indeed be blasphemy, which was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16). Various forms of the word *blasphemy* occur dozens of times in the New Testament. Jesus eventually would be crucified on this very charge (Matthew 26:65–66; Mark 14:64; compare John 5:16–18; 10:31–33). The text establishes this instance as the first organized opposition to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.

What Do You Think?

How can you prepare yourself for others' questions regarding the identity and authority of Jesus?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you need to take to be successful in this regard?

Part of the Solution or the Problem?

My wife and I have been reading Helen L. Taylor's *Little Pilgrim's Progress* to our kids each night. They love this adaptation of Bunyan's classic *Pilgrim's Progress*, published in 1678. They are fascinated by all the obstacles Little Christian encounters—giants, lions, and other children who mock him as he keeps moving along the King's Way toward the Celestial City.

The characters who oppose Little Christian are what might be called “threshold guardians,” and they have names that reveal their nature. Characters named “Obstinate” and “Pliable” try to keep Little Christian from ever starting his journey of faith; “Worldly” tries to get him to go an easier way; “Self” attempts to enslave him, etc.

The Pharisees arose as threshold guardians against Jesus' ministry, but Jesus did not abandon His calling. When you think of the problem of spiritual threshold guardians, how do you ensure you're not part of the problem? —N. G.

Jesus Includes "Outsiders" in Luke's Gospel

<p>Jesus and Outsiders</p> <p>Jesus eats with sinners (11:27-32)</p> <p>Jesus heals the servant of a Gentile (17:11-17)</p> <p>Jesus teaches on neighborly mercy (10:29-37)</p> <p>Jesus and the tax collector (10:1-10)</p> <p>Jesus and the sinful criminal (23:43-43)</p>	<p>Jesus and Women</p> <p>A woman anoints Jesus' feet (7:36-50)</p> <p>Jesus heals a bleeding woman (8:43-48)</p> <p>Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath (13:10-17)</p>	<p>Jesus and the Unclean</p> <p>Jesus heals a man possessed by a spirit (8:16-17)</p> <p>Jesus heals a man with leprosy (9:1-14)</p> <p>Jesus heals a man with paralysis (9:1-14)</p> <p>Jesus heals a man possessed by demons (9:17-19)</p> <p>Jesus heals a man with leprosy (17:11-19)</p> <p>Jesus heals a man with blindness (18:35-43)</p>
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Visual for Lesson 6. *Point to this chart and ask, "What do Jesus' actions in the Gospel of Luke reveal about who or what Jesus finds most important?"*

22. But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

Everyone present could see the evidence of the faith of the man and his friends in their actions. Jesus, however, was able to see the doubt and lack of faith in the *hearts* of the religious leaders. The ability to know people's hearts and innermost thoughts is one of the divine characteristics of Jesus that Luke emphasizes (see Luke 6:8; 9:47; 24:38). With this ability, He was able to respond to their unspoken question with an audible question of His own. Although Jesus knew the thoughts of their hearts, He asked them a question, a method of teaching that He often used (2:49; 6:9, 39, 46; etc.).

C. Man Is Healed (vv. 23-25)

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

Not waiting for an answer to His question, Jesus immediately poses another one. Some students see this as a "greater to lesser" argument (technically known as a *maiores ad minus*). A simple example of this argument goes like this: "If a glass can hold eight ounces of water, then it can surely hold five ounces of water." Other students see it as the opposite—a "lesser to greater" argument (technically known as a *minores ad maius*). A simple example might be: "If it is illegal to shoot fireworks on the Fourth of July (a single day), then

it is surely illegal to shoot them off on all other days."

In either case, Jesus' question gave the religious leaders something to think about. What was to be not doubted was Jesus' ability not just to say *rise up and walk* but actually to bring that action about, as the next verses demonstrate.

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.

This verse—worded almost the same as Matthew 9:6 and Mark 2:10-11—stresses that Jesus healed the paralyzed man as evidence of Jesus' authority to forgive sins (compare John 5:8). In this way, Luke again connects what has happened here to Jesus' reading of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue (see notes on Luke 5:17b, above). When John the Baptist wavered in his faith while imprisoned, Jesus confirmed His messiahship by mentioning signs such as this (7:22-23). Faith in Jesus is based on evidence!

This verse is the first of 25 occasions that Luke records Jesus' using the self-designation *Son of man*. Overall, this expression occurs across all four Gospels more than 80 times. In almost every case, it comes from the lips of Jesus and not as a description of Jesus by the Gospel writers. (Luke 24:7 and John 12:34 are the only two exceptions, both quoting Jesus.) The background of this designation comes from the Old Testament. The book of Ezekiel applies the title to that prophet more than 80 times, but without suggesting that he was divine (examples: Ezekiel 5:1; 6:2; 7:2). The two uses of the designation in the book of Daniel recognize the Son of Man as having divine attributes (Daniel 7:13-14; 8:17).

25. Immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

Earlier, Luke established Jesus' authority and power to heal and drive out demons (Luke 4:33-36). And we remember that *authority* is "the right to do something," and *power* is "the ability to do something." Luke is the only writer of the four Gospels to use both words together (examples: 4:36; 9:1; 20:20). Although the text now under

consideration does not explicitly use those words, both concepts are present in this verse.

The adverb *immediately* establishes that the healing happened instantly at the mere spoken words of Jesus. This particular adverb is a favorite of Luke's. The Greek word that is being translated occurs most often in the New Testament in the Gospel of Luke (examples: Luke 1:64; 8:44; 13:13; 18:43) and the book of Acts (examples: Acts 12:23; 13:11). The healing did not happen over a length of time. And there is no indication that Jesus' touch was involved, as healing miracles featured in other contexts (compare Mark 8:22-25; John 9:6-7).

The man's sudden ability to walk was (or should have been) evidence that Christ had both authority and power to forgive sins (see Luke 20:2-8). The statement *before them* is essential to this proof—everyone present saw the result. In biblical times two or three witnesses were required to prove the veracity of an event (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; John 8:13-18; 2 Corinthians 13:1). Thus, Luke confirms that a sufficient number of witnesses were present to verify the miracle.

What Do You Think?

How do you ensure that worship is your first response when you experience God's work?

Digging Deeper

How do you maintain an attitude of worship even when it seems God has not worked in the manner that you desired?

D. Crowd Is Amazed (v. 26)

26a. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear.

This is the only verse in the New Testament where amazement, glorifying *God*, and *fear* occur together as reactions of a crowd. The parallel verses of Matthew 9:8 and Mark 2:12a, by contrast, record only two of these three reactions each. We presume that the word *all* includes the religious leaders who were present. This was their first encounter with Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel of Luke, and it's not unreasonable to conclude that they shared in everyone's reactions. Like everyone else, those leaders needed time to process the evi-

dence for Jesus' deity just seen. Soon enough, however, some people will reach the wrong conclusion (see Luke 11:14-16).

26b. Saying, We have seen strange things today.

This is the crowd's fourth reaction, as recorded by Luke. If spoken aloud, the Greek word translated *strange things* (which occurs only here in the New Testament) would sound like the English word *paradoxical*. This reaction, unlike that in Luke 4:28-29, is one of confused neutrality. It reaches no conclusion.

Conclusion

A. Authentic Friends

Social media has changed the world's concept of friendship. Only time will tell whether a new word is needed to distinguish between a virtual social-media friend and an authentic real-life friend. In the meantime, I will continue to post online as we prepare for our next move and patiently wait for my 300 so-called friends to show up.

The friends in today's lesson remind us of the nature of authentic friendship. We are unsure how long they had been carrying their friend around on this bed. We know that when Jesus came into the city, they believed He could help their friend. However, they did not stop at simply believing. They put their faith into action and brought their friend to Jesus, overcoming every obstacle on the way.

It was not an easy task to get their friend onto the roof, tear it apart, and lower him into the room. Undoubtedly, they could have spent their time on other matters that day. How can you dedicate your time and resources to assisting a friend in need?

B. Prayer

Father, we are grateful for the friends who have helped us on our faith journey. We pray that You will help us be the friend who carries the bed of another when needed, regardless of the obstacles in our path. We give You thanks for friends and the strength to be a friend in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God enables us daily to be faithful friends!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Look up the definition of *friend* in a dictionary and write that definition on the board. Distribute index cards and pens to each learner and ask them to write down the first three words they think of when they hear the word *friend*.

After one minute, ask volunteers to share their three words as you write those words on the board. Lead a whole-class discussion using the following questions: 1–Which of the listed words are similar? 2–Which words stand out as unique? 3–How do these words match the definition? Keep these words and their definitions on the board for the entire class time.

After comparing the contributed words with the dictionary definition of *friend*, lead a discussion regarding how the meanings of words can change over time. Say, “For example, the word *friend* means something entirely different in the context of social media.” Lead into Bible study by saying, “In today’s lesson, Luke describes a faithful friendship. While reading the text, notice how the text uses active words to describe the actions of a friend.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups: **Jesus Group**, **Religious Leaders Group**, and **Friends Group**. Write the following headers on the board: *Jesus / Religious Leaders / Friends*. Introduce the activity by saying that the action verbs found in this section of Scripture help us understand the passage.

Distribute a sheet of paper and pen to each group. Ask each group to read Luke 5:17-26 and write down all the action verbs associated with their group’s namesake. After five minutes, have a volunteer from each group write their group’s words on the board under the appropriate header.

Lead a whole-class discussion using the following questions: 1–What do the lists of verbs reveal about the characters’ motives? 2–What do these

verbs reveal about the faith of the friends? 3–What do these verbs highlight about the disbelief of the religious leaders? 4–What do these verbs tell us about what is most important to Jesus? 5–What is the connection between the faith of the friends and Jesus’ actions?

Option 1. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 17:14-20. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–How does Matthew 17:14-20 pertain to today’s lesson? 2–What is the connection between having authentic faith and our actions?

Option 2. Distribute copies of the “God’s Definition of a Friend” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have the learners work in pairs to complete and discuss the activity page as indicated.

Into Life

Ask learners to work in small groups to create a definition of the word *friend* using only the ideas conveyed in Luke 5:17-26. Ask each group to write their definition on the board. In a whole-class discussion, ask how these definitions are similar to or different from the definition from Into the Lesson. Allow five minutes for this discussion.

Have learners work in their small groups to brainstorm real-life helping situations analogous to today’s Scripture text. Ask, “How does each helping situation fulfill the role of a friend as described in your definition?” Then have groups come up with possible challenges they may face in acting on these helping situations. Distribute an index card to each learner and have them write the name of a person who can benefit from a helping situation in the upcoming week.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Remarkable Friendship” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it as a take-home activity. To encourage completion, tell the class that you will set aside some time at the beginning of the next class to review the activity and its results.

Faith of a Centurion

Devotional Reading: Zechariah 8:18-23
Background Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

Luke 7:1-10

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.

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 shouldst enter under my roof:

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

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

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

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



Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit II: The Measure of Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the reason for Jesus' amazement.
2. Explain the role of the town of Capernaum in Jesus' ministry.
3. Brainstorm ways to exhibit faith as analogous to that of the centurion.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Remote Everything
- B. Lesson Context

I. Desperate Need (Luke 7:1-5)

- A. Situation in Capernaum (v. 1)
- B. Request and Endorsement (vv. 2-3)
- C. Insistent Elders (vv. 4-5)
Credit Check

II. Unmatched Faith (Luke 7:6-10)

- A. Insightful Centurion (vv. 6-8)
First Resort or Last Resort?
- B. Astonished Jesus (v. 9)
- C. Remote Healing (v. 10)

Conclusion

- A. Centurion Faith
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Remote Everything

My first modem-equipped computer allowed me to purchase a small amount of usage time from an Internet service provider, connect to a phone line, and access distant servers. I marveled at what I could do. An exciting moment came when I was able to access the digital catalog of a university library in England, helping me identify a book I had needed for months.

Now we take the Internet for granted. My wife and I have weekly video calls with my grandson and his mother from 1,500 miles away. When I teach online, it is not uncommon for me to have students in several geographically separated areas “attend” class at once.

Physical distance was a challenge to communication in Jesus' day. Indeed, distance remained a challenge to rapid communication until the year 1844, when the first public telegraph went into operation. We easily see the challenge of distance in today's lesson. What is more difficult to see is the positive importance physical distance played in communicating with Jesus. We dare not miss it.

B. Lesson Context

The physical context of today's lesson is the village of Capernaum (see also the parallel account in Matthew 8:5-13). It was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, a freshwater lake in northern Palestine. Bible students are accustomed to thinking of Jesus as being from Bethlehem (John 7:42; etc.) or from Nazareth (Matthew 2:23; etc.). But a case can also be made for the claim that He was “from Capernaum” because the village became something of a headquarters or base of operations for His preaching and teaching tours of Galilee (4:13; Mark 2:1); notice that Matthew 9:1 refers to Capernaum as Jesus' “own city.”

The importance of Capernaum is seen in the fact that it is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament, in one instance quite negatively (Matthew 11:23 and parallel Luke 10:15). Five of Jesus' twelve disciples were residents of Capernaum when Jesus called them to follow Him: four fishermen (James, John, Peter, and Andrew; see Mat-

thew 4:18-22) and one tax collector (Matthew, also known as Levi; see Mark 2:14).

Although Capernaum probably did not have more than a few hundred residents, it was a thriving regional hub for at least three reasons. First, the fishing industry provided steady income for many families. The lake was productive, with one account telling of a haul of 153 large fish (John 21:11). Fishing businesses like that of the Zebedee family (Mark 1:19-20) would have caught more fish than could be sold locally. So some fish were preserved with salt and sent to larger cities such as Jerusalem.

Second, Capernaum was situated on the main road from Damascus into the region. This location made it a good place for the Romans to set up points for tax collectors to assess tolls on goods passing into the area. Matthew worked for the Romans this way, maintaining a tax-collecting booth on this road (Luke 5:27). Jewish tax collectors from Jerusalem also operated out of Capernaum to collect the annual temple tax from the Jews of Galilee (Matthew 17:24).

Third, Capernaum was important enough to have had some Roman soldiers stationed there, as today's lesson reveals (compare Acts 10:1). The need to safeguard the tax money collected may have been the reason. It is possible they were under the authority of Herod Antipas, the Roman client "tetrarch" of the Galilee region from 4 BC to AD 39 (Luke 3:1).

Capernaum has been the site of some remarkable archaeological discoveries over the last hundred years. A lavish synagogue dating from the fourth century AD likely sat on a foundation floor from the time of Jesus. This place could be the location of the synagogue of Capernaum where Jesus taught (Mark 1:21). Also uncovered nearby is a large house that has become a Christian pilgrimage site. Evidence suggests this was the actual house of Simon Peter, a place where Jesus resided while in town (Luke 4:38).

I. Desperate Need

(Luke 7:1-5)

A. Situation in Capernaum (v. 1)

1. Now when he had ended all his sayings

in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

We reach a transition point in the narrative. The teaching (*all his sayings*) and healing actions of the previous section (Luke 6:17-49) were concluded, so Jesus moved from one place to another. The location of where He moved from is only given as "the plain" (6:17), perhaps referring to a suitably level site on or at the base of the mountainside (6:12). For Jesus to have then *entered into Capernaum* was probably not a long walk, given His record of movements around that area at the time (see Lesson Context).

B. Request and Endorsement (vv. 2-3)

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

A centurion was a soldier who commanded a unit known as a "century" in a legion of a Roman army. A Roman legion ideally consisted of 59 centuries organized in 10 cohorts. The second through the tenth cohorts consisted of 6 centuries, each century having 80 men. A legion's first cohort was an exception. That cohort had only five centuries, but each of those, also commanded by a centurion, was at double strength. The math of all this adds up to 59 centurions in a legion of approximately 5,000 troops. Thus, the centurion in today's lesson was likely the most important and senior Roman official around Capernaum.

The *centurion's* domestic situation in the case at hand is indicated by his having at least one *servant* in his household. This servant was likely not a hired hand but an enslaved person owned by the centurion. Roman military campaigns often resulted in those people on the losing side being

How to Say It

Capernaum	Kuh- <i>per</i> -nay-um.
centurion	sen- <i>ture</i> -ee-un.
Damascus	Duh- <i>mass</i> -kus.
Herod Antipas	<i>Hair</i> -ud An-tih-pus.
Levi	<i>Lee</i> -vye.
Nazareth	Naz-uh-reth.
synagogue	<i>sin</i> -uh-gog.
tetrarch	<i>teh</i> -trark or <i>tee</i> -trark.



Visual for Lesson 7. Point to this visual and ask volunteers for other examples from Scripture when God's power was revealed through human words.

taken into bondage. Also common during this period were children born into slavery as the offspring of women who were themselves enslaved. Legally, Roman slavery laws allowed the owner to use another man “like a piece of property or a domestic animal” (historian Dio Chrysostom; lived AD 40–120). But not all master/slave relationships were brutal or exploitative.

Slavery was not necessarily a lifetime situation among the Romans (compare 1 Corinthians 7:21). Ancient sources indicate that many were freed (manumitted) by age 30, thereby becoming “Libertines” (compare Acts 6:9, lesson 4). In depicting the deathly ill servant as *dear* to the centurion, Luke uses a word that expresses value and respect (compare the same word's translation as “precious” in 1 Peter 2:4, 6).

Luke, a physician, does not give us his specific diagnosis of the man's affliction; Luke gives us only the prognosis: he was *sick, and ready to die*. Matthew adds more information by noting that the servant was “sick of the palsy, grievously tormented” (Matthew 8:6). In contrast with the situation in Luke 5:18, the servant may have been too ill to be brought to Jesus. Although people in antiquity had a limited understanding of disease and its causes, they could recognize the signs of unlikely recovery and impending death.

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.

The centurion undoubtedly had heard of Jesus in two senses: through general word of mouth (Luke 4:14, 37) and specifically of His return to Capernaum. Perhaps the fact that the centurion sent his healing request via the elders of the Jews reflects an intentional strategy, reasoning that Jesus may respond more positively to fellow Jews than to a Gentile (compare Matthew 10:5-6; 15:21-24).

This verse paints a picture of an intelligent man who recognized and understood the cultural issues of Gentiles interacting with Jews (Acts 10:28; 11:1-3). Rather than risk being spurned in a public, face-to-face meeting with Jesus, the centurion turned to Jewish leaders with whom he had become a friend in the community.

C. Insistent Elders (vv. 4-5)

4-5. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

The elders who *came to Jesus* were apparently leaders of the synagogue in Capernaum. They did not convey the centurion's message as reluctant lackeys—they earnestly pled his case.

For some unstated reason, the centurion loved the Jewish *nation*. The proof of that love is found in an astonishing detail: the centurion had *built* Capernaum's *synagogue*. The expense might have included not only funding for the structure itself but also the interior furnishings: (1) a place to store scrolls for preservation and convenient access (compare Luke 4:17), (2) an elevated platform from which someone reading the Scripture would be visible to all in attendance (compare Nehemiah 8:4-5), (3) lamps for illumination, and (4) adequate seating (Luke 4:20a). We don't know whether the centurion footed the bill for these, but it is possible.

Synagogues are not mentioned in the Old Testament, except for Psalm 74:8. However, the underlying Hebrew word is also translated “congregations” in that same psalm (Psalm 74:4). Elsewhere, the word occurs very frequently in conjunction with the tabernacle, which was the focus of assembly for worship before the temple was built (examples: Numbers 1:1; 2:2).

The need for synagogues as gathering places for

worship and instruction in Scripture arose during the Babylonian exile that began in 586 BC (2 Kings 25). With the temple in Jerusalem destroyed and Jews far from their homeland, the people needed places to congregate; the word *synagogue* is a Greek word that means “place of assembly.” The return from exile probably modified the function of synagogues to being primarily places of Scripture teaching rather than worship. This transition was because worship in its fullest sense was to take place at the temple (compare 1 Kings 8:29-51; John 4:20; contrast 1 Kings 13:26-30), which had been rebuilt.

Some students believe that the centurion was a Gentile in the category of “one that feared God” (compare Acts 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26). Such Gentiles were not proselytes (converts) to Judaism (contrast Matthew 23:15; Acts 6:5; 13:43) but were devout nonetheless. Therefore, the centurion’s funding of the synagogue was more than a public works project designed to curry favor. Instead, it was rooted in his deep respect for Judaism and its God.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can your congregation act as a go-between in connecting resources to those in need?

Digging Deeper

How can your congregation partner with other congregations in this regard?

Credit Check

When my son was old enough to drive, he saved up his money and bought his first car. I was pleased with how responsible he had become. A few years later, some things started to go wrong with his vehicle, so he decided he wanted a new car. The problem was that he was only 19 and had no credit.

As a character reference, I could vouch for how responsible he was. But that doesn’t cut it in the realm of credit. The only way my assurance would mean anything was if I cosigned the loan—and Proverbs 22:26-27 warns of the dangers of doing so. The only reason I decided to do so was because I knew my son. I had watched him demonstrate his responsibility over the years, and his actions showed me that he deserved this risk I was taking.

The request by the elders of the Jews can be seen as their “cosigning” the centurion’s request for aid. Those elders knew the man’s heart, as evidenced by his actions. For Jewish leaders to vouch for a commander in a Gentile occupying army was astounding! Their reason for so doing even more so.

Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16). What “fruits” did you produce this past week that would cause others to vouch enthusiastically for your character? —P. L. M.

II. Unmatched Faith

(Luke 7:6-10)

A. Insightful Centurion (vv. 6-8)

6a. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him.

Capernaum was not a large city. Crossing from one end to the other would not have taken more than 15 minutes. Therefore, the time between when the elders spoke to Jesus and when the *friends* did so must have been very short.

Since the group was *not far from the house of the centurion*, the man may have seen Jesus and His entourage approaching before he dispatched delegation number two. These friends may have been either Gentile, Jewish, or both (compare Acts 10:24; 19:31). The message they brought was surprising! This act demonstrated, among other things, knowledge of and respect for Jewish law, customs, and sensibilities on the part of the centurion (compare John 18:28; Acts 10:28).

The parallel in Matthew 8:5 has the centurion himself speaking to Jesus personally. One way to resolve the tension between the accounts is to consider how that first-century culture would have viewed a messenger commissioned to speak on behalf of another person. In other words, when the centurion’s friends talked to Jesus, it was as if Jesus was conversing with the centurion himself since that man had commissioned his friends to do so on his behalf. Matthew’s Gospel, in a way, merely simplifies the account of the interactions.

6b-7. Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself

worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

As the centurion (through his friends) addressed Jesus as *Lord*, we should not automatically presume that the centurion acknowledged Jesus as the Lord God. The Greek word translated “Lord” occurs more than 700 times in the New Testament, and it is often used as simply a polite address of respect. In such cases, it is equivalent to our modern word *sir* (examples: Matthew 27:63; John 4:11).

The centurion’s friends brought Jesus the unexpected message we see in the verses before us. Two things should be considered. First is the centurion’s humility in admitting his unworthiness. Other admissions of unworthiness (same Greek word) occur in the parallel passages Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7; and Luke 3:16. The tension created between the theme of unworthiness here and the theme of worthiness in Luke 7:4-5 is interesting! Second, some students propose that in addition to admitting personal unworthiness, the centurion was demonstrating sensitivity in avoiding a potentially awkward cross-cultural meeting under the *roof* of a Gentile (compare John 4:9; 18:28; Acts 10:28; 11:3).

What Do You Think?

How will you show humility as you come before God in prayer?

Digging Deeper

In what ways is humility crucial for your formation into Christlikeness? How does James 4:6-10 inform your response?

First Resort or Last Resort?

In 2001, the very first telerobotic surgery was performed. The so-called Lindbergh operation involved a surgeon in New York City performing the surgery on a patient in Strasbourg, France! The ensuing years saw further advances in this technology.

To heal without needing to be in the same room as the patient is certainly a feat worthy of accolades and awards. We wonder how much faith that first patient must have had to agree to such an experiment! One glitch and chaos could have ensued. Would any of us have such faith in this technology? Knowing human nature as we do, it’s easy to envi-

sion almost everyone agreeing to undergo such an experiment if (1) there was no other option and (2) the medical condition was quite serious or terminal.

We see both conditions met in the situation of today’s text. But that brings up a question: Do we bring our problems to Jesus in prayer from the beginning or only as a last resort when nothing else works? —P. L. M.

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.

The centurion’s plea was based on a hierarchical view of authority—a view that came from his military experience. See the discussion of the centurion’s status in the commentary on Luke 7:2, above. Earlier in Capernaum, Jesus had commanded a demon to come out of a man (Luke 4:31-37). Those who had witnessed it acknowledged Jesus’ authority and power as a result (4:36). The centurion was undoubtedly aware of this miracle and thereby recognized an analogy to his own authority. Moreover, the statement of the centurion admitted the limitations of his authority. The centurion had authority over his soldiers. However, Jesus has unlimited authority over the world. Regardless of how we perceive the centurion’s words, they emphasize Jesus’ authority over all things—even sickness.

What Do You Think?

How can you use the positions of leadership in which God has placed you to worship and serve Him?

Digging Deeper

How do you discern the limitations of your leadership and use those limitations as an opportunity to depend on God?

B. Astonished Jesus (v. 9)

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.

The four Gospels do not often speak of Jesus

himself being amazed at something or someone. Almost always, it's the other way around: people *marvelled* at Jesus or something He did. The two exceptions are the *faith* of the Gentile centurion (today's text plus parallel in Matthew 8:10) and the lack of faith of the people of Nazareth (Mark 6:6).

Furthermore, Jesus did not actively seek to minister to Gentiles, only to fellow Jews (compare Matthew 10:5-6 with its parallel in Mark 6:7 and Luke 9:1-2). Even so, Gentiles sought Him out in a few cases (in addition to today's text, see Matthew 15:28 and John 12:20-21). Jesus' initiative to the Samaritan (a person who was ethnically half Jewish) in John 4:1-42 is unique. As far as Luke is concerned, the centurion's faith is the greatest miracle in this passage.

What Do You Think?

How can you demonstrate "great faith" in your neighborhood? your city? your country?

Digging Deeper

What distractions do you need to remove in order to live with "great faith"?

C. Remote Healing (v. 10)

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

Jesus' healing miracles in the Gospels have been categorized in various ways. These include healings by touch (example: Matthew 8:15), command (example: Luke 5:24), and prayer (example: John 11:41-42). One interesting way of healing, not often considered, is miracle healing from a distance. There are three such: the ones involving (1) the Gentile centurion's servant in today's text and Matthew 8:5-13, (2) the Gentile woman's daughter in Matthew 15:21-28 (lesson 9), and (3) the nobleman and his son in John 4:46-54. In all three cases, faith was vindicated.

Conclusion

A. Centurion Faith

When we offer up intercessory prayer for the healing of a friend or family member, are we exer-

cising the faith of the centurion? Without a doubt, any forthcoming healing will be a "remote healing" since Jesus is not here in the flesh, so that is not the issue.

The issue, instead, is one of believing in Jesus' authority. That's the essence of what we might call "Centurion Faith." Our intercessory prayers must have more than a "maybe" or "hope so" tone. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, we demonstrate "Centurion Faith" that God will answer our prayers. When we are distracted from Him and wring our hands in despair, nothing good happens (Matthew 14:25-31). Jesus taught, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (21:22).

The centurion's background speaks loudly. He had cultivated friendships within his community for years. He had treated his neighbors with respect and honor, not pulling his rank as a Roman officer to get his way. In many ways, the significant gap between the Jews and Gentiles of Jesus' day was bridged on that day in Capernaum. The centurion had used his wealth and influence to protect the Jews and provide a gathering place for their study of Scripture. He played "the long game" in the most sincere and authentic manner possible. When his household was in need, his character and actions were remembered. Can the same be said of ours?

What Do You Think?

How will you have "Centurion Faith" in situations when it seems that God doesn't answer your prayers in a preferred or expected way?

Digging Deeper

What about in situations when God's presence seems altogether gone?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, our lives constantly need Your support and healing. Our churches and homes need Your presence. May we honor You in all ways and never doubt. May we have a simple faith like the centurion! We pray in the name of Jesus, Your Son. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Have "Centurion Faith"!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask learners to pair up and answer the following questions: 1—What was an honor that you received that was a total surprise? 2—What is an example of praise you received that you would not otherwise give yourself? Allow one minute for each learner to share.

Reconvene the class and ask for volunteers to share their answers. For whole-class discussion, ask, “How does it feel to be praised or honored when you don’t feel worthy?”

Lead into Bible study by saying, “Today we’ll learn about a man who came to Jesus, desperate for help. However, this man didn’t feel he was worthy to receive that help. Perhaps some of you will be able to identify with his feelings.”

Into the Word

Before class, ask a volunteer to prepare a five-minute report on Capernaum and its role in the ministry of Jesus. Encourage the volunteer to use the Lesson Context portion of the commentary, Bible encyclopedias, and other online resources.

Organize a dialogic reading of today’s text. Choose four volunteers and assign them the following verses from Luke 7: Narrator (vv. 1-3, 4a, 6a, 9a), Elders (vv. 4b-5), Friends (vv. 6b-8), and Jesus (vv. 9b-10). Have volunteers read aloud through the lesson Scripture, each volunteer reading their assigned verses in the appropriate order. Encourage volunteers to “act out” their readings with emotion.

Distribute handouts (you prepare) to each learner with the following questions: 1—How did the centurion demonstrate faith? 2—How did the centurion show respect for Jesus? for the Jews? 3—Compare and contrast the elders’ description of the centurion with his description of himself. 4—Why was Jesus impressed with the centurion’s faith?

Invite learners to pay attention to answers to these questions as they listen to the Scripture reading. After the reading, have learners join the

same pairs as in the previous activity to answer the questions. After several minutes, ask volunteers to share their answers with the whole class.

Option. Distribute copies of “The Centurion, the Servant, and the Savior” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Write the following question on the board: *What are ways that we can exhibit faith as analogous to that of the centurion?* In the same pairs as before, ask learners to brainstorm answers to this question. After five minutes, reconvene the class and ask volunteers to give their responses to this question. Write the responses on the board.

Then ask the class to divide into groups of four. Assign one response to each group and have each group create a plan so that class members can develop and exhibit that faith in the upcoming week. After five minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to share their group’s plan with the class.

Option. Write the following question on the board: *What are untruths that we tell ourselves that prevent us from going to Jesus with our needs?* Conduct a brainstorming exercise to answer the question. Write responses on the board. Ask the following question for whole-class discussion: “How does today’s lesson encourage us to ask Jesus for the help we need?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Jumbled Words, Clear Messages” activity from the activity page. Have learners work with a partner to complete as indicated. If time allows, have pairs present their findings to the whole group. Conclude class with a time of prayer, thanking God for the truths stated in the unscrambled messages and asking God for the courage to share those truths with someone in the upcoming week.

Faith of an Anointer

Devotional Reading: Romans 8:1-16
Background Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Luke 7:36-39, 44-50

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.

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.

Key Text

He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. —Luke 7:50

Examining Our Faith

Unit II: The Measure of Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify what “saved” the woman.
2. Compare and contrast the mindsets of Jesus, the Pharisee, and the woman.
3. Evaluate his or her own mindset in light of those three.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. A Person’s Value
- B. Lesson Context

I. Three People (Luke 7:36-39)

- A. An Invited Guest (v. 36)
- B. An Uninvited Guest (vv. 37-38)
- C. An Ungracious Host (v. 39)

II. Different Actions (Luke 7:44-50)

- A. Criticism and Praise (vv. 44-46)
Feet Worth Kissing
- B. Little and Much (vv. 47-48)
- C. Forgiveness and Peace (vv. 49-50)
The Right Rock

Conclusion

- A. Who Needs Forgiveness?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. A Person’s Value

The “smiley face killer” (so-called because of notes he sent to the police) was a self-appointed vigilante. As depicted in the TV documentary series *Forensic Factor*, he seemed determined to put an end to prostitution in his town by murdering those who engaged in that immoral trade. By the time this otherwise ordinary citizen was caught, he had murdered 13 women.

The investigation into the murders was initially hampered because there wasn’t much concern from the general public over the fate of missing prostitutes. In the first place, few people noticed that the women were missing. Second, most people seemed to view prostitutes as the dregs of society.

Today’s text features a law-abiding citizen and a sinful woman who both met the merciful Savior. Jesus’ interaction with them reveals an important link between forgiveness and love.

B. Lesson Context

Just prior to the events of today’s lesson, Luke summarized two viewpoints toward Jesus that had emerged. Those viewpoints are revealed by reactions to John the Baptist. On the one hand, “All the people that heard [Jesus], and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John” (Luke 7:29). On the other hand, “the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him” (7:30). Rejection of John the Baptist, the Christ’s forerunner (1:15-17; 3:1-20; 7:33-35), meant rejecting the Christ as well (Matthew 17:12). This set the stage for a contrast between those who held these polar-opposite viewpoints.

As an oversimplification, we can see “the publicans” (tax collectors) as a demographic that represented the first view above. These Jews had chosen to work with the Romans to extract taxes from their fellow Jews, thereby earning great scorn as collaborators. Tax collectors could become wealthy by overcharging taxes (see Luke 19:2, 8).

The Pharisees, by contrast, can be seen as primary representatives of the second viewpoint

above. Pharisees advocated strict and scrupulous observance of the Law of Moses. Over time, this resulted in human traditions being added to that law. See Jesus' critique of this fact in Matthew 23:1-36 and Mark 7:1-23.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus estimated that there were only about 6,000 Pharisees throughout the Roman empire. Perhaps no more than a few hundred lived in the villages of Galilee. Yet they exerted an influence out of proportion to their numbers, as witnessed by their being mentioned about 100 times in the New Testament. (By contrast, Sadducees are mentioned only 14 times.)

Today's lesson takes us to an early point in Jesus' ministry when things had gotten serious enough for Pharisees to come from "every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem" to investigate Him (Luke 5:17). The nearest example up to the point of today's lesson is Jesus' having been in the village of Nain, about 25 miles southwest of Capernaum (7:11). Combining that fact with information in Luke 8:1, 22, and 26, we conclude that a village in Galilee was the location of today's lesson.

I. Three People

(Luke 7:36-39)

A. An Invited Guest (v. 36)

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.

The first use of the word *him* refers to Jesus. This is one of three times in Luke that Jesus was invited to a meal at the home of a Pharisee (see Luke 11:37; 14:1). On whether the Pharisee's invitation included other guests, see commentary on 7:49, below.

The motive behind the invitations seemed to be that of scrutinizing Jesus more closely, noting any violations of the Law of Moses as interpreted by *the Pharisees*. In so doing, they were asking the wrong question of themselves. That question was: *Is Jesus on the side of truth as we know it?* But their question should have been: *Are we on the side of truth as Jesus is witnessing to it?*

B. An Uninvited Guest (vv. 37-38)

37a. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house.

Some students have identified this *woman* as Mary Magdalene, who is introduced in the following chapter (Luke 8:2). But this identification is speculative. Unless the woman's arrival at *the Pharisee's house* was a "set up" to trap Jesus (compare 20:20-26), it is safe to assume that she had not been invited. Therefore, the host did not welcome her presence at his dinner.

The scandal factor was multiplied by the fact that she *was a sinner*. Such a reputation probably suggests (but does not require) that the woman was a prostitute. Prostitution and harlots are mentioned about 100 times in the Old Testament and a dozen times in the New Testament. Sometimes this immorality is blended with the sin of adultery (example: Hosea 3:1-3). Prostitution is frequently used figuratively to refer to idol worship (example: Ezekiel 16:15-34). And although prostitution is sometimes presented in a matter-of-fact way (examples: Genesis 38; Joshua 2), the activity as such is never commended (Leviticus 19:29; 21:7, 9, 14; 1 Corinthians 6:15; etc.).

37b. Brought an alabaster box of ointment.

This action indicates preparation for the woman's encounter with Jesus. The woman who later anointed Jesus in Bethany also had *an alabaster box* (Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3; see also John 12:1-3). These were appropriate containers for various oils. The woman's vessel held *ointment*, which is an aromatic perfume that could be rubbed into the hair or onto the skin. On that other occasion, Mark 14:3-5 establishes both the nature and value of the ointment. But no such specifics are noted in

How to Say It

alabaster	al-uh-bas-ter.
Capernaum	Kuh-per-nay-um.
Josephus	Jo-see-fus.
Magdalene	Mag-duh-leen or Mag-duh-lee-nee.
Nain	Nay-in.

the scene before us. Even so, this may be at a great expense on her part.

38a. And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears.

What happened must have surprised everyone. With no spoken word recorded, the woman went from a posture of standing to one of kneeling near Jesus—that's the only way for her to have been able to be in a position to wash *his feet*. It was customary to take off one's sandals during a meal, and people would sit around the low table on their knees with their feet behind them. The text says nothing about why she was *weeping*. We can only speculate that her tears come out of a repentant heart.

What Do You Think?

When have you been reduced to tears in Jesus' presence?

Digging Deeper

What blessing did you experience after being vulnerable at Jesus' feet?

38b. And did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

There's more than meets the eye here as the woman used *the hairs of her head* as a washcloth. Women's hair in this era was typically bound up. Therefore this woman's letting her hair down was a departure from propriety. This act further suggests that she was lost in the moment with Jesus. She did not consider what anyone else might see or think.

C. An Ungracious Host (v. 39)

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.

Identities of local prostitutes were likely well known since the activities of such persons could not be secret for long in small villages. If the woman was indeed a prostitute, it explains why *the Pharisee* was scandalized that Jesus would not recognize her as *a sinner*. The Pharisee himself recognized her immediately.

The Pharisee's unspoken thoughts condemned

both the woman and Jesus (contrast Luke 7:16). The Pharisee reasoned from a certain presupposition that he wouldn't allow to be overturned: if Jesus doesn't fit the Pharisee's idea of how a prophet should conduct himself, then Jesus can't be one. Jesus was thought to have carelessly allowed the woman's touch. The Jews' understanding of what made them unclean was often tied to touching (example: Numbers 9:6; 19:11). In general, touching anything considered unclean made the toucher unclean as well (see Isaiah 52:11; Haggai 2:13). Pharisees were obsessed with the avoidance of anything unclean or violations of the Law of Moses. This woman was the living embodiment of everything they warned against. The contrast between the woman, who expresses her love for Jesus, and the Pharisee, who views her with disdain, could hardly be sharper.

In the verses not included in today's lesson (Luke 7:40-43), Jesus told Simon a parable about a money lender pardoning debtors. While Jesus turns to the woman, He still speaks to Simon, but He is getting ready to make the parable a reality.

II. Different Actions

(Luke 7:44-50)

A. Criticism and Praise (vv. 44-46)

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.

An awkward situation ensued: Jesus *turned to the woman*, but His words were for the Pharisee. We also learn that the Pharisee's name was *Simon*, a common Jewish name. Simon (or "Simeon") was the second-born son of Jacob (Genesis 29:33), a patriarch of the tribes of Israel. Jesus had two disciples named Simon (Matthew 10:2, 4) as well as a brother (Mark 6:3), but this Pharisee was none of these.

Foot-washing was a centuries-old cultural practice (Genesis 18:4; 19:2; 43:24; etc.). It was an act of hospitality for guests in one's house. Footwear of the era did not keep dust and dirt out. Walking on unpaved roads resulted in feet getting filthy

quickly, thus the expedience of the foot-washing courtesy—or at least providing water and a towel for the guest to do the foot-washing himself. Yet Simon had not even provided those to Jesus! Simon’s actions were cold and calculated; both he and Jesus knew it. What a contrast to the woman, whose actions were those of spontaneous gratitude.

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

As difficult as it may be for us to understand the ancient cultural practice of foot-washing, understanding the significance of a *kiss* is scarcely any easier! The missing *kiss* at issue here would have been an expression of greeting and welcome, customarily offered by a host to his guest (see Luke 15:20; compare Romans 16:16; contrast Luke 22:47-48). As with the absence of foot-washing water, the lack of a kiss indicates something less than full acceptance by the host.

The kissing of *feet* rather than the cheeks was not a part of hospitality expectations. But its presence here shows the woman’s humility and her desire to serve Jesus.

Feet Worth Kissing

You will be hard-pressed to find a culture where kissing someone’s feet in public is a normal, everyday expectation! It’s a universal truth that feet stink, especially when people wear open sandals and walk on streets also used by animals. Most kissing aims for the face, cheek, or hand for a variety of reasons. And surely one of those reasons is that if we want to put our lips on something, clean is better.

To kiss feet eagerly indicates total devotion. The one whose feet are worthy of being kissed is special. It’s uncomfortable to display affection in a way that breaks cultural norms unless the esteem of the object of one’s love requires it. When was the last time your level of devotion to Jesus caused you to exceed your “embarrassment threshold” in an act of loving service to Him? —D. D.

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

To offer one’s *head* to be anointed *with oil* also seems strange to us, something we would never expect when visiting a friend’s home. But this, too, was a gesture of hospitality in first-century Palestine. The practice communicated favor (see Psalm 23:5; Ecclesiastes 9:8). Simon had withheld this level of courtesy as well.

The oil to which Jesus referred was olive oil, the multipurpose liquid used for cooking, fueling lamps, and medicinal purposes. By contrast, the woman anointed the *feet* of Jesus with perfumed *ointment* from her alabaster container. This might have been nard oil, which was highly prized and expensive in Palestine—much more so than household olive oil (compare Mark 14:3; John 12:3). The contrast of anointing the feet rather than the head demonstrated the great humility of the woman. Her actions were unsolicited.

What Do You Think?

When do you practice hospitality? Keep in mind that this is not limited to hosting dinners.

Digging Deeper

How does your hospitality honor Jesus?

B. Little and Much (vv. 47-48)

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.

The Pharisee Simon had doubted Jesus’ credentials as a prophet. But at this point, Jesus spoke with prophetic insight. The moral status of the woman as “a sinner” is uncontested—it is a given. But the scene depicted here illustrates the astonishing power and magnitude of God’s forgiveness and its realization by the recipient. The woman’s great love demonstrated that she knew she had much for which to be forgiven (see Luke 7:42-43, not in our printed text).

By contrast, Simon *loveth little* because his scrupulous attention to the Law of Moses had resulted in few sins to be forgiven of. Simon was proud of his tidy lifestyle as a Pharisee. He believed that he was vindicated by his success in keeping the Law

of Moses strictly and by his descent from Abraham (John 8:39). The Pharisee understood neither why he needed to love (and be loved by) Jesus nor how the woman's *sins, which are many* could be forgiven, especially by Jesus (see Mark 2:7). In His encounters with sinners, Jesus walked the fine line between affirming the person while not condoning the sin (examples: John 4:17-18; 5:14; 8:10-11), and that's what we see Him do here.

What Do You Think?

What danger is there in not acknowledging one's own sins as serious or many?

Digging Deeper

How do you guard against both excessive pride in your own efforts and debilitating awareness of your sin?

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

Jesus then spoke directly to the woman, but His words were for everyone in the room to hear. No such declaration of *thy sins are forgiven* is recorded for Simon the Pharisee.

C. Forgiveness and Peace (vv. 49-50)

49a. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves.

The Pharisee's invitation in Luke 7:36 above does not mention the presence of friends or colleagues of the host or whether any of Jesus' disciples were invited. But others were indeed present at the dinner, as evidenced by the phrase *they that sat at meat with him*.

49b. Who is this that forgiveth sins also?

This is not the first time that Luke records controversy resulting from Jesus' forgiving *sins*. In the story of a paralyzed man of lesson 6, Jesus both healed the man and pronounced his sins to be forgiven (Luke 5:20; compare Matthew 9:2). The audience of scribes and Pharisees were outraged. But they spoke better than they knew with their rhetorical question, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" (Luke 5:21).

Similarly, Simon and his other guests in today's lesson are startled by Jesus' declaration. The pro-

nouncement of forgiveness of sins in both texts forces a choice on the religious leaders: if Jesus indeed had the power to forgive sins, then He is God-in-the-flesh. But if Jesus did not have such power, then He was guilty of blasphemy.

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

The episode is closed with a final two-part word from Jesus to the woman. First, He clarifies the underlying reason for her forgiveness: her *faith*, which is the source of her love. By devoting herself to Jesus, she has yielded her heart to Him in repentance.

Second, Jesus' telling her to *go in peace* reminds us of His words to a sinful woman caught in adultery. After that woman's accusers left the scene, Jesus said to her, "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Neither woman would have found peace if they had departed only to resume lives of sin.

What Do You Think?

What circumstances make it difficult to experience peace in your salvation?

Digging Deeper

If Jesus told you to "go in peace," how would that impact your daily activities?

The Right Rock

The most important test of Carl's life neared, but he wasn't nervous. He had no reason to be as long as he still had his lucky rock. Once upon a time, the smoothest oval-shaped stone he had ever laid his eyes on sat under a tree in his yard. Ever since then, from first grade to college, he never took a test without the lucky rock in his pocket. He earned straight A's.

So when Carl flunked his first test in over a decade, he was shocked. The rock had been in his pocket the whole exam! The failure shook his faith.

Faith has no power in itself. It's only as powerful as the object of one's faith. Faith in a rock to help you ace a test is silly and impotent. Rocks don't do that. Our faith in something does not magically activate what we believe it can do.

Faith in Christ Jesus is what matters. He is the ultimate Rock (Psalms 18:31, 46; 19:14; 28:1; 95:1;

etc.). He will never fail us. The faith of the sinful woman was not faith in her ability to convince Jesus to do something by means of her power of persuasion. Rather, her faith was focused on her Savior. Where is your faith focused? On your horoscope? On your retirement nest egg? On the government? Or on Jesus? —D. D.

Conclusion

A. Who Needs Forgiveness?

Many unbelievers today are involved in unholy, unbiblical activities. Some even make their living doing things that Christians know are immoral. It is easy for those within the church to take a dim view of these people, judging them to be incorrigible sinners. To be sure, a judging function does (or should) exist legitimately within the church (Matthew 7:16; 1 Corinthians 5:1–6:5; Titus 1:10–16; 3:10; etc.). But this judging function bears little, if any, resemblance to the one used by Simon the Pharisee. His viewpoint was that of complete rejection, thinking of himself more highly and being confident of his own righteousness (compare Luke 18:9–14).

But Simon was not completely sinful. As a student of the Law of Moses, he should have realized, as the Pharisee Paul did, that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23; compare Acts 23:6). Another way to look at it is to imagine a survey being taken in Pharisee Simon’s village. The survey question is, “Who needs to be forgiven, Simon or the immoral woman?” The villagers would predictably respond overwhelmingly to “the immoral woman.” But this is really a trick question since it presents a false choice. It is not a matter of “either/or,” but one of “both/and.” They both needed to be forgiven of sin. They both needed a humble faith that would bring them to God with hearts full of love. They both needed to follow Jesus, love God, and serve others. The tragedy of this story is that only one of these people left the banquet forgiven. Simon’s apparent pride in seeing himself superior to the woman blocked any realization of needing forgiveness.

Christians are to flee from sin and obey God. We show our love for God when we keep His



Visual for Lesson 8. Allow learners to ponder this question and what their love for Christ suggests about the answer before praying to end class.

commandments (1 John 5:2–3). But does this justify us when we reject and condemn those who struggle with sin? Are sinners welcome in our fellowship if they are seeking to love Jesus? Or must they clean up their sinful lives before they enter the doors of our church? Jesus taught that even the vilest of sinners can be forgiven if they turn to Him in faith and love. Are we willing to follow Him in His love for sinners and help them as they strive to follow Jesus, however imperfectly?

What Do You Think?

What makes a good dinner guest?

Digging Deeper

Do Jesus’ words and actions at this dinner change your answer? How, or why not?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, You have shown us Your willingness to forgive sinners. May we not keep that message to ourselves! And let us not be selective in pretending to know who will accept and who won’t. Help us to love our neighbors as you love us by taking the good news of Your Son to them. In His name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

To have forgiveness, we must first realize that we need it.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Write on the board *Rejection / Acceptance* as the headers of two columns. Divide learners into pairs or triads and ask them to brainstorm books, songs, TV shows/episodes, and/or movies that have themes fitting under one or both columns. Invite them to use smartphones to help them if needed. After five minutes, let groups share their conclusions while you write them on the board. Discuss with the whole class: 1—How common is rejection in our culture? 2—What have you learned by being accepted just as you are by someone in your life?

Lead to Bible study by saying, “Today’s lesson will show us someone who was known for her sinfulness. Yet she risked further rejection to honor Jesus. As we look at the story, try to imagine what she, and those around her, were thinking as the incident unfolded.”

Into the Word

Distribute a handout (you create) with the title “What Were They Thinking?” The chart should have four columns with the headers *Scripture / Pharisee / Woman / Jesus*. In the *Scripture* column, list four references from today’s text: Luke 7:36-38; 7:39; 7:44-47; 7:48-50. Using the same groups as earlier in the lesson, ask learners to complete the chart together. Ask them to use their “sanctified imaginations” to consider what each person might have been thinking and feeling.

After six to eight minutes, ask learners to share their answers, jotting down any they hear from another group that are particularly compelling. Then have them circle the reactions on their charts that they find most surprising and put an exclamation point beside the sections they find most troubling. Then call the groups together once again to discuss as a whole class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “An Encounter with Jesus” exercise from the activity

page, which you can download. Have groups work together to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Have learners refer back to the Bible-study chart they completed above. Ask them individually to put a star beside any emotions or thoughts recorded on their charts that they have ever had themselves. After a minute, ask volunteers to share.

Divide the learners into two groups. Assign a different discussion question to each group: 1—What leads Christians today to sometimes think like the Pharisee in this story? How can Christians react more like Jesus and less like the Pharisee? 2—What leads Christians today to react to Jesus with the passionate conviction this sinful woman displayed? What would prompt us to relate to Him more as she did? Give groups several minutes for this discussion.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Scripture Story, Contemporary Attitudes” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions with a partner.

After either activity, call the class together and urge as many as possible to share their reactions and conclusions after comparing the characters in today’s story with their own life experiences.

Distribute slips of paper to each learner to write down one or more of the following prompts:

1. Lord, help us to have the compassion of Jesus for those who may not feel worthy to seek Him.
2. Lord, help us to overcome our preoccupation with ourselves that keeps us from boldly expressing our love for Jesus.
3. Lord, forgive us when we’ve looked down on others who need Jesus as much as we do.

Invite participants to use the prayer slips as part of their prayer time this week.

Faith of a Canaanite

Devotional Reading: Psalm 61
Background Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

Matthew 15:21-28

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.

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.



Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit II: The Measure of Faith

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the interaction between Jesus and the Canaanite woman.
2. Explain Jesus' response in verse 24.
3. Brainstorm situations where a parent should and should not intervene on behalf of a child.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Blessing an “Outsider”
- B. Lesson Context

I. First Request (Matthew 15:21-24)

- A. Woman's Mission (vv. 21-22)
A Mother's Care
- B. Jesus' Mission (vv. 23-24)

II. Second Request (Matthew 15:25-28)

- A. Great Need (v. 25)
- B. Greater Priority (vv. 26-27)
- C. Great Faith (v. 28)
No Surprises Here

Conclusion

- A. Great Faith for God's People
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Blessing an “Outsider”

The Rain Gutter Regatta was one of the highlights of my time in Cub Scouts. Competitors built tiny sailboats small enough to be placed in a rain gutter. These boats were human-powered by our blowing on the sails. Competitors risked blowing too hard or at the wrong angle lest they face disqualification.

One year, another boy showed up to the regatta with an unfinished boat that was barely “seaworthy.” It hardly floated, and the boy was upset. My dad noticed the boy's frustration and offered to help him fix his boat into a more appropriate vessel. After a few minutes of work, my dad turned the barely “seaworthy” vessel into a regatta-winning craft. It even beat my boat in the process.

My dad blessed that boy with generosity. I had difficulty, however, accepting my dad's actions. I was upset because he had helped a boy I barely knew—a boy I considered an “outsider” to our family.

As you read today's lesson, consider which character in the story with whom you most identify. Do you align with the (outsider) woman or the (insider) disciples? Either option will affect how you view God's gracious and generous blessings.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of Matthew does not explicitly identify its author. The early church, however, attributed authorship to Matthew, a tax collector who became one of the apostles (Matthew 9:9; 10:3). Other Gospels mention this person by his given name: Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27-28), named after one of the sons of Jacob (see Genesis 29:34; 35:23).

As a tax collector, Matthew worked with the foreign occupiers of Palestine: the Romans. During the first century AD, tax collectors (also known as *publicans*) were despised by their fellow countrymen (example: Luke 18:11). They were seen as traitors to the Jewish people because they assisted the Romans in taking tax money. They were also held in low regard because they frequently enriched themselves at the expense of others (example: 19:2, 8).

The only other information we have about this

apostle is that he was the “son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2:14). The apostle James was also the “son of Alphaeus” (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15). These two may have been brothers, but none of the Gospels make that relationship apparent like they do with other sets of brothers (Matthew 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19).

Matthew’s Gospel contains the most quotations from the Old Testament of the four Gospels. The Gospel of Matthew has about 65 Old Testament quotes; Mark has about 30; Luke has about 26, and John has about 16. As such, students frequently call Matthew the “most Jewish” of the four Gospels. It is thought that Matthew intended his Gospel to be received by a primarily Jewish audience.

Although this Gospel emphasized the Jewish context of Jesus’s ministry (see Matthew 10:6; 15:24), its message reveals that the gospel of Jesus Christ was intended for both Jew and Gentile. Matthew is the only Gospel to record the visit of the Gentile wise men (2:1-12). It is also the only one to include Jesus’ commission to His disciples that they “teach all nations” (28:16-20).

The events leading to today’s Scripture reveal the intended expansion of the gospel message. As Jesus’ ministry in Galilee drew to a close, it became evident that His people would reject Him and His mission (see Matthew 13:53-58). His disciples displayed little faith regarding His identity (see 14:22-32). They also failed to understand His teaching (15:12-20). Even the religious leaders were offended by Jesus’ message (15:1-9). The people most expected to accept Jesus and His mission failed to understand. Mark 7:24-30 is a parallel account of Matthew 15:21-28.

I. First Request

(Matthew 15:21-24)

A. Woman’s Mission (vv. 21-22)

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

This verse is not the first time Matthew’s Gospel states that Jesus *went* from one area to another (compare Matthew 4:12; 12:15; 14:13). After He confronted the religious leaders (15:1-9), He *departed* from their midst.

Jesus frequently withdrew from crowds of people so that He could pray in solitude (examples: Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:16). He also removed himself from those who might misunderstand His ministry (example: John 6:15).

Tyre and Sidon were two prominent cities located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea north of Galilee, in the region that is modern-day Lebanon. Following the exodus, much of the area was designated for the tribe of Asher (Joshua 19:24-31). But that tribe didn’t drive out the inhabitants as directed (Judges 1:31-32). Tyre was about 125 miles north of Jerusalem, with Sidon being an additional 25 miles farther. The cities are mentioned together as “Tyre and Sidon” about 30 times in the Bible.

Because of their access to maritime trade, the cities attained great wealth—especially Tyre (also called “Tyrus”; see Zechariah 9:3). However, their prideful leaders had acted unjustly (see Ezekiel 26–28). As a result, the Old Testament prophets strongly condemned the cities (examples: Isaiah 23:1-18; Joel 3:4; Amos 1:9-10).

Jesus mentioned these cities in His indictment of the Jewish towns of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 10:13-14). His contrast to the Gentile cities was to make a lesser-to-greater argument. If Gentile cities would have repented from sin and thereby avoided judgment, how much more should the Jewish towns do the same?

The Law of Moses taught the Israelites to avoid following the pagan practices of other people

How to Say It

Bethsaida	Beth-say-uh-duh.
Canaanite	Kay-nu-nite.
Capernaum	Kuh-per-nay-um.
centurion	sen-ture-ee-un.
Chorazin	Ko-ray-zin.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Mediterranean	Med-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un.
omniscient	ahm-nish-unt.
Phoenicians	Fuh-nish-unz.
Syrophenician	Sigh-roe-fih-nish-un.
Zarephath	Zair-uh-fath.

groups (Leviticus 18:3). By withdrawing into the *coasts* near those cities, Jesus ensured that no Jewish person would follow Him into a Gentile region.

Centuries before, this region was the location of two events involving the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:7-24). While in the town of Zarephath, that prophet demonstrated God's provision for a widow and resurrected the son of another woman. Perhaps the author Matthew had this story in mind as he wrote his account of the events that occurred to Jesus and His followers.

What Do You Think?

How do you decide whether or not to withdraw from a situation for your own spiritual, physical, or emotional health?

Digging Deeper

How might the example of Jesus help inform your decision?

22a. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him.

The crowds that followed Jesus included people from the region of Tyre and Sidon (see Mark 3:7-8). This *woman* undoubtedly had heard of Jesus and His work because of His popularity, as evidenced by those crowds.

Matthew describes her as being *of Canaan*, but Mark is more specific, noting that “the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician” (Mark 7:26). The Canaanites were an ancient people who had settled in Palestine before the arrival of the Israelites (see Exodus 3:8). During the time of the ancient Israelites, the Canaanites were considered the enemies of Israel (example: Deuteronomy 7:1-6). Their descendants became the Phoenicians—people living in the regions of Tyre and Sidon. This woman was certainly not of Jewish heritage, and her ethnic background would have been seen in a negative light by most first-century Jewish people (compare Acts 10:28).

Mark's Gospel provides other details not given by Matthew. Mark states that Jesus “entered into an house” (Mark 7:24). This house was likely not the woman's (compare 7:30). That Gospel also reveals that Jesus had intended for His presence in that region to be a secret, but “he could not be hid”

(7:24). The fact that Jesus desired secrecy reveals that He did not initially intend for His journey into Gentile territory to be a teaching mission.

22b. Saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

The form of the designation *Son of David* appears 17 times in the Gospels. Matthew's Gospel contains 10 of those instances. In 1 of those 10, the reference is to Joseph (Matthew 1:20); in the other 9, people use that title about the Messiah (here and 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42). Jesus never directly applied the designation to himself, but He did so indirectly (22:42; Mark 12:35; Luke 20:41).

The designation comes from the hope that a descendant of Israel's King David would someday rule with peace and justice (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 34:23; compare Psalm 110). During the time between the Old and New Testaments, the Jewish people had strong expectations of this individual. They hoped the Son of David would come as a political leader to cleanse Jerusalem (see the nonbiblical Psalms of Solomon 17:22-28).

Because this designation reflected a uniquely Jewish expectation, it is shocking that a Gentile woman used it about Jesus. She would have been the most unexpected person to recognize Jesus as the long-awaited descendant of David. Before this event, some people had questioned whether Jesus was the Son of David (Matthew 12:23). This woman spoke in a way that reflected her genuine belief about Jesus' identity and mission.

The woman's cry for *mercy* resulted from seeing her daughter suffer demon possession. The New Testament writers understand devils and unclean (evil) spirits as the same thing (examples: Luke 8:2, 29). Neither Matthew nor Mark describes the daughter's symptoms. Others who experienced demonic possession also experienced physical disorders (examples: Matthew 9:32; 12:22). Therefore, we can assume that the daughter suffered similarly.

The way that Matthew's Gospel presents the woman's request is notable. She did not explicitly ask Jesus to heal her *daughter*, thus freeing the daughter from demonic possession (contrast Mark

7:26). Instead, the mother desired to experience *mercy* herself. She was likely her daughter's primary caretaker, and the weight of that work had become an unbearable burden.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to increase our faith in God before we see Him act?

Digging Deeper

How do cautionary admonishments, such as that of Luke 12:22-23, help inform your answer?

A Mother's Care

My mother was the most influential woman in my life. As a single parent, she was solely responsible for caring for my sibling and me. She worked hard to give us the best life possible. She began a new business, formed new relationships, and adopted new habits to care for us.

We know very little about the caring mother in today's lesson text. But caring for her daughter had taken its toll on the mother. By reaching out to Jesus, the mother displayed the extent that she was willing to go for the good of her daughter.

Who went to great lengths to care for you as a child? Maybe that person was your mother. Or perhaps that person was your father, an extended family member, or someone else altogether. Regardless of who that earthly caretaker was, remember God is the ultimate source of care: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66:13). What prevents you from accepting God's care or being an agent of it to another? —O. P.

B. Jesus' Mission (vv. 23-24)

23a. But he answered her not a word.

Jesus' refusal to answer the woman might seem cruel, but His silence reflects some cultural differences of His day. At that time, it would be considered inappropriate for a Jewish rabbi to answer a woman—and a Gentile woman, no less (compare John 4:9)!

His silence could also be considered a test of the strength and quality of the woman's faith. Jewish teachers and rabbis sometimes tested their



Visual for Lesson 9. Have this visual on display as you pose the discussion question that is associated with Matthew 15:28a.

students, and Jesus was no exception (examples: John 5:6; 6:6). The strategic silence created space for the woman to continue talking and explaining her desires.

23b. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

The woman had become a nuisance to Jesus' disciples. They did not address whether they thought Jesus should grant her request. Instead, the disciples wanted the woman out of their midst. Did they not think she was worthy of Jesus' aid because she was a Gentile woman? Or was it how *she crieth after* them that led to their dismissive attitude? Either way, the disciples tended to want to dismiss people they considered annoying or distracting (compare Matthew 19:13).

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

Jesus did not send the woman away as His disciples requested. The text is unclear regarding whom He *answered*. If His answer was directed at the disciples, He was reminding them about the mission for which His heavenly Father had *sent* Him (Matthew 10:5-6).

Jesus' primary mission before His resurrection focused on *the house of Israel*. They were like *lost sheep* without a shepherd (examples: Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5-6; Zechariah 10:2; Matthew 9:36). As a result, Jesus came as a shepherd for the people. He provided spiritual care

and guidance, like a shepherd caring for sheep (see Ezekiel 34:23; Luke 15:1-7; John 10:1-18, 27-30).

Central to Jesus' mission as a shepherd was His preaching on the need for repentance and the presence of God's kingdom (Matthew 4:17). This mission was first revealed to the people of Israel. God's blessing would be offered first to them. Then through them would blessing be available to all peoples (see Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:6-7).

To be clear, Matthew's Gospel is not conveying an anti-Gentile sentiment. Old Testament prophets proclaimed that the Messiah's mission would include Gentiles (examples: Isaiah 19:16-25; Hosea 2:23; Zechariah 14:16). With a few exceptions (example: Matthew 8:5-13), Jesus' earthly ministry focused on the people of Israel. He acknowledged that His mission would reach Gentiles (see 24:14; 25:31-33; 28:19-20).

II. Second Request

(Matthew 15:25-28)

A. Great Need (v. 25)

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

The woman did not debate Jesus on the direction of His mission. Instead, she sought relief in a way that could only come from a desperate mother.

B. Greater Priority (vv. 26-27)

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

Jesus responded with a metaphor to the woman's request for help. The statement highlights that the *bread* is given to the children of the household first and foremost. It is inappropriate for sustenance to be handed out *to dogs* when it would deprive the children. Most of Scripture's references to dogs carry a negative meaning (examples: 2 Samuel 9:8; Philippians 3:2). Unlike today's house pets, dogs in biblical times were scavengers (examples: Exodus 22:31; 1 Kings 14:11).

When we read this text today, we might feel that Jesus spoke harshly to the Gentile woman by comparing her people to dogs. But a study of the verses that follow may cause us to conclude otherwise.

In this statement, Jesus highlighted expectations

regarding the order of the mission of God. Some Jewish people considered that the Messiah's mission came first and foremost for the people of Israel. Therefore it would have been inappropriate for Jesus to do anything concerning this Gentile woman.

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

The Gentile woman accepted that Jesus was sent to Israel (Matthew 15:24, above). But she did not accept that He was *exclusively* sent to Israel, and she did not take Jesus' answer as a *no*. Instead, she built on His words, pointing out that *the dogs* did not have to take food from children in order to receive the blessing of *the crumbs*.

What Do You Think?

What metaphors or analogies might we use to help someone understand the depth of God's grace and mercy?

Digging Deeper

What are some dangers of using these comparisons?

C. Great Faith (v. 28)

28a. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith.

Rarely do we read in Matthew's Gospel of instances when *Jesus* publicly commended someone for their faith (see Matthew 9:22, 29). More often, Jesus challenged people for their lack of faith (examples: 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8). It is two Gentiles—this woman and a Roman centurion (8:10; Luke 7:9 [see lesson 7])—whom Jesus proclaims to have exceptional *faith*.

We should not interpret the designation of *woman* to be one of harshness. It could be used as a term of endearment (example: John 19:26).

What Do You Think?

How will you exhibit great and persistent faith in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to address possible roadblocks that challenge your faith?

No Surprises Here

In 2021, I was hired as a university professor to help mentor and teach Latino and Hispanic students. These groups had increased in number at my university. Therefore, the administration felt it was appropriate to have a faculty member who could focus on their needs. I developed a plan that I thought would best reach these students. One of the first tasks was to create a course to educate all students regarding the cultures, religions, and histories of Latino and Hispanic peoples.

Student conversations soon went beyond the classroom. Even in my wildest dreams, I could have never planned for the students' positive response to the course. What I had designed to help *some* students soon turned into a way for *all* students to grow. I was caught unaware by the results and remain hopeful for the welfare and growth of my students!

Jesus, however, is never caught unaware. He is all-knowing (omniscient). He was not caught unaware when the Gentile woman approached Him and asked for mercy. He was not caught unaware when His disciples wanted to send her away. And He was not caught unaware when the Gentile woman demonstrated great faith. He is never unaware of our concerns—He knows them before we do! Do you have a great faith willing to bring your cares to Jesus? —O. P.

28b. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

There is another parallel point between this story and Jesus' healing of the Roman centurion's servant in Matthew 8:5-13. In both instances, the healing occurred from a distance. The woman's *daughter was made whole*, and the centurion's servant was healed (Matthew 8:13) without Jesus being in the immediate proximity of the ailing person.

Those two occasions and Jesus' healing of the son of a certain nobleman in John 4:46-54 are the only times in the Gospels when a distance healing occurred. Further, all three instances may each describe the healing of a Gentile. As such, these

accounts prefigure the apostles' ministry to the Gentiles described in Acts 13:14-52; 17:1-4, 12; etc.

Conclusion

A. Great Faith for God's People

The woman in today's text was the ultimate "outsider" to a first-century Jewish audience. She was aware of the biases against her. The deck would be stacked against her if she approached a Jewish teacher. Despite that awareness, she came to Jesus anyway. Her desperate situation and her suffering daughter necessitated a bold response.

The woman's behavior revealed a persistent and great faith. As a result, she received mercy from the Son of David. She was considered an "outsider" to some people, but she was an "insider" because of her life of faith.

This Scripture invites us to desire a life of great faith. What blessings do we fail to receive because we limit or misplace our faith? A life of great faith requires steadfast confidence that God will show mercy to everyone. How does your perspective need to change in this regard?

What Do You Think?

Considering this quarter's title, "Examining Our Faith," what's the most important thing you can do to complete a self-examination of your faith?

Digging Deeper

Who will you recruit as an accountability partner to help with that examination?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are grateful to be part of Your family. Reveal to us the things that prevent us from having great faith. Encourage us when we feel unable to show persistent faith. Give us eyes to see people we consider "outsiders" so we can invite them to experience Your great mercy. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Live by great faith!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before class, set aside one index card for each learner. On one side of each card, write the name of a different group of people. (*Examples:* city-dwellers, farmers, oldest children, youngest children, business executives, small-business owners, empty nesters, dog owners, cat owner, public school teachers, church attendees, etc.)

Distribute one card to each learner. Begin the exercise by saying, “We frequently have certain assumptions regarding different groups of people. Write a commonly held assumption about the group on your card.” Have learners spend one minute writing down their responses.

After time has passed, ask volunteers to provide their written responses. Then ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—Are these assumptions accurate? Why or why not? 2—What are the dangers of holding these assumptions? 3—How can these assumptions lead to the exclusion of that group?

Lead to Bible study by saying, “Different groups of people have sometimes felt excluded. In today’s lesson, we will read about the experience of a woman who was considered an outsider by some people.”

Into the Word

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

Distribute a handout (you create) with the following statements:

1. A woman from Capernaum approached Jesus.
2. The woman asked Jesus to heal her daughter.
3. Jesus did not answer the woman with a word.
4. Jesus’ disciples eagerly welcomed the woman into their midst.
5. Jesus said He was sent only to “the lost sheep” of Israel.

6. Jesus responded with a metaphor about dogs eating bread from children.

7. Jesus considered the woman’s faith to be “great.”

8. Jesus went to the woman’s house to heal her daughter.

(*Answers:* 1. False [v. 22a]; 2. False [v. 22b]; 3. True [v. 23a]; 4. False [v.23b]; 5. True [v. 24]; 6. True [v. 26]; 7. True [v. 28a]; 8. False [v. 28b])

Have learners read Matthew 15:21-28 and work in pairs to decide whether the statements are true or false. After no more than 10 minutes, ask pairs to give their answers.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Challenging Her Faith” exercise from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Write the following sentences on the board:

1. *Everyone can receive God’s mercy regardless of their background.*
2. *Parents sometimes risk everything for the good of their children.*
3. *God celebrates when people show great faith.*

Place learners in pairs and say, “Imagine you are writing a devotional on Matthew 15:21-28. On the board are three takeaways from this Scripture. With your partner, choose one and write points of application.” After five minutes, reconvene the class.

For pairs who responded to the first prompt, ask: 1—What group has our congregation failed to reach with the gospel? 2—How can we remedy this?

For pairs who responded to the second prompt, ask: 1—How can a parent discern whether to let a child fend for themselves or to intervene for the child? 2—If you are a parent, has your opinion on this issue changed?

For pairs who responded to the third prompt, ask: 1—How do you live with great faith? 2—What obstacles to faith do you face, and how do you overcome them?

Justified by Faith

Devotional Reading: John 3:1-8, 13-17
Background Scripture: Romans 3:21-30

Romans 3:21-30

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

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

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

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

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

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

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



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

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

Key Text

Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. —Romans 3:22-24

Examining Our Faith

Unit III: Standing in the Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify what is “excluded” and why.
2. Explain the concept of *propitiation*.
3. Brainstorm ways to explain the concept of *propitiation* to an unbeliever.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Always Going Downhill
- B. Lesson Context

I. God’s Righteousness (Romans 3:21-24)

- A. Attested by Law and Prophets (v. 21)
- B. Obtained in Christ (v. 22a)
- C. Universally Required (vv. 22b-23)

Report Cards

- D. Freely Given (v. 24)

II. Christ’s Sacrifice (Romans 3:25-26)

- A. For Righteousness (v. 25)
- B. For Justification (v. 26)

III. Human Boasting (Romans 3:27-30)

- A. “It Is Excluded” (vv. 27-28)
Bragging Rights
- B. God of All (vv. 29-30)

Conclusion

- A. Things We All Have in Common
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Always Going Downhill

The Greek poet Homer (lived in the ninth or eighth century BC) recorded a myth about a king named Sisyphus. The human king figured out a way to cheat his death: by capturing the god of death, Thanatos, and thereby preventing anyone from being able to die. The consequences of this imprisonment were grisly, and the other gods could not allow the situation to persist.

Thanatos did not stay inactive forever. And when Sisyphus did die, he received an interesting punishment. He was to roll a heavy stone up a hill. But, just as he was about to reach the top of the hill, the stone would roll back down again. And this punishment would go on forever. This is the origin of characterizing an unachievable task as Sisyphian.

Surely we have all experienced a Sisyphian task, like having the carrot of a raise or promotion dangled just ahead, always out of reach, or family harmony always seeming just beyond the next therapy session or fight. Trying to earn salvation is another Sisyphian task we all know, whether we have struggled with it ourselves or only seen others in the midst of this impossible quest. There must be another way! And Paul teaches that other way in our lesson text today.

B. Lesson Context

Paul’s letter to the Romans was written in about AD 58, most likely from Corinth during his third missionary journey. He had not planted the Roman church, and the letter’s origins are something of a mystery. It could be that believers who were present at the first Pentecost brought it back from their Jerusalem pilgrimage to their home in Rome (Acts 2:10). The nature of the church in Rome was influenced by an edict, issued by Emperor Claudius in about AD 49, that had forced Jews living in the city to leave (18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius tells us that Claudius “banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus,” the word *Chrestus* likely referring to *Christ*.

This experience probably fostered a certain division within the Roman church between Gentile and Jewish believers, with each group contending that it had a better claim of salvation in Christ than the other (compare Romans 11:13-24). The expulsion of Jews from Rome resulted in Gentile Christians being in the majority in the church there, if they had not been the majority already (1:5-6, 13). Their majority status seems to have continued even after the death of Claudius in AD 54 allowed Jews to return to the imperial city (compare Acts 18:2 with Romans 16:3-5). Much of Paul's letter was therefore directed specifically to the Gentile believers there (11:13).

Paul hoped to visit Rome soon, so his letter served as an introduction of himself and the gospel he would teach in Rome and abroad, God willing. Part of Paul's purpose in writing to the Roman Christians was to inform them of his desire to meet them (Romans 1:11-15) and to gain support for his planned travel to Spain (15:23-28). But the body of the letter is all gospel, making Romans perhaps the closest thing in the Bible to a systematic exploration of Christian doctrine. Our lesson today cuts straight to the heart of the matter: what is required for salvation.

I. God's Righteousness

(Romans 3:21-24)

A. Attested by Law and Prophets (v. 21)

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

But now builds on the thought that came before, that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). For some, the law offers a surefire way to become righteous in God's eyes—by perfectly obeying it. But anyone with true understanding of God and the purpose of His laws knows that the law was never intended to make a person righteous and thus justify that person. If lawful action cannot justify a person, what can?

For the first time in this letter, Paul separates law from righteousness and affirms that his argu-

ment is not new; it aligns with *the law and the prophets*. This was a way to refer to all of the Old Testament (examples: Matthew 22:40; Luke 16:29; Acts 13:15). The law was intended to make people aware of their sin, and the prophets explicitly called out the people when they became blind to their sinfulness. Paul expanded on that idea in Galatians 3:19-29, which refers to the law as "our schoolmaster," teaching what God is like and keeping us safe until Jesus came to reveal *the righteousness of God* (see Romans 3:22a, below). Likewise, the writer of Hebrews said that the law was a shadow of the good things to come (Hebrews 10:1).

What Do You Think?

What texts in the law can explain that God's righteousness cannot be attained through obedience to it?

Digging Deeper

How do the words of the Old Testament prophets build on this idea?

B. Obtained in Christ (v. 22a)

22a. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.

The righteousness of God mentioned in verse 21 is here revealed to be the gift believers receive. There is some challenge in understanding the phrase *faith of Jesus Christ*. The Greek could imply that the faith is Jesus' own, as in His faithfulness to His promises. However, the context suggests that Paul is referring to one's faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not just a collection of beliefs but is connected to the person of Jesus Christ.

Beginning in Romans 3:9, Paul makes clear that no person is righteous. The issue at hand is not Jesus' faithfulness, but how *all them that believe* can be called righteous (Romans 5:19). By faith in Jesus, we are eligible to and do, in fact, receive the gift of being called righteous (compare Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3-8; Ephesians 3:12). The contrast is with the attempt to be made righteous through works, including keeping the law (compare Galatians 2:16). And we do well to remember

that righteousness described here is being made right with God, despite our continued imperfect efforts.

C. Universally Required (vv. 22b-23)

22b-23. For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

Paul likely begins an aside here (see commentary on Romans 3:24, below). The phrase *for there is no difference* looks back to Paul's arguments about the fallenness of both Gentiles and Jews. Because both groups (which encompass all of humanity) are lost in sin and living counter to God's will, salvation for both must be attained in the same way (compare 3:9; Galatians 3:28).

The expression *all have sinned* is also found in Romans 5:12 (compare 1:18-21). In the Old Testament, *the glory of God* can be used in two primary ways: to refer to an experience of God (examples: Exodus 16:10; Ezekiel 1:28) or to give God the worship that is due Him and extolling others to do the same, implicitly or explicitly (examples: Joshua 7:19; 1 Chronicles 16:28-29). In these examples, there is a sense of God's revealing himself through His glory so that people might experience Him and honor Him. The glory of God can be defined as His presence with His people (compare John 1:14). God's glory is a true and holy representation of God's character, in contrast to any idol or other falsehood (see Romans 1:23-25). As His image-bearers, we were meant to reflect well on our Creator by living lives that reflect His holy character, His glory (Genesis 1:26; Leviticus 20:26; Isaiah 43:7; 1 Peter 1:13-25). Sin prevents us from accurately modeling God's glory.

Report Cards

Growing up, I never liked school. Starting in kindergarten, I would invent all kinds of excuses to stay home. For instance, I'd run home from my bus stop and tell my mother I needed a hug that inevitably lasted *just long* enough to miss my ride. My mom passed away recently, and I ran into some of my old report cards as we cleaned up her belongings. My struggles and failures were

preserved and filed among mom's other essential papers. But something I found in the filing cabinet changed my initial embarrassment. Mom had kept her report cards from elementary school to high school. These papers revealed that my mother struggled in school as I did!

Failure can make us feel isolated. But if we were to compare our "report cards" of righteousness, we would see we are all in the same dismal position. How does knowing that we have all sinned and not attained God's glory change your attitude when you speak of Jesus to your friends and neighbors?

—J. M.

D. Freely Given (v. 24)

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

Some have misunderstood this verse as teaching universal salvation. The argument usually ties *being justified* to "all [who] have sinned" in Romans 3:23. However, this reading cannot be preferred, as Jesus himself warned His listeners regarding eternal punishment (Matthew 7:13; 25:31-46; etc.). In keeping with other scriptural teachings—Paul's included—it is far more likely that much of Romans 3:22-23 (above) is a parenthetical thought. This links being justified not to verse 23 but to "all them that believe" in verse 22a (above; compare 1:17).

When one is justified, God considers that person righteous. There is a stark difference between works-based salvation and justification *by his grace*. In a works-based salvation, one strives as hard as one can and hopes at the very end that he or she has done enough to earn God's pardon. This suggests that salvation can be earned, like a wage, and can only be withheld if the work was not up to snuff. In contrast, justification by God's grace is given *freely . . . through the redemption that*

How to Say It

Claudius	<i>Claw-dee-us.</i>
propitiation	<i>pro-pih-she-ay-shun.</i>
Sisyphæan	<i>Si-suh-fee-uhn.</i>
Suetonius	<i>Soo-toe-nee-us.</i>
Thanatos	<i>Tha-nuh-toes.</i>

is in Christ Jesus (Romans 4:4-5; 6:23; Galatians 3:13).

Redemption for Paul's audience would call up an image of a slave being purchased out of bondage into freedom (compare Hebrews 9:15). To the Jewish recipients of this letter, redemption also meant payment to free a prisoner sentenced to death (Exodus 21:29-30). The metaphor of being slaves, either to sin or to righteousness, occurs later in this very letter (Romans 6). Elsewhere, Paul compares redemption to adoption, the act through which we become God's sons and daughters (Galatians 4:4-5).

II. Christ's Sacrifice

(Romans 3:25-26)

A. For Righteousness (v. 25)

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.

Propitiation can be defined as the sacrifice that God requires to forgive His people. This was a major part of the process of atonement. In Israel, sacrifices were offered throughout the year and for various purposes. The mercy seat of the ark of the covenant was the center of the sacrificial system. But only the head priest could go into the holy of holies and only on the Day of Atonement, once every year, to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. This sacrifice was a mercy from God so that He would forgive their sins (Leviticus 16:2, 13-15).

The sacrificial system was a temporary solution, made obsolete by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross (Hebrews 9:11-14). When we respond *through faith*, Jesus' *blood* accomplishes the atonement we require for *the remission of sins* (John 1:29; Hebrews 10:19-22; Revelation 7:13-17; etc.).

Forbearance points to God's patience (2 Peter 3:9). Taking into account the cycle of sacrifices necessary before Jesus' death, God's forbearance was seen in His allowance for animal sacrifice to forgive sins, even though these only looked forward to Jesus' sacrifice (Hebrews 10:4). The past

sacrifices were a shadow of the true sacrifice to come. God did not overlook sins, but He withheld judgment of those sins until Jesus' death—the sacrifice that took away sins once and for all (9:26; 10:10). This understanding of God's patience works well with the image Paul painted in Acts 17:30-31 of God's holding all people to account because there was no more excuse for ignorance regarding what He required.

What Do You Think?

How have you experienced God's patience?

Digging Deeper

How can we balance God's patience toward sinners with the urgency of accepting Jesus' sacrifice when witnessing to a nonbeliever?

B. For Justification (v. 26)

26. To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

At this time refers to the time since Christ's sacrifice (comparable to "in this world" as a contrast to "that which is to come" in Ephesians 1:21). God's *righteousness* and justice go hand in hand (Job 37:23; Psalm 11:7; Isaiah 5:16; etc.). A remarkable tension is created, then, when God, in His perfect character, desires both justice and mercy for sinners. He could not accurately be called *just* if He simply turned a blind eye to wrongdoing. Through Jesus' sacrifice, a path forward is created. Those who *believeth in Jesus* experience God's mercy and are justified when they are covered in Christ's blood and made new.

III. Human Boasting

(Romans 3:27-30)

A. "It Is Excluded" (vv. 27-28)

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

This verse would have resonated with Jewish Christians who heard it. They took great pride in



Visual for Lessons 10 & 11. *Discuss why God's righteousness needs to be known before we can be called righteous through faith.*

God's having chosen them and revealed His desires through the Law of Moses. Some even boasted about their own success in following that law faithfully. If a person could earn his or her salvation, that person would have reason to boast because they measured up to the *law of works* (compare Romans 4:4-8). If anyone could boast about his adherence to the law, it was Paul (Galatians 1:14).

Since salvation is not accomplished by anything a sinful person can achieve, no person has the right to boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). For this reason, even Paul counted all things “dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:8-9). *The law of faith* supersedes the prior laws and accomplishes what a law of works could not: salvation in Christ.

Bragging Rights

When is it acceptable to boast? Hiring experts assert that the resume is an appropriate place to talk oneself up and make a big deal out of one's accomplishments. Indeed, what would a potential employer think if candidates did not bring up college degrees, prior work experience and accolades, and other pertinent information that qualified them for the job and made them the best candidates for the position? But, of course, too much zeal in touting one's accomplishments can

backfire. For instance, in my hometown, the health director was forced to step down because of his resume: he allegedly oversold his college education.

Paul never weighed in on the merits of an effective resume. But on boasting in general, he reminds us that we have nothing to boast about when we stand before God. No matter what good works we could put on a resume documenting our lives, we fall short of what God requires. Bearing that in mind, how will you guard against illicit boasting?
—J. M.

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

This verse represents a summary of Paul's argument to this point. Keeping *the law* does not accomplish righteousness; trying to keep the law makes us aware of our shortcomings. Justification only comes *by faith*. The works that result are evidence of faith (Galatians 5:22-25); they are integral to a living faith (James 2:17), but they are not saving actions.

What Do You Think?

What evidence can you point to that you are being made new in Christ?

Digging Deeper

In what areas are you still trusting that the Spirit is recreating you in Jesus' image?

B. God of All (vv. 29-30)

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

Paul frequently uses rhetorical questions to further his argument (examples: Romans 6:1; 8:31). On the most basic level, *God* created everything (Genesis 1:1), and so He is the rightful *God of the Gentiles also*. Paul's Jewish audience would have agreed with this. But *the Jews* sometimes assumed that, because *God* had chosen them specially, He was opposed to all other people and chose the Jews *only*. Assuming that God's special care for Israel was an exclusionary concern for Israel ignores God's love for all peo-

ple (Isaiah 42:5-7), expressed both in law (examples: Leviticus 19:10, 33-34; Numbers 15:15-16; Deuteronomy 10:18-19) and in His provision (examples: Genesis 16; 2 Kings 5; Jonah 3). Jesus made clear God's care for all in both His words and deeds (examples: Matthew 5:43-38; Mark 7:24-30; John 3:16-18).

What Do You Think?

Do you affirm in thought, word, and deed that God is the God of all?

Digging Deeper

If not, what repentance and repair might be called for?

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

One God calls to mind the Shema: "The Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4). The command that follows is to "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (6:5; compare Mark 12:29-30). The Shema was recited multiple times a day by observant Jews in pursuit of teaching the command and keeping it in their hearts (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). If there were many (real) gods, maybe there were different ways to justify the Jews and the Gentiles. But since there is only one God, He chose only one way to *justify* all people in the same way: *through faith*.

The circumcision refers to the Jews, as this was the physical sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Genesis 17) and often a badge of pride for Jews. *The uncircumcision* refers to any Gentiles. This made the practice a relatively clear-cut (pun intended) way to distinguish between the two groups. But there is only one way to the Father, no matter one's background: Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6).

Conclusion

A. Things We All Have in Common

All human brokenness and sorrow can be traced back to sin. That's something that everyone has in common. Rumors of wars create us-

versus-them mentalities and the potential of violence through stoked hatred; war makes that violence a state-sanctioned reality and sows fear and destruction, reducing people to statistics of the dead and displaced. Even in times of relative peace, the seemingly conflicting hopes and fears for a nation's future can become polarizing calls to action, preventing the respect and cooperation necessary for cooperation and thriving within communities.

Even when we are not facing existential threats of war or violence, we are all broken by sin. It's sad that we are all united in this, but fortunately, the cure is also something we all have in common. Our own efforts cannot heal us. Like Sisyphus, we can make every effort to roll our stones to the top of a hill. Nevertheless, those sins we try to conquer through constant effort will always drag us back down, always requiring us to try again—unless we call on Jesus, who removes the stone and gives our efforts a whole new meaning.

We all need Jesus. He is the one person we can all have in common and in whom we can find unity outside of our sinfulness (John 17:20-23). He is the only one who can transform our efforts from futility in sin and death to Spirit-led works of hope and life.

What Do You Think?

What futile efforts toward earning salvation can you commit to abandoning?

Digging Deeper

How will unity with other believers in Christ help you in this endeavor?

B. Prayer

Gracious Lord, thank You for Your gift of salvation through faith in Jesus. Thank You that it is a gift offered to everyone regardless of race or status. Forgive us when we think we have to earn this gift. In Jesus' name through whom we have our salvation. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Stop struggling to earn the gift of salvation that Christ offers.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Write the word *Boast* on the board. Ask learners, “What are some things that come to mind when you see this word?” Learners may discuss achievements, possessions, abilities, or feelings of jealousy or pride. Ask learners to think of the most ridiculous thing they’ve ever seen someone boast about. Remind them that this is not a place for gossip, and so they should be careful with these examples. Have learners share the boasts, along with what made them ridiculous.

After the discussion, say, “Today, we’re going to talk about something else that would be ridiculous to boast about.”

Into the Word

As you read Romans 3:21-30 aloud, ask learners to think about what ridiculous boast Paul may be describing. Expected responses include boasting about all the good works we have done and efforts to earn salvation by following the law of works. Divide the class into groups of two or three. Ask the groups to discuss Paul’s ridiculous boast as well as search for other passages that describe this same idea (examples: 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Ephesians 2:8-9).

After calling time, have groups present their findings in a whole-class discussion. Continue talking about the topic with the following questions: 1–Why does Paul say boasting is to be excluded (Romans 3:27)? 2–Why does the law of works not support boasting (3:23)? 3–What does *propitiation* mean, and how does the word apply to Jesus (3:24-25)? 4–What can we do to be justified (3:22, 28)?

Option. Distribute index cards as well as copies of the “Coming Up Short” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Give learners a minute to work individually, then as a group, complete as indicated.

Option. Distribute copies of the “God of All”

exercise from the activity page. Give pairs of learners time to complete and discuss the activity as indicated.

Into Life

Write on the board *Misunderstandings / Metaphor / Action* as the headers of three columns. Conduct a whole-class brainstorming session on how to explain *propitiation* to an unbeliever. Remind learners that unbelievers may not be familiar with terms such as “satisfaction,” “remission of sins,” and “propitiation.” *Option.* If you used the “Coming Up Short” activity earlier in the lesson, discuss why acknowledging one’s sin might be helpful as we explain propitiation to an unbeliever.

If needed, continue further brainstorming by asking: 1–What common misunderstandings or misconceptions might unbelievers have about propitiation, and how can you sort those out? 2–What metaphors, comparisons, or verbal explanations can you use with words in a conversation? 3–What tangible, relational explanations might you use, accomplished over time through deed and action? Write responses in the appropriate column. Request that learners be specific. (For example, follow the non-specific response of “God’s satisfaction” with the question “What is satisfied?”)

Have learners practice explaining propitiation to each other in pairs, as if the other were unfamiliar with the concept. They may use either ideas from the board or their own thoughts. Ask pairs to pray for each other during the week as they talk to unbelievers.

Once they have finished practicing, bring the groups back together. Lead the whole group in a prayer, thanking God for His propitiation given through Jesus on our behalf. Pray for strength to live by faith rather than boasting in works. Pray that we let God’s forgiveness make a difference in our lives and our communities.

Counted as Righteous

Devotional Reading: Genesis 15:1-6
Background Scripture: Romans 4

Romans 4:13-25

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.

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 Sara's womb:

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 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.

Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit III: Standing in the Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Paul’s view of Abraham.
2. Explain faith’s role in being counted as righteous.
3. Brainstorm ways to celebrate with loving actions God’s blessing of grace through faith.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. “The Primitive”
- B. Lesson Context

I. True Heirs of Abraham (Romans 4:13)

- A. Not by the Law (v. 13a)
- B. The Righteousness of Faith (v. 13b)

II. Supporting Arguments (Romans 4:14-25)

- A. Not the Promise (vv. 14-15)
- B. Abraham’s Trust (vv. 16-22)
*Against All Hope
Fully Persuaded*
- C. Our Basis of Hope (vv. 23-25)

Conclusion

- A. We Are Not Alone
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. “The Primitive”

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s resistance to Nazi rule cost him his life in 1945. While directing an illegal seminary, Bonhoeffer wrote to his brother-in-law about his practice of daily Bible reading. He found that practice drew him back to the basics, or what he called “the primitive.” “In matters of faith,” he said, “we are always consistently primitive.” He meant that however elaborate our ideas or practices may be, we must always come back to our starting point: a fundamental attitude of trust in God’s mercy. Our text today focuses on this primitive foundation.

B. Lesson Context

Romans 4 is part of Paul’s overall argument supporting his statement in Romans 1:16-17:

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 1–3 explores God’s primary challenge in keeping the ancient promises, namely, the profound sinfulness of all human beings (3:23).

Chapter 4 begins the discussion of the remedy to universal sin. Far from facing a hopeless situation, humans have a model available to them of how to approach God. That model is the life of Abraham. When God promised that He would bless the world through Abraham, Abraham chose to respond in faith (Genesis 15:6; quoted in Romans 4:3, 9, 22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23). Paul’s readers, especially those of Jewish heritage, would have agreed that Abraham’s legacy was important and valuable. The question in dispute is precisely what that legacy is. Paul argues that Abraham had a relationship with God because he placed his faith in God and trusted God’s promises. Nothing else. In the New Testament, faith equals trust in God as the one who has promised to bless humanity. Jesus modeled that trust by submitting to His sacrificial death on a cross,

being confident that God would work for good through Jesus' shame and suffering. That trust is the basis for any relationship with the same merciful God.

I. True Heirs of Abraham

(Romans 4:13)

A. Not by the Law (v. 13a)

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

Paul does not exclude the Jewish people from God's concern, nor does he minimize the importance of the Torah (the Law of Moses). But Paul builds on the insight that *the promise* predates *the law* (see lesson 10) since *Abraham* lived before Moses (about 2167–1992 BC and 1530–1410 BC, respectively) and the giving of the law (Exodus 19–20). Thus, it follows that the promise was the foundation of the law rather than the other way around (see Galatians 3:17).

The idea that Abraham would inherit *the world* comes in part from Genesis 12:1-3, which describes Abraham's offspring as a blessing to the world. This was sometimes interpreted as meaning that Abraham's family would literally govern all the world. But we see that Jesus' followers—Abraham's true *seed* (Galatians 3:7)—inherit the world (1 Corinthians 3:21-23; see Romans 4:17, below).

B. The Righteousness of Faith (v. 13b)

13b. But through the righteousness of faith.

Faith, which biblically might be defined as trust in God and His ability and intention to keep His promises, can characterize any person, not only those who were given the law. God is the God of all, both Jews and Gentiles (Romans 3:29). The relationship between God and humans rests on something deeper than the law, the thing that characterizes one group but not the other. That deeper reality is faith in Jesus. God chooses to credit us with righteousness when we come to Him through such faith. *Through the righteousness* that only comes from God's gift to us, we also stand to inherit the world as promised to Abraham.

What Do You Think?

How does your life reflect your trust in God?

Digging Deeper

What difference does it make that you cannot and do not need to try to earn righteousness?

II. Supporting Arguments

(Romans 4:14-25)

A. Not the Promise (vv. 14-15)

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

Salvation comes from God's *promise* since God saves "the ungodly" (Romans 4:5; 5:6). Nothing that we can do can save us. This radical confession has roots in the Old Testament, which also affirms that human achievement does not deliver in the final analysis. The analogy of earthly deliverance (examples: Psalms 44:3; 106:6-8; Hosea 11:7-11) is a precursor to the reality of eternal salvation (examples: Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14-15).

Rather, the Law of Moses leads one to love God and fellow human beings (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:5; see Matthew 22:37-40). Paul does not mean that Jews or Gentile converts who keep *the law* cannot also trust God. But what was promised because of faith still required faith; law-keeping could not substitute for trusting God (Galatians 3:18).

Paul's language seems very strong here. He does not reject keeping the Torah for Jews, only the insistence that Gentiles must do so as well (Acts 15). One of the ironies of history has been that the

How to Say It

Abraham	Ay-bruh-ham.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer	Dee-truck Bahn-hahf-ur.
Isaac	Eye-zuk.
Moses	Mo-zes or Mo-zez.
Torah	Tor-uh.

situation reversed itself in the centuries after Paul so that Judaism and Christianity became separate religions, with Christians often persecuting Jews and using this and other texts to justify doing so. In Paul's setting, that situation had not arisen, and his statements must be understood in his different context without condoning any religious violence.

What Do You Think?

When have you experienced someone "voiding" a promise?

Digging Deeper

What gives you confidence that God has not voided the promise He made based on Abraham's faith?

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

At the same time, *the law* has limitations. No one can violate a law that does not exist (Romans 5:13). The law could define sin's precise contours and clarify what effects it has, but it cannot save. It *worketh wrath*, that is, it provokes God's anger when humans break His law. Since God's wrath is justified and necessary to bring about justice, the law's function to notify us of boundaries serves a spiritually useful purpose.

Romans 1:18-32 catalogs the results of a life of sin, the terrible list of ways humans have of harming each other and themselves. These actions provoke God's righteous indignation, but also lead to God's mercy toward precisely all of us caught up in such evils (Romans 6:1-4). The Law of Moses emphasizes God's sense of justice and desire for humans to live together with justice and righteousness—the appropriate responses to a genuine love for God.

B. Abraham's Trust (vv. 16-22)

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.

It refers to the promise (see Romans 4:13, above). This verse makes two interrelated points. First, God's saving work extends to all who will

receive it in *faith* by trusting God's promises and counting on God's mercy, justice, and protection. The Law of Moses was a gift from God for previously enslaved people so that they could experience a life of real freedom (Deuteronomy 30:11-20). Its many provisions tended toward building a community of mutual support and justice (examples: Exodus 22; Deuteronomy 15).

Second, the promise to bless the world (Genesis 12:1-3) extends to all who imitate *Abraham* in trusting God. Descent from the patriarch involves not ancestral DNA (Luke 3:8) but a similar faith-filled life. God's work was bigger than the law could accommodate, and God's *grace* extends to both Jews and Gentiles who trust Him.

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.

Verse 17 offers evidence for the previous verses' assertions by quoting Genesis 17:5. Part of a story of renewed promises to Abraham, this statement reveals the enormous consequences of the then-soon-to-be-fulfilled promise of a child, Isaac (see Genesis 21:1-7). The promise extends even to the raising of *the dead*. This happened metaphorically for Abraham and Sarah, who were long past child-bearing age (see also Hebrews 11:12), and literally for Jesus as "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20). The entire story of Israel and the church is one of unimagined possibilities coming to life thanks to God's saving work.

The final clause alludes to the story of God's creation of the world (Genesis 1:1-2:4), through which nonexistent things became realities. God's creative work did not cease long ago but continues until all things are made new (Revelation 21:5). Creation and redemption form two sides of the same coin because both come from God's love and proceed toward the well-being of the creature.

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.

Genesis repeats the promises to Abraham three times (Genesis 12; 15; 17). Paul moves backward

from the third to the second occurrence, quoting Genesis 15:5 with *so shall thy seed be*. Paul interprets the quoted text in two ways simultaneously. First, the promise of offspring came to Abraham, and it was fulfilled. And second, the offspring would be like Abraham, full of hope for God's redemptive work.

Hope in the Bible is never simply wishful thinking. It is the expectation that something is to occur that is neither a given nor impossible. Two examples illustrate this: sunrise is a given, so we do not hope for it; flying under one's own power is impossible, so we do not hope for that, either. Nor is hope simply an emotional or intellectual state. For Paul, hope is an anticipation of an objective reality, the thing expected as much as the feeling of expectation. Hope can be laid up for us in God's presence (Colossians 1:5).

To hope *against hope* means that Abraham had no natural basis for believing he and Sarah could have a child. He and his wife had long passed the age of childbearing, and Sarah was postmenopausal (Genesis 17:17). The childbirth required a miracle, and the couple trusted God to provide that without knowing how it would occur.

What Do You Think?

How often do you speak of hope as a wish or a dream?

Digging Deeper

How could your witness of hope be strengthened if you only used the word to refer to hope based on God's promises?

Against All Hope

The nurse couldn't find a heartbeat. Doctors and attendants surrounded my wife's hospital bed, and one of them insisted that she could feel the baby moving. They rushed my wife away for an emergency C-section. These surgeries are not performed for babies who would be stillborn; faint heartbeats indicated that our daughter was practically gone.

Many doctors would have refused to operate, our doctor said. Our daughter would likely not survive. Even if she did, she would have profound brain

injuries. "Wrongful life" suits chilled some doctors from acting as our doctor did. But she was a Christian, and she believed strongly in life. She thought, *Even if this child only lives for two days, it is still life*. Against all hope, she delivered our daughter.

Rebekah just turned eight years old.

Is your faith leading you to make a decision "against all hope"?
—N. G.

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.

Paul ignores indications of Abraham's doubts in Genesis 15:2-3 and his ill-conceived attempt to "help" God by impregnating Hagar (Genesis 16). We might be encouraged that such major lapses in judgment and trust did not nullify Abraham's faith.

Instead, Paul's argument focuses on Abraham's ultimate acceptance of God's trustworthiness. For Abraham to focus on his or *Sarah's* limitations rather than the divine promises would have equaled weakness *in faith*. While Abraham recognized his and Sarah's physical states, he did not see that natural limit as the end of the possibilities available to God. Paul asks his readers to embrace this same mixture of realism and hope. As creatures of God, we know our limits but recognize that God's freedom and mercy need not always be channeled within those limits.

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

This verse restates the ideas of the previous sentences but adds two dimensions. First, it clarifies what Abraham believed when he trusted God's *promise*. The grammar of the Greek text serves to emphasize the promise that Abraham trusted rather than his act of believing God. God's action precedes and forms the basis for Abraham's faith.

Second, this verse also proposes that Abraham's trust equaled glorifying *God*. Words of praise, no matter how beautiful, do not really bring honor to God unless the one who is praising lives in the hope that God's promises will be fulfilled.

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



Visual for Lessons 10 & 11. *Point to this visual as you discuss verse 22 and the discussion questions associated with it.*

Here concludes the analysis of Abraham's trust as confidence in God's ability and willingness to act benevolently for the benefit of human beings. The verse also describes an aspect of God's promises: they are not idle words.

What Do You Think?

Do you react differently to a broken promise if the promise-maker lacks the power rather than the will to fulfill it? Why or why not?

Digging Deeper

What other examples can you provide of both God's willingness and ability to fulfill His promises?

Fully Persuaded

Philip Bliss published the hymn "Almost Persuaded" in 1871. The first stanza has a lost soul telling the Spirit, "Go Thy way, / Some more convenient day / on Thee I'll call." The song emphasizes that the time to call on Jesus in faith is short. Bliss's own life was cut short when, on December 30, 1876, he and his wife were killed in a train crash. He was only 38.

Bliss's life and work indicate that he, like Abraham, lived fully persuaded that God could and would fulfill His promises. And like Abraham, Bliss's faith has inspired generations. Hymns he penned are still sung. His home in Rome, Pennsyl-

vania, is now the Phillip P. Bliss Gospel Songwriters Museum, a testament to his ongoing influence.

The time is still short! Consider what your legacy will be. Will family, friends, colleagues, and others remember you as being fully persuaded to follow Jesus?
—N. G.

22. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Paul refers here to Genesis 15:6: "[Abram] believed in the Lord; and [God] counted it to him for righteousness." The word translated *imputed* also is translated elsewhere in this chapter as "counted" (Romans 4:3, 5) and "reckoned" (4:4, 9-10), which clarifies that God accepted Abraham's faith as righteous action. God *imputed to* Abraham *righteousness*, not because Abraham had done good deeds or avoided evil, but because he had staked his life and his family's future on God's promises starting in Genesis 12.

Paul uses Genesis 15:6 to paint a sharp contrast between a relationship built on command and obedience (under the Law of Moses) and one built on promises and trust. Many of his Jewish audience would probably have thought Paul overstated the case, since keeping the law ideally did show one's trust in, and love for, God. Yet Paul makes this distinction because he wishes to show that God keeps the ancient promises through the faithfulness of the Messiah, Jesus, and that the promises embrace both Jews and Gentiles.

What Do You Think?

What does it mean to have righteousness *imputed* based on faith?

Digging Deeper

What other verses can you point to that support your answer?

C. Our Basis of Hope (vv. 23-25)

23. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him.

If God was to keep the promise to Abraham that he would become the ancestor of many nations, then the act of imputing righteousness to him based on faith must extend to others who

do the same thing. Otherwise, God would be a respecter of persons, a player of favorites (contrast Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11-16; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9).

Whereas Abraham trusted God's promise of descendants who would bless the world, Paul's readers, ancient and modern, trust in the promise God sealed by raising Jesus from the dead. Simply believing that the resurrection of Jesus happened historically does not equate to having saving faith (compare James 2:19). To believe in the resurrection means to imitate Christ in His sufferings (2 Corinthians 13:4; Galatians 2:19-20; Philippians 3:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14). It means to trust in the final resurrection of the dead, of which Jesus' resurrection is the promissory note (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

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.

When does God reckon us as righteous? The verb tense of the underlying Greek could indicate a future time, such as the last judgment. But the Greek may also indicate something just about to happen or a certainty with uncertain timing. Perhaps Paul does not mean to be overly precise, as there are mysteries about the future that no one knows (Matthew 24:36). Or perhaps he signals the fact that justification occurs now *and* later as God continuously sustains a relationship with those who trust in His promises. This latter interpretation is in keeping with what can be referred to as the now/not yet of God's kingdom. We are *now* part of God's kingdom, but we are *not yet* experiencing its fullness (see Romans 8:22-25).

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

Paul's language echoes Isaiah 53:6, 12, which anticipated that the suffering servant would be handed over to His enemies to make "intercession for the transgressors" (compare similar language in 1 Corinthians 15:3). Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant was a key text for early Christians in understanding Jesus not as a tragic figure or a victim of state violence, but as the Messiah who died on behalf of others. His death was necessary to pay the price for sins, but it would have

been incomplete without a resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). Jesus joined in the suffering brought about by sin in order to free from sin's power those who trust God's promises.

Conclusion

A. We Are Not Alone

God counts us as righteous when we, like Abraham, trust the promises of redemption and live accordingly. We are not righteous because of the good we do or the evil we avoid, but because God acknowledges us as loyal to Him, staking all our hopes on His promises. And His offer of salvation extends to all because sin has wrecked us all. We stand together in both our need and our hope.

This unity of humanity may show itself in different ways. We might wallow together in our sin, growing increasingly hostile to each other and sacrificing our common humanity on the altar of greed, envy, pride, and hatred. Or we might acknowledge our need, trust in God's mercy, and so join in a community built on such a faith. The choice belongs to us.

How do we build a community on such a basis? A church full of people who trust in God's promises live generous, open-hearted, kind lives. They, like Abraham, show hospitality to strangers as though they were angels (Hebrews 13:2). Such a church values the whole trajectory of a person's life of faith, emphasizing neither failures nor heroic successes but faithfulness in the face of adversity (James 1:2-3) and God's seeming slowness to act (2 Peter 3:9). This community of believers knows itself to be saved, not because of its own merits but because of God's mercy.

B. Prayer

God of Abraham and all who trust You, focus our minds not on our own limitations but on Your great love for Your creation. Thank You for Jesus' sacrifice, which we accept in faith as reconciling us to You. In His name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Justification by faith is not an abstract idea but a reality for life.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before the learners enter, place a mini-size candy bar or similar treat under an opaque bowl on a table in the front of the room. Make sure no one looks underneath the bowl as they enter, and if anyone asks questions, simply respond, “Trust me.”

When the class begins, tell the learners, “There is a candy bar under this bowl. You will receive not just this candy bar but enough for everyone, if you believe me. You can choose to look under the bowl at any point. If you look, and it turns out I was telling the truth, you will not receive any candy bars. If you don’t look and I’m telling the truth, you will receive what I promised. Do you believe me? Why or why not?” Encourage learners to give reasons for their answers.

Pull out the bag of candy bars to show they do exist. Ask, “What about now? Do you believe that there is a candy bar under this bowl?” Again, encourage learners to respond fully. Have the learners share what makes them believe you or not. Then expand the discussion to what makes a promise trustworthy or untrustworthy. At the end of the activity, distribute candy bars to any learners who want them.

Transition by saying, “Today’s study looks at how trustworthy God’s promises are.”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Promises” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing responses in small groups. Not all prompts need answers if learners run out of time.

Into the Word

Introduce the words *imparted* (to give or convey) and *imputed* (to credit or ascribe to someone). Ask, “What was Abraham’s righteousness based on?” Ask volunteers to read these texts out loud: Romans 4:13-25; Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15-16; 21:1-21; and 22:1-19. Then divide the class

into small groups. Distribute handouts (you create) with the preceding Scripture references and the following questions for in-group discussions: 1—What is Paul’s view of Abraham and his faith? 2—What does the rest of Scripture show about Abraham’s faith? 3—What doubts did Abraham have, and what did he do in the face of those doubts? 4—How did Abraham’s actions ultimately show that he trusted God’s promises? Give the groups time to answer the questions before bringing the groups back together for whole-class discussion.

Check back in on the question of the basis of Abraham’s righteousness. The expected response should include God’s character and promises and His imputing righteousness to Abraham, not based on Abraham’s own merit or abilities.

Into Life

Distribute index cards and pens to all learners. Have each person write at the top of one side the name of someone who exhibited faith in the face of doubt or other challenges. This could be a biblical or other historical person or someone he or she knows personally. Ask learners to write down the action this person took in response to a specific hardship. Ask learners to record on the other side of the index card how God demonstrated His continued faithfulness and righteousness in that circumstance.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “A 90-Year-Old Bucket List” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing the conclusion in small groups.

In pairs, have learners share situations in which they either are experiencing God’s faithfulness. Have them brainstorm ways to celebrate God’s grace with loving and faithful action. Close with a prayer that learners will have faith like Abraham to believe God’s promises and trust in His faithfulness.

Reconciled to God

Devotional Reading: Acts 2:37-47
Background Scripture: Romans 5:1-11



Romans 5:1-11

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit III: Standing in the Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify what Christians have through faith.
2. Compare and contrast reconciliation with God to reconciliation between people.
3. Commit to sharing with an unbeliever a personal story of what life was like before and after being reconciled to God.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Boasting Now and Then
- B. Lesson Context

I. Effects of Justification (Romans 5:1-5)

- A. Peace with God (v. 1)
- B. Standing in Grace (v. 2)
- C. The Realm of Boasting (vv. 3-5)

II. Effects of the Cross (Romans 5:6-11)

- A. Reconciled to God (vv. 6-10)
 - The Right Time*
 - Forgiveness*
- B. We Rejoice (v. 11)

Conclusion

- A. Hope vs. Shame
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Boasting Now and Then

Boasting in modern American culture is often seen as unattractive, even offensive. We tend to see it as a mark of insecurity, arrogance and superiority, and/or a disregard for the self-respect of others. We do make certain exceptions, such as when an underdog in a sporting event predicts a win for his or her team or celebrates an unexpected victory.

In ancient societies, however, boasting was part of the culture of warriors as they overcame their foes. Of course, the one boasting had to deliver on the words or risk looking foolish (1 Kings 20:11). But boasting itself did not seem problematic. People often thought of honor as a zero-sum game—“For me to increase my honor, I must diminish yours.” Boasting allowed individuals to position themselves in society, as long as they could deliver.

Paul offers a radical alternative to the Greco-Roman understanding of self-promotion, based on his understanding of Jesus’ death on the cross. He excluded it altogether because all are in the same position with respect to God (Romans 3:27; see lesson 10). Then Paul opened a new possibility for boasting, but not about our triumphs.

B. Lesson Context

Romans 5 depends entirely on Paul’s previous discussion of the human response to the gospel found in Romans 4. Paul has argued, based on the experience of Abraham, that the true basis for a relationship with God is trust in His promises, that is, faith (see lesson 11). Chapter 5 extends the argument.

Our text today makes an important argument about why followers of Jesus both build their lives based on trust in God’s promises yet still experience hardship. Those suffering might wonder whether the new era of God’s mercy had dawned or not. In the past, prophets had revealed certain hardships to be God’s judgment on sin (examples: Numbers 14:20-23; Jeremiah 21:4-14). Is a Christian’s suffering also God’s judgment?

Elsewhere, Paul boasted about his own suffering as evidence of God’s work in his life (2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 11:23-30). Paul would go on to be

executed in Rome in AD 67 or 68. In his estimation, this surely was another opportunity to imitate Christ (Philippians 1:21; 3:7-11). The transformation to be like Christ has several parts, including a new understanding of suffering, reconciliation, growing friendship with God, and ultimately rescue from the power of sin and death. Paul explores each dimension of these implications in today's text.

I. Effects of Justification

(Romans 5:1-5)

A. Peace with God (v. 1)

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

Because God declares us accepted based on our *faith* in the Messiah, Jesus, this trust yields certain effects. Justification is not simply an accounting trick God makes. It begins a transformation of life.

We includes both Jews and Gentiles, with God showing no partiality to either. Because of God's work to keep the ancient promises to Abraham, everyone can have the kind of *peace* of which Paul speaks. The concept of peace had political implications for first-century subjects of Rome. By a mixture of force and political maneuvering, the Roman Empire had built the *Pax Romana* ("the Roman peace," lasting from 27 BC to AD 180). In contrast to peace enforced at the point of the sword, God offers genuine reconciliation of all people to himself through Jesus' faithful obedience (see Romans 5:19). Paul exhorts the Romans to have peace among themselves (14:19). Peace with God leads to (or should lead to) peace among followers of God when exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23).

What Do You Think?

How do you experience peace with God?

Digging Deeper

What practices might you adjust to have a deeper awareness of your reconciled status with God?

B. Standing in Grace (v. 2)

2a. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.

Access to God's *grace* does not derive from an accident of birth or even from doing good deeds. It comes *by faith* in God's gracious offer of mercy. When *we stand*, we take confidence in God's promise, building our lives on it (compare Matthew 5:24-25). Because Jesus trusted God, those who follow him may do so as well. Regarding the access that results, see also Ephesians 2:18; 3:12.

2b. And rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

We come to the major assertion of our passage. The word *glory* draws on an old biblical theme with several dimensions. Some texts use the word to refer to God's overwhelming presence among human beings (examples: Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:11; Ezekiel 1:28). The Psalms use the term to refer to God's splendor in Heaven, which is accessible in controlled ways to humans on earth (examples: Psalms 24:8-10; 29:9; 79:9). God's glory also appears when saving humans (example: Isaiah 40:5).

The final example is especially fitting here. The glory of God comes to light in the saving work of Jesus in his crucifixion and resurrection (Romans 6:4). God's glory is also evident in the life of the church (see 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 4:6) and at the final judgment, when all things will become subject to God and open to His full presence (see Romans 8:18; 9:23). For this reason, we *rejoice* in expectant *hope* that God has forgiven us and given us new life now and in Heaven.

C. The Realm of Boasting (vv. 3-5)

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

This second translation *glory* creates a wordplay that does not exist in the original Greek text since the words being translated aren't the same. The word translated "glory" here is translated "boast" in 2 Corinthians 10:8, 13; etc.; that is the sense here as well. With this word, Paul opens the possibility that Christians might celebrate, not only while experiencing pleasant things but also *in tribulations*. These words do not refer to mild

annoyances or everyday problems but to devastating experiences. Tribulation can result from doing evil (Romans 2:9), though this is not the sense here. Instead, we think of tribulation that confronts the faithful who overcome it by the power of Christ's love (see 8:35; compare 2 Corinthians 1:4; 2:4; 4:17) and patience (Romans 12:12). Such hardship is an opportunity for God's grace to be revealed.

Many ancient people believed in the value of bearing suffering, not as an absolute good but as an important feature of the wise life. Paul is not arguing for a masochistic view of life, but instead that troubles and pain need not diminish our joy in Christ nor define our self-understanding. Suffering can nurture *patience* if we face the tribulation with the proper spiritual attitude. For Paul, growth occurred in the context of the mutual love between God and humankind (see Romans 5:5, below). It does so because the suffering itself is part of God's movement in the present age to bring about the new era that commenced at Calvary and comes to full blossom at the Last Judgment.

Boasting in tribulation makes sense not because of the suffering itself but because of the consequences of endurance. Yet such boasting would have seemed mad to Paul's ancient audience, just as it may to a modern one. Proper boasting should focus on God's achievements, which become most visible in human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:1-10).

What Do You Think?

What role does "glorying" in tribulations play in producing the characteristics that Paul lists?

Digging Deeper

What cautions should you heed when sharing this verse with someone currently going through tribulations?

4. And patience experience; and experience, hope.

The chain of words in verses 4-5 does not imply a straightforward progression from one virtue to another. Rather, the apparent progression reveals the close relationship among the qualities Paul

lists. A willingness to endure hardship strengthens a person's *experience* and makes it possible to *hope* in a better future. In context, the translation *experience* is difficult. When we consider that the same Greek word is translated "proof" in reference to Timothy's character (Philippians 2:22; compare 2 Corinthians 2:9; 13:3), we can conclude here that experience is not the neutral event itself but the positive effect it can have on forming one's character. Experience should be understood in the positive sense of a high level of integrity that has developed through difficulties. Paul uses the same word several other times in his letters, always to praise people who have faced hardship with courage and love for God and their fellow human beings ("trial" in 2 Corinthians 8:2; etc.).

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.

Here Paul draws on an old biblical theme according to which God vindicated His people's *hope* through their restoration to a right relationship with Him (examples: Isaiah 49:5-7; Jeremiah 33:6-26; Ezekiel 20:33-44). Those who have hope in God's saving work, even if they experience social isolation or persecution, still have God's approval. Therefore, they cannot be shamed in any lasting way.

God's love is the source of honor. The Greek verb translated *shed abroad* often refers to the way *the Holy Ghost* comes to followers of Jesus (examples: Acts 2:17, 33; 10:45; Titus 3:6). Here, God's *love* is shed abroad, indicating the abundance that believers receive.

In the Old Testament, the heart indicates the seat of thinking and reason, not primarily of emotion (example: Genesis 17:17). God had promised to recreate Israel's heart so the nation could live in harmony with God and one another (Jeremiah 32:39; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26). The prophets called the people to repentance while also making clear that Israel's heart surgery depended on God. Paul expands that vision even further by including the Gentiles. Paul clarifies that older tradition by speaking not of observing Torah with a new heart but of dwelling in God's love and loving Him in return (compare Matthew 22:37-40).

II. Effects of the Cross

(Romans 5:6-11)

A. Reconciled to God (vv. 6-10)

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

Many scholars believe this verse quotes a saying that was circulating in the Roman church. The main argument for this position is that elsewhere Paul speaks of weakness as a positive attribute rather than as something to be overcome (2 Corinthians 12:5-10; 13:4). If this proposal is correct, it is in keeping with Paul's working to build bridges to his audience, especially when it included many strangers (example: Romans 1:8-15).

The evidence for Paul's claim that suffering borne faithfully produces spiritual growth comes from the life of *Christ* himself (compare Hebrews 5:8). Christ suffered patiently and voluntarily in part because He knew what would be accomplished through His death (see Philippians 2:6-11). His followers may imitate Him in that action (see 2:5).

Paul describes the prior status of all Jesus-followers as both weak and *ungodly*. This is a very strong term in a Greco-Roman context. It might refer to those who ignored the gods or even committed sacrilege against holy places. Christ did not die for the righteous but for the wicked (Hebrews 3-10; etc.). We were helpless to overcome death and evil until God's presence among humankind overcame those dangerous forces. God's mercy extends to those who need it most.

The Right Time

My young children were excited because their mother and I had purchased tickets to ride an Amtrak train for our midwestern vacation. We had never traveled by train before, so I made sure we arrived at the station much more than an hour prior to the arrival of the train so we would have no snafus. We sat in the empty building and waited eagerly for the train to arrive.

We did not know, and there was no one to tell us, that we should have been standing outside the building near the tracks in order to be seen and able to board. When the train arrived right on

time, it sped straight past. The children cried, and I felt helpless. I was holding a train ticket that was no longer worth the paper it was printed on.

Unlike that train, Christ arrived on time *and* picked up those who were not even at the station to wait for Him. He died for the ungodly! And now is the right time to make sure you've boarded His train! —J. M.

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

The distinction between a *righteous man* and a *good man* is a bit unclear. Probably the latter term refers to a benefactor, or more generically, someone who has done tremendous good for someone else. One might die for such a person as an act of appreciation, loyalty, or simple nobility of heart.

What Do You Think?

What is the biggest sacrifice you would consider making for someone you know and love?

Digging Deeper

What sacrifice would you make on behalf of someone you don't know? someone you consider an enemy?

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

The motives described in verse 7 do not apply to Jesus. Christ's death does not fit the normal pattern of brave, noble deaths for a good cause or as acts marking people as superior to others. Such deaths do occur in the ordinary world, and while they often deserve praise, Jesus' death is not comparable to theirs. It far exceeds them: *Christ died for* those who had done nothing for Him and never could. Paul's point is not found in the difference between a righteous person and a good one but instead between those for whom some person might die and those for whom Jesus died.

It is, therefore, highly inappropriate, or in fact, blasphemous, to compare Jesus' death to any other. Christ's death has no parallel because the reason for it has no parallel. The sustained human

commitment to sin necessitated Christ's saving work. God shows love toward us by the radical nature of Jesus' death for strangers and enemies.

What Do You Think?

What circumstances make it challenging to show God's love to unbelievers?

Digging Deeper

Which verses lead you to pray regarding these difficulties?

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

Much more (also in Romans 5:10, below) introduces an argument from the most difficult task to one less difficult. God has overcome the power of sin and death. Since Jesus has already done the hard work of saving us from the power of sin and death, He can do the much easier work of saving us from God's *wrath* against unrighteousness (see 1:18). Wrath in this context refers to the last judgment (see 2:5-9), in which the true distinctions between good and evil become unmistakable to all. In that moment of truth-telling, the truth of God's mercy shown in Christ's death will win through. Those who trust God's promises to save through His Son will see their hope become a reality.

The substitutionary death of Jesus paid the price for our sins, a price we could never pay on our own (see Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Rather, by entering the world of sin and death that humans experience (Hebrews 2:17), God in Christ overcame those great evils and ended the estrangement that separated humanity from our creator. The end of that alienation from God came about because of His actions, not ours. We can be at peace with God. We are new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17); we wear a new name, and we have a new destiny.

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.

The final two verses of this section build on the idea of salvation in two ways. First, Paul asserts that Christ's death has made possible our recon-

ciliation *to God*. While Paul did consider humans as active participants in the process (example: 2 Corinthians 5:20), here he emphasizes God's work rather than human responses. It is puzzling that Paul includes himself among God's (former) enemies since he had always obeyed God with a sincere heart even when he badly misunderstood God's desires (see Acts 22:3-4; Philippians 3:4-6). Yet this understanding reflects his conclusion that "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23) and that keeping the Law of Moses could not reconcile one to God without God's mercy.

Paul's new thought is that humanity can be saved by Christ's *life*. We participate in the life He has brought about through His actions at Calvary. Those who trust God can anticipate rescue from the forces of evil. They will experience Christ's life in their own lives (see also Galatians 2:19-20).

What Do You Think?

How do you participate in Jesus' ministry of reconciliation?

Digging Deeper

What role does your congregation play in calling your community to reconciliation in Christ?

Forgiveness

On October 22, 2006, 11-year-old Kathryn Miller rode with her Amish family in their horse-drawn buggy, returning home from a hymn sing. Mark Vandyke had been drinking. Just after 9:00 p.m., he smashed into the buggy with his truck. The impact killed Kathryn and injured her seven family members. Mark fled the scene, only stopping when he crashed into a car. Mark was arrested and charged for his crimes.

While in prison, Mark received an unexpected visitor: Kathryn's dad, Levi Miller. Even more shocking was Levi's mission: to offer Mark forgiveness. The day Mark was convicted, the judge referred to this forgiveness, offering it as a source of peace to Mark as he served his sentence.

Without our sin, the cross would not have been necessary. However, the Father chose to forgive us

and not hold His Son's death against us. And God went beyond what Levi could offer: God *pardoned* us and took away our penalty! Do you experience the peace of God's forgiveness? If so, do you pass it along? See Colossians 3:13. —J. M.

B. We Rejoice (v. 11)

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

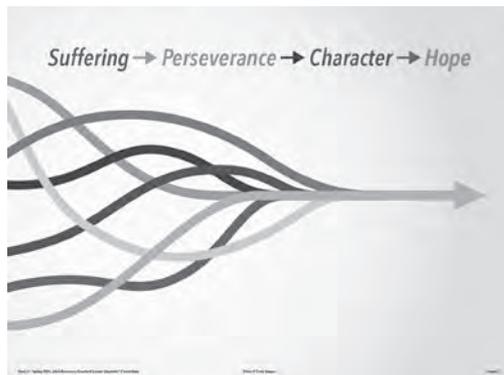
Salvation has tangible results in one's attitude toward daily life. The word translated *joy* is also translated "boast" in Romans 2:17, 23, and that is the sense here. Verse 3 raised the possibility of celebrating even the worst parts of life as opportunities to experience God's mercy. But here, the rejoicing focuses on the mercy itself. Those who trust God celebrate the fact that God's mercy extends to all, not just to themselves. They see themselves as part of the grand story of redemption from the power of evil and share that joy with others. Most importantly, their joy comes *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. That is, He is the author, inspirer, and basis of their words of celebration.

The Greek word translated *atonement* is the noun form of the verb translated "reconciled" in Romans 5:10 (above). Elsewhere, the *King James Version* translates this noun as a form of the word *reconciliation*, and that is the sense here (compare Romans 11:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). The last reference is relevant here: God's act of reconciliation involved not counting our sins against us. God does not pretend them away, but He refuses to let them define the relationship with us.

Conclusion

A. Hope vs. Shame

All human groups believe certain actions are respectable and others unrespectable, with many gradations in between the two poles of honor and shame. Because they followed a crucified Messiah, early Christians had to rethink their cultures' understanding of honor and shame from the ground up. This rethinking allowed them to endure the suffering that families and govern-



Visual for Lesson 12. Discuss as a class how the threads of suffering, perseverance, and character can come together to produce hope.

ments imposed on them for their faith. They concluded that human life was not a contest for a limited supply of honor and that the true fount of honor was God. The God who raised Jesus from the dead would raise them too. They endured suffering, not for its own sake, but because in suffering, they could imitate Jesus Christ. That radical hope allowed them to face public disgrace or private strife with generous hearts and confident minds.

It still can today. The ability to endure suffering as Christ did shows that the new era is in the process of dawning and that God's promises to protect those who trust Him are reliable.

B. Prayer

God of our Lord Jesus Christ and of all who follow Him, we thank You for not allowing us to be shamed by our failures or even our sins. You have welcomed us into Your household as honored members, and for that, we are grateful. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We have peace with God because Christ paid sin's price for us.

How to Say It

Messiah Meh-sigh-uh.
Pax Romana (Latin) Pahks Ro-mah-nah.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Write the words *peace* and *truce* on the board. As a class, define the concepts, paying attention to similarities and differences between them. Expect to hear that peace is a state of reconciliation, whereas a truce can be only a kind of cease-fire before hostilities resume. Ask for examples of peace and of truce. Then ask which word best describes reconciliation. What other words can be added to describe reconciliation?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Vocabulary Quiz” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete the exercise as indicated. When pairs have finished discussing, give the class an opportunity to share their responses.

After either of these activities, say, “Reconciliation between God and us required His action on our behalf. Today’s lesson will explore what our reconciliation required and what it means for us.”

Into the Word

Ask volunteers to read Romans 5:1-11. Divide the class into small groups and distribute to each group a handout (you create) with the following questions to help them compare reconciliation with God and reconciliation between people: 1—Who is responsible for initiating the reconciliation? (God; one of the people involved) 2—What occurs in the process of reconciliation, and how is reconciliation achieved? (Christ reconciles us to God through His sacrifice; one or both parties compromise.) 3—What is the goal of the reconciliation, or what does it lead to? (Peace and relationship.) 4—What happens if the reconciliation is not achieved? (We remain in sin, separated from God; our relationship with others is broken.) 5—What is the relationship like before reconciliation? (Lost, alone, dead in sin; broken, upset.)

Encourage learners to ask and answer other questions as well to compare and contrast the two types of reconciliation more fully. Remind participants that these questions are just prompts; they don’t need to answer every question.

Bring the groups back together for whole-class discussion. Draw two large interlocking circles on the board, with one labeled “God” and the other labeled “People.” Using learners’ responses, fill in the diagram with the similarities and differences between reconciliation with God and reconciliation between people.

Into Life

Distribute index cards and pens to the learners. Challenge them to quickly outline what life was like before they were reconciled to God compared to after. It might help to think of a specific personal story from before reconciliation and then contrast it to a similar situation after and how it was different because of their reconciliation. Remind them to only write enough to remember the basic ideas. After a minute, have them practice sharing their story in pairs. Once both people have shared, switch to another set of pairs. If time allows, ask for one or two volunteers to share their stories with the entire class. Encourage the learners to share this story with an unbeliever sometime in the next week.

Option. Ask volunteers from the class to share their own stories of difficult life circumstances and how God used those to develop godly characteristics in their lives.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Not Only So!” exercise from the activity page to be worked on individually and completed at home. Inform learners that you will allow time for volunteers to share at the beginning of next week’s class.

After either activity, pray for learners to experience the peace of reconciliation with God in the week to come.

Who Has Believed?

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Background Scripture: Romans 10:1-21

Romans 10:1-17

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.

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.

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 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.

Key Text

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

Examining Our Faith

Unit III: Standing in the Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the seven Old Testament passages that Paul quotes.
2. Summarize how those seven quotations undergird Paul's argument.
3. State his or her personal responsibility in light of verses 14-15.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Life Is a Gigantic Prayer
- B. Lesson Context

I. Paul's Prayer (Romans 10:1-4)

- A. Heart's Desire (v. 1)
- B. Zeal Without Knowledge (vv. 2-3)
- C. Christ and the Law (v. 4)

II. The Word of Salvation (Romans 10:5-13)

- A. Righteousness by Faith (vv. 5-8)
- B. Trust in God (vv. 9-10)
The Language of Faith
- C. Faith Includes All (vv. 11-13)

III. Preaching Leads to Faith (Romans 10:14-17)

- A. How Will They Hear? (vv. 14-15)
The Lawyer of Good News?
- B. Who Has Believed? (vv. 16-17)

Conclusion

- A. Who May Be Saved?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Life Is a Gigantic Prayer

Preaching that does not come out of love for the people being addressed ultimately does not benefit the listening crowd. The Catholic activist Dorothy Day once commented on preaching that, "If people will not listen, one can still love, one can still find Christ in them to love." We need not strain ourselves in order to provide examples of leaders whose message sounded good but whose practice turned out to be destructive. In these instances, whatever good was done because of the beautiful words is largely undone because of the harm of the speaker's actions. As with all Christian practice, preaching without love is worthless (see 1 Corinthians 13).

The same is true for prayer. We might think of preaching as a prayer shared with an audience. The speaker presents the good news in the hope and prayer that God will work in the hearts of those who hear. And, when we find ourselves unable to preach in words, our actions can still be a prayer that the people who interact with us will find themselves turning to God.

B. Lesson Context

Just how comprehensive *is* the good news of Jesus the Messiah? The entire book of Romans is concerned with this question. Romans 1–8 sets forth proof of the need and extent of God's mercy available to those who trust Him with their lives. God has announced salvation for all who trust (see Romans 1:16-17). The gospel of grace has come to light for all. The extension of God's offer of salvation to Gentiles does not exclude Jews. Chapters 9–11 advance the discussion in part by considering the fate of Israel. The depth of God's love extends to Israel as well as the Gentiles (11:33-36).

Romans 10 reflects on Paul's hope that the good news that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord will also come to his fellow Jews. God promised salvation to Israel, and God keeps promises at all times. Therefore, the promise of salvation must come to Israel. The hard division between Jews and Christians did not occur until several generations after Paul's lifetime. Paul himself never used the word "Christians" in his writings, though

it had begun to circulate within the church. He likely did not anticipate the centuries of hostility between the two groups or the habit of those thinking themselves to be Christians of insulting and even persecuting Jews. The hard division that Paul experienced and wrote about was between Jews (whether Christ-followers or not) and Gentiles (whether God-fearers or not). The gospel of reconciliation and peace in Christ reaches all, allowing God both to keep the ancient promises to Israel and to add the Gentiles to the faithful community.

I. Paul's Prayer

(Romans 10:1-4)

A. Heart's Desire (v. 1)

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

Praying for God's salvation *for Israel* was probably habitual for Paul. His concern for his people—including family and friends—was reason enough to pray for the nation. The Scriptures he long had studied modeled praying for deliverance for Israel from its various foes (examples: Psalms 79; 85:4-7; 130:7-8). And there was an expectation, found particularly in the prophets' writings, that the nation would be restored after suffering for their sins (Isaiah 40:1-2; 49:14-26; Jeremiah 30:10-11; Ezekiel 40-48; etc.). Paul's prayers expanded to include that his people would turn to Christ and find eternal salvation in Him.

What Do You Think?

What group of people do you belong to that you long to see come to be saved?

Digging Deeper

How does your status in that group allow you to witness to the good news in ways that might be difficult for someone from "outside"?

B. Zeal Without Knowledge (vv. 2-3)

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

This verse and the next summarize Paul's under-

standing of the state of his Jewish contemporaries. Paul did not suggest that his fellow Jews were all pursuing evil ends, because that was clearly not true. Jews who did not follow Jesus still desired to follow God. But, Paul asserts, they misunderstood the trajectory of God's work and how their own Scriptures pointed to Jesus as their Messiah (compare Luke 24:25-32). Paul does not dismiss *zeal* for God as insignificant; he knew from personal experience that misdirected zeal could be turned to God's purposes (Acts 22:3-21; Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:6). Still, his people's zeal without *knowledge* of Christ prevented them from recognizing that God's long-anticipated provision for deliverance of His people (and indeed all nations) had finally been revealed (compare Acts 2:17-36).

What Do You Think?

When have you experienced zeal without knowledge?

Digging Deeper

Is there an occasion when zeal without knowledge only needs time and experience rather than intervention? Explain.

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.

Paul has argued that *God's righteousness* consists of extending salvation to all on the basis of trust in the work of Christ (Romans 4; see lesson 11). This verse echoes Romans 2:17-24, in which Paul criticized the attempt to make Jews out of Gentiles. Attempts to come to God on the basis of anything other than Christ, and especially on the basis of any human achievement, fail (compare Philippians 3:9). An approach to saving the Gentiles that tried to compel them to keep the Law of Moses (the Torah) neglected the deeper reality that the relationship to God always depends on faithful trust, not on the works themselves.

C. Christ and the Law (v. 4)

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

The word translated *end* can have the sense of

“the ultimate goal” in Greek, as it does here (compare Romans 6:22; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 1:9). The coming of the *Christ* (the Hebrew Messiah) and His activity in revealing God’s salvation to all human beings was always the goal *of the law*. And the Law of Moses itself pointed Israel to the work of God, as opposed to the law’s existing for its own sake. Paul did not expect the abolition of Torah but the completion of God’s promises (compare Matthew 5:17-20). Those who trust God’s work through Jesus have fulfilled the Torah’s overarching objectives.

II. The Word of Salvation

(Romans 10:5-13)

A. Righteousness by Faith (vv. 5-8)

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

Here and in Galatians 3:12, Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5: *The man which doeth those things shall live by them*. Paul did not oppose Jews keeping *the law*, and he accepted the idea that its instructions can guide a person to a wiser, more faithful life (see Romans 2:25; compare Psalm 119; James 1:22; 2:10-13). In this way, Jews who kept the Torah in faith did *live by them* and could experience the limited *righteousness* of striving to accomplish God’s will.

6-7. 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.) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

Paul next quotes Deuteronomy 30:12-13: *Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? . . . Who shall descend into the deep?* These verses are part of God’s promise that He would extend mercy to Israel after the nation experienced the consequences of breaking covenant and turned to Him in repentance and faith (see commentary on Romans 10:8, below).

Paul adds to these quotations two comments, the first being *that is, to bring Christ down from above*. This is characteristic of a typical Jewish style of reading. In this style, the reader-scholar

supplemented the original text by connecting it to a larger doctrinal point. Here, Paul’s point is that Christ’s descent into the human world (Philippians 2:7-8) was God’s work, not that of striving human beings. Salvation, therefore, comes from God and not from humans. The second comment, *to bring up Christ again from the dead*, connects the ancient text to the core Christian story of Jesus’ resurrection (Mark 16:6-7; etc.).

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.

The quotation continues, this time from Deuteronomy 30:13. In Deuteronomy *the word* (in context, the Law of Moses) is nearby, entering into the heart of those who love God with all their “heart, . . . soul, . . . and . . . might” (6:5). The Lord asserted His laws are neither hard to understand nor difficult to carry out (30:14), though people’s experience showed that perfect adherence was not possible (example: Acts 15:10). This puts keeping the law into stark contrast with the heroics of mythic people like Gilgamesh, who needed to climb to Heaven or cross the ocean depths to please their supposed gods. Unlike mythical ancient heroes, ordinary people could not go to Heaven or survive in the waters, but they didn’t need to in order to keep the Torah. It was accessible—as long as it was written on their hearts and not just in a book (consider 4:29; compare Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 11:19).

The word of faith that comes to believers, both Jews and Gentiles, is the trustworthy message that Paul has been preaching. The end of the verse sets up the next several sentences.

What Do You Think?

How do you keep the Word in your mouth and in your heart?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance your efforts with the Spirit’s work in this regard?

B. Trust in God (vv. 9-10)

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.

Paul links the confession of faith from one's *mouth* with the belief in one's *heart* and thus to the commitments of the whole person (compare Deuteronomy 6:5; see commentary on Romans 10:8, above). To confess *Jesus* as *Lord* is a radical commitment. It was obviously so in the first century AD when the Roman emperors claimed to be sons of their gods, and many gods were worshipped as sovereign. The confession "Jesus is Lord" was almost certainly a part of early Christian worship; it was definitely a statement used to indicate one's ultimate allegiance (see 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11). Anyone who can sincerely make that confession with their mouth and heart will see a changed life over time.

To *believe* that God has raised Jesus *from the dead* also means to trust that God has overcome the power of death itself (see Revelation 1:18). Salvation involves both the present and the future. We can understand being *saved* as a shorthand for the entire relationship that the redeemed person enjoys with God. The effects begin in our Spirit-led lives now and will culminate in everlasting life in Heaven.

This verse is sometimes interpreted as a description of the entry point into the Christian life. Yet Paul's vision goes beyond beginnings. Confession of Christ's lordship occurs daily, both in the face of opposition or hardship and in more peaceful times. It also involves witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12), making it a public commitment (Acts 19:18). The message of the gospel connects deeply to real lives, and those who hear it must internalize it and proclaim it.

What Do You Think?

What biblical examples come to mind of people who called on the Lord and were saved?

Digging Deeper

Do these examples suggest anything about the process of being saved? Why or why not?

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

The prior verse followed the sequence confess/believe in the order of Deuteronomy 30. But this verse follows a more intuitive order, with the commitments of *the heart* leading to the words of *the mouth*. (On the heart, see lesson 12 commentary on Romans 5:5.) When the heart and the mouth align in acknowledging the saving work of Christ, it becomes possible to experience both *righteousness* and *salvation*. Paul does not separate the realities of righteousness and salvation any more than he separates trust and confession (see 10:9, above). These all interconnect, each supporting the other.

The Language of Faith

I've taught all levels of Spanish as a second language. At higher levels, language acquisition assesses a person's ability to use their new vocabulary based on several elements. Among them are writing, reading, and imagining things with words.

It's always speaking that makes the difference in language learning. The ability to think in a second language is a form of high cognition because it's internalized. But speaking words that sound foreign takes boldness and courage. After all, the change of just one letter can be comical or downright embarrassing.

Paul encourages us to confess with our mouths, making a bold, courageous step in our faith. Have you learned the language of faith? What are you keeping to yourself instead of boldly proclaiming?
—O. P.

C. Faith Includes All (vv. 11-13)

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

Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 (also in Romans 9:33), which is part of a promise that God would rebuild Zion after its destruction. The quotation may not quite match how our English Bibles state Isaiah 28:16 because Paul is quoting from the ancient

How to Say It

Gilgamesh	<i>Gil-guh-mesh.</i>
Septuagint	<i>Sep-too-ih-jent.</i>
Torah (Hebrew)	<i>Tor-uh.</i>

Greek version known as the Septuagint. Paul may have read that text metaphorically so that the promised “stone” laid in Zion became a reference to the Messiah (compare Acts 4:11), although Paul does not spell out this connection.

The Bible often conceives of shame as a social condition, visible to all, rather than an inner, more private emotion (examples: Psalms 35:26; 132:18; Isaiah 42:17). Paul understands trust in God as the opposite of public humiliation. At the final judgment, those who trust in Jesus for deliverance from sins *shall not be ashamed* because our hope of salvation will be fully realized.

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.

This verse returns to the thesis statement of the book in Romans 1:16-17. The theme of God’s richness also appears in 2 Corinthians 8:9, which describes the work of Christ in terms of the foregoing of wealth. The image in both texts is of a king who bestows goods on subjects whenever they need them. By calling Jesus *Lord over all*, the verse emphasizes His close relationship to the Father and the universal scope of His kingdom.

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

This verse quotes Joel 2:32 (see also Acts 2:16-21), which is part of a passage about one instance of God’s rescuing Israel. Both Joel and Paul understand God as one who answers the sincere cries of people longing for help. Because Jesus is “Lord over all” (Romans 10:12), *whosoever* may *call upon* Him.

III. Preaching Leads to Faith

(Romans 10:14-17)

A. How Will They Hear? (vv. 14-15)

14-15a. 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? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?

How do people know to *call on* God? The answer becomes a sustained explanation of the nature and purpose of Christian preaching. The

act of proclaiming the gospel ultimately comes from the God who sends out proclaimers, not from their own concerns or abilities. Paul always understood his own mission as following God’s leading (examples: Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1). Here, we see a logical progression: a preacher must be sent so that an audience can hear the gospel and come to faith.

15b. As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

The evidence Paul offers for God’s calling messengers to preach is a quotation of Isaiah 52:7. That text, in turn, is part of a long discussion of the *glad tidings* to ancient Israel: God was ending the suffering of the Babylonian exile. The exiled people would soon return home and rebuild the ruined cities, especially Jerusalem (examples: Ezra 6:13-18; Nehemiah 6:15). The people would experience a good life in their own land, complete with the healing of physical and social ills (see Isaiah 61:1-4).

An important characteristic of Christian preaching is the proclamation of *peace* between God and humanity. When one experiences reconciliation with the Lord, it becomes possible to be reconciled to other people as well. Christian teaching and preaching should, therefore, be filled with joy and hope because of the *good things* God wants to accomplish in us and through us.

What Do You Think?

What books of the Bible most heavily informed your faith? Explain.

Digging Deeper

What books of the Bible have influenced you least? What value might you anticipate from giving one of those books another look?

The Lawyer of Good News?

A few years ago, my aunt received a vague voicemail from a lawyer. Her first reaction was worry; why was this person reaching out? She had some ideas, none of them good. For this reason, my aunt decided to call the lawyer back, with her family in the same room for moral support.

To their collective amazement, the call was about some money she was inheriting. Her sister, whom she had not seen in decades, had passed. Because her sister had no other family, my aunt received the entire inheritance. When the call was finished, my aunt resolved to express her appreciation to the lawyer who had shared this unexpected news.

Messengers who bring good news are welcomed and appreciated because of what they carry, regardless of who they are. And regardless of who *we* are, Paul challenges us to carry out the beautiful job of telling others the gospel. How will *you* proclaim the glad tidings this week? —O. P.

B. Who Has Believed? (vv. 16-17)

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

Paul quotes Isaiah 53:1, a text that is part of the prophetic reflection on the fact that people do not always listen to God's Word (compare Isaiah 6:9-11; compare John 12:37-41). In its immediate context, Isaiah 53:1 continues the account of the Suffering Servant, noting the disbelief of many.

In spite of that disbelief, Paul's job, and the job of all Christ-followers, is to keep celebrating the good news and to live lives that reflect our faith in Jesus (see 2 Corinthians 4). After all, we might plant the seed and water it, but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). Our responsibility is not the outcome but our faithfulness to report *the gospel*.

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

There is a contrast between verses 16 and 17. Both draw on an idea from the Old Testament prophets regarding how their audience would react. Verse 16 emphasizes the negative side of unbelief, while verse 17 understands the power of *the word* to be so great that it leads people to trust God. Paul was confident that both Jews and Gentiles would learn to trust God once they understood the nature of the gospel.

Conclusion

A. Who May be Saved?

The offer of salvation comes through the preach-



Visual for Lesson 13. While discussing the questions with verse 9, talk about how the first two imperatives on this visual relate to the third.

ing of the Word as one of hope and expectation. God is *for* us and wishes to be *with* us. When we trust the reliability of that offer, we can enter into a life of joyful hope, which the Bible calls salvation. That life begins now and extends into eternity.

In Romans 10, Paul speaks of those who cry out to God, confess Jesus as Lord, and so receive salvation. Like the prophets of Israel, who called on their people to turn from evil toward good, Paul makes a direct connection between the words that humans speak and God's willingness to save. The words must be sincerely uttered, but the key actor in the drama of salvation is God. Preaching connects closely to prayer as we seek to conform our desires to God's desires. It must be full of hope, inviting listeners to trust a gracious God.

This readiness to hear comes from God's passionate love for the creation. In truth, God created the world originally out of love, and He sustains the creation out of the same love. In an environment of love, a needy humanity crying out for help receives a willing ear.

B. Prayer

O God who makes promises and keeps them over generations and long centuries, our prayer is for all people near and far to come to know Jesus. Send us! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Confess and believe that Jesus is Lord!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Option. If you used the “Not Only So!” exercise from lesson 12, allow volunteers to share now.

Write on the board *Real-Life Heroes* and *Heroes in Mythology* as the heads of two columns. Have the class brainstorm people who belong in both categories. (In addition to characters known from ancient stories, *Heroes in Mythology* could include comic book, movie, or folk heroes, among others.) Once two sizable lists have been created, ask learners to consider which characteristics are likely shared between the groups (bravery, a sense of moral duty, honesty, and so on) and which characteristics more likely belong to one or the other.

Decide as a class whether the following statement is true: heroes in mythology conquer *impossible* odds with *supernatural* abilities, while real-life heroes conquer *great* odds through the extraordinary application of *natural* human abilities. Tweak as desired to highlight the differences between a mythic hero and a real-life hero. Lead into the lesson by saying, “God does not require us to be heroes to live according to His will. Our lesson focuses on the good news of the hero who accomplished what we could not do for ourselves.”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Zeal Without Knowledge” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. Say, “Paul wrote to the Romans about the importance of understanding what Jesus has done for us—and of sharing that knowledge.”

Into the Word

Distribute printed copies of Romans 10:1-17 (you create), with a list of the following Old Testament passages. Leave out the references in parentheses—they are for the leader’s reference only: Leviticus 18:5 (*v. 5*); Deuteronomy 30:12 (*v. 6*); Deuteronomy 30:13 (*v. 8*); Isaiah 28:16 (*v. 11*);

Joel 2:32 (*v. 13*); Isaiah 52:7 (*v. 15*); and Isaiah 53:1 (*v. 16*). In pairs or groups of three, have participants match up each Old Testament quotation to its use in today’s Scripture passage.

Ask the following discussion questions: 1—What is Paul’s overall argument? 2—How is Paul using each quotation to bolster his argument? 3—What steps does Paul describe in the progression of salvation? 4—What is the difference between the actions of the heart and the mouth? Bring the class back together to discuss. Consult the commentary for answers to these questions, as well as any that arise from learners. Tie this discussion back to the Into the Lesson exercise you chose by exploring together how that concept (either heroics or zeal without knowledge) relates to the gospel proclamation.

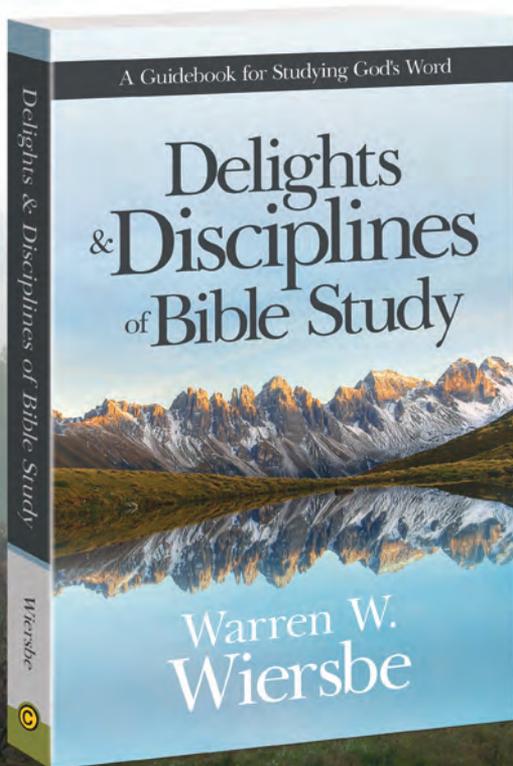
Into Life

Have the learners think through the progression Paul describes in verses 14-15 (hearing, believing, preaching), and ask, “Based on these verses, what is your personal responsibility?” Give learners a one-minute time limit to think individually, and then share their reflections with a partner. Ask: 1—Does Paul’s progression seem complete? Why or why not? 2—What, if anything, would you add to this progression? Provide verses to support this assertion. 3—Where are you in this progression? 4—What, if any, next steps should you take? If there are no next steps, why not?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Who Has Believed?” exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before sharing their answers with a partner.

After either activity, lead the class in a closing prayer that learners will be attentive to the Spirit’s leading this week as they find opportunities to grow in their belief in and preaching of the gospel in both word and deed.

Bible Study Should Be an Adventure

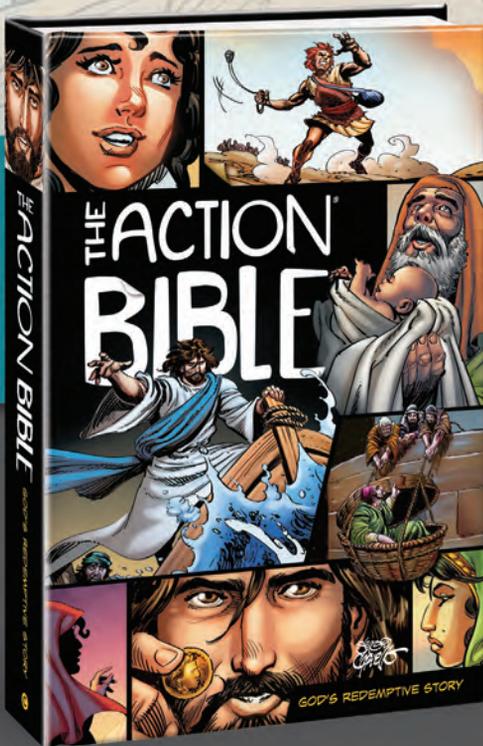


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