

DIRECTION[®]

THE BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR ADULTS

CALL
IN THE **New**
Testament

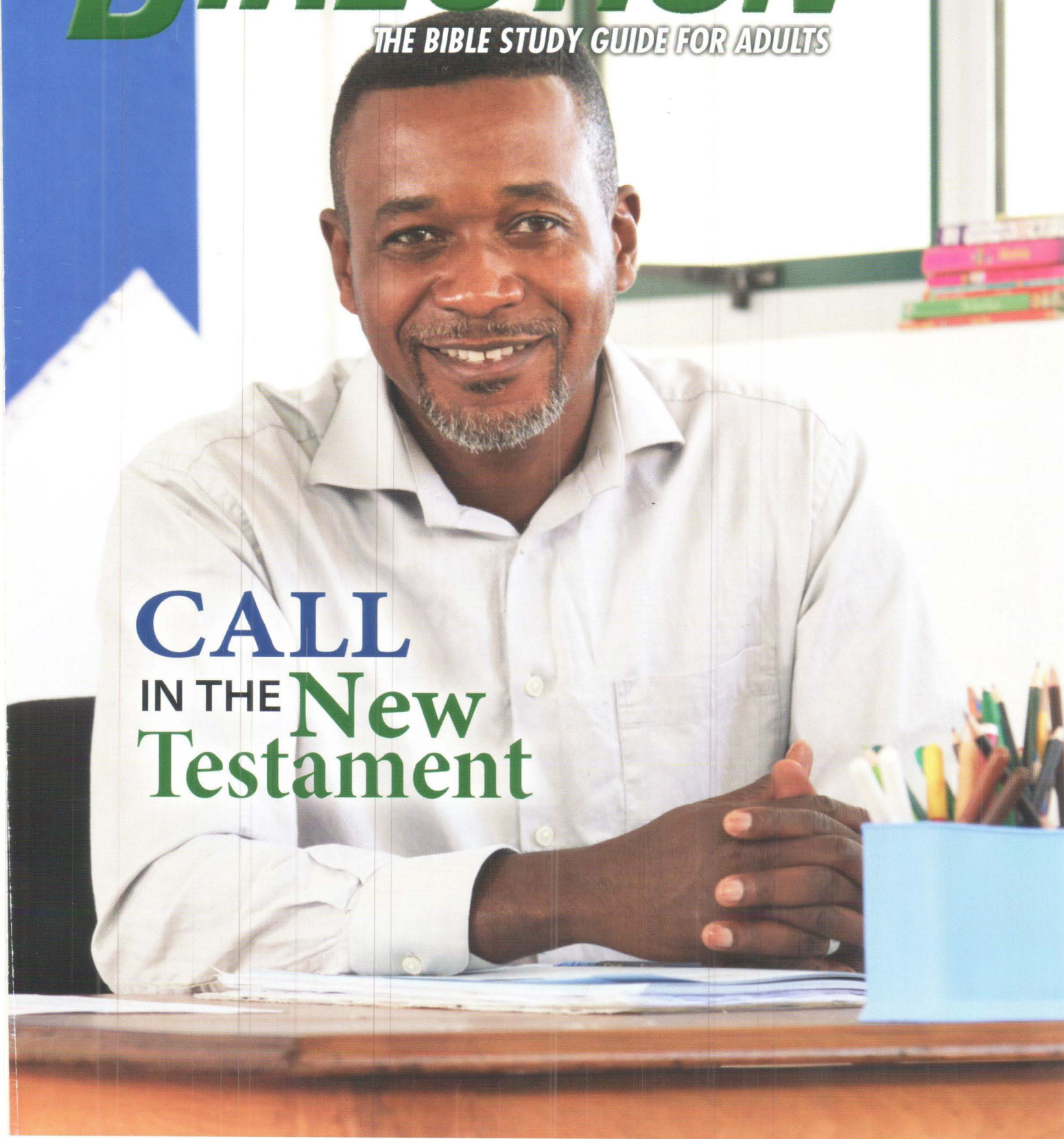


TABLE OF CONTENTS

DIRECTION®

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THEME: Call in The New Testament

December 2020 Quarter At-A-Glance 1

BIBLE STUDY LESSONS

UNIT 1: THE BEGINNING OF A CALL

December

- 6** Called through Heritage 2
- 13** Called Before Birth. 7
- 20** A Regal Response to Holy Light 12
- 27** Called to Prepare the Way. 17

UNIT 2: JESUS AND CALLS IN HIS MINISTRY

January

- 3** Called to Proclaim 23
- 10** Called to Significance 28
- 17** Called to Heal 33
- 24** Called as the Intercessor 38

UNIT 3: THE CALL OF WOMEN

- 31** Prophesying Daughters. 43

February

- 7** Called to Evangelize 48
- 14** Mary Magdalene: A Faithful Disciple. 53
- 21** Priscilla: Called to Minister. 58
- 28** Lydia: Called to Serve 63

Quarter At-A-Glance

December 2020

Call in The New Testament

This quarter examines God's call in stories from the New Testament. The greatest call came to Jesus. Other calls in the New Testament led to the extension of Christian ministry into the world.

UNIT 1 • The Beginning of a Call

This unit has four sessions from the Gospel of Matthew. Lesson 1 highlights the heritage of Jesus. Lesson 2 tells the story of Jesus' birth. Lesson 3 speaks of the witness of the Magi to Jesus' call as the Messiah. Lesson 4 tells of the call of John the Baptist.

UNIT 2 • Jesus and Calls in His Ministry

This unit presents four lessons about Jesus' ministry. Luke emphasizes Jesus' call to proclamation and ministry and identifies Jesus as one who calls followers. Mark speaks to Jesus' call to a ministry of healing. John gives us a look at Jesus' call as the intercessor for those who follow Him.

UNIT 3 • The Call of Women

This five-week study highlights women in ministry. The first lesson focuses on prophesying women mentioned in the New Testament. The second lesson focuses on the Samaritan woman's evangelistic ministry. Lesson 3 explores Mary Magdalene's call to unwavering discipleship. Lesson 4 gives an opportunity to study the impact of Priscilla's ministry. The final lesson focuses on Lydia's call to service and hospitality.

Called Through Heritage

Bible Background • MATTHEW 1:1–17; HEBREWS 1 | Printed Text • MATTHEW 1:1–6, 16–17; HEBREWS 1:1–5 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 102:12–22

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will GRASP the significance of Jesus' earthly heritage and His heavenly origins, WONDER at the depth and scope of God's eternal plan to bring salvation through Jesus, and WORSHIP Jesus as God's definitive word to humanity.

In Focus

Lydia loved to study her family genealogy. She found it so interesting to learn about the different people in her past. Connecting with her history gave her a stronger sense of who she was on many levels. As a result of her genealogy research, Lydia discovered why she couldn't settle down. Like many of her ancestors, she shared an inherent need to be free. Lydia didn't think "commitment" would ever be part of her vocabulary.

One thing Lydia didn't have in common with the people in her past was faith in God. She couldn't even commit to the people in her life. How could she commit to a God she couldn't even see? Joe was probably the closest to a best friend that Lydia had ever had. He was a Christian and had witnessed to Lydia on several occasions, but she was a hard case. Joe was aware of her interest in genealogies, so he challenged Lydia.

Joe told her, "If you research the genealogy of Jesus and still come to the conclusion that He's not really the Messiah, then I'll never bother you about your unbelief again."

Lydia accepted the challenge. Two weeks into her research, she accepted Jesus as her personal Savior and Lord. Ironically, Lydia discovered that real freedom requires commitment. By committing her life to Jesus, she was freed from the chains of sin. Now, Lydia tells people how her love of genealogy led her to Christ.

In today's study, researching the ancestry of Jesus will bless you, too, with a closer walk with Him. What meaning does your family history hold for you today?

Keep in Mind

"[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:2, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Matthew 1:1** The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;

4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;

5 And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are

fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.

Hebrews 1:1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:

4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

The People, Places, and Times

Joseph and Mary. Both of Jesus' earthly parents were descendants of King David. Joseph was Jesus' earthly and legal father—though not His biological father—and was engaged to Mary when Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was a righteous man (Matthew 1:19), meaning he had spiritual discernment and was sensitive to the guidance of the Lord, regardless of the consequences. Mary was chosen by God Himself to be Jesus' mother—to carry, bear, and raise the Savior of the world. The couple had children together after Jesus' birth.

Genealogical Lists. Bible genealogies, though cumbersome for the modern reader, are essential for the worldview of the Bible's original audiences. The lists let the audience feel the

weight of the incredible span of years through which God has been working out His plan of cultivating a people for Himself. Genealogies also link Scriptural stories, which can seem far off, with physical, verifiable history. The term “begat” or “fathered” in Scripture can denote an ancestor, not necessarily a direct, biological parent (1 Kings 15:11; 2 Kings 18:3; 22:2). This is not done in a duplicitous manner to obscure timelines or unsavory relations, but to streamline the story and highlight the ancestors who are relevant to the author's purpose.

Background

The Gospels are about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Savior. The Old Testament in its entirety lays the groundwork for the birth of the Messiah. It is a bridge

connecting the humanness of Jesus—the son of Mary and step-son of Joseph—to the supernatural Christ the King, the Son of God. Delving into the human genealogy of Christ far surpasses the mystery of uncovering our family ancestry. As we search name by name—from Abraham, to Boaz, to Solomon—we realize that all the pieces fit together and give us a perfect picture of Christ.

The original readers of the Letter to the Hebrews faced a dilemma. As Jews, they practiced Judaism all their lives. When the apostles and other Christian believers presented the Good News of salvation to them, many turned to Christ as Lord and Savior. However, some were beginning to wonder how an unknown son of a carpenter from an obscure village called Nazareth could be greater than their forefathers and prophets like Moses. These harried believers needed to be reminded of the essential truth of their new faith. The writer of Hebrews demonstrated that Jesus Christ is superior to all others because He was born of God.

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus' Diverse Ancestry (Matthew 1:1–6)
2. Jesus' Place in History (vv. 16–17)
3. Jesus' True Heritage (Hebrews 1:1–5)

In Depth

1. Jesus' Diverse Ancestry (Matthew 1:1–6)

Matthew begins by summarizing that Jesus is descended from Abraham and David. God made a covenant with Abraham that from his lineage all the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). God also promised David that an Eternal King would come from his seed (Psalm 89:3–4). This King and global blessing is Jesus Christ.

While establishing Christ as the heir of the covenant and the throne, Matthew's genealogy also refuses to hide the sinners and Gentiles in Jesus' family tree. Tamar resorted to prostitution to force her father-in-law Judah to fulfill his promise of a child through his family. The twins, Perez and Zerah, were the result of that union and have their place in Christ's family (Genesis 38). The Canaanite Rahab was a pagan and perhaps a prostitute (Joshua 2:11), but heard of the awesome power of God and decided to join God's people. Rahab's son Boaz married another foreigner who became a faithful follower of God, Ruth. Even the great King Solomon was born from a marriage that began with deceit and murder (2 Samuel 11:2–17).

In what ways has God redeemed the negative parts of your family history and made them into something beautiful? How has your family included those who were not born into the family?

2. Jesus' Place in History (vv. 16–17)

While Joseph was the man who reared Jesus, he is not Jesus' true father. Nevertheless, Jesus was heir to all the genealogical history of earthly ancestry. Despite what we might see as family “baggage” He “grew in wisdom and in stature” (Luke 2:52, NLT).

Through the list of his earthly heritage, Matthew grounds Jesus in Jewish history. Abraham was the Father of the Faith. David was the king of the Promise. The period of the Babylonian exile saw the vast loss of life and the loss of God's presence in the Temple. Just as fourteen generations passed between each of these major events in Jewish history, now fourteen more generations have passed since the exile. In this presentation of lineage, Matthew shows the progression of God's plan in salvation history.

Matthew's genealogy emphasizes the Jewishness of Jesus. How would you present your

genealogy to emphasize your ethnicity? Are you able to trace the genealogy of your faith through those who led you to salvation?

3. Jesus' True Heritage (Hebrews 1:1-5)

As already mentioned, Joseph is not Jesus' true father. While Matthew communicates Jesus' humanness through His earthly father's genealogy, the writer of Hebrews affirms Jesus' divinity through His Heavenly Father. To support this argument, the author turns to Scripture. He first quotes from a messianic psalm (Psalm 2:7). While this psalm's promise was already metaphorically fulfilled in the reigns of David and Solomon, the Promise finds its full, literal completion in Jesus. The second quote likewise is initially, partially fulfilled in Solomon (2 Samuel 7:14). God's covenant with David promised that David's "son" would be an eternal king over God's people. Solomon inherited these blessings but ultimately failed to live up to God's standard. As later prophesied, David's "son," Jesus, demonstrated faithfulness through His life and death. As prophesied, Jesus inherited the blessings of the Davidic covenant. The idea of inheritance (v. 4) is a key concept in Hebrews. Since Jesus is the Son of God, He is able to pass an eternal inheritance to those who follow Him. Jesus' followers become one with Christ and therefore inherit all that Christ inherits.

What would our faith mean if Jesus were not divine?

Search the Scriptures

1. What is significant about each of the women mentioned in Jesus' genealogy? (Matthew 1:3, 5-6, 16)
2. After completing His sacrifice on Calvary for the forgiveness of our sin, where did Jesus go? (Hebrews 1:4)
3. What are two reasons Jesus is superior to angels? (v. 5)

Discuss the Meaning

Many in the world will challenge your belief in Jesus Christ. They will say He was a great teacher, a good moral example, but just a man. He is often given the same status as Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, or other great religious leaders. What would you say to them about who Jesus really is?

Liberating Lesson

Believers today can marvel at the scope of God's plan—creating a people through Abraham, establishing a nation through David, and making all humanity a part of both through Jesus. Even if you do not know your heritage, you can claim this spiritual heritage. Every Christian, no matter their biological parentage, stands on the spiritual heritage of all our spiritual forefathers from Abraham and Paul, to St. Augustine and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Application for Activation

Jesus is the culmination of God's work of bringing salvation to the world through one sinful family line. Jesus is God's final and definitive word for humanity. He is our perfect example of living into the great faith heritage you inherit from your family. He is also our perfect example of rising above the family drama that can hold you back from fulfilling God's plan for your life. This week think of one family member who imitated Christ's example for you and thank that person (in person or spirit) for helping you in your spiritual walk.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Perez. **PEA**-rez.

Zerah. **ZEE**-rah.

Hezron. **HEZ**-ron.

Amminadab. ah-**MIN**-uh-dab.

Nahshon. **NAH**-shon.

Salmon. **SAL**-mon.

Bathsheba. bath-**SHEE**-buh.

Uriah. you-**RIE**-uh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God's Anointed Ruler of All Nations
(Psalm 2)

TUESDAY

Blessed and Chosen in Christ
(Ephesians 1:1–14)

WEDNESDAY

Christ, Head Over All People/Things
(Ephesians 1:15–23)

THURSDAY

In the Family Line of David
(Matthew 1:6–15)

FRIDAY

God Anoints Jesus King
(Hebrews 1:6–9)

SATURDAY

Jesus, Creator and Eternal Ruler
(Hebrews 1:10–14)

SUNDAY

Expectations of Jesus Before His Birth
(Matthew 1:1–6, 16–17; Hebrews 1:1–5)

Notes

Called Before Birth

Bible Background • MATTHEW 1:18–25

Printed Text • MATTHEW 1:18–25 | Devotional Reading • ISAIAH 42:1–9

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will REMEMBER the story of the angel's announcement to Joseph of Jesus' birth, REJOICE that the birth of Jesus fulfilled God's promise to be with His people, and LIVE with greater awareness of God's abiding presence.

In Focus

Mackinsie and Michael looked at their new baby boy in awe. They were thankful for Mackinsie's mother being able to stay at their house with their other children, giving the parents time alone with their new youngest child. They were also thankful that Michael's Grandmother Opal was on her way to the hospital to meet her newest great-grandbaby. Just two months ago, the family lost Grandpa Steve, Opal's husband, the patriarch of the family. Opal was still grieving deeply, but she felt seeing this new life born so soon after the death of her Steve would be good for her soul.

Grandma Opal held the baby in her arms with practiced grace.

"We wanted to tell you in person, Grandma Opal," Michael said. "Mackinsie and I want to name him Steve, after Grandpa."

The new baby made Grandma Opal smile. But the news of the baby's name sprinkled tears in her eyes. "It's good to have a new Steve in the family," Opal said. "Look how strong that grip is! He'll have Steve's dedication to working hard, for sure," Opal said.

"I hope he'll have Grandpa Steve's sense of humor," Michael said.

"I hope he'll have Grandpa Steve's dedication to the Lord," Mackensie said. "I love that best about this family, how much you boldly show Christ to the world. Be praying for us, Grandma Opal, that we can give little Stevie as good a Christian home as Grandpa Steve gave his kids."

What spiritual heritage did you inherit from your family?

Keep in Mind

"Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (from Matthew 1:20-21, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Matthew 1:18** Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

The People, Places, and Times

Prophet. The biblical prophet is a speaker for God. God communicates directly with him or her sometimes with future predictions and sometimes with commands from God. When He led the Israelites out of slavery and when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments, God spoke to Moses face to face (Exodus 33:11). God spoke frequently to His Old Testament people through the major and minor prophets (Isaiah through Malachi). God still speaks through individuals today, but not in a way that brings novel revelation because we now have the complete Word of God, the Bible, which speaks to all people everywhere.

Angels. The Greek word *aggelos* (ON-gell-oce) means “messenger,” and can refer to an earthly or heavenly being. Although angels have an exalted position, we are warned never to worship them (Colossians 2:18). Angels serve many functions, but their primary functions are as messengers and ministers of God to

humanity (Hebrews 1:14). They bring God’s specific commands (Judges 6:11-23; 13:3-5). They assist people in times of distress (1 Kings 19:5-7) and even carry out military missions (2 Kings 19:5-7; Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1). Jesus indicated the existence of personal guardian angels (Matthew 18:10; cf. Psalm 91:11).

Why does God communicate differently at different times, whether through prophets, angels, or His Son?

Background

The book of Matthew is called the Jewish Gospel because its intended audience is Jewish. It is rooted in Old Testament prophecy related to the coming King through the lineage of King David. The first chapter of Matthew, presents Jesus’ royal lineage, describing His kingly line and rightful place as heir to David’s throne. His legal inheritance comes through the line of Solomon through Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father (Luke 3:23; 4:22). Jesus’ lineage

proves that He has the right to be called the King of the Jews.

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, which gives Him the right to be called the Son of God (Matthew 1:18-25). He is fully God and fully human; He is the Living Word who came down from heaven, clothed in human flesh, and dwelled among people (John 1:1-4; Luke 1:26-35; 2:1-7). His virgin birth fulfilled the prophetic utterances of Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14). The sinless and divine nature of Jesus makes Him the only man capable of shedding divine blood on the Cross and becoming the final atonement for our sin.

What does it tell us about God to know that Jesus fulfilled so many prophecies?

At-A-Glance

1. Divine Conception (Matthew 1:18-19)
2. Divine Correction (vv. 20-23)
3. From Divine Clarity to Human Obedience (vv. 24-25)

In Depth

1. Divine Conception (Matthew 1:18-19)

Having laid out the historical background of the Messiah's birth, Matthew introduces an unexpected divine element. When Matthew says that "before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost," he introduces a problem to the Jewish mind—for them, the Messiah was nothing more than a human being. By stating it this way, Matthew sets the stage to argue that this human being is also God.

Joseph is described as a righteous man. Unlike the Pharisees, who insisted on a rigid reading of the law's justice, Joseph understood the compassion of the Lord. Pregnancy before the actual wedding would render Mary unfaithful. Fully applying the letter of the law,

though, would lead to Mary's being stoned to death. Joseph was unwilling to expose her to the disgrace of public divorce. He, therefore, chose a quiet divorce. Thus Joseph would satisfy the requirement of the law and fulfill his sense of covenant righteousness and his compassion.

What do Joseph's actions say about him?

2. Divine Correction (vv. 20-23)

God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream to stop the divorce. The dream imparted three key things. First, Joseph was reassured that Mary had not been unfaithful (v. 20). Joseph must see this child as God's Child, and this event as a God-event. When God speaks into our situation, we see more clearly and our relationships are put in the right perspective. Second, Joseph was told the baby's sex and what He was to be named. The name "Jesus" is a Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "the Lord saves." Third, he was told the baby's divine purpose: "he shall save his people from their sins" (v. 21).

God also clarifies the situation by pointing back to Scripture. All this can be understood by what God had already said through the prophet Isaiah. Our belief in God is not wishful thinking. Rather our faith, like Joseph's acceptance of Mary, is grounded in prophetic insight coming directly from God.

3. From Divine Clarity to Human Obedience (vv. 24-25)

Too many of us spend time fighting with God when we should take a lesson from Joseph and stop worrying about how God guides us. God would only command us to do something consistent with His Word. After God told Joseph what to do, human opinion no longer mattered. Instead, he chose to please the One who was in charge of his life. Once God clarifies the events to Joseph and reveals that this was God's work, Joseph married Mary and named the child Jesus as instructed.

God never makes mistakes. He didn't pick just any virgin or any carpenter—and there were likely scores of both in Nazareth. Instead, God chose the couple who would, individually and together, place His will above all else. Their individual and collective actions made the family that paved the way for the new community that would be known as one that fosters belonging and acceptance.

Search the Scriptures

1. Where and why did the angel of the Lord appear to Joseph (Matthew 1:20)?

2. Why was Joseph instructed to name his son Jesus (v. 21)? Why is the prophesied name Emmanuel important (v. 23)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does it mean to be “a just man” and “son of David”?

2. Why did God reveal the truth about Mary's miraculous conception only privately to Joseph in a dream? Why not also tell her family or the whole town?

Liberating Lesson

We never hear Joseph speak. When Joseph was disgraced and humiliated by the news of his betrothed's pregnancy, we never hear him speak. When Joseph is told to marry the woman with whom by law he should have severed ties, we never hear him speak. When Joseph learns of Herod's plot to kill Mary's baby, we never hear Joseph speak. When Joseph learns about Herod's death, we never hear him speak. When Joseph realizes that he must take his young bride and the baby Jesus to live in the despised and unimportant town of Nazareth, we never hear Joseph grumble or complain. Why? Is he not human like the rest of us? Surely he must have had strong feelings about the stress and mess of life.

Whatever his feelings may have been, Matthew portrays Joseph as one who guards his

tongue. Given all the pressures that crowded in upon Joseph, why do we never hear him vent his feelings? Joseph's aim in life was obedience. The only speaking that Joseph does is through his active response to the Lord's commands.

Application for Activation

As Joseph found, divine clarification must lead to the practical application of God's Word. God reveals things to us so that we might act in concert with the movement of His Spirit in the world. Insights are not given to us so that we can harbor and hoard them for self-promotion, but to create within ourselves a motion to action. God can use us to unfold this divine will, just as He did with Joseph. All we need to do is listen to the Word of God.

This week, reflect on the question: How committed am I to obeying God's Word? Pray and ask God to help you make decisions and govern your family life and relationships in ways that reflect obedience to His will. Make your speech and actions reflect your dedication to doing the will of God.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Davidic. dah-VID-ik.
Aramite. AIR-am-ite.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Sign of God's Presence
(Isaiah 7:10-15)

TUESDAY

Called a Light of the Nations
(Isaiah 42:1-9)

WEDNESDAY

Called to Mission Before Birth
(Isaiah 49:1-7)

THURSDAY

Birth of Jesus Foretold to Mary
(Luke 1:26-38)

FRIDAY

Simeon Foretells Jesus' Ministry
(Luke 2:34-38)

SATURDAY

Mary, in the Lineage of Ruth
(Ruth 4:9-17)

SUNDAY

Miracle of the Holy Spirit Conception
(Matthew 1:18-25)

Notes

A Regal Response to Holy Light

Bible Background • MATTHEW 2:7–15

Printed Text • MATTHEW 2:7–15 | Devotional Reading • EXODUS 1:8–22

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLAIN how the wise men point to the universality of Jesus' mission, GRIEVE for those who suffer innocently due to the world's brokenness and sin, and JOIN with peoples of every ethnicity and culture to worship Jesus, the King of all nations.

In Focus

Rather than exchanging gifts, Kathy's family went on a Christmas tour of the Holy Lands, beginning in Egypt. They did all the touristy things—seeing the great pyramids, sailing up the Nile River, and even getting on camels for pictures. Their tour guide focused on the time the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, but Kathy was thinking of Mary, Joseph, and young Jesus seeking sanctuary here while King Herod was carrying out his plan to murder any potential rival king. Kathy followed the tour guide through a market teeming with brown and black people, some matching her own skin tone. She thought that the white people often portrayed in Bible art would surely stand out in a crowd like this. A more historically accurate portrayal of the holy family would blend right in, here in Mother Africa.

Kathy's son, Stephen, had begun saying that Jesus was only for white people. "Not only was Jesus first imposed on us by slave owners," Stephen would say, "He also doesn't seem to care about black issues like police brutality, colorism, or badly funded schools." Here in Egypt, though, Kathy could see that idea was wrong. Jesus was no "white Savior"; He was everyone's Savior. That night she shared her photos and thoughts with Stephen. Kathy's trip to Egypt and Israel made her feel even closer to Jesus.

What happens when we view historic happenings through only one cultural lens? How do we make sure we are not blind to the unique perspectives of other cultures' lenses?

Keep in Mind

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Matthew 2:7** Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures,

they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

The People, Places, and Times

Herod. The Herod featured in today's Scripture passage is known as "Herod the Great." He was a descendant of Antipater, an Edomite who converted to Judaism in the 2nd century BC. An exceptionally cruel king, Herod ordered the murder of one of his wives, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, and at least three sons. Although the Jews did not like him because of his friendliness with the Romans, he brought enough stability to Galilee and Judea that he gained some independence from Rome for the Jewish people. He is also remembered as a great builder. His biggest achievement was renovating the second temple in Jerusalem, which was not completed until 68 years after his death.

Magi. The words "wise men," translated Magi (singular: magus), refer to a group of men who may have studied the stars. Because the Bible says they came from the East, many scholars believe they were Babylonian astrologers. The

wise men first come to Jerusalem because of a star, a special manifestation from God to indicate a Jewish king's birth. They then come to Bethlehem following the star again and find Jesus. Tradition says there were three of them, but Scripture never gives a number. The idea that there were three of them comes from the number of gifts they offered to the Christ Child (v. 11).

Background

Matthew 2 opens with wise men coming from the East in search of the newborn King of the Jews. Although we are familiar with the non-biblical story of three wise men, Scripture says that they were all from the East. To people of New Testament days, that would probably have been from Persia, modern-day Iran. This was a center of much belief in astrology. The Bible makes very clear that the study of horoscopes is wrong (Deuteronomy 4:19). It ascribes divine

plans to the created stars and moon. Yet God uses His creation to unexpectedly bring people to Himself. In calling these Gentiles from far away, God showed that Christ came for us all.

The wise men were astrologers and saw some sort of unusual star (possibly a conjunction of planets) that indicated to them that a new king of the Jews was born. So they traveled to Jerusalem, the capital, where they expected to see this baby. They almost certainly arrived in a great caravan with many servants. Hearing that a new Jewish king has been born, Herod instantly knows this must be the Messiah. The jealous and power-hungry king asks his scholars where the Messiah was predicted to be born.

At-A-Glance

1. Foreigners Before a King
(Matthew 2:7–8)
2. Foreigners Before the King (vv. 9–11)
3. The Messiah in a Foreign Land
(vv. 13–15)

In Depth

1. Foreigners Before a King (Matthew 2:7–8)

The paranoid King Herod took no chances on a potential rival, even if it was just a baby. After Herod's scholars told him where the Messiah was to be born, he has a private meeting with the wise men. He tells them to bring him back the news of the Messiah's whereabouts after they find Him. Herod says this is so he can worship Him, too. Of course, Herod has no such intentions.

We see in this story different responses to Jesus. In Herod, we see outright opposition. Even though Herod is king of the Jews, he does not rejoice at his promised Messiah's birth. He sees Jesus, instead, as a rival, one who could

take control away from him. Then we see the wise men—foreigners without much biblical understanding—and yet these were the ones who set aside everything else in their lives to truly know Him.

Herod knew a great deal about the Messiah. Why would anyone who knows about Jesus Christ, sit on the information rather than respond positively to it?

2. Foreigners Before the King (vv. 9–11)

After leaving Herod, the wise men continued their search. As they traveled, the star reappeared and guided them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. By the supernatural light of that star, the wise men found the Perfect Light, Jesus.

Mary and Joseph were married and living in a house in Nazareth (Luke 2:39). When the wise men arrived, they immediately knelt and worshiped the holy Child. The wise men worshiped Christ before He performed any miracles, preached any sermons, or healed any sick. Their worship was based solely on who He was, not what He did. They honored Him with special gifts worthy of His divine station (v. 11). We should all do as the wise men: find Jesus, accept Him as Lord and Savior, and worship Him!

The Magi did not listen to what King Herod told them to do. A higher authority spoke to them through a dream and told them not to return to Herod. God warned them and they obeyed His warning, returning home a different way.

Share about a time you had to disregard an authority figure to follow God's guidance instead.

3. The Messiah in a Foreign Land (vv. 13–15)

After the wise men departed, God also warned Joseph about Herod's plan. In a dream, Joseph learned that Herod was searching for the child with the intent of killing Him. Joseph was instructed to pack up and move his family

to Egypt. When Herod found out that the wise men were aware of his scheme and had left the country by another route, he was furious (v. 16). He ordered his soldiers to go to Bethlehem and kill every male two years old and under. This tragedy fulfilled another prophecy. The destruction caused by sinful, evil humans sets a sorrowful stage that God will soon turn to joy (Jeremiah 31).

Joseph follows the angel's directions and moves to Egypt, returning home only when Herod was dead. Because Jesus' childhood followed this journey, Matthew notes that He fulfills yet another prophecy of coming "Out of Egypt."

How have you noticed God's protection in your life as you followed His direction?

Search the Scriptures

1. What information did Herod want from the wise men? Why did King Herod say he wanted it? (Matthew 2:8)
2. How did Jesus' flight to Egypt help prove He is the Messiah? (v. 15)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Both the Magi and Herod have a high social standing in their lands. Why is their reaction to Jesus' birth so different?
2. Even though God tells His people not to trust astrology, He uses His creation to communicate with the Magi. What does this reveal about God's nature?

Liberating Lesson

The Enemy is happy to remind us of any excuse to cut ourselves off from one another, creating distance and mistrust between groups that could enjoy unity. Believers must work to bring healing and reconciliation in the areas of racial, cultural, and religious division. How does the Gospel especially resonate with minority, refugee, immigrant, or foreign voices?

Application for Activation

The Magi came to Jesus and worshiped their way, by bowing to the ground and giving gifts. Are you welcoming to other cultures' worship traditions in your church? Jesus' family left their ancestral land and lived in another country. How would you continue to worship God and be a witness of the Gospel in a foreign country? Work with a local charity or immigrant population to invite immigrants to lead a worship service at your church.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Antipater. an-TEE-pah-tare.
Magus. MAY-gus.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Midwives Frustrate Pharaoh’s Decree
(Exodus 1:15–22)

TUESDAY

God Answers Solomon’s Dream
(1 Kings 3:5–14)

WEDNESDAY

Insight into the Meaning of Dreams
(Daniel 1:8–17)

THURSDAY

In Christ No Divisions Allowed
(Galatians 3:25–29)

FRIDAY

Gracious Ruler to Come from Bethlehem
(Micah 5:1–5)

SATURDAY

Successful Return from Egypt
(Matthew 2:19–23)

SUNDAY

Safe in the Midst of Danger
(Matthew 2:7–15)

Notes

Called to Prepare the Way

Bible Background • MATTHEW 3

Printed Text • MATTHEW 3:1–12 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 1:19–34

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will **RECOGNIZE** the reality of sin and the necessity of repentance, **IDENTIFY** with John the Baptist in his call to prepare the way for Christ, and **REPENT** of their sins and bear witness to this repentance through their deeds.

In Focus

From center stage, Quentin practiced with his gospel band. They were good—really good. However, Quentin was concerned about their drummer's attitude. Adrian liked being the center of attention. When they had started the band, it wasn't a big deal, but now that they were trying for a serious career, Adrian's antics diminished the band's ability to minister.

"Adrian, you're drowning us out," Quentin yelled yet again from his position at the mike. Oblivious to Quentin's rising frustration, Adrian continued to drum fast and loud. The rest of the band stopped and glared at him until Adrian finally noticed.

"I'm sorry, Adrian," Quentin said, "But you can't play at our next engagement. You seem unaware of the difference between ministry and performance. We minister through music to prepare the way for people to receive Christ. I want you in the band, but your attitude has to change. What do you say?"

"I say this is bogus. I quit!" Throwing down his drumsticks, Adrian stormed out. A half-hour later, he returned looking apologetic. "I was wrong. Please forgive me. All this is not about me, but about being a 'voice in the wilderness,' like John the Baptist was. Can we all worship together?"

Working in any community requires a willingness to repent and a commitment to community purposes, guidelines, and leaders. What difficulties do leaders face when going into a new phase of the community, like when John the Baptist led the people of God into the church age?

Keep in Mind

"For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight."
(Matthew 3:3, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Matthew 3:1** In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan,

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The People, Places, and Times

John the Baptist. John was a miracle child, born to childless, elderly parents—the priest Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth (Luke 1:5–25). While still pregnant, Elisabeth received a visit from her cousin Mary, who also had been divinely chosen to bear a child—Jesus. The baby in Elisabeth's womb jumped at Mary's voice (Luke 1:44).

John was the prophesied forerunner of Jesus even before his birth. The public reception of John's ministry was tremendous (Mark 1:5). John took no credit for the response to his preaching but properly relegated himself to the role of messenger, rather than savior.

Wilderness. In the Old and New Testaments, the wilderness served as a place God chose to meet with, chastise, and revive His children. The wilderness was also the place where Jesus

endured a forty-day fast, encountered Satan, and overcame temptation (Matthew 4:1–11). We often think of wildernesses as deserts, because the wilderness the Israelites wandered before entering the Promised Land is in an arid region. The word, however, merely refers to a region with a low population, a place of solitude. Because John did not venture into the cities to preach, people had to come out of those cities into the wilderness to hear him.

How have places of solitude been important in your spiritual journey?

Background

After a long prophetic silence, John bursts onto the scene. This sudden appearance further emphasizes the silence the Israelites have been enduring from God. The last time God had spoken to His people was through the prophet

Malachi, around 400 BC. Fittingly though, Malachi was the very prophet to foretell the ministry of John (Malachi 3:1; 4:5). There is also a long lapse of time between the end of Matthew 2 and the beginning of Matthew 3. Near the end of Matthew 2, we leave Jesus as a young child growing up in Nazareth (see Matthew 2:21-23). By the time we reach Matthew 3, John, who was born only several months before Jesus, is a grown man “preaching in the wilderness of Judaea.”

John’s ministry was preaching and baptizing ministry that anticipated the ministry of Jesus. John’s ministry called people to a confession of sins, to repentance, and to the acknowledgment of the coming one who cleanses us from sins and provides the Spirit who enables living right (Matthew 3:6-12). John’s baptism was a public affirmation that the repentant and now-baptized participants were positioned to receive God’s saving grace and presence. They had repented, been cleansed, and were ready to follow the imminent Messiah.

If you have been baptized, what did it symbolize to you? How is baptism viewed in your church?

At-A-Glance

1. Preaching the Kingdom (Matthew 3:1-4)
2. Baptizing the Repentant (vv. 5-6)
3. Rebuking the Dishonest (vv. 7-10)
4. Prophesying the Messiah (vv. 11-12)

In Depth

1. Preaching the Kingdom (Matthew 3:1-4)

The people recognized John as a prophet. God had promised to send Elijah before the coming of the Day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5). When John came dressed in camel’s hair with a leather belt, he even appeared like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8). John’s

ministry being in “the wilderness of Judaea” fulfills a prophecy of Isaiah, and again links John to Elijah, who often spent time in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:5-7; 19:4, 15).

John’s ministry had two emphases. First, his ministry called people to repentance. John was intent on calling people to turn from their old ways and pursue God’s righteousness. Second, his ministry announced the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. God’s kingdom coming soon further urges people to repent, but also gives hope of forthcoming improvement. The coming of God’s kingdom on the Day of the Lord is a time of judgment. The Jews would desire to make themselves pure so they could pass God’s judgment.

2. Baptizing the Repentant (vv. 5-6)

People responded to John’s message and came from all over the Jordan Valley. When they confessed their sin, he baptized them in the Jordan River. While we cannot be certain of the source of John’s practice of baptism, it is likely based on various common purification rituals of the time. It is obvious from the context that his baptism was offered as a public sign that those being baptized had received and accepted his message.

Despite John’s rough clothing and limited diet, people were attracted to John because of the quality and content of his preaching. There is a lesson in this for today’s church. We like to have beautiful worship facilities, hopefully as a sign of our honor to God, rather than a show for ourselves. Ultimately, though, our beautiful buildings or fashionable dress is not what attracts people to Jesus Christ. Real Christian disciples are made as a result of clear and perceptive handling of the Gospel.

3. Rebuking the Dishonest (vv. 7-10)

While John’s ministry was successful, it did not go unchallenged. Even though the Pharisees

and Sadducees had their differences, they were united in their opposition to John's ministry. In return, he calls them "vipers" and questions their sincerity. The religious leaders are in danger of God's judgment, as John reveals in his metaphor about the ax and tree. Their aim is solely to escape God's punishment for sin, rather than demonstrating a commitment to abandon their evil behavior and lead righteous lives.

John the Baptist also questions their pride in their religious heritage. He reminds them that God could easily turn something as commonplace as a stone into a faithful follower. Rather than automatically conferring a holier status on the Jews, being a child of Abraham means they have a clearer revelation of how God expects them to act.

How can we be sure to produce "good fruit" and avoid God's punishment?

4. Prophesying the Messiah (vv. 11–12)

John is emphatic about the relationship of his ministry to that of Jesus. John's purpose is to call people to repentance. Jesus' purpose is to save us all. In other words, John awakens people's desire for righteousness. Jesus provides the righteousness of God to those who believe and empowers us to live righteously through the Holy Spirit (Romans 3:22; Acts 1:8). Both ministries are needed even today. If the unchurched are to accept Christ and live righteously, they need someone to awaken within them the desire for righteousness.

John uses the pictures of fire and the threshing floor to explain Jesus' ministry. Fire suggests the purification of metal, which must suffer extreme heat to burn away its impurities. Sometimes as we go through hard times, God is using them to purify our characters. On a threshing floor, harvested wheat is tossed into the air and the breeze blows away the lightweight, useless chaff, leaving the heavy grain to fall to the ground. The farmer then

stores the wheat and burns away any chaff that remains. Likewise, God will diligently and easily separate His true followers from the hypocrites.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was John the Baptist's primary message (Matthew 3:1–2)?
2. What did the people do before John baptized them (v. 6)?
3. According to John, how would Jesus baptize (vv. 11–12)?

Discuss the Meaning

John's baptism was a baptism of repentance only. His baptism was to prepare people's hearts for the coming of the Messiah. Several Scripture passages talk about the baptism of John being insufficient after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (for instance, see the story of Apollos in Acts 18:24–26). Read Romans 6:4 and discuss the symbolism of Christian baptism and how it goes beyond simple repentance. Discuss your understanding of the meaning of baptism when you were baptized. Can you think of ways to make baptism more meaningful at your church?

Liberating Lesson

Given the ever-present temptation of sin and evil, the church still needs John's kind of preaching ministry. Moral standards must be set and people need to be reminded of their potential for growth in the things of God. The message of repentance, forgiveness, and the call to live right can revitalize and bring spiritual renewal to people. The ministry of sharing our testimony and giving witness of Jesus Christ is the call and responsibility of every believer. Like John the Baptist, we too are to seek to awaken in people a desire for righteousness. We are to do this in the confidence that when desire is awakened, God will grant salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and convey

righteousness by the power of the Holy Spirit to all who will believe.

Application for Activation

While the desire to avoid divine retribution may be a motive for right living, it is not the best motive. We should desire to live right because it is the right thing to do in response to God's love for us. It is far better to pour one's energies into bringing forth fruit suitable for repentance to glorify God, rather than to pour one's energies into merely avoiding the wrath to come. God is concerned about right motive, as well as right behavior. Repentance that is acceptable to God results in right behavior that is sustained not by a fear of hell, but by unconditional love for God.

This week, examine your reasons for following Christ and doing the work of the church. Are you motivated by your love for God or by fear? If you feel any fear—whether of rejection, failure, or inadequacy—meditate instead on God's great love for you and see how that can change your motivation.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Malachi. MAL-uh-kie.

Judaea. joo-DAY-uh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Voice Cries, "Comfort My People"
(Isaiah 40:1-5)

TUESDAY

John the Baptist Is the Greatest
(Matthew 11:2-15)

WEDNESDAY

The Baptist's Testimony of Faith
(John 1:19-34)

THURSDAY

Jesus, the Father's Beloved Son
(Matthew 17:1-8)

FRIDAY

In John, Elijah Has Come
(Matthew 17:9-13; Malachi 4:4-5)

SATURDAY

John Baptizes Jesus in the Jordan
(Matthew 3: 13-17)

SUNDAY

John Prepares the Way for Jesus
(Matthew 3:1-12)

Notes

Called to Proclaim

Bible Background • LUKE 4

Printed Text • LUKE 4:14-22 | Devotional Reading • DEUTERONOMY 8:1-11

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will COMPREHEND the meaning and significance of Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth, SENSE the impact of Jesus' pronouncement at Nazareth, and ALIGN our faith response with Jesus' call and mission.

In Focus

Pastor Greenborough took to the podium on Sunday morning. "I want to talk this morning about my vision for our community. I won't be so bold as to say I have a dream. But...well, I have a dream." He smiled and shuffled with his notes.

"I want us to do something about these poor folk who stand around on our street corners. I know you say, 'But Pastor if we give them money, they'll buy booze and drugs.' Let me tell you, I would buy booze too if I hadn't showered in a month, hadn't had fresh socks and underwear for two weeks, hadn't had a proper sleep in five days, and hadn't had a proper meal in two days. We must do something.

"I want us to do something about our brothers and sisters suffering from depression, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts. I know you say, 'But Pastor, faith will make those people whole. They just need to pray harder.' Let me tell you, they do pray. They pray every day that they could spare the time and money and self-respect to talk to someone trained to help them out of their dark thoughts. They pray every day that God would send them a friend. We must do something, Church."

As Pastor Greenborough went on, sister Patsy sat placidly in her pew. It was great rhetoric, she had to admit and of course she wanted to help all God's children, but still... it was all too great a task for her. What was this "something" their church was supposed to do? Would it really even help?

How do you react to the message of Jesus and the Church's mission in the world?

Keep in Mind

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,
To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Luke 4:14** And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the

gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

The People, Places, and Times

Synagogue. After Solomon's Temple was destroyed and many of the Hebrews were sent into exile, it became necessary to develop local centers of worship and instruction in the Jewish faith. Even after their return from exile and the Jerusalem Temple was rebuilt, these local centers of worship continued. Most communities of size had at least one synagogue and some had several. Jewish sources hold that a synagogue was to be built wherever there were ten or more Jewish men. The primary meeting was held on the Sabbath (Saturday). The usual worship service consisted of the recitation of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), prayers, Scripture readings from the Law and the Prophets, a sermon, and a benediction. Often the community appointed a ruler who cared for the building and selected those who participated in the worship service. Jairus of Capernaum (Mark 5:22), and Crispus and Sosthenes of Corinth (Acts 18) were rulers at their local synagogues. On many occasions,

Jesus encountered opposition and conflict in the synagogues both for His teaching (Mark 6:1-6) and His miracles (Luke 4:31-37). As opposition grew, Jesus warned His disciples of a time in the future when they, too, would be persecuted in the synagogues (Matthew 10:17; 23:34; Mark 13:9; Luke 12:11; 21:12).

What similarities do Jewish synagogues have with modern Christian churches?

Background

At the age of thirty, Jesus submitted Himself to baptism as a sign of obedience and to initiate His public ministry, even though He was without sin. Following His baptism, the Holy Ghost led Him into the wilderness, where He endured forty days and nights of fasting and isolation. This was a period of physical weakness but spiritual strength. Three times Satan tried to tempt Jesus, making Him offers that might appeal to His humanness. But in His divine nature, Jesus endured this period and refused the devil's temptations.

Luke 4:1 says that it was the Spirit that gave Jesus the victory over Satan in the wilderness and led Him to Galilee. There, He was able to teach in the synagogues and He was well received, gaining popularity among the people there. Jesus was glorified by all those around Him. The accolades Jesus received in Galilee did not represent the true glory of Jesus, which was to come. Still, Jesus' ministry began and ended with Him being glorified.

Jesus' ministry was initiated after sacrifice and obedience. What lessons might this pattern teach us?

At-A-Glance

1. Returning by the Spirit (Luke 4:14–17)
2. The Spirit is Upon Me (vv. 18–19)
3. Scripture Fulfilled (vv. 20–22)

In Depth

1. Returning by the Spirit (Luke 4:14–17)

Here we find the opening scene of Jesus' ministry—in Galilee. From a glorious reception in Galilee, Jesus' next stop was His hometown, Nazareth. The phrase “where he had been brought up” gives the impression that Jesus had not been in Nazareth for a while before this visit (Luke 4:16). Jesus had been raised by devout Jewish parents who reared Him to participate in the tenets of His faith. Therefore, as His custom was, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. It was normal and usual for Him to participate in worship.

Anyone could be invited to read the Scripture lesson for the synagogue services. Scholars are uncertain as to how the reading from the Prophets was chosen. Perhaps the particular reading was left to the discretion of the man reading. Possibly Jesus chose this passage, as

indicated by the phrase, “he found the place where it was written” (v. 17).

2. The Spirit is Upon Me (vv. 18–19)

The reading from Isaiah points back to the very nature of Jesus' ministry. His purpose was to bring the Good News to the poor, brokenhearted, captives, blind, and oppressed (bruised). The Gospel is the Good News to those whose hope lies in Almighty God to act on their behalf. Jesus identifies Himself with the social, religious, and economic outcasts of His day.

Throughout the Old Testament, God is clearly on the side of the poor and oppressed (Isaiah 58:6; Psalms 103:6; 146:7; 72:12–14). “The acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19) to which Jesus referred to was likely the jubilee year described in Leviticus 25. The Year of Jubilee was a time when the economic and social inequities accumulated through the years were to be crossed off and all God's people would begin again at the same point. Jubilee meant that slaves were to be set free, and people who were in servitude because of debts they couldn't pay were given back their ancestral lands and set free to return to their families.

3. Scripture Fulfilled (vv. 20–22)

After His reading, the congregation was still. All eyes were fastened on Him, expecting this budding rabbi to offer a sermon on this prophetic text. Jesus broke through the silence with a simple, yet powerful declaration, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (v. 21). There He was, in their midst. Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of God's promise. The acceptable year of the Lord had been launched in the person and ministry of Jesus. Jesus was ushering in a new age of salvation. The Good News of the kingdom was indeed the fulfillment of the Old Testament Messianic hope.

Initially, those who heard His words responded favorably. They wondered at the gracious words He had just spoken. Still, they were confused about His identity. They could not move beyond the fact that He was Joseph's son. How could a carpenter's son declare Himself to be the Son of God?

Think of a time a speaker has unexpectedly blown you away with their message. What was surprising about the message?

Search the Scriptures

1. What did Jesus do once He arrived at Nazareth (Luke 4:16)?
2. What responsibilities had Jesus been given because the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him (vv. 18-19)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Jesus often fulfilled prophecy in one way during His earthly ministry, but will also fulfill the same prophesy even more fully when His Kingdom comes. How is it the day of the Lord's favor today? How much more of the prophecy do we still await?
2. What did Isaiah's prophecy mean to its original audience?

Liberating Lesson

We are not redeemed simply to console ourselves in the Spirit, but to be a hand extended to the unchurched and the hurting. People today are looking for peace in their lives. As believers in Christ, we know that Jesus is the answer. But it is of no consequence if we do not get the message to people who really need to hear it. The African American and the global African population is disproportionately influenced by poverty and imprisonment. Make plans to implement one practical way that the class can be a Christ-like influence in your community by doing each of these in the following weeks:

1. Preaching the Gospel to the poor
2. Preaching deliverance to prisoners
3. Helping the blind see
4. Setting the oppressed free

Application for Activation

Isaiah refers to Jubilee in the context of a restoration of Israel after the nation's enemies had humbled her (Isaiah 61:2). Jesus referred regarding the new day He would bring. This week use your Bible and Bible reference tools to do some research on the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-55). Spend time meditating on how the deliverance Jesus brings compares and contrasts with the freedom of the Jubilee year. Share your thoughts with the group next week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Shema. shuh-MAH.

Jairus. JIE-russ.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Live By God's Word
(Deuteronomy 8:1-11)

TUESDAY

Jubilee, Year of God's Favor
(Leviticus 25:8-17)

WEDNESDAY

Miracle of the Meal and Oil
(1 Kings 17:8-16)

THURSDAY

Naaman's Leprosy
Healed in Jordan River
(2 Kings 5:1-14)

FRIDAY

Jesus Overcomes
the Devil's Temptations
(Luke 4:1-13)

SATURDAY

Jesus Driven out of Nazareth
(Luke 4:23-30)

SUNDAY

Jesus' Mandate for Ministry Announced
(Luke 4:14-22)

Notes

Called to Significance

Bible Background • LUKE 5:1-11

Printed Text • LUKE 5:1-11 | Devotional Reading • LUKE 9:57-62

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONTEMPLATE a miraculous catch of fish, REFLECT on Simon's changing attitude toward Jesus, and HEAR Jesus' instructions and eagerly obey them.

In Focus

Marilyn always heard that if you find a career you love, it will never feel like work. She had the career, but work never felt fulfilling. Marilyn knew this was where God wanted her, but also felt she could do more to minister.

She found that ministry when her mother's friend, Miss Sandra, yet again invited her to serve at the Neighbor-to-Neighbor Breakfast at her church. Miss Sandra's invitations were nothing if not persistent. Even though Marilyn always said she didn't have the time, Miss Sandra invited her every week. Finally, Marilyn cleared her schedule to go.

That morning, Marilyn entered the Fellowship Hall, not knowing what to expect. She found rows and rows of tables with homeless people—whom Miss Sandra always called “our unhoused neighbors”—chattering among themselves while waiting to be fed. She looked for Miss Sandra and found her at the front of the room, near the kitchen. As Marilyn threaded her way through the crowd, Miss Sandra called for quiet. Everyone gave Miss Sandra their full focus as she prayed before the volunteers started serving.

After the prayer, Marilyn spent the next hour moving from the kitchen to the tables, with trays full of plates of scrambled eggs, turkey bacon, and fruit salad. In the corner of her eye, she could see Miss Sandra doing the same while joking and laughing with the neighbors, offering a friendly word or a warm touch—or, best of all, a bit of hope. That hope touched Marilyn's heart. She said a prayer of thanks that Miss Sandra had invited her to serve, and she knew she would come back to serve again.

Are we humble enough to accept the blessing of being in service to others?

Keep in Mind

“Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men”
(from Luke 5:10, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Luke 5:1** And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret,

2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.

3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake.

7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

8 When Simon saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.

11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

The People, Places, and Times

The Lake of Gennesaret is also known as the Sea of Galilee. It is called Gennesaret because the fertile Plain of Gennesaret lies on the northwest side of the lake (Matthew 14:34). The Old Testament calls it the Sea of Chinnereth because of the shape of it (Hebrew “harp-shaped,” Numbers 34:11) and “Chinneroth” (Joshua 12:3) from the town so named on its shore. Gennesaret is probably the corruption of the name Chinneroth. The Sea of Tiberias is another designation (John 6:1; 21:1), associated with the capital of Herod Antipas. All of the names of this single body of water were derived from places on the western shore. The lake is located some 60 miles north of Jerusalem.

The Sea of Galilee was the focus of Galilee's wealth. Nine cities with a population of 15,000 or more stood on its shores. To the northwest was Capernaum, the home of Simon and Andrew (Mark 1:29) and where Matthew sat at

custom (Matthew 9:9). It was also the scene of much of Jesus' Galilean ministry.

Background

Previously in Luke, the Lord Jesus was in Capernaum (Luke 4:31) healing many people who came to Him after the Sabbath (vv. 40-41). After these many mighty works, Jesus slipped away to pray in a deserted place near the city. His disciples found Him and reported how many people wanted Jesus to stay there among them. But Jesus told them that He had to go to the other cities and preach the kingdom of God, for that is what He was sent to do (v. 43). His mission was not to call others from a single place but to go to people throughout Judea—where they worked, where they lived, where they studied—and call them as they were, where they were. Jesus left Capernaum to preach in other cities of the Decapolis (see Matthew 4:25). His first stop was Lake

Gennesaret (i.e., the Sea of Galilee) where He makes contact with a crowd of people and with some of the men whom He would call to be His disciples.

At-A-Glance

1. The Teaching (Luke 5:1-3)
2. The Miracle (vv. 4-7)
3. The Commitment (vv. 8-11)

In Depth

1. The Teaching (Luke 5:1-3)

On a certain morning Jesus was on the shore of Lake Gennesaret, near Capernaum. As a result of His fame at that time, a great multitude had already collected around Him there early in the morning to listen to His teaching. In order to be able to address the multitude more effectively, the Lord entered into Simon's ship—one of two that were standing by the shore of the lake. He then asked Simon to push the boat out a little further from land and from there He taught the multitude out of the ship. Jesus used an unusual setting from which to teach. It was not in a synagogue, but in a boat (v. 3). In other words, Jesus taught where the people were. The Bible tells us to "Go ye into all the world" (from Mark 16:15); it does not tell the world to come to us. Wherever the opportunity, be ready and committed to do what you can to share the Good News of God!

When have you shown a willingness to share about God in unexpected places?

2. The Miracle (vv. 4-7)

After He finished teaching, Jesus commanded Simon to launch out from the shore into the deep part of the lake and fish there. They were going to have to launch out further in the deeper part of the lake (v. 4). Simon then objects that they

had toiled all night to catch fish but had caught nothing. They had already washed their nets, apparently to put them away until another day (v. 5:2). After all, the best time for fishing with nets was during the night. Everything appears to be so unfavorable for fishing and Simon and his friends were probably exhausted and frustrated from their night's work, nevertheless, at Jesus' words, they obeyed His command.

Jesus rewards their faith. They catch so many fish in their nets that they have to call their partners in another boat to come and help them out. And even then both boats become so full of fish that they could not hold the catch.

We need "nevertheless" kind of faith in our lives today. "Nevertheless" faith means that, no matter what the obstacles are, we are going to move forward at Jesus' Words. Do you have "nevertheless" faith?

3. The Commitment (vv. 8-11)

The Lord's revelation of power in the field of Simon's particular calling makes a powerful impression on him. He falls before the Savior, overwhelmed by His divine glory and with a deep realization of his utter sinfulness. When we come into the presence of the Lord, we too must confess that we are sinful and need to be made whole. Jesus understands Simon's state of mind and speaks reassuringly to him. Unexpectedly, Simon receives a divine calling to evangelism. Simon, James, and John committed to the Lord Jesus Christ that they were going to follow Him to the end. They have no idea what they were going to be involved in, only that they would "catch men" (v. 10). Still, they dropped what they were doing and followed Him. We should have that kind of commitment today. We should be willing to forsake all and follow Jesus.

What have you forsaken for the sake of Christ? What do you still cling to?

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Jesus' command to Simon? How did Simon respond to Jesus' command (Luke 5:3-5)?
2. Why did Simon tell Jesus to depart from Him (v. 8)?
3. What did Jesus mean when He said: "thou shalt catch men" (v. 10)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What does it mean to "forsake all" and follow Jesus today? What kind of commitment does it take to follow Jesus? Is following Jesus difficult? Give reasons for your answers.
2. Should all ministers work for the kingdom full-time or is there space for bi-vocational ministers?

Liberating Lesson

Today, as in Jesus' day, thinking of walking away from your job to pursue full-time ministry is frightening. However, Jesus did not call His disciples to leave everything they knew. They would pivot from fishing for fish to fishing for people. Some of the same skills and natural talents would be applied differently. What natural talents do you use in your occupation that can be used to spread the Gospel?

While the fishermen left their nets to follow Jesus, the men also had a network of support that freed them to focus on full-time ministry. How can your Bible study group or church lend background support so others are financially able to devote themselves to the ministry?

Application for Activation

Think about the commitment you've made to Jesus. Are you still excited about it? If not, ask Him to give you a new excitement this week so you can become "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). Encourage each student to write out a prayer to the Lord giving over their life, particularly in those areas where He is not fully Lord. Encourage honesty. Suggest that students pray to be willing to do this, if necessary.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Gennesaret. geh-NESS-are-ett.
Draught. DRAFT.
Chinneroth. CHI-ner-oth

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Called to Lead Israelites from Egypt
(Exodus 3:1-12)

TUESDAY

Called to Deliver Israelites
from Midianites
(Judges 6:11-16)

WEDNESDAY

Called and Cleansed for Ministry
(Isaiah 6:1-8)

THURSDAY

Single-Mindedness
Required to Follow Jesus
(Luke 9:57-62)

FRIDAY

Repentance, Goal of God's Kindness
(Romans 2:1-11)

SATURDAY

Jesus Calls Peter to Ministry
(John 21:15-19)

SUNDAY

Don't Be Afraid to Catch People
(Luke 5:1-11)

Notes

Called to Heal

Bible Background • MARK 2:1-12

Printed Text • MARK 2:1-12 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 103:1-14

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will STUDY Mark's account of Jesus healing the man who was paralyzed, APPRECIATE how one's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs are intertwined, and PRAY for God's healing grace to touch us at our particular point of need.

In Focus

Brenda listened to the small group's prayer requests. They were going to pray for Lee's cousin who had cancer, Jordan's knee replacement surgery, and Georgie's nephew who had an opioid addiction. Brenda thought hard, but her family was blessed with good health at the moment. She had just video-chatted with her parents a couple of days ago and everyone was happy and healthy.

Especially in the face of the other serious prayer requests, she felt embarrassed to ask about what was really weighing on her heart. She often suffered from mild Seasonal Affective Disorder. She had felt it settling in over her once Christmas vacation back home in Mississippi was over and she had come back to Virginia where she worked. When it was her turn, Brenda took a deep breath and shared, "I feel silly asking this, but could you guys pray for my mental health?" Brenda met the small group's sympathetic gazes. "I usually have seasonal depression and I'm worried this year will be worse than usual since this is my first winter here away from my family."

"No need to feel silly at all, Brenda. Thanks for letting us know how to help you," the small group leader Jordan said. "I've had some bouts with depression myself and I am happy to talk with you about it, if you want."

God cares about our wholeness in all aspects of our beings—bodily, mentally, and spiritually. How can we work as the church to make sure we minister to the whole person?

Keep in Mind

"Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?" (Mark 2:9, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Mark 2:1** And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

2 And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

6 But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

The People, Places, and Times

Palsy. This disability is due to the loss of motor function of muscles or certain nerves. It refers to all forms of paralysis. The word “palsy” translates the Greek word *paralutikos* (pah-rah-loo-tih-**KAHSS**) from which we derive the English words paralytic and paralysis. The man in this week’s Scripture is paralyzed, hence he is unable to walk by himself to meet Jesus. Matthew records the Capernaum centurion asking Jesus to heal his servant of paralysis, which causes him terrible suffering. (Matthew 8:5-6). The apostles also healed those who suffer from this condition (Acts 8:7; 9:33-34).

Scribes. Often called lawyers, doctors, or teachers of the law (Matthew 22:35), they were not considered a Jewish sect or a party, nor were they priests. The title scribe referred to their capacity as transcribers of the Hebrew Bible. They would copy the entire Old Testament by hand onto new scrolls when a new copy

was needed. This careful, precise copying of the entire Law, Prophets, and Writings gave them great knowledge of the Scriptures. Mark presents the scribes as often in the company of Pharisees and of the chief priests and coming from Jerusalem.

Have you had special training or a profession that gave you expertise in a subject? How do you and others value that skill?

Background

The news of Jesus, the worker of miracles, spread throughout Capernaum. This was an exciting time. The community had never experienced a healer and teacher like Jesus. No wonder Mark 1:32-33 speaks of the townspeople bringing all the sick and demon-possessed to Jesus. And in Jesus’ great compassion He healed every one of them, but He too needed a time of restful healing. So the next morning He departed to be alone with the Father.

The Scriptures do not tell the length of Jesus' solitude, but His time was shortened by the disciples' appearance. Jesus did not appear to be irritated by the disciples' presence, but informed them that He must preach in other places: "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (from Mark 1:38). Of a certainty there were more people in need of healing in Capernaum, but Jesus knew His mission was to spread the Gospel to everyone, so He traveled to other towns.

Do you make time to recharge with periods of solitude?

At-A-Glance

1. Jesus Preaches (Mark 2:1-4)
2. Jesus Pardons (vv. 5-9)
3. Jesus Heals (vv. 10-12)

In Depth

1. Jesus Preaches (Mark 2:1-4)

When Jesus entered Capernaum (v. 1), He preached "the word," meaning the Gospel of God's kingdom. Mark's description of the enthusiastic crowd that gathered suggests that it filled the house, jammed the doorway, and spilled out into the street. What a tribute to the ministry of Jesus!

Four men carrying "one sick of the palsy" joined the crowd but were unable to access Jesus through the doorway. Therefore, to get within touching distance of Jesus, they carried the paralytic up the outside stairway to the roof of the house. The oriental house structures in those days were one or two stories, built in a rectangle or square. They had one door that opened into an open space called the porch. Often the porch contained a stairway that led to the roof. So these friends saw the roof as a means to reach Jesus. They tore the roof open and lowered the

paralytic on his bed down through the opening to where Jesus stood preaching. What a scene!

Share about a time you have worked hard to help a friend hear the word of God.

2. Jesus Pardons (vv. 5-9)

Jesus knows this extraordinary action was based on extraordinary faith. He pardons the crippled man's sin. The teachers of the law said nothing but were outraged as they pondered Jesus forgiving the sins of another. Based on Old Testament laws (Exodus 34:6-7), the scribes knew only God had the authority to forgive sins. In their view, Jesus had committed blasphemy (Leviticus 24:15-16), a serious charge that was punishable by death. Even though the scribes do not voice their concerns aloud, Jesus knows their thoughts, which serves as further proof that He is the all-knowing, all-powerful God. Jesus declares His authority as One who is able not only to heal but also to forgive sins. Jesus' words convey to the scribes that forgiving sins are no harder than healing. Since Jesus can heal, as the scribes had seen Him do, then He can also forgive sins.

3. Jesus Heals (vv. 10-12)

Jesus turns His attention to the paralytic and commands him, "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house" (v. 11). The healing verified Jesus' claim to grant forgiveness. Since the healing was real and impossible for any but God, the claim to forgive sins is also real. The paralytic immediately arose, took up his bed, and walked out in full view of the crowd. This amazed everyone and they praised God—they had never seen anything like this!

Every healing that takes place is cause for rejoicing and praising God. God still heals, but we all know instances where healing didn't occur. Sometimes in the face of our illness, our faith demonstrates God's higher purpose (John 9) and our relationship with Him. Our faith, despite the absence of physical healing, can

recognize the grace of God's peace and strength amid our weakened state. God's healing may be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Even in the absence of healing (2 Corinthians 12:7), we must remember that His grace is sufficient and our faith is the trademark of our relationship with Him—a relationship based on the forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation with our God.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was the main thing that Jesus noticed about the four men who brought their friend to Him? (v. 5)
2. What did Jesus do before He told the man to "take up thy bed, and walk"? (v. 9)
3. What was the reaction of the people when Jesus healed the paralytic? (v. 12) What about when He forgave his sins?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why did Jesus perform the miracle of forgiveness before performing the miracle of healing (Mark 2:10)?
2. Given their commitment to upholding Jewish law, were the scribes justified in their accusations against Jesus? What motivated their thinking?

Liberating Lesson

Illness and infirmity in body, mind, and soul afflict everyone today. May those who have not yet found physical healing continue seeking it in the faith, believing that God does heal physical illnesses. Yet He does not heal in every situation.

Whether God offers you healing to overcome your illness or strength to continue despite it, you have witnessed the power of God in your life. Paul tells us that God comforts us so that we can comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:4). The testimony of God's presence in your life at a

time when healing or deliverance was needed, provides an opportunity for you to share how God sustained you through that time. Whether He has brought you out or continues to help you through, simply sharing with other hurting people helps them know they are not alone.

Application for Activation

Think of someone you know who is suffering from a physical illness. Pray that God might grant wisdom and a deeper understanding of the role of faith in their healing process. Dare to believe that when physical illness prevails, there is more to pray for than a cure. We can pray for God to give us grace and increased faith amid our pain.

Make a list of the times God has healed you physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Reflect on how that healing changed your life and deepened your faith. If you are still awaiting healing, reflect on the blessings He has given you during your situation.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Capernaum. kah-**PEER**-nah-um.

Palsy. **PALL**-zee.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Peace and Healing Will Come
(Isaiah 57:14–21)

TUESDAY

Healed by Christ's Wounds
(1 Peter 2:18–25)

WEDNESDAY

Canaanite Daughter Healed by
Mother's Faith
(Matthew 15:21–28)

THURSDAY

Anoint Sick with Oil and Prayer
(James 5:13–16)

FRIDAY

Woman Healed by Her Faith
(Mark 5:21–34)

SATURDAY

The Sick Need a Physician
(Mark 2:13–17)

SUNDAY

Jesus Heals and Forgives the Paralytic
(Mark 2:1–12)

Notes

Called as the Intercessor

Bible Background • JOHN 17:14-24

Printed Text • JOHN 17:14-24 | Devotional Reading • 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-7

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE Jesus' intercessory prayer for His disciples, LONG for Jesus' prayer to be answered more fully in their lives and the church, and PRAY for others and work for unity in the body of Christ.

In Focus

The idea came from a pamphlet Anthony picked up somewhere called "The Power of 30 Days." The pamphlet presented a simple way to deal with problems and trials we all face: Choose a prayer partner and every day for 30 days you and your partner come together in prayer and present the need to God.

Anthony discussed the idea with his wife and they agreed to come together each day and pray that God would do something about the drug house on the corner of their block. As they prayed, they continued to raise awareness of the problem among their neighbors and village officials. They knew God would provide the perfect solution to the dangerous activities that house promoted. Three weeks into their prayer vigil, the drug house burned down. No one was hurt, but the building was burned down so the city had to demolish the remaining structure.

Anthony and his wife were so overjoyed with the results of their prayer experiment that they shared the news with their church. Soon others were joining in the "Power of 30 Days" prayers and many people were reporting miraculous results. In the cases where God had not yet moved, the participants reported a renewed vitality in their prayer lives. Some people who previously did not pray often had started praying regularly.

Prayer does, in fact, change things. When we communicate our love, gratitude, and needs to our heavenly Father, He is moved to act on our behalf. In today's lesson, we will examine Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" for His followers.

Keep in Mind

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV John 17:14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

The People, Places, and Times

God as Jesus' Father. Jesus' relationship with the Father is unique because He is the eternal Son of God. Jesus expressed His unique intimate relationship to God by referring to Him as "Abba" (Mark 14:36). *Abba* is an Aramaic word that denotes a warm sense of intimacy. On several occasions, Jesus spoke of God as "My Father" (Matthew 7:21; 10:32; 16:17). The personal pronoun is expressive of their relationship. The claim that Jesus had a unique Father-Son relationship with God was shocking to the religious leaders of Jesus' time. His claim not only violated their traditions, but the Jewish leaders understood that Jesus was making Himself God's equal.

The World. In the New Testament specifically, the Greek word *kosmos* (**KOS**-mos) carries a variety of meanings. In some verses, it carries a positive denotation of all humanity (John 3:16: "the world"). John most often

uses it to refer to the realm of sin and human affairs in alienation and opposition to God (1 John 4:5; 5:19). John declares the nature of the world is ruled by lust and pride and dominated by Satan, God's enemy. The world's system has an inherent hatred toward God. In the end, the world and its wares are passing away. However, those who believe in Christ and obey God's Word will abide forever (cf. 2:8).

Background

The prayer in Matthew 6:9-13 is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." However, that prayer is actually a model for the prayers of believers. The true Lord's Prayer is the prayer of John 17. This is Jesus' farewell prayer for His disciples. In the prayer of Matthew 6, Jesus explains what His disciples should desire for themselves. In the prayer of John 17, Jesus petitions God on behalf of His disciples. Jesus and His disciples had just finished eating the Passover meal. And

“Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father” (from John 13:1). Jesus gave the disciples their final instructions. He told them of the coming betrayal, going to the Father to prepare a place for them, and the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 13-16).

After completing His final teaching, called the “Upper Room Discourse,” Jesus offered up His longest recorded prayer, called the “High Priestly Prayer.” The prayer was likely prayed in the presence of the disciples either in the Upper Room or on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane.

If you could only give one last prayer for your children or another group you lead, what would you pray for them?

At-A-Glance

1. The Believers’ Protection (John 17:14-16)
2. The Believers’ Sanctification (vv. 17-19)
3. The Believers’ Unity (vv. 20-24)

In Depth

1. The Believers’ Protection (John 17:14-16)

In this final prayer before His Passion, Jesus petitions God for His followers. The Lord realizes that His earthly ministry is drawing to an end. Soon He will return to His rightful place in heaven. So He commits His followers to the Father’s care. Jesus affirms that He has completed part of His mission already: He has given the disciples the Father’s Word. Jesus Himself is the Word of God. By His teaching, preaching, and His holy presence, He has imparted the Father’s Word to His followers. Although believers are separated from the world, Christ does not expect us to withdraw

from the world. Instead, He asks that we be protected from the world’s evil influences. The “evil one” is Satan, the devil, who always seeks to drag people away from God. Though the disciples will be in the world, they belong elsewhere (namely heaven), just like Jesus Himself. Their allegiance and citizenship have changed to the kingdom of heaven.

2. The Believers’ Sanctification (vv. 17-19)

Jesus’ second petition is for sanctification: “Sanctify them through thy truth” (v. 17). To sanctify means to set apart for God and His holy purposes. Every believer has been set apart to carry on the work of Christ (v. 18). Each Christian has been appointed some divine task and equipped to carry it out. God sent Jesus with a specific mission to enlighten all humanity that involved a great deal of courage, prayer, and self-sacrifice. This is exactly what He expects from us, exactly what he has prepared and personally “sanctified” us for.

Jesus set Himself aside from all defilement and resisted all temptation so that He could successfully carry out His spiritual responsibility. He did this so that others “might be sanctified through the truth.” The truth is God’s active Word that must be obeyed. Jesus in His incarnation was God’s truth personified (14:6) and all of His followers know the truth (8:32) and abide in it (8:44). For their sakes, He has consecrated Himself as a living sacrifice and stood in the gap on our behalf.

How have you sanctified yourself to God’s purpose? How do you manifest that promise in everyday life?

3. The Believers’ Unity (vv. 20-24)

This prayer can be summed up as a desire for a unity that would mimic the unity that Jesus has with the Father. Up to this point, Jesus has focused His prayer primarily on His disciples. Now He looks to the future and prays for the

universal church throughout the ages. The Father and Son provide the best example of Christian unity (John 17:21). Christians will find themselves united with each other as they unite with Christ. The glory of Christ unites Christians with Him. Our common salvation unites us as one and serves as a sign to the world that Christ came from God and lives within us. Jesus asks that the unity of believers would show the world that Jesus was sent by the Father and would cause the world to believe in Him as Savior. All believers should join with Christ in praying that God be glorified and that believers everywhere be protected, sanctified, and unified.

How has the lack of unity in the Church, the body of Christ, contributed to why the world has not been convinced of the Gospel?

Search the Scriptures

1. What did Christ ask God to do to protect believers from the world's evil system? (v. 17)
2. Aside from His disciples, whom else did Jesus include in His prayer? (v. 20)
3. What does Jesus want His followers to see when He brings them to heaven? (v. 24)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Jesus prays for believers to be one with each other. How is this made possible? And how do we maintain unity as the church?
2. Is the church currently a unified witness of Christ? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

Many of the problems in our communities could be better addressed by a united effort on the part of God's people. What effect might such unity have on crime, immorality, and social ills?

Application for Activation

This week select a community or church problem that you want God to answer. Then

choose a prayer partner. You and your partner will spend at least ten minutes each day praying for this problem. Be prepared to report back to class next week with your experiences.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Aramaic. air-ah-MAY-ik.
Gethsemane. geth-SEH-muh-nee.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Prayer for Peter in Prison
(Acts 12:5–11)

TUESDAY

Pray for a Successful Ministry
(Romans 15:22–33)

WEDNESDAY

Pray for Inner Strength and Power
(Ephesians 3:14–21)

THURSDAY

Pray the Prayer of Our Lord
(Matthew 6:7–13)

FRIDAY

Pray for Your Abusers
(Luke 6:22–33)

SATURDAY

Pray to Avoid Trials
(Luke 22:39–46)

SUNDAY

Jesus Prays for His Disciples
(John 17:13–24)

Notes

Prophesying Daughters

Bible Background • LUKE 2:36-38; ACTS 1:12-14, 2:16-21, 21:8-9

Printed Text • LUKE 2:36-38; ACTS 2:16-21, 21:8-9 | Devotional Reading • JOEL 2:28-32

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXAMINE how God called and empowered women to proclaim His message, AFFIRM contributions of godly women to the church's mission, and ADVOCATE for greater recognition of God-called women in the church.

In Focus

Gina had enjoyed the company of elderly folks since she was a child. Now, as an adult, Gina worked taking care of them. She had seen so much heartache. The physical suffering was bad enough, but it was the emotional suffering like abandonment and loneliness that hurt them the most.

In the past year, there had been several elderly folks in Gina's church who had succumbed to poor health and were no longer able to attend services. Gina genuinely missed seeing their faces in church on Sunday morning. She began to pray for the folks she missed, and the more she prayed, the greater her burden became. Her burden began to expand beyond the boundaries of her church and extended to the elderly folks who needed to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit was at work in Gina's heart. Surely she wasn't the only one in her church who saw the need for outreach in this area. Gina spoke with her pastor, and with his prayer and support, she launched a visitation and outreach program for the elderly in her community. The outreach team found that some of the elderly folks wanted to hear nothing about a Savior or the gift of salvation. They began to pray that the Holy Spirit would soften those hardened hearts and that He would empower them in their ministry. One by one, lost souls were led to Christ—not only the elderly but their family members and caregivers as well.

Today's story illustrates how the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, at work in one faithful heart, can reach out to lost, hurting souls and unite a community.

Keep in Mind

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Luke 2:36** And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity;

37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Acts 2:16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

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

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

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

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

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

Acts 21:8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.

9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

The People, Places, and Times

Upper Room Women. Jesus instructed His followers to go to Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They obeyed and 120 men and women assembled in the Upper Room. The Scripture clearly states that certain women were included in this number. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was mentioned by name (Acts 1:14) and the wives of the apostles (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:5). Also, in this assembly were the female followers of Jesus devoted to Him throughout His ministry (Luke 8:2–3). So, when the Holy Spirit came, He fell on men and women, just as Joel prophesied.

Pentecost. Celebrated fifty days after Passover, Pentecost was also called the “Feast of Harvest” and the “Feast of First Fruits” (Leviticus 23:5–21). Pentecost is also celebrated as Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks,

which celebrates Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Christians celebrate Pentecost as a commemoration of the outpouring of the gifts of the Spirit. While Shavuot also represents the Jews being freed from slavery to Egypt, Pentecost represents humankind being freed from slavery to sin.

What has God freed you from and how do you share that redemption with others?

Background

Joseph and Mary carried the baby Jesus into the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfill two Jewish ceremonial obligations: the redemption of the firstborn and the purification of the mother after childbirth (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 8:17; 18:14–16; Leviticus 12:1–8). There they met the prophets Simeon and Anna.

Thirty-three years after these prophets proclaimed their message about Christ, another prophet's words were fulfilled when both men and women played a significant part in the Day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit had been active since the beginning of time, throughout the Old Testament, and during Jesus' ministry. However, after the Day of Pentecost, the role of the Holy Spirit expanded. The power of God's Spirit equips the believer to live the Christian life and carry out Christ's mission (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Acts 21 states that Paul and his company stayed with Philip the evangelist and his four daughters for some time. The daughters, each called prophetess, and their father may have given Luke (the author of Luke and Acts), information about their ministry and the spreading of the Good News in Caesarea and the surrounding areas.

While Anna and Philip's daughters have only a small mention, we will always remember them because they are in Scripture. What act of Christ-like goodness will you always remember?

At-A-Glance

1. A Woman Called to Declare the Messiah (Luke 2:36-38)
2. All Believers Called to be Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-21)
3. Women called to Prophecy (Acts 21:8-9)

In Depth

1. A Woman Called to Declare the Messiah (Luke 2:36-38)

The Gospel of Luke highlights a prophetess named Anna, from the Israelite tribe of Asher. Anna's husband died after seven years of marriage. Afterward, she devoted the rest

of her long life in absolute surrender to God. Faithfully, she prayed, fasted, and served in the Temple in Jerusalem. Anna was so devoted that she "departed not from the temple" (v. 37), where she was certain to gain great knowledge and experience in God's ways.

Anna longed to see the Messiah's face. God granted her heart's desire when Mary and Joseph walked into the Temple with the baby Jesus. Anna immediately recognized the long-awaited Messiah. She praised and thanked God for allowing her to see Jesus and witness the unfolding of the messianic prophecies. Anna, inspired by the Holy Spirit, spoke boldly about the coming Messiah, declaring the baby Jesus is, in fact, the promised one bringing salvation and redemption.

2. All Believers Called to be Filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-21)

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter addressed the crowd in Jerusalem. He clarified that it was the partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy as it pertained to the church (Joel 2:28-29). Christians are now God's temple, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). At one time the operation of the Spirit was most prominently recorded as the revelation to a few people and one particular nation—Israel. Today God connects and communicates His desires through people in every walk of life, not merely through the Jewish leadership. Following the Day of Pentecost, people from all nations, cultures, and people groups regardless of gender, race, and social status can be filled with the Holy Spirit, empowered to speak out God's words. Both young and old; men and women; those who might be considered as insignificant and those who are high ranking in society; the educated, the unlearned; the rich and the poor can be recipients of God's divine salvation and filled with His Spirit.

While Joel also predicted changes in the physical atmosphere, those signs will be fulfilled in the end times (Revelation 6:12, 8:12).

In what way was Joel's prophecy seen on the day of Pentecost? What aspects of his prophecy will be deferred?

3. Women Called to Prophecy (Acts 21:8-9)

Philip was one of the first seven deacons (Acts 6:1-6). He witnessed to an Ethiopian eunuch and then the Holy Spirit led him to Azotus where he preached in Caesarea and the surrounding area (Acts 8:26-40). Twenty years later, Philip continued to reside in Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9).

Paul, Luke, and eight others visited Philip whose four unmarried, virgin daughters lived with him. Some scholars believe their unmarried status was an indication of their solidarity and devotion to the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:34). The Scripture offers no extensive details about these four prophetesses. They are unnamed and nothing was recorded about their mother or specific involvement in ministry except that they prophesied. Philip committed himself to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, boldly talking about Christ. As is often seen even today, when parents are involved in ministry their children are likely to be involved as well.

Search the Scriptures

1. How does the mention of Anna, the women in Acts 2, and Philip's daughters contribute to Jesus' ministry? (Luke 2:38, Acts 1:14, Acts 21:8).
2. Who were the recipients of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16-17)?
3. What was Anna's message and to whom did she prophesy (Luke 2:38)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How is Anna a role model for men and women?

2. How do you account for the unity of men and women in the Upper Room (Acts 1:14; 2:21)?

3. Why did Luke see the mention of Phillip's daughters as significant?

Liberating Lesson

Some churches and denominations debate women's roles in the furtherance of the Gospel. How do the passages in today's lesson address this issue?

Application for Activation

The statements regarding women in today's passages, declare the role of women in speaking out as the Spirit of the Lord divinely inspires. Have you ever felt the urgency of speaking in faith under God's Word? How did you respond? What was the result? Seek God for the boldness to speak in favor of the Gospel.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Phanuel. FAH-noo-ell.

Azotus. AH-zoe-tuss.

Caesarea. KYE-sare-EE-uh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jesus Supports Mary's Choice
(Luke 10:38-42)

TUESDAY

Jesus Responds to Sister's Call
(John 11:1-11)

WEDNESDAY

Jesus Raises Lazarus; Mary Believes
(John 11:38-45)

THURSDAY

Women Carry Resurrection
Message to Apostles
(Luke 24:5-10)

FRIDAY

Jesus' Final Words and Ascension
(Luke 24:44-53)

SATURDAY

Simeon Sees Impact of Jesus' Ministry
(Luke 2:28-35)

SUNDAY

The Spirit Empowers
Daughters to Prophecy
(Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21; 21:8-9)

Notes

Called to Evangelize

Bible Background • JOHN 1:37-51, 4:25-42
Printed Text • JOHN 4:25-42 | Devotional Reading • JOHN 1:37-51

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will IDENTIFY the barriers Jesus crossed in speaking with the Samaritan woman, SENSE the wonder the Samaritan woman felt in her meeting with Jesus, and SHARE with others the transforming power of God at work in their lives.

In Focus

Thirty-year-old Retha, pregnant and unmarried, sat in her kitchen, staring blankly into her cup of coffee. Ever since her abdomen had started rounding obviously, her neighbors and friends avoided her. So, she was quite surprised when she heard a knock on her door. Retha found herself face-to-face with two elderly women she had never seen before.

“Hi, I’m Artice, and this is Peggy. We’re from the senior adult Sunday School class of True Rock Church. We’ve come to bring you some things for your baby,” said Artice.

“Our pastor asked us to scout out the neighborhood to see who we can help. When we saw you walking and looking sad the other day, we decided that you might be one we would help. So, here we are,” said Peggy.

Retha could hardly believe her eyes and ears. After sharing a cup of coffee and conversation with the ladies, Peggy spoke up first. “We have some good news for you. We came to tell you that Jesus loves you and we would like for you to go to church with us.”

But how could Jesus love me? Retha wondered. Wasn’t He going to look down on her just like her family did? Still, they had been nice to her and even offered to come by to take her to church on Sunday. Retha’s decision to go to church that week would change her life. Eventually, she would know for herself that Jesus is alive and she too would want to share the Good News of Him with others.

No one is too much of an outcast of society that Jesus cannot reach them and make their lives new. How has your witness helped someone to feel that they were welcomed?

Keep in Mind

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

Focal Verses

KJV **John 4:25** The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.

26 Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.

27 And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?

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

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

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

31 In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat.

32 But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.

33 Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?

34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

35 Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

36 And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

37 And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.

38 I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

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

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

41 And many more believed because of his own word;

42 And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

The People, Places, and Times

Jacob's Well. There is a present-day well near Sychar, which Samaritans believed was built by Jacob. A narrow opening four feet long led from the floor of the vault into the well which was dug through limestone. The ground mentioned by John had been purchased by Jacob (Genesis 33:19). The area was later wrested by force from the Amorites (Genesis 38:22). The well is near the base of Mount Gerizim, which was as holy to the Samaritans as Mt. Zion was to the Jews. Many religious differences like this led to disdain between Jews and Samaritans.

The Woman at the Well. The little we know about the Samaritan woman at the well is gleaned from Scripture. She comes to draw water from the well at noon, even though most women came in the morning and socialized. Jesus gives us a personal detail that perhaps explains this behavior. She has had five husbands and is currently living with a sixth man. Although the woman was possibly widowed more than once, she has likely been divorced at some point. The stigma for divorce, especially for the woman, was high in Jesus' time, and likely the woman draws water at an odd time to avoid the judgment and gossip of the other women of the town.

Background

In John 4, Jesus and His disciples left Judea to return to Galilee. The route led them directly through Samaria. Although Jews and Samaritans both descended from ancient Israel, their religious practices and beliefs were slightly different, and there was long-standing hostility between them. While His disciples went into the city to buy food, Jesus rested by the well in the heat of the day. While Jesus rested, a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water. Due to the social customs, the woman did not expect Jesus to speak to her. He asked her to draw physical water for Him and promised that He could provide her with living or spiritual water. There at the well, they shared a theological conversation. As the conversation progressed, she realized that Jesus was no ordinary Jewish man. Just before the disciples returned, Jesus revealed Himself to be Israel's long-awaited Messiah.

Have you ever had a life-altering spiritual experience at an unexpected time or in an unexpected place?

At-A-Glance

1. "I Am" (John 4:25-30)
2. Gathering Fruit for Eternal Life (vv. 31-38)
3. Because of the Woman's Testimony (vv. 39-42)

In Depth

1. "I Am" (John 4:25-30)

A common phrase Jesus uses in the Gospel of John is "I am He." The phrase reveals Jesus to be the great "I Am." Although Jesus' disciples struggle throughout the Gospel of John to understand who Jesus is, the Samaritan woman does not struggle to believe that He

is the Messiah. When the disciples return from the city, the woman leaves her water jug at the well and runs to tell the good news of the man who had "told her everything [she] had ever done." Although the disciples were surprised to find Jesus speaking publicly with a Samaritan woman, none of them said anything to discourage the conversation. When the woman reported her experience with Jesus in the city, the Samaritans went out to meet Him.

Why do you think the Samaritan woman was so receptive to the idea that Jesus was the Messiah?

2. Gathering Fruit for Eternal Life (vv. 31-38)

While the woman was in the city sharing her testimony, the disciples encouraged Jesus to eat, but they received an unexpected response. Like the woman to whom Jesus had offered living water, Jesus told the disciples that they did not know about the food He had. Mirroring the woman's confusion about living water, the disciples wondered who might have brought Jesus something to eat. However, Jesus explained that His "food" was the work God sent Him to do. He told the disciples that the fields were ripe for harvesting. Harkening back to the long legacy of Hebrew Bible prophets and teachers, Jesus told the disciples that they entered into the labor which others had already begun. Likewise, when we share the story of Jesus and His love, we stand on the shoulders of those who have labored to spread the good news.

When was the last time you let someone know about God's indescribable love for them?

3. Because of the Woman's Testimony (vv. 39-42)

What impact could your simple testimony have on the people around you? The testimony of the Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well

was simple. She believed that Jesus was the Messiah because He had told her everything she had ever done. The woman believed in Jesus because she felt seen by Jesus. For the Samaritans, her honest and straightforward testimony was sufficient. They believed in Jesus because of what she had told them about Him. The group Jesus met that day invited Him to stay with them and He agreed to do so for two days. Upon interacting with Him, even more people believed. They told the woman that they no longer believed because of her words alone. They now believed in Jesus because they had encounters with Him.

Will you walk with a friend, neighbor, or family member as they have personal experiences with Jesus?

Search the Scriptures

1. What evidence did Jesus present that convinced the Samaritan woman that He was the Messiah?

2. What experiences did Jesus have in Samaria that made Him convinced that the fields were ripe for a spiritual harvest?

Discuss the Meaning

1. In what way does Jesus treat the Samaritan woman as a worthy evangelist?

2. How does Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman transform the way we understand the roles that women might play in Christian ministry?

Liberating Lesson

Globally, ethnic and cultural groups struggle to relate to each other. Cultural misunderstandings can lead to violence including the abuse of women and children. This passage points us to an alternative model for living. It encourages us to build relationships even when cultural norms discourage us from doing so. It reveals that even when we feel alone,

we stand on the shoulders of ancestors who have done the labor that we are now continuing. It reminds us that as followers of Jesus Christ, we can model Christ's sacrificial love, grace, and mercy to everyone we meet. It also reveals that we cannot and should not underestimate the ability of women and girls or anyone regardless of the labels society has placed on them.

Application for Activation

Go tell the Good News of Jesus Christ! You never know who might be transformed by your testimony. Do not be afraid to share what God has done for you. However, we are not only called to share the Good News of Jesus Christ individually. Working as members of church families, we also can share the love of Jesus with our community. As a church, explore the possibility of interfaith or interracial dialogue. The church is the hands and feet of Jesus in the world and we should pursue every opportunity to love others as freely as Jesus has loved us.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Sychar. sih-CAR.
 Gerizim. GAIR-ih-zeem.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Receive the Water of Life
 (Revelation 21:1-7)

TUESDAY

Jesus Declares, "I Am From Above"
 (John 8:21-30)

WEDNESDAY

God's Children Led by the Spirit
 (Romans 8:12-17)

THURSDAY

Simon and Andrew First Disciples
 (John 1:37-42)

FRIDAY

Galileans Philip and Nathanael
 Become Disciples
 (John 1:43-51)

SATURDAY

Jesus Heals the Son of a Galilean Official
 (John 4:43-54)

SUNDAY

Samaritans Come to Jesus
 (John 4:25-42)

Notes

Mary Magdalene: A Faithful Disciple

Bible Background • MARK 15:40; 16:1-9; LUKE 8:1-3; JOHN 20:10-18 | Printed Text • LUKE 8:1-3; MARK 15:40; JOHN 20:10-18 | Devotional Reading • ROMANS 4:13-25

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DISCERN Mary Magdalene's motivations for committing her life to Jesus, APPRECIATE the sacrifices Mary Magdalene made in order to follow Jesus, and EMBRACE a lifestyle of wholehearted discipleship.

In Focus

It was a wearying plane ride from San Diego to the military hospital overseas, but Jackie got no rest; she was too anxious. This was not the reunion she wanted for her and her husband Bruce, a lifelong Army officer whose career had taken him to deployments across the United States and around the world.

Every time Bruce was reassigned, they dutifully made the moves, understanding that they were together in marriage no matter where it took them. They packed everything they had and she took on the challenges of settling into new housing, making new friends, and supporting him, even as their family grew from two to three, then four.

But the family wasn't allowed to follow when Bruce was stationed at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, which meant Jackie leaned harder on her faith that her husband would be safe. Before Bruce left, he gave her a bracelet engraved with the Mizpah: "The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another." For months, that carried her through. Then came word that Bruce was injured in a vehicle crash.

Now Jackie stood in a hospital corridor being told Bruce had been moved just before her arrival, but it wasn't clear where. As an Army chaplain and an administrator tried to sort out the confusion, a kind charge nurse saw Jackie's distress.

"Don't let worry overtake you now," she said with a smile. "Believe me, with a loving partner like you in his corner, he'll be fine."

Can we trust God to care for those we love, wherever they are?

Keep in Mind

"The twelve were with him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils"
(from Luke 8:1-2, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV **Luke 8:1** And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him,

2 And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils,

3 And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

Mark 15:40 There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome;

John 20:10 Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.

11 But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre,

12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my LORD, and I know not where they have laid him.

14 And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

18 Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the LORD, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

The People, Places, and Times

Demonic Possession. Demons are evil spiritual beings (Matthew 8:16; 12:43-45) who are enemies of God and have certain power over people (James 2:19; Revelation 16:14). They belong to the number of fallen angels that "kept not their first estate" (Jude 6). Demonic possession is mentioned quite often in the New Testament, with a variety of effects such as muteness (Luke 11:14) and epilepsy (Mark 9:17f). The child's posture in Mark 9 is evidence of the physical exhaustion caused by the intense nervous strain of demonic possession. The Gospel records clearly show that Christ distinguished between ordinary sickness and demon possession. Jesus generally healed sick

people by the laying on of hands or anointing. The demon-possessed were delivered when the spirits were commanded to depart (for example, see Matthew 10:8; Mark 6:13; Acts 8:7). Sometimes multiple spirits possess a single person, such as the legion of demons who possessed the man in Gennesaret or Mary of Magdala.

Background

Although some traditions have historically advanced the idea that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute, more recent Biblical scholars have debunked that claim because Scripture does not support it. Possibly the link began with scholars assuming Mary Magdalene (who is first named

in Luke 8:2) is the same “sinful woman” who anointed Jesus in Simon’s house (Luke 7). In Luke 8:2, what we really learn about Mary Magdalene is that she was a woman from whom seven demons had gone out and she was a close follower and friend of Jesus. In Mark 15:40, we learn that when Jesus was crucified, Mary was among the group of women who looked on from a distance. When the Sabbath was over, she was also one of the three women who brought spices to anoint Jesus’ body. Mary’s consistent presence with Jesus and His appearance to her after His Resurrection points to the value Jesus placed on the contributions of women to the spread of the Gospel.

What transforming life experiences have shaped your relationship with Jesus?

At-A-Glance

1. The Twelve and Some Women (Luke 8:1-3)
2. Refusing to Leave the Scene (Mark 15:40)
3. Looking for Signs of Resurrection (John 20:10-18)

In Depth

1. The Twelve and Some Women (Luke 8:1-3)

Jesus’ earthly ministry would not have been possible without the support of disciples and friends who traveled with Him as He proclaimed the Gospel. As seen in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus’ ministry takes Him all over Galilee. He traveled with twelve disciples to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. However, Jesus did not travel with only His disciples. A group of women also accompanied Jesus. Each of the women who traveled with Jesus had been cured of evil spirits or diseases. Mary was

called Magdalene because she was from the town of Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Joanna also traveled with them. She was the wife of Herod’s steward, Chuza. Her faithfulness to Jesus possibly indicates her opposition to Herod’s rule. Luke also records Joanna as being one of the women (along with Mary Magdalene) who first discovered Jesus’ tomb was empty (Luke 24:10). Another woman named Susanna also traveled with them. The women who traveled with Jesus and the disciples provided resources such as food and other support for the group.

What unique resources do you provide to contribute to ongoing Christian ministry?

2. Refusing to Leave the Scene (Mark 15:40)

The women who traveled with Jesus supported Him in life and death. Each of the Gospels presents slightly different details of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but the account is briefest in the Gospel of Mark which was the earliest of the four Gospels written. Mark does not indicate that the disciples remained at the foot of Jesus’ Cross, but he does note that there were women who looked on from a distance (Mark 15:40). These women included Mary Magdalene. Crucifixion was meant to be a humiliating and shameful execution. People would not normally associate themselves with such a person. Crucifixion also demonstrated the total power of the Roman Empire. People who were crucified served as an example to Roman citizens of what happens when one crosses Rome. These women associated themselves with someone who was a threat to the Empire—Jesus. Though they are not right at the feet of the Cross (where John records himself and Jesus’ mother), they do not fully desert their master as the other disciples did. These three women stay with their Master through His death and are the first to come

planning to anoint His body on the morning of His resurrection.

When was the last time you supported someone or something until the end even knowing that you would not receive the result for which you had hoped and prayed?

3. Looking for Signs of Resurrection (John 20:10-18)

Mary is the first to find the empty tomb. She then alerts the Apostles (John 20:1-2). When Peter and John went to Jesus' empty tomb, they thought that someone had taken His body. The two returned home. Like Peter and John, Mary feared that someone had taken the body also, but she was unwilling to leave the tomb without trying to determine where the thieves placed Him. Mary remained at the tomb only because of her devotion to Jesus. Mary's grief prevented her from immediately recognizing Jesus when He appeared to her in His resurrected body. When Mary finally recognized Him, she knew Jesus because of the distinct way He spoke to her. The miraculous had happened and Mary was the first of Jesus' friends to bear witness to the fact that Jesus had risen with all power in His hands. Mary could not wait to share the Good News!

When you receive unexpectedly good news, whom do you tell first?

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did Jesus travel with such a large group of followers? Why did those followers include women? (Luke 8:1-3)

2. Why did Mary Magdalene and others go to the tomb after Jesus' death? (Mark 6:1-2; Luke 23:56; John 20:3-9)

Discuss the Meaning

1. What might these women, especially Mary Magdalene, reveal about what it means to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ?

2. What risks did Mary take to support Jesus' ministry?

Liberating Lesson

Crises of conscience plague contemporary society. Mary Magdalene's example to us as individuals is two-fold. First, she reminds us to allow God to transform our lives. Second, she shows us what it means to be a faithful follower and friend. In a world where so much seems temporary and fleeting, Mary teaches the contemporary reader to stay plugged into our relationship with Jesus. Mary's example to our churches is not to be hasty and walk away from the empty tomb. Today's churches often find that they are bombarded with statistics of how people in younger generations are less likely to attend church. These statistics sometimes lead us to change or dilute our message to suit changing times. Mary reminds the church to remain steadfast. There is yet hope.

Application for Activation

Think of someone you know who has experienced a liberating transformation because of Jesus. (Maybe you have yourself.) Ask the person to share their testimony with you. Consider asking the person if you may record their story to share with others in your small group.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Magdala. **MAG**-dah-lah.

Salome. **SAH**-low-may.

Chuza. **KOO**-zah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jesus Appears to Paul
(1 Corinthians 15:1–11)

TUESDAY

Present with Jesus at the Cross
(John 19:25–30)

WEDNESDAY

Spices Prepared to Anoint Jesus' Body
(Mark 16:1–8)

THURSDAY

Mary Magdalene Finds an Empty Tomb
(John 20:1–9)

FRIDAY

Angel Confirms Jesus' Resurrection to Women
(Matthew 28:1–10)

SATURDAY

Jesus Appears, Disciples Sent into Ministry
(John 20:19–23)

SUNDAY

Mary Magdalene, Faithful Disciple
(Luke 8:1–3; Mark 15:40; John 20:10–18)

Priscilla: Called to Minister

**Bible Background • ACTS 18:1-26; ROMANS 16:3-4; 1 CORINTHIANS 16:19;
2 TIMOTHY 4:19 | Printed Text • ACTS 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26; ROMANS 16:3-4 |
Devotional Reading • COLOSSIANS 4:7-15**

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will RESEARCH the life and ministry of Priscilla and her husband Aquila, APPRECIATE the ministry of those who explain the Way of God with accuracy, and SEEK opportunities to use our gifts or abilities to further the Gospel.

In Focus

Gloria and Raoul had come to the United States five years ago as refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo. They had to leave their home because regional infighting was making it dangerous for them. The U.S. would provide a safe place where they could start a family. Even though Gloria and Raoul only knew a few people who had immigrated, they trusted that God would provide for them as they journeyed to this new land.

The couple was grateful to be welcomed into a local church. The church included them in their ministries, and Gloria and Raoul offering their skills at the church's after-school program. Raoul had actually taught algebra before they fled, and Gloria loved looking after little ones.

One day, a new face showed up in the congregation. He was an immigrant from Costa Rica named Julio. Even though he spoke only a little English, he loved the Lord and loved to share that love on the field. He told stories about his time coaching fútbol back in his hometown. Gloria insisted Julio come to their house for lunch, and they recruited him to join them at the after-school program, teaching soccer. Julio quickly became invaluable to the ministry. Many students were excited to learn new soccer tricks, but they also learned about Jesus' love for them.

What skills do you have that can be used to directly further the Gospel? How can you use your skills in ways that help others share the Gospel too?

Keep in Mind

"Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles"
(Romans 16:3-4, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Acts 18:18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;

21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

Romans 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

The People, Places, and Times

Ephesus. A principal Roman city of Asia, Ephesus was both a strategic commercial city and a major religious center. The city was famous for its magnificent temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The practice of magic and a large part of the local economy were intertwined with this temple. Paul remained in Ephesus for three years on his third missionary journey. The Word spread throughout that region. Paul's ministry hurt the sale of magical items and images, leading to an actual riot. After this, Paul left and went to Macedonia and returned only for a brief visit with the elders, several miles outside the city. Paul wrote a letter to the Ephesian church while imprisoned in Rome.

Apollos. An Alexandrian Jew who came to Ephesus in AD 52 (Acts 18:24). He had an accurate understanding of the story of Jesus and a profound understanding of the Old Testament. He was eloquent, articulate, and enthusiastic as he preached the truth as he knew it (Acts 18:24-25). However, he lacked knowledge about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and baptism. Priscilla and Aquila patiently instructed Apollos, filling in the gaps in his knowledge (Acts 18:26). As a result, Apollos went on to become a powerful proclaimer and defender of the Christian faith (Acts 18:27-28).

Do you make yourself open to receiving correction as Apollos did?

Background

Luke, the Gospel writer and author of the Acts of the Apostles, portrays the husband and wife team of Aquila and Priscilla as an ideal model of Christianity. They are friendly, hospitable, and generous. Aquila was a tentmaker who traveled extensively throughout the New Testament world with his wife Priscilla (see Acts 18:2-28; 1 Corinthians 16:19). Some scholars suggest that Priscilla inherited wealth and held tremendous influence in her community. They count this as one possible reason she is often mentioned before her husband in Scripture.

The Bible does not say how Paul met this couple, but it is clear that the apostle formed a friendship with Aquila and Priscilla. Through their influence and friendship, Paul was able to continue his missionary journey while leaving a faithful ministry team in Ephesus to preach the Gospel on his—and Jesus’—behalf.

How has a friendship with another Christian family or friend helped your faith journey?

At-A-Glance

1. Paul Meets Priscilla and Aquila
(Acts 18:1-3)
2. Expanding the Ministry to Ephesus
(vv. 18-21)
3. Apollos Meets Priscilla and Aquila
(vv. 24-26)
4. Paul Salutes Priscilla and Aquila
(Romans 16:3-4)

In Depth

1. Paul Meets Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:1-3)

After Athens, Paul’s next stop is Corinth, approximately fifty miles to the west. While there, Paul meets a Jewish-Christian couple named Priscilla and Aquila. Even though Aquila

was born among the large Jewish population of Pontus, he and his wife had most recently lived in Italy. When Emperor Claudius commanded all Jews to be expelled from Rome, however, the couple left and eventually arrived in Corinth. The Scriptures affirm that Aquila, Priscilla, and Paul were all tentmakers, so the three of them worked at their tentmaking trade, and Paul engaged in ministry on the Sabbath, preaching to both Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue.

Most would agree that Paul was a great apostle and evangelist, but dedicated friends helped Paul achieve many of his accomplishments. Christian friends, like Priscilla and Aquila, are vitally important to ministry and evangelism. God’s church is not made of brick and mortar; it is made of people who are codependent on one another and Christ.

2. Expanding the Ministry to Ephesus (vv. 18-21)

Paul and his companions minister for a year and a half among the Corinthians before the stirring of the Holy Spirit prompts them to travel to Syria to further the ministry. Paul leaves accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila and sailed back across the Aegean Sea.

The ship upon which the trio has traveling stops in Ephesus for a short time and Paul takes advantage of the stopover to teach in the local Jewish synagogue. His preaching stirs interest among the Jewish inhabitants of Ephesus, who entreat Paul to stay with them longer. However, Paul desires to return to Jerusalem in time for one of the Jewish festivals and is unable to stay. He promises, however, to return if God will permit it. He also leaves Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to carry on what he has begun. Priscilla and Aquila remain in Ephesus for several years and permit their home to be used as the meeting place for the Christian church they help to plant.

3. Apollos Meets Priscilla and Aquila (vv. 24-26)

Sometime later, Apollos, a Jew who was born in Alexandria, comes to Ephesus. Apollos was excited about the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ and described as “an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures” (v. 24).

Apollos possesses great biblical skills, having the ability to teach the Word diligently, even though he only knows about the baptism of John. However, Apollos’ ministry catches the attention of Priscilla and Aquila. They are impressed with his teaching and his boldness as he speaks in the synagogue, but they realize that Apollos lacks a fuller understanding of Jesus.

Priscilla and Aquila become his mentors in the things of the Spirit. We all need spiritual mentors who can help us expound the Word of God in a more complete way. We should not be afraid to ask others who may be more spiritually mature to help us get a better understanding of the Scriptures.

4. Paul Salutes Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3-4)

At the close of his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul greets 26 people by name. At the top of this list is the ministry team, Priscilla and Aquila. He refers to the couple as “my helpers in Christ Jesus.” The word “helper” means “fellow worker” and looks back to their love and aid when Paul arrived in Corinth. The apostle says that the couple “laid down their own necks,” or risked their lives on his behalf. Scripture does not record the incident when this took place, but at some point the couple was willing to sacrifice their own lives for the Gospel. Paul affirms his gratitude for this couple’s work, adding that “also all the churches of the Gentiles” thank them. This shows that Paul considers Priscilla and Aquila’s work so influential that every church started by non-Jews owes gratitude to them.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why had Priscilla and Aquila left their home in Rome and relocated to Corinth? (Acts 18:2)
2. What activity helped cement the partnership between Paul and the couple? (v. 3)
3. What phrase did Paul use to describe the couple’s ministry with him? (Romans 16:3)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Many people believe that working with one’s spouse professionally or in ministry can cause problems in the home because work problems or ministry disagreements follow the couple home and cause friction. Do you believe this? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. What are some of the reasons people do not mentor younger people? How should these issues be resolved?

Liberating Lesson

Christian homes and solid Christian marriages remain two of the best tools for spreading the Gospel. Husband-and-wife teams can be tremendous blessings for the body of Christ. The faithfulness of people like Priscilla and Aquila makes ministry a joy for others. The effectiveness of their ministry says a lot about their personal relationship with each other and with God. Their hospitality became the doorway of salvation for many.

This is why the enemy fights so hard against marriage. More than half the marriages in the United States end in divorce. List some of the positive features and negative hindrances that can affect husband-and-wife businesses/partnerships (and marriages). Report on your list next week.

Application for Activation

In today’s lesson, Priscilla and Aquila took young Apollos under their wing and mentored him in the Gospel. Examine your life to see who you are influencing in the body of Christ. If you

can't think of anyone, ask God to help you make a specific contribution to someone's life this week. Perhaps making a phone call or writing a letter to lift someone's spirit is a good place to start. Before the class is over today, commit to find someone this week.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Cenchrae. kenn-KRAY-ah.

Sosthenes. SOSS-theh-neeZ.

Aquila. ah-QUILL-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Paul Reflects on His Ministry
(2 Timothy 4:9-18)

TUESDAY

Greetings to Saints in Jesus Christ
(Colossians 4:7-15)

WEDNESDAY

The Holy Kiss Strengthens
Ministry Bond
(2 Corinthians 13:11-13;
1 Thessalonians 5:23-28)

THURSDAY

Ministry Shifts from Jews to Gentiles
(Acts 18:4-11)

FRIDAY

Roman Official Refuses to Settle Dispute
(Acts 18:12-17)

SATURDAY

Greetings to All Sisters in Ministry
(Romans 16:1-2, 6-7, 12-13, 16)

SUNDAY

Priscilla, Key Outreach Minister
(Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26;
Romans 16:3-4)

Lydia: Called to Serve

Bible Background • ACTS 16:11-15, 40; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-30 | Printed Text • ACTS 16:11-15, 40; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-30 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 33:1-12

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will CONSIDER how Lydia used her gifts and her place in society to support Paul's ministry, REPENT of the times we have looked down on others who have not had the same opportunities or advantages, and SERVE others joyfully through whatever means are at our disposal.

In Focus

William lounged on the couch by the window in the Saturday afternoon sun. His wife Betty was off at her book club across town, and he had the house to himself. So quiet, he thought happily. But as he listened more to the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, he grew restless.

They had lived in this house for over thirty years, long enough to have three kids and see them off to homes of their own. William and Betty were certainly enjoying the time to themselves, but now their empty nest just didn't feel right to him. He almost missed the little feet traipsing loudly upstairs or the chatting teens in the TV room. Dinners at the kitchen table were definitely less lively without the kids and their fiancés.

It seemed to William like a waste of space. He wasn't ready to move to a smaller apartment; he wanted the guest rooms. He wanted to be hospitable. Over dinner, William talked with Betty about the feeling.

"You're right, dear," Betty said. "Things are so different now without the kids. In fact, I was just thinking on my drive over there, how far away my book club is. It used to make sense when Billy's baseball practice was out that way, but that was years ago."

"I was thinking," William said. "How about we tell the church office that we're offering to host something here. Could be a new book club, maybe a small group ..."

How can you show God's love to others through hospitality?

Keep in Mind

"And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us" (Acts 16:15, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 16:11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis;

12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

1 Corinthians 1:26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

The People, Places, and Times

Purple Cloth. The ancient Mediterranean peoples used a dye from a certain kind of sea snail found in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. This dye was very expensive because of its rarity and the labor intensity of extracting it. Clothing made from this dye was equally expensive and reserved for notable members of society. The color is now called Tyrean purple, after Tyre, the Phoenician city that perhaps discovered the dye.

Philippi. A predominantly Roman city at this time, Philippi was eight miles inland from Neapolis, which was a seaport in northern Macedonia. The city is named for Alexander the Great's father, Philip II of Macedon. The city Philippi was located near two rivers and

connected with coastal cities by several good roads; therefore, trade was enjoyed and was financially lucrative. Philippi lay along the Egnatian Way, the major east-west Roman road connecting lands in Greece and Turkey.

Background

After Paul and Barnabas' successful journey planting many churches in Syria and surrounding provinces, a new journey to plant churches was planned—this time throughout the Roman province of Asia. Paul and Silas set out from Antioch and were joined by Timothy while visiting a previously established church in Lystra. Soon after, the Holy Spirit deflected the group's plans to go into Asia and guided the men instead of to Macedonia. At this point,

Luke (the writer of Acts) joined the team too, and they set sail from the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea.

After meeting Lydia, the team stays in Philippi preaching. They cast a demon out of a slave girl and her masters provoked an uproar that ended with Paul and Silas in jail. When an earthquake opened the chains of every cell in the prison and the jailer was about to kill himself, Paul and Silas led the man to Christ instead.

Paul and Silas benefited from the hospitality of wealthy converts, but Paul also knew that most Christians did not have much worldly wealth or status to boast of. He wrote to the Corinthian church to show how God uses that fact to His advantage so Christians should feel no shame in their lowly status.

Compare and contrast the conversion of Lydia and the jailer. Describe other biblical and present-day examples of how God works.

At-A-Glance

1. The Ministry at Philippi (Acts 16:11-13)
2. The Conversion of Lydia (vv. 14-15, 40)
3. The Wisdom of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:26-28)
4. The Benefits of the Cross (vv. 29-30)

In Depth

1. The Ministry at Philippi (Acts 16:11-13)

It took two to five days for Paul and his team to travel from Troas to Macedonia. The first colony they visited in Macedonia was Philippi. On the Sabbath, Paul and the others traveling with him made their way through the city gate and to the water's edge. They had discovered that there was no synagogue in Philippi,

indicating that there were not ten Jewish men in the community, as this is the number of men required to hold a Sabbath service. Those who sought to worship God, then, were mostly women and did so down by the riverside, where women often gathered to draw water, do laundry, and enjoy female companionship.

Paul and his friends began to preach Christ to these women. Paul had learned that God did not show favoritism and the women who had converted to Christ had become a major source for the spread of Christianity in other places where he had preached.

Where have you seen women take the initiative to start a gathering when men could not or did not do so?

2. The Conversion of Lydia (vv. 14-15, 40)

Lydia's heart is already open to receive God's Word, so when Paul begins to speak, she listens and accepts the truth of the things he has to say. Lydia became the first convert in Europe. Then after accepting Christ for herself and being baptized, she was blessed to see her entire household baptized into the Christian community of believers. The joy she experienced in Christ must have been tremendous, for after her conversion she invited Paul and his companions to stay in her home as her guests and refused to let them say no.

Paul and the other missionaries traveling with him stayed with Lydia until their ministry in the city had concluded. Her home became the first church at Philippi. Paul later referred to the Philippian church as his "joy and crown" (Philippians 4:1).

Lydia became one of Paul's financial supporters and was a loyal helper in his ministry. Lydia even fearlessly opened her house to Paul and Silas after they were released from prison. She did not let the fear of associating with people accused of rabble-rousing keep her from supporting God's workers.

What effort have you made to lead your family and close friends to Christ?

3. The Wisdom of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:26-28)

As we have seen in this past month of lessons, God does not hesitate to call people to spread the Word even though society has overlooked them. Lydia was rich, but most converts were poor or working class. Paul tells these converts that formal education, political power, and economic status are not what put you ahead in the kingdom of God.

Instead, God specifically chooses those the world counts as low to show His glory. The Lord ordained twelve social outcasts to be His disciples, to learn from Him, and be empowered with the Holy Spirit. They, in turn, were responsible for sharing the message of the Cross worldwide. Perceived as a powerless baby born in a manger, Jesus escaped the murderous rampage of a king. A despised Cross and physical death, instead of ending Jesus' existence, demonstrated His wisdom and power over sin and the grave itself.

How has God used the weaknesses in your life to show His glory?

4. The Benefits of the Cross (vv. 29-30)

When we look back and remember how the Lord has brought us, sheer necessity compels us to sing, "If it had not been for the Lord on my side, where would I be?" Those who know we would be nothing without God have reason to rejoice and brag. True wisdom is knowing that our rejoicing and bragging is in what God has done for us through Christ Jesus.

God chooses the lowly, and completed the entire work of salvation by Himself, so that no one has anything to boast about to God (v. 29). The marvel is that God makes Jesus everything—and then includes us! He makes Christ all the deep, lasting, spiritual things we

could boast about: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (v. 30). But he doesn't keep them to Himself. He shares them with us. God specifically gives these gifts to the lowly so that the world can see how far a person is lifted solely by the power of Christ.

How have you expressed your gratitude for all God has done for you?

Search the Scriptures

1. Who was baptized along with Lydia (Acts 16:15)?
2. What aspects of the world does God confound, shame, and bring to nothing? (1 Corinthians 1:27)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why did God lead Paul to Macedonia to the women at the river, but forbid him to go to other places?
2. Why is it significant that Lydia already worshiped God?
3. Christians are not saved because we are wise, strong, or wealthy. In fact, Scripture reminds us of how little merit we have on our own. However, Scripture also reminds us of our unity with Christ, who is everything glorious. In light of these two opposite self-images, how should Christians understand themselves and present themselves to the world?

Liberating Lesson

Missionaries who travel to Africa report that the nature of hospitality is such that within the community whenever anyone needs food or shelter, the members of the church rise up and take them into their own homes until they can correct whatever problem might have caused their circumstance. Such hospitality is not uncommon across the world. What do you think would happen in America if Christians practiced that type of hospitality?

Application for Activation

Through Lydia's successful trade of purple, God equipped her to perform the task of hospitality. When Paul's team came, Lydia faithfully jumped at the chance to make use of the skills and means that God had given her. Take time this week to examine how God has equipped you and presented you with the opportunity to make use of your gifts. Find a way to take that opportunity this week and just like Lydia, don't take no for an answer!

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

Strong, James. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003.
 Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: American Book Company, 1994.
 Vine, W.E. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996.

Say It Correctly

Troas. **TROE**-as.
 Samothrace. **SAH**-moe-thray-ss.
 Neapolis. nee-**AH**-poe-liss.
 Thyatira. thigh-ah-**TIE**-rah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Don't Complain but Serve One Another
 (1 Peter 4:7-11)

TUESDAY

Everyday Expressions of Hospitality
 (Romans 12:9-19)

WEDNESDAY

Hospitality Practiced in Jail and Home
 (Acts 16:35-40)

THURSDAY

Hospitality Practiced by
 Widow and Bishop
 (1 Timothy 5:9-10, 3:2)

FRIDAY

Christ, God's Power and Wisdom
 (1 Corinthians 1:8-25)

SATURDAY

Know Jesus Christ Crucified
 (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

SUNDAY

Lydia, Model of Hospitality Practice
 (Acts 16:11-15, 40;
 1 Corinthians 1:26-30)



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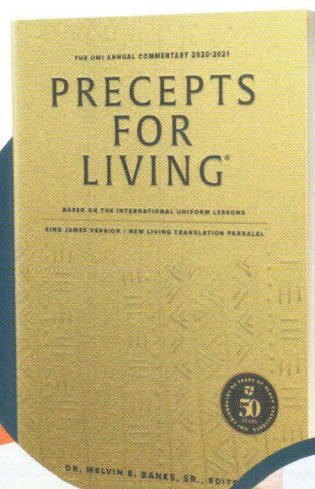
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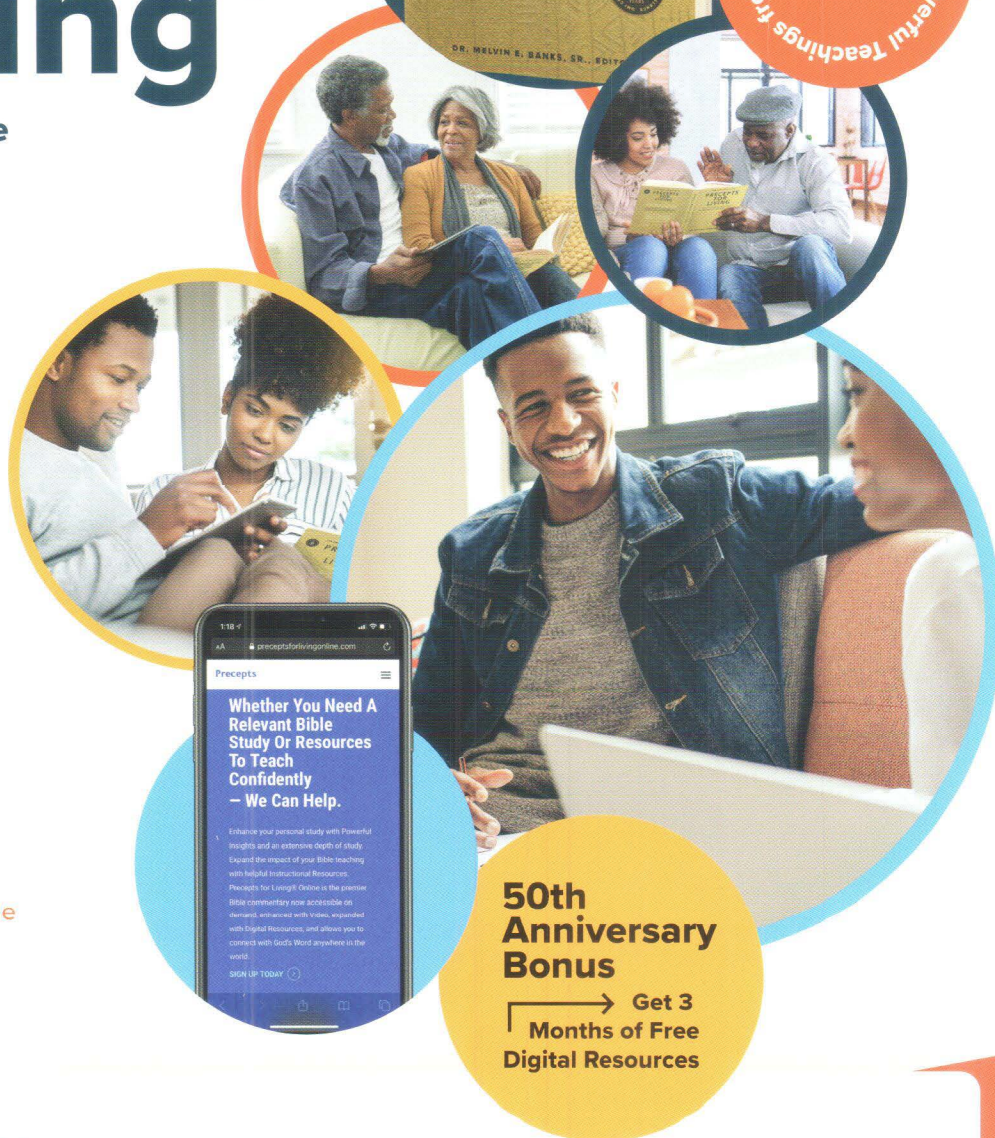
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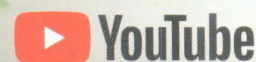
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