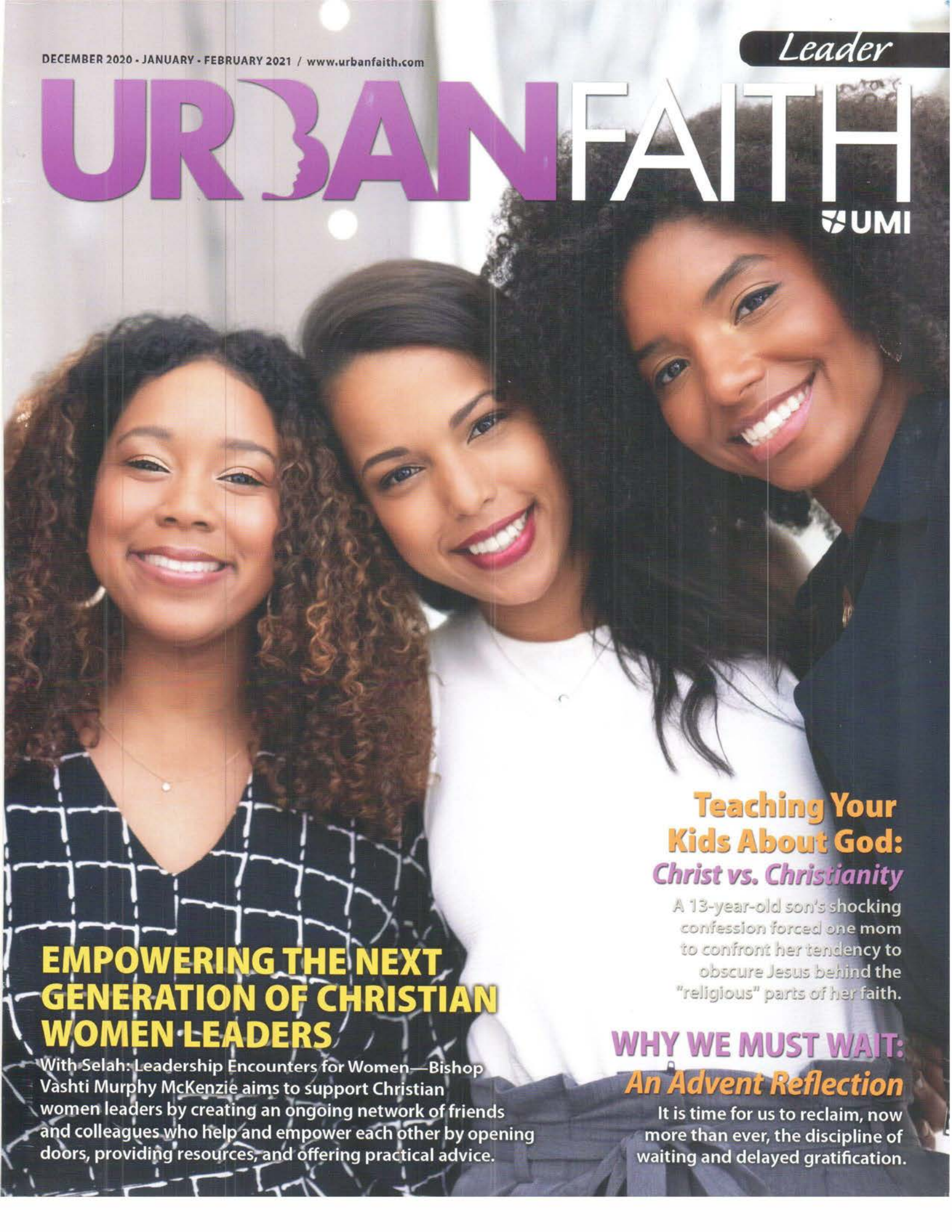


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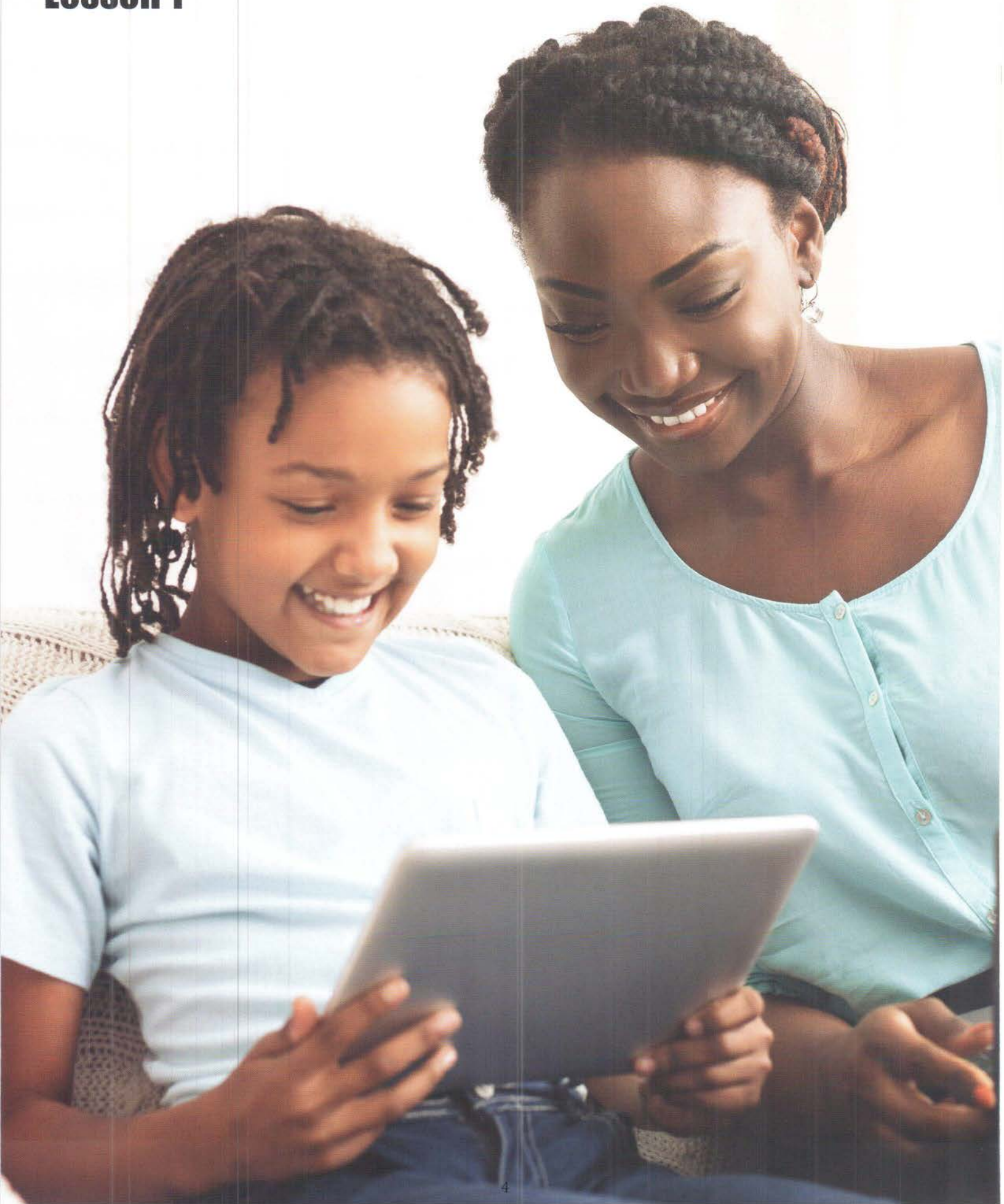


ENGAGE

[verb: in-gaj—to come together and interlock]

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Lesson 1





Where We're Going

Today, participants 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.



Get Them Going

Before class, ask two or three class members to be ready to share what they know about an ancestor of theirs.



Heritage Focus

Like every year, as Christmas draws near and Laila plans for a large family get-together, she can't help but think back on the family members who have passed on. Today, Grandpa Donald came to mind as she was cleaning the house to prepare for her visitors and came across one of his old photo albums in her closet. Grandpa Donald died 15 years ago.

As a young child, she remembers Grandpa Donald sitting with her on the couch and flipping through old photographs. It was important to him that she know where he came from. He even took the time to type up the family history, which included relatives who had immigrated from Africa, and put it in a notebook so that she'd have a record of what he said long after he was gone.

"This is a picture of my great grandmother and the house where she raised 11 children," she remembers him saying with a smile. "And here's my great grandfather, who was born in Kenya."

Laila was fascinated by the black and white photos, the old-fashioned clothes, even the fact that none of the people in the pictures really smiled. Laila's grandfather had not only kept several photo books from his childhood, but he also had special ones with thick cardboard pages that were passed down to him from the late 1800s.

Now in her early 30s and with small children of her own, Laila decided it might be a good idea to keep the photo history tradition alive. She pulled out the photo album from the closet and sat down with her two kids, sharing stories about the family in the pictures and what they meant to her and Grandpa Donald. The kids enjoyed it so much that she decided it was time for her to continue creating albums, but with this being the digital age create a family history website, too. It would be a fun project to do with her kids and a wonderful way to keep the family history alive for generations to come.



Real Talk

1. How does knowing your family history shape and validate who you are as a person?
2. Have you created an up-to-date family tree or family photo album?
3. What can you do moving forward if you don't know your parents or your are not aware of their heritage.



The Big Picture

Hebrews affirms the ultimate origins of Jesus in the very life of God, and Matthew explains how he was the product of his long biblical heritage.



The Players

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"



Make It Stick

“And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe” (Hebrews 1:2, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Matthew 1:1 This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham:

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

3 Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar). Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Ram.

4 Ram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

5 Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth). Obed was the father of Jesse.

6 Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).

16 Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

17 All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

Hebrews 1:1 Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets.

2 And now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he created the universe.

3 The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.

4 This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names.

5 For God never said to any angel what he said to Jesus: “You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.” God also said, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son.”

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.



Backstage

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 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.



Combing Through

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 desperate measures 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 a prostitute, but heard of the awesome power of God and decided to join God's people (Joshua 2:1, 11). 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, 27).

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” (from 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?



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Hebrews 1:1–5, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. Jesus mirrors the nature of God. Do you think we mirror this nature also? Why or why not (Hebrews 1:3)?
2. God never placed the angels on the same level as Christ. What do you think this was establishing (v. 5)?
3. The Scripture says God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways. In what ways does God speak to us today?



Next Steps

Think about the many ways you can document your family history, whether in photos, videos, stories, or albums. Make sure these

priceless treasures you create are documented and preserved for generations to come.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Ask the class members to explain the modern adage, "History is the story written by the winners." (This is generally used to mean that history is merely a narrative created by whoever is in power at the time.) Help them refute that idea using the texts studied today.

B. Personal Application

Sketch out your family tree. Looking at the whole of your lineage, what do you consider important influences that contribute to who you are today? What important events and stories are you connected to through your family tree? What does this indicate about your earthly heritage?



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Lord, thank You for the rich heritage we have in Your family. We pray for the generations to come. Amen.



Say Word?

Pentateuch, PIN-tuh-took.



"Every child is gifted; they just unwrap their packages at different times." - Unknown

Lesson 2





Where We're Going

Today, participants will know that God keeps His promises, find comfort in knowing His promises don't expire, and plan to live in a position of trust toward God apart from their circumstances.



Get Them Going

Ask participants to describe a time when their trust was broken. How did it make them feel about themselves? About others? About God? Ask participants to describe what it is to be trustworthy; how can they tell if a person is trustworthy? Why is it important to establish trust in relationships?



Almost Perfect

It was a good life for Jerome and Stacy. Some would say almost perfect, until one day it wasn't. They had been married for 10 years when their oldest daughter, at the age of five, started to go blind. The diagnosis was terrifying: Batten disease. This degenerative disease would slowly erode Skylar's nervous system, taking her ability to see, speak, move, and swallow. In all likelihood, it would lead to a short and difficult life. They went through all of the usual emotions of panic and grief along with rounds of doctor visits, research on new therapies, and figuring out how to pay for her treatment.

The couple was still adjusting to Skylar's challenges, when a few years later, their second daughter, Veronica, started going blind, as well. The result of combining two recessive genes from each parent, Batten disease, also known as Juvenile-onset Neuronal Ceroid Lipofuscinoses (JNCL), is genetic. Now, not only would they lose their two precious children to this horrible disease, they couldn't bring themselves to risk passing it on to any other children. The couple often thought, *how could God let this happen to our family? What does this mean for our future?*

They did what they had to do. They kept going. They provided their daughters with as many experiences as they could while each had their sight and mobility. Each of the girls developed their own personalities and pursuits. Even after mobility was difficult, Skylar and Veronica did not slow down. The girls wrote stories, quilted, and even tried their hands at raising chickens. The family laughed together, sang together, prayed together, and dreamed together. The girls contributed in their classrooms, made friends, and showed Jerome and Stacy each day how to embrace life as it comes, rather than wishing for it to be something else. The girls didn't know they were dying, and they didn't know that time would continue dealing their bodies cruel blows until they could do nothing on their own. They simply lived. They graduated high school, which was quite a feat for individuals with this disease. Jerome and Stacy rejoiced over each accomplishment, no matter how small.

Through the heartache of each difficulty, God let them see that their two young women, just by living, have indeed lived lives of impact. Many of the people they met along the way—doctors, caretakers, classmates, and friends—had been touched by their passion for living, their joy, and their love. In that sense, the family's legacy was a living one. Every life that brushed their daughters' would carry with it something of their joy and their passion, and hopefully pass those same qualities on to someone else.

Looking back over parenting their two children, knowing the extraordinary treasure God has entrusted to them, Jerome and Stacy recognized that it was a good life. Some would say almost perfect.



Real Talk

1. Why should we trust God in the face of circumstances we can't understand? What are the benefits? What are the challenges?
2. What promises does the Bible extend to believers?
3. How did this family's choice to live joyfully through tragedy create a new "legacy" for them? How might that have changed if they had chosen to live in grief instead?
4. In what areas of your life can you deepen your faith in God to provide you with your own legacy?



The Big Picture

God is faithful, trustworthy, and capable of doing all that He says He will do. Because this aspect of His character doesn't change, it will always be true, and therefore we can rely on Him to continue to keep His promises in the future.



Make It Stick

“Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (from Matthew 1:20–21, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Matthew 1:18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

19 Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

21 And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

22 All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet:

23 “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife.

25 But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.



The Players

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-occe) means “messenger,” and may 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?



Backstage

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 Messiah 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?



Combing Through

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 the marriage took place, while she was a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit,” 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.

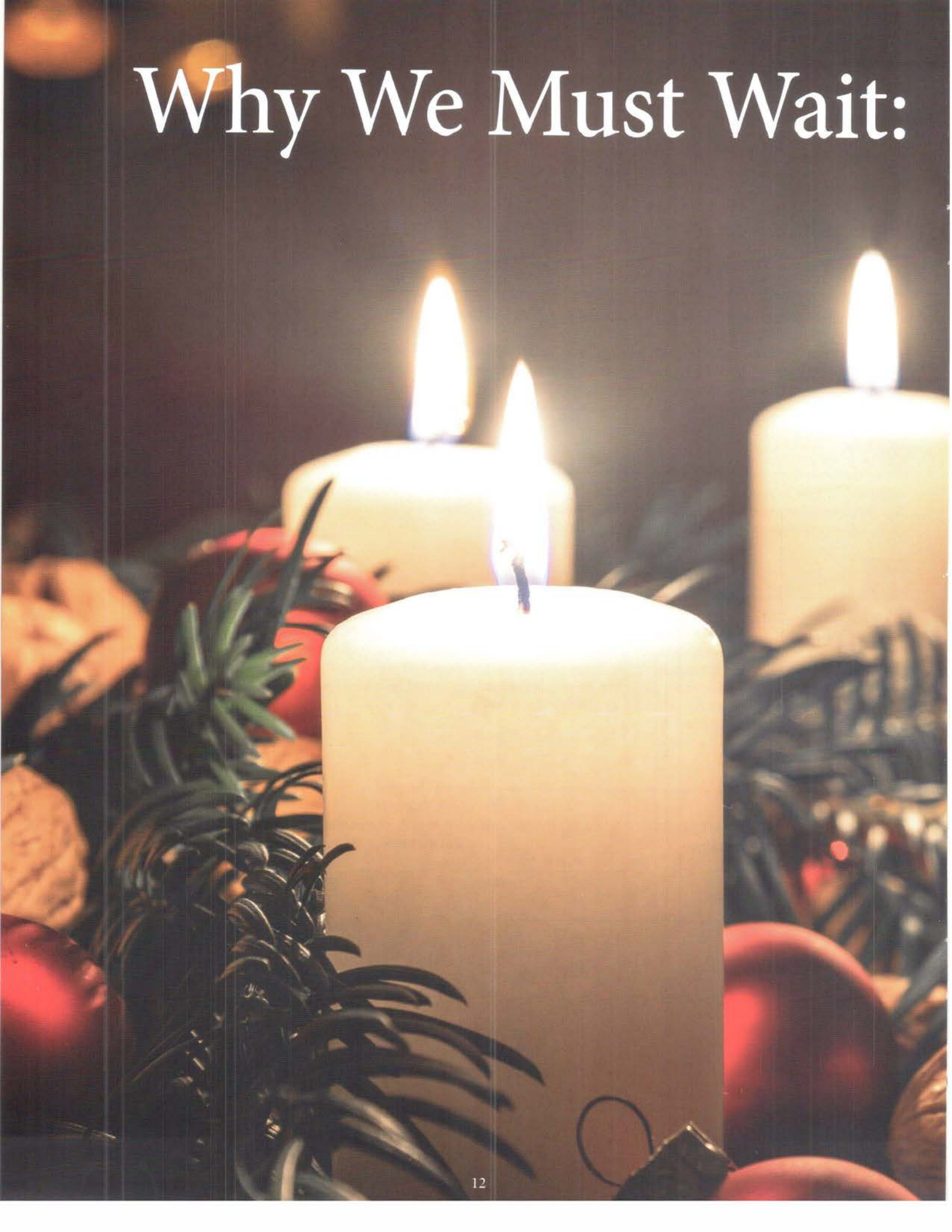
Joseph is described as a righteous man. Unlike the Pharisees, who insisted on a rigid reading of the Law’s justice, Joseph understood the compassion of the Lord. Pregnancy before the actual wedding would render Mary unfaithful. Fully applying the letter of the Law, though, would lead to Mary’s being stoned to death. Joseph was unwilling to expose her to the disgrace of public divorce. Therefore, he 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 his character?

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).

Why We Must Wait:



An Advent Reflection

It is time for us to reclaim, now more than ever, the discipline of waiting and delayed gratification.

By Nicole Symmonds

Advent is upon us—the liturgical season observed by many Christians as a period of waiting and preparation for the Nativity of Jesus. This season begins four Sundays before Christmas and concludes on Christmas. The hanging of greens, adorning sanctuaries and wearing vestments of purple, and lighting the Advent wreath candles in order to move from darkness to light are key components in Advent observation. All of this is in anticipation of the celebration of the birth of Jesus, a birth that people anxiously awaited then and a symbolic birth we should anxiously await now. But some may ask, “Why must we wait for something that has already happened? Why exist in symbolic darkness for a time in order to celebrate that which was revealed some 2,000 years ago? Why is this relevant to our time?” I suggest that we must wait in order to reclaim the wonder of the Light that was brought into this world.

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*Christmas
Day!*



“A reflection on the true significance of this moment on the Christian liturgical calendar is sometimes left as an afterthought to what is given top billing on the calendar of capitalism.”

Earlier this year, during an Ash Wednesday service at a large Baptist church, I looked forward to ushering in the season of Lent with somber worship and a penitent message. Ash Wednesday is supposed to remind us of our finitude and it plunges us into a season of penitence, and the journey into the wilderness with Christ. But as I sat in that service, I was jolted from somber reflection with songs of joy and a sermon celebrating victory. Not a moment in the service—besides the impartation of ashes which concluded the service—was spent ushering people into the dry season ahead of them because the church was compelled to praise. On one hand, I understood the church’s inability to squelch their praise. It’s a church that has seen many trials and tribulations, whose membership are a part of the resilient race in this country who must praise because of how far they’ve come by faith. Why would they want to launch themselves into a period of solemnity? But on the other hand, I desired for this congregation to withhold their praise and shouts of victory in order to rightfully claim it at the end of the Lenten season. In doing this, they would truly walk with their Redeemer and taste the sweetness of victory because they had made the journey, by way of symbolically situating themselves on Ash Wednesday, as sojourners with Jesus. This, too, is our call during the season of Advent, except we are not sojourners with Jesus this time around but sojourners with a generation of people who were awaiting His arrival. People who heard a particular prophecy about the coming Messiah and were waiting and preparing for Him. People who didn’t have Christmas gift shopping, parties to attend, and a plethora of “holiday” distractions, but were watching and waiting for Him. I imagine that their wait was one of wonder mixed with skepticism fueled by the rumors of Mary, a virgin, who was impregnated by the Holy Spirit with the Son of God. How unbelievable that had to be then and how unbelievable we should consider it now in order to rekindle the wonder of it all. Awesome wonder is what this season is about.

Yesterday in church, I was reminded of how in danger we are of losing that wonder because we are so familiar with the stories that tell of the coming of Jesus. It has become so common that the narra-

tive seems just as plausible as a man getting pregnant and giving birth. Some of us are no longer moved by the story because we’ve spent years with it in our churches, seminaries, and homes, but we force ourselves to be moved just a few days before Christmas because that’s what we’ve been trained to do. Many wind down and reflect as they start to wrap up their Christmas shopping, place the last few gifts under the tree, and bake the last batch of cookies. A reflection on the true significance of this moment on the Christian liturgical calendar is sometimes left as an afterthought to what is given top billing on the calendar of capitalism. But we must wait, and wait longer than a few days to acclimate ourselves to the coming of Jesus. When we take hold of the season of waiting that Advent is, we give ourselves the opportunity to experience the wonder of every occasion that leads up to the birth of our Savior.

When we read the Gospel narratives that foretell of Jesus’ birth, of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, of the Magnificat, we must stop ourselves from breezing through it quickly because we’ve heard it all before. Instead, be held captive by every word as if we were hearing it for the first time and as if we may never hear it again. When we repeat the refrain, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear,” we are implicating ourselves as those in captivity in need of a release from our self-imposed exile. Given the capitalism and consumerism that has marked this season—and the violence it has wrought—we are now, more than ever, in need of the discipline of waiting. We must wait in order to restore the wonder of this blessed season we are in, a season that shines a light into dark places and gives much hope. We must wait, not only for ourselves but for every person who has yet to experience the great hope that many of us know so well. We must wait, so that we refresh ourselves in the wondrous love to come over receiving it as an entitlement that we might take for granted. We must wait, because in waiting we are forced to slow down. Because it is in the slowing down that we will gain perspective into the significance of this season which brings us back to wonder. The awesome wonder of the coming of Jesus is what this season is about, just wait for it.

Lesson 3





Where We're Going

After studying today's lesson, participants should realize that God can turn things around, and that even when our enemies intend to hurt us, God can change the situation so we are blessed.



Get Them Going

Have participants share a time when they faced a seriously bad situation, but they prayed about it and God turned things around.



A Set Up for Failure

Carita Johnson didn't know what to do. Her boss hated her—she was convinced of it. Carita felt that her boss was out to get her. Carita's boss was always rude to her and never complimented her.

One day, Carita's boss told her that she would be attending the departmental meeting with the vice president of their company at 10 a.m. and would need to write out her goals for the year and present them at the meeting. The entire department was required to do this so that the efficiency of the department could be evaluated. Carita was in shock. She had arrived at the office less than 15 minutes ago, and she was told she had to prepare goals and have them ready in one hour. Unbelievable!

When her coworker Brian walked by her desk, he saw that Carita was upset. He asked what was wrong.

"Maggie just told me about the meeting at 10 o'clock. I don't have one goal written down," Carita exclaimed.

"What? Maggie told me about this meeting last week. I thought everyone knew to prepare their goals for the meeting," Brian replied.

"I guess she forgot to mention it to me until this morning," Carita said. "I'd better try to clear my head so I can write something down."

"Good luck," Brian said. "Holler if you need help."

"Thanks," Carita said.

Right before she turned on her computer, she whispered a prayer to God. She didn't know why all this had happened, but she did know God had brought her through many times before.

Carita began to type her goals, but things weren't falling into place. She would hate to commit to a goal that wasn't beneficial to her or the company.

At 9:50, Maggie came around to Carita's desk and said everyone needed to be upstairs in two minutes. Carita couldn't understand it. She almost broke down, but she whispered another prayer. She didn't have her goals done; she would just have to say she wasn't finished.

At the meeting, Mr. Quigley the vice president, asked each person to read his or her goals. When he got to Carita, she said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Quigley; I haven't completed my goals. I didn't have enough time to adequately think about them."

"Well, Ms. Johnson, that's mighty intelligent of you, not to turn in your goals until they are satisfactory to you," Mr. Quigley replied. "I almost wish some of your colleagues had followed your path and taken more time to thoroughly assess their plans and goals."

"Our goals for the Year 2021 shouldn't be taken lightly. Each one of you should honestly evaluate how you plan to contribute to this company's growth. Please take some more time to be more specific in your plans. And thank you, Ms. Johnson, for your honesty and courage to admit that you didn't have enough time. We could use more of that around here."



Real Talk

1. How do you think Carita handled her situation?
2. Carita still has a boss who doesn't seem to treat her with respect. She avoided disrespecting her in front of the vice president, but what can she do to turn her situation around more permanently?
3. What are some things we can do when it seems people are out to harm us?



The Big Picture

God intervened in Herod's wicked plan. Although Herod commanded the wise men to report back to him when they had found Jesus, God intervened and told them in a dream not to return.



Make It Stick

“They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Matthew 2:7 Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared.

8 Then he told them, “Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!”

9 After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!

11 They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.

13 After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother,” the angel said. “Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

14 That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother,

15 and they stayed there until Herod’s death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: “I called my Son out of Egypt.”



The Players

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).



Backstage

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 it 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 may have been 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 child. 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.



Combing Through

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 child. 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 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" (cf. Hosea 11:1)

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



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Matthew 2:7–15, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. What did Herod tell the wise men to do when they found Jesus? (v. 8)
2. What did the wise men do when they saw Jesus? (v. 11)
3. Why didn't they return to Herod? (v. 12)
4. How do you worship Jesus?



Next Steps

Write a caption or film a short video about how God has protected you from your enemies and post it on your favorite social media account. Be sure to tag @UrbanFaith in your post.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Many times people have bad motives or ill intentions toward Christians. In an effort to protect ourselves from hurt and harm, we may become preoccupied with finding out the real motive behind someone's actions. Today's lesson tells us that we can relinquish those fears because our omniscient God is taking care of things. When we turn our lives over to the Father, He takes control of our situations. What looks like evil can be turned into good for those who love the Lord (Romans 8:28). Encourage participants to find other verses in the Bible that remind us that God protects us from our enemies. They

may want to write these verses on index cards so they'll have them as handy references.

B. Personal Application

The wise men worshiped Jesus when they arrived in Bethlehem. When we accept what Jesus has done for us, we too should worship Him. How do you worship Jesus? What gifts are you presenting to Him? Remember that the wise men brought fine gifts, not leftovers. Evaluate your life to see if the gifts you are presenting are your best. If they are not, purpose to give your all to Christ. Ask for His help.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Lord, help us to remember to turn to You when we feel like our enemies are out to get us. We know You can protect us from harm.



Say Word?

Magi. MAY-JY

WAG
(Wisdom and Guidance)

"Never be limited by other people's limited imaginations." - Dr. Mae Jemison

Lesson 4





Where We're Going

Participants should know whether or not they are completing the assignment God has given them. They should use John the Baptist's example to do whatever God has called them to do.



Get Them Going

Ask the participants how many of them know that God has something for them to do. Count the number of raised hands. Then ask the participants how many of them know what that something is and count that number. Finally, ask the participants how many of them are doing whatever it is that God wants them to do on a regular basis. Count that number. The number of raised hands will probably get smaller and smaller after each question.



As a Thief in the Night

Most of us know that God has something for us to do. A smaller number of us know what that something is. An even smaller number of us can truthfully say that we are doing whatever it is that God has called us to do on a consistent basis. We, like John the Baptist, are to live our lives in preparation for the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Like John, we should be willing to tell others about Jesus even when no one believes or receives our message. As in the case of John the Baptist, one day soon the Lord Jesus Christ will show up on the scene of whatever it is that we are involved in unannounced "as a thief in the night."

Marcus knew that God had something for him to do, but he believed that he had his whole life to find out what it was and then to do it. After all, he was a handsome, healthy, popular young man and everyone knew that Marcus was going to do great things with his life. In high school, he was voted the most likely to succeed.

Marcus thought that success was determined by how much money he made, what he accomplished, and how much he accumulated. He didn't realize true success is obedience to the call of God. He became very successful in the eyes of most people and his wealth and popularity was no surprise to those who knew him.

One day as Marcus was playing ball with his friends, he began to feel weak and extremely dizzy. When his friends asked him what was wrong, Marcus collapsed and his heart stopped beating. They gave him CPR and called the paramedics. After spending several days in the hospital on life support machines, he finally regained consciousness.

As soon as he was able to talk, he told his friends that he was at death's door, but God gave him a second chance at life. When he reflected on his life and what he hadn't done, Marcus asked God for forgiveness.

When his health was completely restored, he felt as if he had to take advantage of his second chance at life. He vowed to live for God and to complete his mission. Today, his friends and family are amazed at the commitment that Marcus has for the spreading of the Gospel. He uses his time, talent, and treasure to promote the kingdom of God. He started a lunchtime Bible study at his job, he mentors young boys, and he is active in the men's ministry at church. Marcus uses his experience as a testimony to let others know that Jesus is coming soon and no one knows the day or the hour.

We must not wait any longer to find out and do whatever it is that God has called us to do. He's coming as a thief in the night.



Real Talk

1. Before Marcus' illness, he was prosperous and popular. Does fame and fortune indicate that a person is producing good fruit? Explain.
2. How did Marcus' illness help him to become committed to the call of God on his life?
3. What has God called you to do? Are you doing it? If not, why not?
4. What should you do to find out what God has for you to do with your life? Who might be able to help you find out?
5. Describe the people you know who are consistently doing what God has called them to do with their lives.



The Big Picture

John the Baptist went before Christ and prepared the way for His arrival. John the Baptist was a very committed servant of God who worked hard and sacrificed to fulfill the ministry that he was called to do.



Make It Stick

“The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, ‘He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming! Clear the road for him!’” (Matthew 3:3, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Matthew 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was,

2 “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

3 The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said, “He is a voice shouting in the wilderness, Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming! Clear the road for him!”

4 John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey.

5 People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John.

6 And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath?”

8 Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.

9 Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.

10 Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

12 He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”



The Players

John the Baptist. John was a miracle child, born to childless, elderly parents—the priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth (Luke 1:5–25). While still pregnant, Elizabeth received a visit from her cousin Mary, who also had been divinely chosen to bear a child—Jesus. The baby in Elizabeth’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 40-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?



Backstage

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 who “came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching.”

John’s ministry was about preaching and baptizing, preparing others for Jesus. John’s ministry called people to a confession of sins, repentance, and to turn to God (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 the Holy Spirit’s 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?



Combing Through

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

The people recognized John as a prophet. God had promised to send Elijah (which refers to John, who came in the spirit of Elijah, the messenger who would prepare the way for Jesus) “before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives” (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 Judean wilderness” 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 great and dreadful 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 for Him, 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 character. 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.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Matthew 3:1–12, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. What was the message that John the Baptist preached?
2. How was John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus' ministry?
3. What did John the Baptist say would happen to those who didn't produce good fruit? (v. 10)
4. If Jesus stood before you at this moment and asked you if you had completed your assignment, what would your answer be?



Next Steps

Create personal goals in your life that are achievable, interest you, and make you happy. Pray for guidance on when they should be completed.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

The world in which we live seems to be moving in the direction of destruction. If that is true, why do so many of us follow the ways of the world? Many of us, Christians included, seem to live our lives without purpose and wonder why we're defeated in many areas of our lives. God has warned us through His Word that this world will pass away. Yet, most of us live as though we have all the time in the world when the world itself doesn't have much time. Christians throughout the world must boldly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and prepare the world for His return.

B. Personal Application

Each of us as individuals must realize that Jesus is coming very soon. We must work diligently for the kingdom of God now because we don't know how long we will live. So before the Lord returns or before He takes you to your resting place, make sure that your assignment is complete. Jesus has warned us in His Word that He is coming as "a thief in the night."



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Lord, I want to do Your will. Please help me to understand and embrace my assignment.



Say Word?

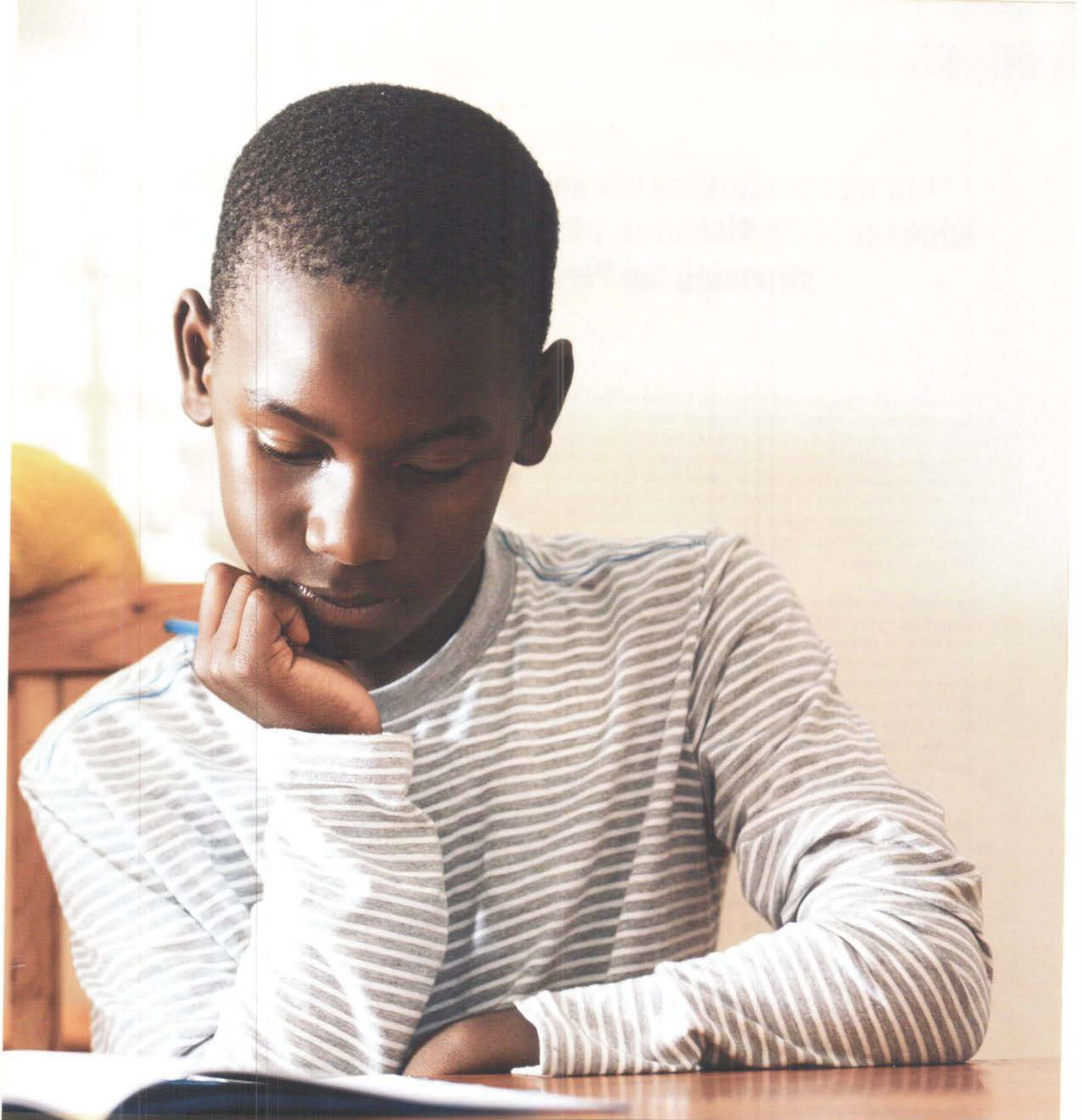
Sadducees. SAD'DU-CEES

WAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

"Just don't give up what you're trying to do. Where there is love and inspiration, I don't think you can go wrong." - Ella Fitzgerald



Teaching Your Kids About God: Christ vs. Christianity



My 13-year-old son's shocking confession forced me to confront my tendency to obscure Jesus behind the "religious" parts of my faith.

By Chandra White-Cummings

As many Americans, I use the Christmas and New Year holidays to reflect and try to gain perspective on matters near and dear to me. So one recent evening, I sat down with my sons to discuss where we are spiritually as a family, and to get a read on their individual faith journeys. I never could have imagined what I heard or the impact it would have on me.

“Are we bombarding our young disciples, and those who might become disciples, with rules and regulations without stressing the Person of Jesus Christ?”

Our conversation began simply enough. I asked each of them to share how they feel about where they are with God. I intentionally left it open-ended so they wouldn't feel like I was steering them in a specific direction. I could see the antennae going up in my 13-year-old's brain, so I reassured them that this was not Mom on some kind of surreptitious fact-finding mission, looking for ammunition to blast them to kingdom come if they didn't give the “right” responses. The antennae retracted, and the words began to flow.

Me: So, son (the 13-year-old), how's it going for you spiritually?

Son: Okay, I guess. Well, maybe not so okay.

Me: What do you mean?

Son: Well, I'm still praying some, and I kinda remember to read my devotions sometimes, but...I don't know.

Me: It's okay, just be honest.

Son: Are you sure?

Me: Yes, I really want to know how you feel.

Son: Well, I love God and everything. I know I need to follow Him and do the right things, but it's just...the Christianity thing.

Alarms went off in my head, and everything in me went on full alert. What did he mean “the Christianity thing”? He was about to tell me.

Son: I mean, *Christians*. All they talk about is going to church, which movies you shouldn't watch, do this, don't do that... this music is bad, don't look at porn.

Me (in my head): *OH, LORD...porn?! Maybe I'm not ready for this conversation after all.*

Me: Okay, so what's the problem? We should be obedient to Christ, right?

Son (now getting more animated): Yeah, I know, but it's just the way they are. Everything is *do this, don't do that*. Blah, blah, blah.

Me: Are you saying you don't want to be a Christian anymore?

Son: No, Mom.

Me: Well, are you saying you don't want to walk with Christ anymore?

Son: No, no, that's not it. I want to walk with Christ. It's *Christianity* that doesn't interest me.

Whoa. What was my boy saying? And how was he able to draw this distinction between Christ and Christianity? I assumed he considered them to be one and the same. But then, a flash of

revelation hit me, wrapping some concepts together that I have been grappling with and teaching on during the past year.

Just like many of us adults, my child is feeling a disconnect between who he envisions Jesus to be (and what He desires and requires), and the way in which professed Christ-followers relate to Him and how they require others to relate to Him. Are we bombarding our young disciples, and those who might become disciples, with rules and regulations without stressing the Person of Jesus Christ?

My son is no theologian or scholar, but at a visceral and instinctual level, he is resisting the system we have created to facilitate a relationship with Jesus. I know that obedience is important, and apparently so does my son. But he confessed to me that he is confused with our packaging of what is supposed to be a dynamic, life-giving, robust sojourn with our Lord.

In the midst of all this revelation, another thought hit me. I am probably one of those “Christians” of whom my son is referring. After all, he has more exposure to me than anyone else. It's not completely surprising that a teenager would feel this way since parents often stress behavior and conduct in our attempts to control and manage our offspring. Our discussion highlighted the fact that our goal should be more about influence and guidance rather than control. Also, Jesus needs to be front and center when we demonstrate Christianity, not just rules.

They're Watching Us

I wanted to know what other teenagers think about my son's remarks so I had a conversation with a youth group from a local church. These questions were running through my mind: Do they feel the same way? Are they drawing the same distinction he is between following Jesus and adhering to the system of Christianity? What has their Christian experience been like? You never know ahead of time how a discussion with young people might turn out, but I hoped for the best. They didn't disappoint.

The group consisted of seven young people, ranging in age from 10 to 17—two males and five females. I could tell they weren't sure what to expect. I did my best to put them at ease by telling them what I would use the information for, that no one's name would be mentioned, and that I wasn't there to gather intel for the church administration or their parents. With those preliminaries covered, we plunged right in.

DO NOT STEP OUT OF LINE




Our discussion started with their feedback on my son's statement about being okay with *Christ*, but not so much okay with *Christianity*. Several in the group expressed right away that they totally understand where my son was coming from. They see what they call hypocrisy among adult Christians who say one thing but do another. They admitted that the level of hypocrisy depends on the individual and even the church to which one belongs. They are turned off by this apparent double-speak. Their body language and tone suggested that they are indeed a little insulted that adults don't seem to realize how transparent they really are. The "do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do" cliché clearly doesn't work. These young people seem to find this especially notable given how much adults emphasize the "what" of Christianity while downplaying the "Who" or "why."

Moreover, their comments demonstrate the very point they're making. Although I asked them directly about any distinction they saw between Christ the Person and Christianity the faith, they said very little about Jesus Himself. The overwhelming majority of their discussion focused on Christians, Christianity,

and other faith concepts. I see this as a reflection of our own tendency to relegate Jesus to background status as we attempt to translate the faith for unbelievers and youth into a modern, hip version we feel will be more palatable to them.

The group participants see this emphasis on "what" manifested in how much they hear "the Bible says..." As someone who is very committed to the authority of the Scriptures, this idea immediately caught my attention. I wanted to know how they feel about the Bible. Do they believe it is *authoritative* or just a book full of *suggestions* for how to behave? One young lady was very clear that she doesn't have a problem with the Bible, per se, but she gets tired of hearing the answers to all her questions begin with that phrase; not so much because she doesn't want to know what the Bible says, but because she knows there's not going to be any explanation of what the Bible *means* by what it says. The group agreed. According to them, it detracts from the power of the Bible when Christians stress the commands and instructions therein without showing them how to practically live according to those commands and instructions. They want to hear *and* see what the



“They want to hear and see what the Bible says. They have a genuine interest in knowing how to apply the Word to their everyday lives ... but we are coming up short by not encouraging them to get understanding, as well as knowledge.”



Bible says. They have a genuine interest in knowing how to apply the Word to their everyday lives—what Solomon referred to as wisdom—but we are coming up short by not encouraging them to get understanding, as well as knowledge.

This particular segment of our discussion really brought home to me an observation I've made about churches and Christians. In many cases, we've not effectively made the transition from Old Testament Christians (which is itself a bit of an oxymoron) to disciples under a new covenant brokered by the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we grasping the explanation James gives to us about the relationship between faith and works, without also remembering what Paul says about grace and works? Our young people's resentment of what we say the Bible says might be rooted in our own inability to demonstrate what it means to obey the Lord's commands as an act of love and commitment rather than as a performance-based ritual.

Our discussion of Christianity led to a fascinating talk about the church. The roundtable participants showed a fair amount of confusion about the role and purpose of the church. Their overall sense is that people are going to do what they want to do, no matter what anyone says.

I couldn't help but think how saturated even churched and Christian youth are with the concept of individual choice and everyone's "right" to make their own decisions. I pressed them pretty hard on these points by asking them if the power of individual choice is so strong, what purpose does the church really serve? Can we ever hope to impact people's lives if they're going to go their own way, regardless of what's proclaimed by the church? Their view was further tested when I asked how they think the church should try to address social problems like unbiblical sexuality, teenage pregnancy, and other issues. And what does our apparent cultural impotence mean for our command to bring people to Christ?

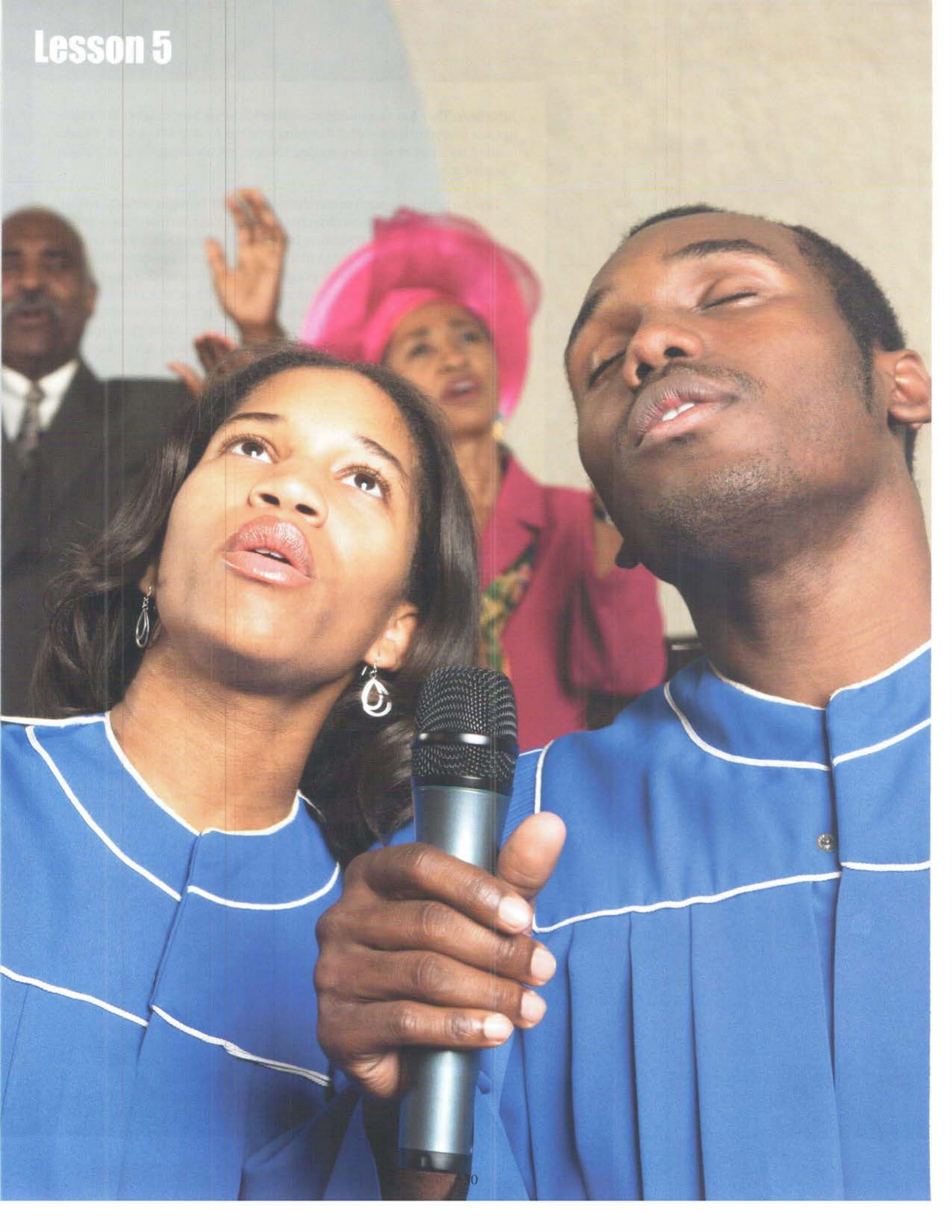
Even though it was obvious they didn't know how to answer these questions, I was gratified to see them really struggling with it. Our spiritual ancestors knew that we have a faith able to withstand even the most robust questioning and debate. I'm not sure we have that same appreciation anymore for the value of a strong apologetic. And more than anything, I sensed that these young people are dying for us to boldly show them that our faith can stand up to peer pressure, sexual temptation, premature childbearing, broken families, broken hearts, corrupt politics, prejudice, poverty, and anything else they might encounter.

So how did our stalemate of silence end? As it often does when we find ourselves in a faith quandary, one voice offers a tentative suggestion. In this case, the 17-year-old young man said this in answer to my challenges: "Hope. It all comes down to hope."

I could almost visibly see the dam breaking. "Yeah, hope and faith," someone else said. Everyone nodded their agreement. They concluded that even though people might not listen and it may not seem as if any change is taking place, we as the church can offer hope to those who would listen. And we take it on faith that somehow, with God's help, a change can be made.

In the end, they realized they didn't have a lot of answers, and I don't think they necessarily changed their minds about how they see adult Christians and our issues. But I'm certain they left that room reminded that when it's all said and done, Christianity and Christ are tied together by two indomitable forces of our belief system: faith and hope. I can't argue with that.

Lesson 5





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will understand the particular significance of what Jesus read in the synagogue in Nazareth, be motivated to explore their spiritual gifts and consider what God may want them to do with their lives, and create a list of their spiritual gifts with ways that God can use them.



Get Them Going

Ask the participants to find the mission statements of different companies that they buy from. Ask them whether these companies live up to their mission statements. Then ask the students what their personal mission statement is. With that in mind, have them contemplate what it means to continue Jesus' mission on earth.



The Spirit is Moving

Dayshawn had grown up in church. He could not remember ever missing a Sunday. He was so active in church that he was at the building at least four or five days a week. If it wasn't Bible study or midweek service, it was choir rehearsal or Sunday night youth service. Besides that, when things were slow at his home church, Dayshawn would travel around to other churches—especially when a well-known preacher was in town. He looked forward to when worship and praise would leave people ecstatic and they would begin running around and dancing in the aisles. He knew then that he could feel the Spirit.

One day Dayshawn's friend Darren came by to ask him to play basketball. Dayshawn said it was almost time for church and he didn't want to miss it. "Man, you go to church every day. You practically live there," Darren responded. "I just don't want to miss what God is doing. When the Spirit is moving, it is a privilege. I don't want to take that for granted," Dayshawn said. Darren didn't understand. "Is this what the Holy Spirit was for? So people could jump around, holler, and not engage with everyday life? If that's the Holy Spirit, then I don't want any of it. People are hungry and have no place to go while you church folk dance yourselves into heaven," Darren mocked. Dayshawn replied, "I'd rather be in the Lord's house than anywhere else."

Just then Dayshawn's neighbor, Deacon White, came by and asked Darren and Dayshawn if they wanted to go volunteer at the soup kitchen. "I can't do it tonight," Dayshawn said. "I've got to go to church. The Spirit is moving." Deacon White stood there almost in shock. "If that's what the Spirit is moving you to do, I don't know what kind of spirit that is," he said. "The Spirit is moving me to make a difference." Dayshawn thought about what Deacon White said. He always thought that the Holy Spirit was moving when he had goose bumps, not when he actually served others. The following week both Darren and Dayshawn decided to volunteer at the soup kitchen.



Real Talk

1. What made Dayshawn participate in so many church activities?
2. Why do some people believe the Spirit of God only manifests Himself in church services?
3. How can the Holy Spirit use us to make a difference in our communities?



The Big Picture

In this week's passage, Jesus declares His mission on earth. He reads a passage from Isaiah on the ministry of the Messiah. He then lets the people in the synagogue know that He is the fulfillment of that Scripture. The Spirit of God anointed Him to tackle many of society's ills.



The Players

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 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



Make It Stick

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come” (Luke 4:18–19, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Luke 4:14 Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit’s power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region.

15 He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures.

17 The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

18 “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free,

19 and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.”

20 He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently.

21 Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

22 Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. “How can this be?” they asked. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

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?



Backstage

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 Spirit 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?



Combing Through

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 “his boyhood home” 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. 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. 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 time of the LORD’s favor” (from 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 focused 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, “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!” (v. 21). There He was, in their midst. Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of God’s promise. The time of the Lord’s favor 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?



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Luke 4:14–22, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. According to the passage, in whose power did Jesus return to Galilee and how did this affect His ministry (Luke 4:14)?
2. The passage states the "Spirit of the LORD is upon me." To whom does this verse apply to (v. 18)?
3. According to the passage, what is the purpose of being anointed by the Spirit of the Lord (v. 18)?
4. Jesus states, "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" How was this Scripture fulfilled (v. 21)?



Next Steps

Find ways in which you can position yourself to preach the Gospel to those who are disenfranchised. Spend some time outside of your comfort zone and visit a homeless shelter. Allow God's Spirit to

empower you to proclaim Good News in situations that scream bad news. Ask others to join you in this endeavor.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Ask participants to come up with different organizations in their community that embody aspects of Jesus' mission from Luke 4:14–21. Have them discuss how they can volunteer their time, talent, or finances to further the mission of one of the organizations they mention.

B. Personal Application

Encourage participants to take time to further detail their own personal mission statements from the GET THEM GOING section. Have them think about ways that their mission statement can reflect Jesus' mission on earth. Suggest that they memorize this statement and repeat it to themselves every morning as a way to focus on what God wants to do through them.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Thank the Lord for the opportunity to participate in the mission of Jesus.



Say Word?

Nazarenes, na-za-REENS.

WAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

"When do we get to do the stuff? You know, the stuff here in the Bible; the stuff Jesus did, like healing the sick, raising the dead, healing the blind —stuff like that?" - John Wimber

With Selah: Leadership Encounters for Women, Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie aims to support Christian women leaders by creating an ongoing network of friends and colleagues who help and empower each other by opening doors, providing resources, and offering practical advice.

The typical conference for women tends to fall into a familiar format. Lots of meetings are led by strong, expert women who give you a solid three points on a particular issue. Attendees studiously write down notes, trying to take in tidbits that will help them move forward in their roles back at home. For the most part, it's a one-way interaction—the leader at the podium gives you the information, and you absorb it.

The Selah: Leadership Encounters for Women experiences are different. Sure, you'll have the traditional panels and probably

take a note or two. But the connection and mentorship don't stop after the intimate workshops and expert panels are over. Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, who is the 117th elected and consecrated bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, founded the event that is hosted in the spring and fall in large cities across the country, such as Atlanta and Dallas. Bishop McKenzie aims to support Christian women leaders by creating an ongoing network of friends and colleagues who help and empower each other by opening doors, providing resources, and offering practical advice.



Attendees at Selah: Leadership Encounters for Women.

Urban Faith had a chance to talk to Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie about the Selah experience, how Christian women leaders can lift one another, and who inspires her.

How can women leaders best support each other?

Don't kill each other off! There are more women in the ministry now than ever before. Some seminaries are 30%, 40%, 50%, 60% women. But when you go out in the field, you still might be the one—or one of two. So you have to be careful that you don't use that platform to be the queen and, you know, *there is only one queen*. If you get it, you want to make sure there's somebody else who is following you. I was elected and the next election cycle two women got in. And then the next election cycle, one woman got in. And we're right at the door of another election cycle right now, and we hope to get another one. You want to be sure you are helpful to your sister. Sometimes when you're in business or in congregations, you know the stuff, you know how it works, but you don't share how it works. *"Nobody told me. I had to learn myself. I know what to do. I know what to say. I know who to say it to. So you're going to have to learn yourself, too."* No! Help a sista out. It's always tricky. It's called human relationships, human nature. I think it has limited ministry. We have an opportunity to develop a model of resourcing, assisting, and support that was not in place when we were coming along—which is why I do Selah.

What kind of experience can women expect when they attend Selah?

I want you to be exposed to people who are doing wonderful things. I want you to be able to talk to them about their stories and how they got there. I want you to see where you can go. I want you to meet people who can open doors for you. I want us to talk honestly with each other about the problems that we have so we can figure out how we can solve some of those problems. I want to put you in front of people who are problem solvers, who you can connect to, who can help you. It's trying to create a model that will help people get to the next level.

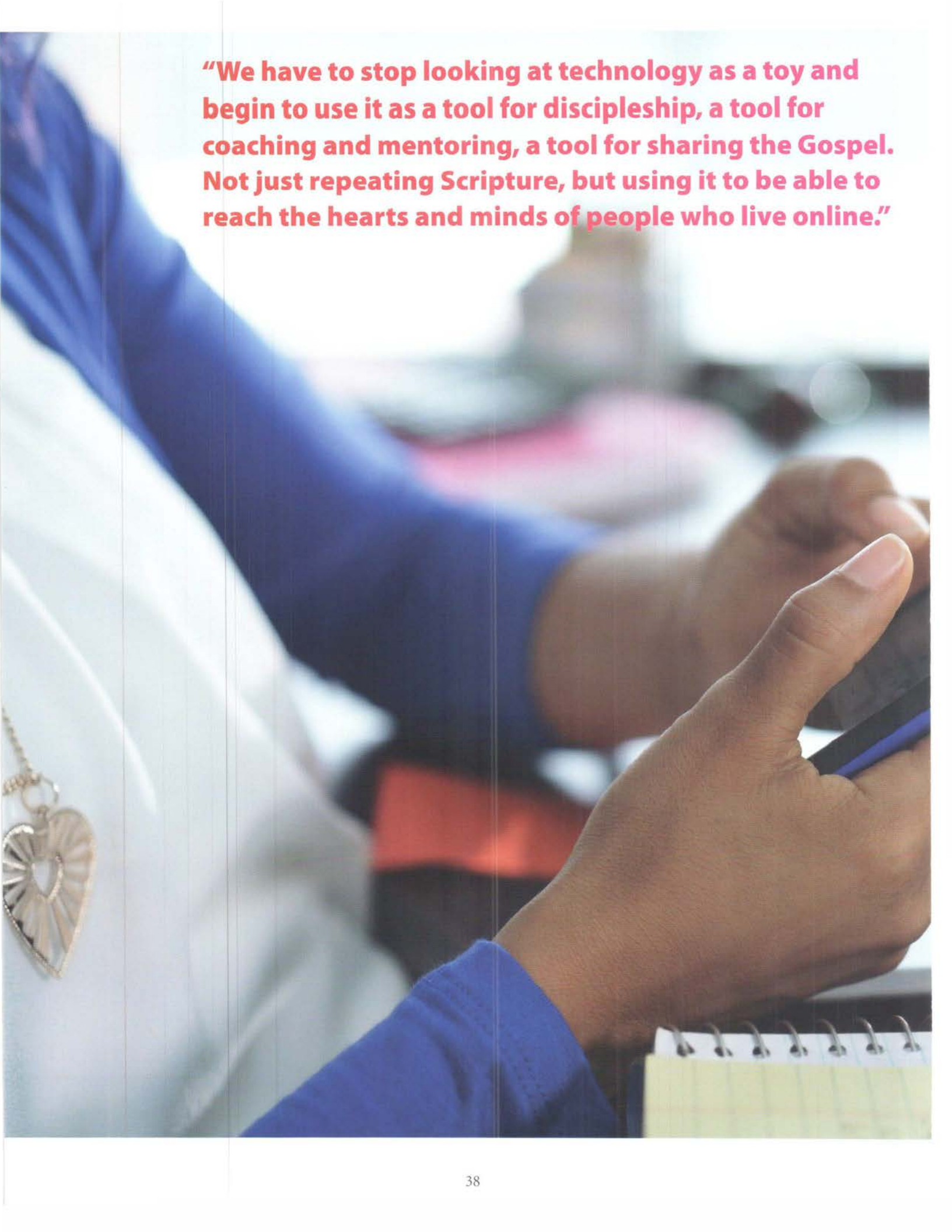
Given this new model of raising leaders, what do you see as the future of the Black church?

We are moving into a new season in the 21st century. The way we do church has changed from when we started preaching 20–30 years ago. When we started preaching, there were big churches, and then there megachurches. I think we're getting to a place where success is not defined by size and real estate. Success is going to be defined by disciple-making and having the people inside impact the outside. Historically, our churches have always been the center of community in the neighborhood. We have anchored neighborhoods that were in trouble and kept people

“You want to be sure you are helpful to your sister. Sometimes when you’re in business or in congregations, you know the stuff, you know how it works, but you don’t share how it works.”



“We have to stop looking at technology as a toy and begin to use it as a tool for discipleship, a tool for coaching and mentoring, a tool for sharing the Gospel. Not just repeating Scripture, but using it to be able to reach the hearts and minds of people who live online.”





COURTESY OF BISHOP VASHTI MURPHY MCKENZIE

Attendees at Selah: Leadership Encounters for Women.

surviving, and I still think there is a role for us to play. But younger and newer generations are looking for other types of experiences. We have seen the growth in online churches and online experiences. So if you want to capture the new and younger generations, you're going to have to have a dialogue about Jesus where you're having a dialogue about life—beginning that conversation where they are talking to each other. We have to stop looking at technology as a toy and begin to use it as a tool for discipleship, a tool for coaching and mentoring, a tool for sharing the Gospel. Not just repeating Scripture, but using it to be able to reach the hearts and minds of people who live online.

As the first woman ever elected to be Bishop of the AME church, and author of several books, which women who came before you do you admire or who have inspired you along the way?

I think that the first would be my family. The first women in my life who showed me that what I could do was not determined by my gender, but by my gifts were my mother, aunt, and grandmother because all of them were out of the box. They were managers back in the '30s and '40s. They did all these things. They were editors and publishers. They were chief editors, marketing directors, and entertainment directors. My family was a publishing family. My grandfather didn't have any sons to follow him in the business. He had daughters. And so whatever your gift was, that's what you did. I grew up in that atmosphere.

Cecelia Williams Bryant was the first woman in ministry that I had ever heard. When I heard her, that was the OMG to the third power. She has been a coach and a mentor. In the secular realm, it would be the late Congresswoman Barbara Jordan. I heard her speech before the Democratic National Convention, and I was transfixed before the TV. She said what needed to be said, and I was like, *Wow, when I grow up, I want to be just like that.* And then years later, when I stood up on the stage at the Democratic National Convention and gave remarks and a prayer, for me, it was full circle.

Lesson 6





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will be motivated to hear the Word of God and let it work for them in their lives so they will be equipped to live by it.



Get Them Going

Allow participants to share how they develop “ears to hear” the Lord. How does having “ears” help us understand the importance of witnessing?



Fishers of Men

“Jared! Did you see that big fish Renee caught?” asked John.

“Yeah, it was huge! I didn’t even know they had fish that big in the lake,” said Jared. “I wish I could’ve caught one that big.”

“I’m sure you will eventually,” said John. “But Renee had a head start on the rest of us. She took the time to read books and articles on how to fish.”

“Really? That’s a lot of trouble just to learn about fishing,” said Jared.

“Maybe, but she has caught way more fish than the rest of us,” said John. “We could probably do better if we read up, as well.”

“Fishing for fish and fishing for people—I guess it never hurts to read up on it either one,” said Jared.

“Yeah. You remember that from the morning devotions? Pastor was talking to us about how we need to read our Bibles every day in order to be good witnesses,” said John.

“Do you think by reading our Bibles we can catch the big fish of people for Jesus?” asked Jared.

“It would seem so,” said John. “We need to know what we are talking about in order to tell people about Jesus.”

“I guess since the Bible is the instruction book for believers, it should help us out,” said Jared.

“I think it would be unfortunate for someone to ask us about Jesus and we don’t know what to say because we didn’t read the Bible,” said John.



Real Talk

1. Have you ever had someone ask you a question about Jesus, but you didn’t know the answer? How did you handle the situation?
2. What do you think of Jared’s comparison of fishing for fish vs. fishing for people?
3. Are there other ways to hear God’s Word aside from sermons and Bible study lessons? Explain.



The Big Picture

We need to learn the truths in God’s Word and apply them to our own lives. Without a good understanding of the Scripture, we won’t be well equipped to share the Good News of Jesus with others.



The Players

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 along 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 his office (Matthew 9:9). It was also the scene of much of Jesus’ Galilean ministry.



Make It Stick

“Jesus replied to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid! From now on you’ll be fishing for people!’” (from Luke 5:10, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Luke 5:1 One day as Jesus was preaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, great crowds pressed in on him to listen to the word of God.

2 He noticed two empty boats at the water’s edge, for the fishermen had left them and were washing their nets.

3 Stepping into one of the boats, Jesus asked Simon, its owner, to push it out into the water. So he sat in the boat and taught the crowds from there.

4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish.”

5 “Master,” Simon replied, “we worked hard all last night and didn’t catch a thing. But if you say so, I’ll let the nets down again.”

6 And this time their nets were so full of fish they began to tear!

7 A shout for help brought their partners in the other boat, and soon both boats were filled with fish and on the verge of sinking.

8 When Simon Peter realized what had happened, he fell to his knees before Jesus and said, “Oh, Lord, please leave me—I’m such a sinful man.”

9 For he was awestruck by the number of fish they had caught, as were the others with him.

10 His partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were also amazed. Jesus replied to Simon, “Don’t be afraid! From now on you’ll be fishing for people!”

11 And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.



Backstage

Previously in Luke 4, the Lord Jesus was in Capernaum (v. 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 (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.



Combing Through

1. The Teaching (Luke 5:1–3)

On a certain morning, Jesus was on the shore of Lake Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee, NLT), 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 boat—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 He taught the multitude from the boat. 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 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 Jesus!

When have you shown a willingness to share about Jesus 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 (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. 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 “be fishing for people” (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?



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Luke 5:1–11, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. When was the last time I shared my faith with an unsaved person? What would help me to become bolder in sharing my faith?
2. Why is it important that we hear the Word of God as often as we can? What does this do for us?
3. Why is it hard for people to accept things they can't understand? What is this a sign of?
4. Is there a correlation between our hearing the Word and acting upon it? Explain.



Next Steps

Make a commitment to read, study, and meditate on the Word every day.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Allow participants to share how they develop “ears to hear” the Lord. How does having “ears” help us understand the importance of witnessing? What strength does God’s Word and the Holy Spirit give us as a resource?

B. Personal Application

It may seem impossible for any person, group, or church to make a difference. Consider your belief in God’s power to change hearts. What shapes your belief? What biblical and experiential support do you have for your answer?



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Dear Lord Jesus, I want to follow You by reading Your Word daily and also be a fisher of people.



Say Word?

Gennesaret. ghen-nay-sar-et'

WAG
(Wisdom and Guidance)

“In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute.” - Thurgood Marshall

Lesson 7





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, students will understand the importance of bringing people to Christ to receive forgiveness. They will also understand that they shouldn't be too quick to judge the actions of other people.



Get Them Going

Discuss how we let our judgment of others affect the way we show God's love to them. What is the importance of listening to God to know when and where to go, as well as what to say?



God Forgives

Brenda stuffed her college literature book into her black mesh book bag. She zipped the bag up and hoisted it onto her shoulders.

"Where are you going?" her roommate Janine asked before biting into her red Rome apple.

"I'm getting ready for a study session," Brenda replied.

"What study session?" Janine asked as she caught the drip of apple juice about to roll down her chin.

"Nobody told *me* about it."

"That's because it's a private session," Brenda responded.

"I do better by myself anyway," Janine said as she took another bite of the apple.

Brenda adjusted the straps on her shoulder. "Good."

"So... who are you studying with?" Janine pressed.

"Trust me. You don't want to know."

"Is it that guy from Dr. Mason's class? He's fine."

"No," Brenda answered in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Come on, tell me," Janine pleaded.

"It's Tosha," Brenda said as she walked toward the door.

Janine jumped off the bed and ran in front of Brenda. "Again? Don't you think you've been spending too much time with her?"

"No." Brenda tried to move past Janine.

"Girl, she's going to bring you down." She pointed a finger at Brenda while holding the apple in the same hand. Brenda looked at Janine with disapproval. "You don't get it, do you?"

"I don't get it? Remember what we talk about in Bible study? 'Don't be unequally yoked.'"

"You're taking that out of context." Brenda knew that Janine was right about Tosha, but still, something was driving her to stay connected to the girl. "I've got to go."

"Alright. Don't say I didn't warn you, though. That girl has got the kind of reputation that you don't write home about. And I'm just saying..."

"Goodbye, Janine." Brenda said and walked out the door.

Brenda was relieved to get to Tosha's room. As the two girls sat down to discuss their assigned story, Tosha blurted out, "Why are you so nice to me? Haven't you heard the rumors about me? The guys. The gifts. Why do you keep coming around?"

"I..." Brenda silently asked God to give her the right response.

"Most of your friends won't give me the time of day," Tosha started before Brenda could reply to her first set of questions. "Why are you different?"

"God loves you, Tosha. So, who am I to judge you?"

"He couldn't love me. You don't know all the things I've done. I want to change but I don't know how."

"It doesn't matter what you've done. God forgives," Brenda said. "Do you want to visit our Bible study? You'll learn a lot there."

"Maybe after I get myself more together," Tosha said.

"You can't get yourself together. That's why God sent Jesus. Why don't you give Him a chance? Allow *Him* to help you get yourself together."

Tosha smiled. She was glad someone cared. "Tell you what—I'll come if you'll promise to walk in with me. Deal?"

"Deal," Brenda said as she reached over and gently squeezed Tosha's hand.



Real Talk

1. Why do you think Brenda agreed to help Tosha?
2. How can you help someone who is considered an outcast?
3. How can we reach out to people who are different from us?



Make It Stick

“Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk?’” (Mark 2:9, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Mark 2:1 When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home.

2 Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God’s word to them,

3 four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat.

4 They couldn’t bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus.

5 Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “My child, your sins are forgiven.”

6 But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves,

7 “What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!”

8 Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, “Why do you question this in your hearts?”

9 Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk?’

10 So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins.” Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said,

11 “Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!”

12 And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, “We’ve never seen anything like this before!”



The Big Picture

The passages detail the conflict that occurred in Jesus’ early ministry. The first incident occurs when Jesus heals and forgives the sins of a paralyzed man. The second occurs when Jesus eats with sinners.



The Players

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 pain (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. 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?



Backstage

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 with 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: “We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came” (from Mark 1:38). There were probably 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?



Combing Through

1. Jesus Preaches (Mark 2:1–4)

When Jesus entered Capernaum (v. 1), He preached “God’s 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 “a paralyzed man” joined the crowd but were unable to access Jesus through the doorway. Therefore, to get within touching distance of Jesus, they possibly carried the paralytic up an 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 led into an open space called the porch. Often the porch contained a stairway that led to the roof. So these friends could have used the roof as a means to reach Jesus tearing the roof open and lowering the paralytic on his mat down through the opening to where Jesus stood preaching. What a scene!

Share about a time when you 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 paralyzed 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 to not only 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,

“Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home” (v. 11). The healing verified Jesus' claim to grant forgiveness. Since the healing was real and impossible for anyone but God, the claim to forgive sins is also real. The paralytic immediately arose, took up his mat, 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. He 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.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Mark 2:1–12, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. The paralytic man was carried by friends to Jesus and was healed. Why do you think these men took the paralyzed man to Jesus?
2. Why do you think they didn't turn around when the crowd wouldn't let them through? (v. 4)
3. Why do you think Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven? (v. 5)



Next Steps

Many people try to put God in a box and say that He always acts a certain way. Then they assume that Christians should all act and talk alike. It's important to leave room for the Holy Spirit to speak to

us individually and guide us in our walk. We must remember not to depend on our own thinking, but to acknowledge God in all of our ways so that He can guide our paths.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

We should remember to look beyond the sinful actions of others to the cause of their actions. Are they searching for something? Are they trying to suppress pain or overcompensate for insecurity? Discuss how looking beyond questionable actions will enable us to deal more effectively with others and demonstrates the power Jesus offers to help all of us overcome negative situations.

B. Personal Application

Have you ever failed to show God's love to someone because you considered him or her intimidating, beneath you, or too sinful? How could you have handled that situation in a way that would have pleased God? Be cautious about judging the actions of others; God may be using them in a unique way.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Lord, help us to look beyond the poor choices that people make so we can reach out to them and share the Good News of Jesus.

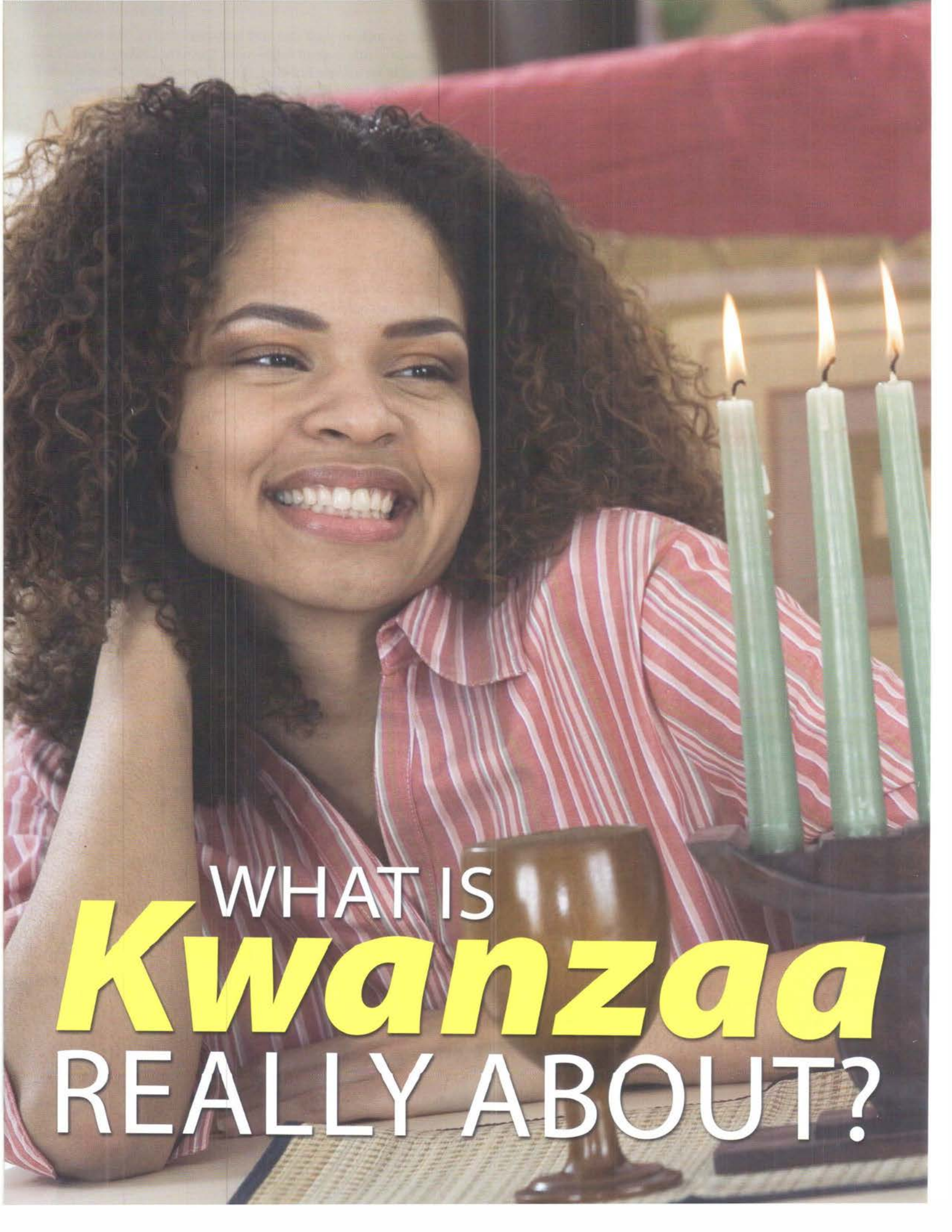


Say Word?

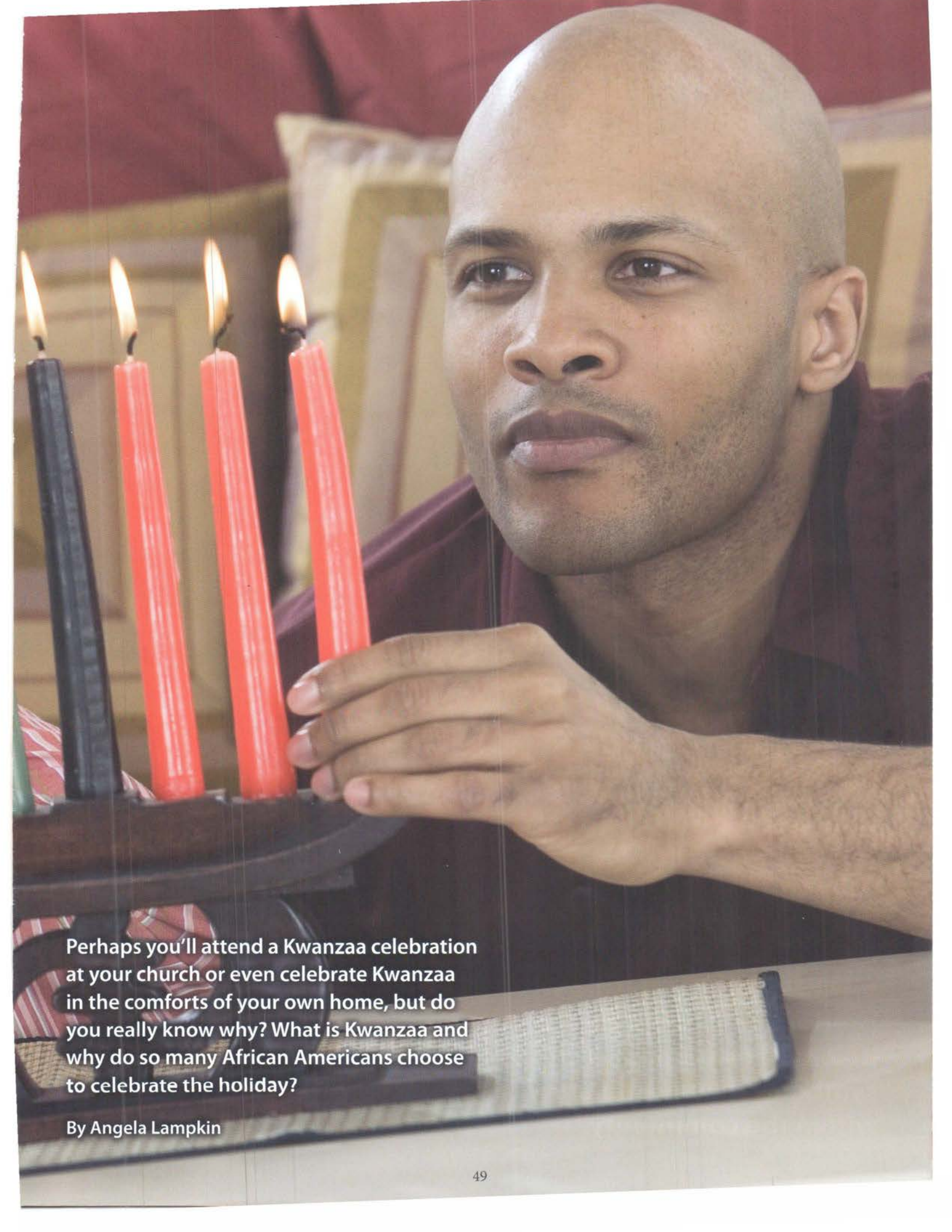
Zebedee. ZEH-beh-dee

WAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

“Diversity is not about how we differ. Diversity is about embracing one another's uniqueness.” - Ola Joseph




WHAT IS
Kwanzaa
REALLY ABOUT?

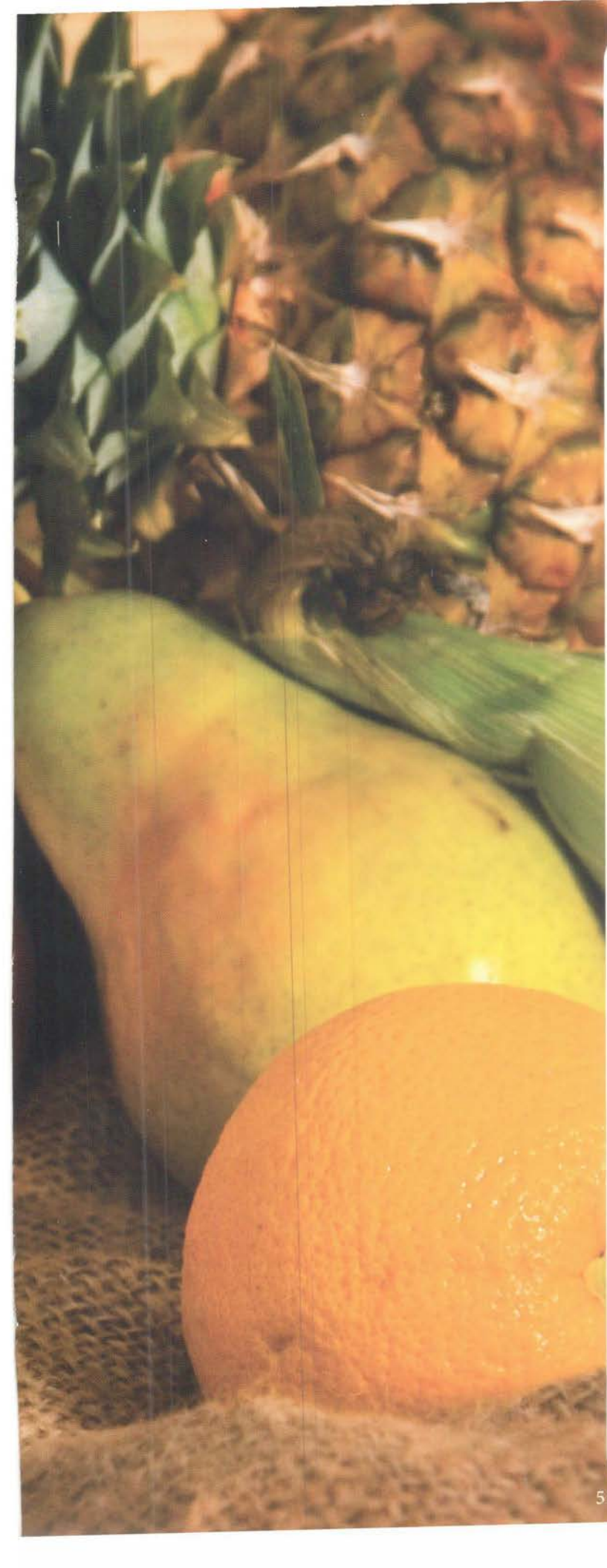


Perhaps you'll attend a Kwanzaa celebration at your church or even celebrate Kwanzaa in the comforts of your own home, but do you really know why? What is Kwanzaa and why do so many African Americans choose to celebrate the holiday?

By Angela Lampkin



“Place the Mazao, the fruit or crops in a bowl, on top of the Mkeka (a woven mat or straw) symbolizing the culture’s productivity ... Include the Kikombe cha Umoja, a cup to symbolize family and unity within the community.”



Kwanzaa is an African American holiday celebrated from December 26–January 1. Perhaps you will attend a Kwanzaa celebration at your church or even celebrate in Kwanzaa in the comforts of your own home, but do you really know why? What is Kwanzaa and why do so many African Americans choose to celebrate the holiday?

Kwanzaa was created and developed by Dr. Maulana Ron Karenga in 1966. Dr. Karenga is an author, professor, and scholar-activist who is passionate about sustaining Pan-African culture in America, with an emphasis on celebrating the family and the community.

There are three main ideas that are foundational to sustaining the Kwanzaa tradition. The first idea is to reinstate rootedness in African culture. The second is to serve as a consistent, annual, public celebration to strengthen and confirm the bonds between people of the African diaspora. And finally, Kwanzaa is to familiarize and support the “Ngunzo Saba,” also known as the “Seven Principles,” which are each celebrated during the seven days following Christmas.

These seven principles represent the values of African communication. They include the following:

1. Umoja or Unity
2. Kujichagulia or Self-Determination
3. Ujima or Collective Work and Responsibility
4. Ujamaa or Cooperative Economics
5. Nia or Purpose
6. Kuumba or Creativity
7. Imani or Faith.

People celebrate Kwanzaa in numerous ways and have different practices that have been incorporated into their celebrations.

SYMBOLIC DECOR

Are you unsure as to how you and your family can participate in a Kwanzaa celebration? A good way to start is to decorate your home or living quarters with the symbols of Kwanzaa.

First, start by putting a green tablecloth over a table that is centrally based in the space you intend to decorate. Then, place the Mkeka, a woven mat or straw that represents the factual cornerstone of African descent, on top of the tablecloth.

Place the Mazao, the fruit or crops in a bowl, on top of the Mkeka symbolizing the culture’s productivity. Next, place the Kinara, a seven-pronged candle holder, on the tablecloth. The Kinara should include the Mishumaa Saba, seven candles that represent the seven central principles of Kwanzaa.

The three candles placed on the left are red to symbolize struggle, the three candles to the right are green to symbolize hope, and the one candle placed in the center is black to symbolize those who draw their heritage from Africa or simply just the African American people. The candles are lit

“Activities may include ... lighting the candles, musical selections played on the drums, readings of the African Pledge and the Principles of Blackness, reflections on the Pan-African colors, discussing African principles for that day and/or reciting chapters in African heritage.”





each day in a certain order, with the black candle always being lit first.

Next, include the Muhindi, ears of corn, to symbolize each child. However, if there are no children present, place two ears to represent the children within the community.

Also, include Zawadi, gifts for the children, on the table. And finally, include the Kikombe cha Umoja, a cup to symbolize family and unity within the community.

PAN-AFRICAN CREATIVITY

You may also choose to decorate the rest of your home with Kwanzaa flags, called Bendera, and posters that focus on the

seven principles. Some children usually take pleasure in making these flags or they may be purchased. African national and tribal flags can also be created to symbolize the seven principles.

Other ways to celebrate may include learning Kwanzaa greetings, such as "Habari Gani," which is a traditional Swahili greeting for "What is the news?"

Activities may include having a ceremony which may include lighting the candles, musical selections played on the drums, readings of the African Pledge and the Principles of Blackness, reflections on the Pan-African colors, discussing African principles for that day and/or reciting chapters in African heritage. Be creative!

Lesson 8





Where We're Going

By the end of the lesson, participants should understand the importance of intercessory prayer in their daily lives. They should begin to recognize the power that prayer has in their protection as well as in their spiritual growth.



Get Them Going

Ask the participants if they are aware that the enemy is constantly trying to harm us. Emphasize that Jesus knew this and loved us so much that He prayed for our safety before we were born.



Krista's Miracle

Krista had her quiet times with God in the morning. She treasured this time with her Savior because it gave her a spiritual lift at the beginning of her day.

Thursday was a day just like any other day in Krista's life. She got up early and had her quiet time. She read a few chosen verses and then she prayed. In her closing prayer, as she had always done, she prayed for God's protection for herself, her family, and friends.

While coming home from work on the expressway that night, Krista was singing along with the music on the radio and enjoying the drive home. Traffic was heavy, but it was still moving quickly. Soon a fog slowly started to cover the road. A drizzle began to fall, which made the roads very slick. Krista began to reduce her speed, and she moved into the middle lane to avoid any trouble, but what she saw just in front of her made her heart stop.

A car slowing down too quickly caused another car to slam on its breaks and spin out across several lanes. A truck in the right lane, swerving to avoid the careening car, lost control and hit the truck in the left lane. Krista thought for certain that she was going to die when she couldn't get out of the way of the two trucks ahead of her. She heard several cars crashing around her. She knew there was no escaping. She closed her eyes and tightened every muscle in her body and braced for impact. The trucks, however, were still sliding to the left and amazingly she went right past them. When she opened her eyes, the road ahead of her was clear, but the one behind her was a scene of mangled cars. Once she was out of danger, she pulled to the side of the road and called 911. While on the phone, she stared in amazement at the chaotic scene behind her and openly thanked the Lord for His protection.



Real Talk

1. Today's story is an example of the miracles that God works in our every day lives. Do you have any personal examples of miracles in your life?
2. Do you often remember to thank God when He protects you from danger?
3. Do you live your life based on tomorrow not being promised?



The Big Picture

We can learn a great deal from Jesus' model prayer. Not only did the Son of God feel the need to pray, but He prayed for others.



The Players

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 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.



Make It Stick

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message” (John 17:20, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

John 17:14 I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

15 I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.

16 They do not belong to this world any more than I do.

17 Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.

18 Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.

19 And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.

20 I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message.

21 I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

22 I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one.

23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.

24 Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!

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.



Backstage

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 had come to leave this world return to his Father” (from John 13:1, NLT). 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?



Combing Through

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: “Make them holy by your truth” (v. 17). To make holy or to sanctify means to be 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 “can be made holy by your truth” (v. 19). 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 reflect 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

Social Justice, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Bible

In celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., be inspired by these radio broadcast excerpts from over the years that draw biblical connections and insight into his life and leadership.

Did you know that the founder of UMI, Dr. Melvin E. Banks, records a daily, two-minute radio broadcast with Christian commentary on everyday events and Black history? It's a bonus blessing to start your day. Dr. Banks covers a variety of topics and you can listen to them on UrbanMinistries.com/blog. However, in celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we've pulled the audio of a few memorable ones from over the years that draw biblical connections and insight into his life, leadership, and commitment to social justice.



“[Dr. King] said nonviolence actively resists evil; wins friendships and understanding; seeks to defeat injustice not people; educates and transforms those who suffer; teaches love, not hate; fosters faith because it believes justice will win in the end.”





What Can We Learn from Dr. King's Nonviolent Methods?

To achieve social justice, Dr. King chose nonviolent methods. He said non-violence actively resists evil; wins friendships and understanding; seeks to defeat injustice not people; educates and transforms those who suffer; teaches love, not hate; fosters faith because it believes justice will win in the end. In Moses' first efforts to win justice for his fellow Israelites, he tried violence. He saw an Egyptian overseer beating his fellow Hebrew, so he killed the Egyptian and hid the body in the sand. When Pharaoh discovered what he did, Moses had to flee for his life. Fortunately for him, God overruled his flawed strategy. When he fled to Midian, he met a priest at a well who invited Moses to his home and he settled there. Later the priest gave Moses his daughter in marriage and started a family. It took him 40 years to learn that violence was not the way to liberate his people. The end of Exodus 2 tells us that, after the king of Egypt died, the Israelites continued to groan under the burden of slavery for some 400 years. Finally, God decided it was time to act. It's beyond us to fathom God's wisdom in how He chooses to bring justice for us, or to act on our behalf. Our task is to seek His will, to act according to His Word, and to trust Him to bring justice in His own time and way.

How Did Dr. King Justify Breaking Segregation Laws?

Dr. King is perhaps the most famous human rights leader America has ever had. Not only did he lead the struggle to eliminate racial segregation in our country, but he has also inspired millions of people around the world to work for justice. Much of what he sought to achieve did not happen until after his death. In that respect, he had a similar experience to that of our Lord. Despite the incomparable ministry Jesus Christ carried on, from a human perspective, His work might seem to be in vain. Consider this: John reminds us that He came to His own—His own creation, nation, people, and land, but His own rejected Him (John 1:11). The religious leaders conspired with the Romans to crucify Him (John 18). His disciples forsook Him when the soldiers arrested Him. The crowds initially applauded Him, but later they said, "Crucify Him!" (John 19:15). Yet despite all these hurtful experiences, He conquered sin, death, and the grave (1 Corinthians 15:55). Not only has God the Father declared Him ruler over heaven and earth, His followers now number in the billions and still counting. God said of Him through Isaiah the prophet, "I will make you a light to the Gentiles and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6, NLT). Even after 2,000 years, we still share the Good News—"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NLT).

What Did Dr. King Mean by the Moral Arc of Justice?

Dr. King often said, "The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice." He meant that even though justice may seem slow in coming, it will surely come. David, the author of Psalm 109, wrestled with the issue of justice. An enemy had badly mistreated him using slander, lies, and curses to destroy him—even though David often prayed for his enemy (verse 4). The assault from this adversary left him poor, needy, and brokenhearted. Instead of taking things into his own hands, David prayed that God would judge and punish his enemy. He was convinced that because God is just, he could count on Him to chastise this evildoer appropriately. He prayed that God would punish his enemy for the sake of His own reputation. He also believed that when justice prevails and evil subsides, God's kingdom would expand. God has established governments to penalize evildoers; their task is to oversee deserved punishment. On the other hand, we sometimes want vengeance. We want to inflict injury, harm, or humiliation on the person who injured or offended us. The Bible tells us that revenge belongs to God. "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," (from

Romans 12:19, NLT). When God repays, He is not only fair, He is also thorough. So when somebody mistreats us, whether we may or may not choose to seek justice in courts, we must surely leave vengeance to God.

Dr. King's Last Words are Memorable

Here is a part of "I've Been to the Mountaintop," Dr. King's last message: "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter to me now, because I have been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the

mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land." The next day, after uttering those words, Dr. King was assassinated. As Jesus ended His public ministry and before He was crucified, He spoke these last words to the crowds: "I have come as a light to shine in this dark world so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark ... I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken. I don't speak on my own authority. The Father who sent me has commanded me what to say and how to say it. And I know his commands lead to eternal life, so I say whatever the Father tells me to say" (John 12:46-50, NLT). Jesus' last words are profound: to ignore and




reject Him, the only Giver of eternal life, is the greatest mistake a person can make.

The Statue of Dr. King Carries a Strong Message

The famous artist Michelangelo said, "Every block of stone has a statue inside and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it." This rings true as the statue of Dr. King in our nation's capital communicates the hope and justice that was articulated in his "I Have A Dream" speech. It also reminds us of the way the Apostle Paul spoke of the church at Corinth. Even though that congregation was beset with numerous moral failings, the apostle looked beyond the failings to envision what God intended the church to be. In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul calls them "holy," despite all their

failures. In fact, God's Church is composed of the most diverse crew you can imagine, comprised of people with various levels of education, income, social standing, ethnic diversity, cultural backgrounds, and spiritual maturity. God welcomes everybody. When all these various individuals come together, you would expect conflict. Yet despite the makeup of this motley crew of believers, God expects the Church, who confess Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, to welcome all. That is because, like the sculptor envisioning an image in a stone, God looks at who we are in Him, not who we are today. Mature Christians realize that. They stop thinking of the Church as an elite social club, but as it truly is, the Body of Christ.

A black and white photograph showing three large, simple wooden crosses standing on a grassy hill. The crosses are silhouetted against a cloudy sky. The hill is in the foreground, and the crosses are arranged from left to right, with the middle one being the tallest.

“As Jesus ended His public ministry and before He was crucified, He spoke these last words to the crowds: ‘I have come as a light to shine in this dark world so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark ... I have come to save the world and not to judge it. But all who reject me and my message will be judged on the day of judgment by the truth I have spoken.’”

Lesson 9





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will explore Jesus' presentation in the Temple, express their feelings about the phrase, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise" (from Luke 2:34, NLT), and decide how they might walk in holiness.



Get Them Going

Ask the participants about any past dreams that may have taken a long time to materialize. Inquire whether they have long-term hopes and dreams. Be sure to stress that the Lord will honor their hopes and dreams as they strive for holiness. With that in mind, have the participants contemplate Jesus' birth as the fulfillment of Israel's hopes and dreams.



Big Break

Maya was so nervous going into the director's office after the audition. For years, she had dreamed of becoming an actress, and now it was about to happen. She knew that the Lord had called her to make a difference with her gifts. She felt that one of her greatest gifts was acting.

Her dream was to be in a feature film and get the opportunity to share her faith in Christ. She didn't know how it was going to happen, but she knew that this desire was from the Lord. She also knew that she needed to stay faithful to Him and live a life of holiness.

"Okay, he's ready for you, Maya," the receptionist said after the last person left the room. Her palms were sweaty. Before she walked into the director's office, she made sure everything about her was neat and tidy. This could be her big break. She didn't want to blow it. As she sat down in the chair, the director asked her, "Have you done any other work before?" Maya responded, "No, I haven't." "Well, here's the deal, Maya," he said bluntly, "you don't have the experience we need for a project of this caliber." Maya's smile dropped. "But," the director added, "I am willing to consider you for another one of my projects." Maya's hope returned. "You have a lot of potential, but we want to make sure that you get your feet wet with something smaller." Maya felt a little better and then asked the director, "What's the film about?" "Well," the director said as he got up from his seat, "it will require your special gifts and talents." He walked over to the back of Maya's chair and began to massage her shoulders. "This film will require a lingerie scene and I think you are just the girl for the job."

Maya couldn't believe it. He was asking her to be in a film that went against everything she stood for. She wanted to be an actress, but not that badly. She immediately got up from the chair. "I don't think this film is right for me," she said. "Fine," the director annoyingly replied, "Suit yourself. You will never make it in this town." With that, Maya walked out and slammed the door.

Once she got outside, she sat on a bench and began to cry. She wondered if being an actress was a failed dream. Maybe she needed to call it quits and focus on pursuing another career. Just then she looked up at a woman who had approached her. "Hi. How are you? Listen, I'm looking for women about your age to star in a family-friendly movie that I'm producing. We want people of faith who are committed to living out Christian values both on and off the screen. Here's my card. Give me a call!" Maya reached out to grab the card. She smiled and realized that the Lord could fulfill her dreams as she lived a life of holiness.



Real Talk

1. What motivated Maya to stay persistent in pursuing her dream of being an actress?
2. Do you think it's possible to live a life of holiness while pursuing a career in show business?
3. How can we live a life of holiness as we wait for God to fulfill His promises in our lives?



The Big Picture

This week's passage is an account of Jesus' presentation in the Temple. Simeon and Anna both lived lives of holiness as they awaited the coming Messiah. As Jesus was presented in the Temple, they both recognized His birth as the fulfillment of prophecy. In this way, they were rewarded for their faithfulness to God.



Make It Stick

“In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams” (Acts 2:17, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Luke 2:36 Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years.

37 Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshipping God with fasting and prayer.

38 She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

Acts 2:16 No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

17 ‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams.

18 In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy.

19 And I will cause wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and clouds of smoke.

20 The sun will become dark, and the moon will turn blood red before that great and glorious day of the LORD arrives.

21 But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.’

Acts 21:8 The next day we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food.

9 He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.



The Players

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 it was prophesied in Joel 2:28–32.

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 gift 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?



Backstage

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, who had the gift of prophecy, 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?



Combing Through

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 “never left 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. 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 and

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 Azo-

tus 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.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:16-21, 21:8-9, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. What did Simeon tell Mary concerning Jesus and his relationship to Israel? Why is this significant (v. 34)?
2. According to the passage, how did Anna serve God (v. 37)?
3. According to the passage, Anna spoke about Jesus to all who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. How would Jesus bring about redemption (v. 38)?



Next Steps

God is calling us to a life of holiness. Our age doesn't matter. Whether young or old, God wants us to live as an example for others. How do we live holy lives? We can devote time to praying, fasting,

and reading the Word. The Holy Spirit will help to sustain us. Our devotion and service to God can draw others to Him.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Ask the participants to look up Scriptures regarding holiness. Assign six passages to each person. Then encourage them to text the verses to each other and encourage one another to live holy lives. Be sure to stress that we are called to live a holy life as we look to God to fulfill His promises to us and through us.

B. Personal Application

Encourage each person to spend time thinking about the different challenges they encounter in living a holy life. When do these challenges usually occur? What promises and blessings do they forfeit in being defeated by these challenges? Encourage them to share these challenges with a trusted friend or mentor, asking the person to pray for them and keep them accountable.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Thank You, Lord, for the power to live a holy life and for fulfilling all Your promises.



Say Word?

Phanuel. fuh-NOO-uhl.

WAG
(Wisdom and Guidance)

"Holiness is the only path to happiness." - Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Lesson 10





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will discuss who and what is acceptable based on societal norms, feel empowered to know that we can change because of Jesus, and share how our perception of others influences our actions toward them.



Get Them Going

Get your participants excited about today's lesson by asking them to write down their thoughts, feelings, and assumptions if they were to apply for a loan and the loan officer was either a Black female, Black male, White female, or a White male. Which interaction would they feel the most comfortable with, and which would they feel the least comfortable? Encourage them to share and explain their feelings. Let them know that we are all influenced by cultural conventions between men and women, race, and culture.



The Entertainment

Victoria looked at herself in the mirror one last time. She gave herself a nod of approval at the white knee-length silk dress and strappy sandals she wore. Before she headed out the door, she grabbed her purse and phone, and called her coworker Anita.

"I'm on my way. Are you ready?"

"Almost."

Victoria sucked her teeth. "Almost?"

What are you doing?"

"Trying to figure out what to wear to a White person's wedding," Anita said.

"The same thing you'd wear to a Black one."

"Girl, Heather's got money. I can't roll up in there with just anything on."

"Anita, nobody's going to pay attention to anyone but Heather and Jeff."

"This time," Anita sucked her teeth, "we might be the only Black women there. You think that won't draw anyone's attention?"

"Well, if you're not dressed in the ten minutes it takes me to get over there, our tardiness might draw attention."

Victoria laughed at her friend. Surely Heather wouldn't have invited them if her family held negative ideas about African Americans. When she arrived at Anita's house, Victoria was delighted to find that she also wore a white dress.

"I guess you got the memo," Victoria said, pointing at her dress.

"What else would you wear to a White wedding?"

They laughed the entire 15-minute ride to their coworker's wedding, and enjoyed themselves throughout the ceremony. On the way to the reception,

Victoria chided Anita for worrying about how Heather's family would treat them. But as soon as they got out of the car and headed toward the reception hall, an elderly White man approached them saying,

"You must be the entertainment. Come right this way."



Real Talk

1. What would be some reasons behind Anita's concern?
2. What would you have done if you were Victoria and Anita?
3. What assumptions did the elderly man make about Victoria and Anita, and why?



The Big Picture

Life is full of unfair discrimination, but God doesn't discriminate. Jesus accepts all people, regardless of societal standards and welcomes them into the kingdom of heaven.



Make It Stick

“Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, ‘He told me everything I ever did!’” (John 4:39, NLT)



The Word (NLT)

John 4:25 The woman said, “I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

26 Then Jesus told her, “I AM the Messiah!”

27 Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, “What do you want with her?” or “Why are you talking to her?”

28 The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone,

29 “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?”

30 So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

31 Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, “Rabbi, eat something.”

32 But Jesus replied, “I have a kind of food you know nothing about.”

33 “Did someone bring him food while we were gone?” the disciples asked each other.

34 Then Jesus explained: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work.”

35 You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.’ But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest.

36 The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike!

37 You know the saying, ‘One plants and another harvests.’ And it’s true.

38 I sent you to harvest where you didn’t plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest.”

39 Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I ever did!”

40 When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days,

41 long enough for many more to hear his message and believe.

42 Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world.”



The Players

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 48:22). 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 may have been divorced at some point. The stigma for divorce, especially for a woman, was high in Jesus’ time, and the woman probably set out to draw water at an odd time to avoid the judgment and gossip from the other women in town.



Backstage

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?



Combing Through

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 jar at the well and runs to tell the good news of the man who had “told [her] everything [she had] ever did.” 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 harvest. 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?



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read John 4:25–42, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. How does Jesus reveal His identity to the Samaritan woman (vv. 25–26)?
2. Based on the Samaritan woman's reaction to her conversation with Jesus, what sort of impact did He have on her (vv. 28–30)?
3. What kind of barriers did Jesus cross by talking to the woman?



Next Steps

Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman (and to us) that His love extends beyond societal boundaries to all people. He loves everyone, regardless of gender, nationality, and social class. Therefore, as Christians, we must follow Christ's example and reach out to everyone,

including societal outcasts, in order to share Christ's love with others. Challenge yourself to extend a loving hand and share the message of Jesus Christ to someone who has a difficult time because of societal or cultural factors.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Jesus crossed cultural, racial, and social boundaries to minister to others and yet we remain hesitant to do the same. Why do you think our churches are still racially, socially, and culturally separate? What can we learn from Jesus in today's lesson to integrate our churches?

B. Personal Application

Evaluate yourself. What keeps you from ministering to others who might be different from you? How can you overcome those obstacles? Consider that all Jesus did to the woman at the well was talk and listen to her, and offer her a better life through God.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Lord, we are guilty of letting our biases influence how we treat others. Help us to be more like You as we aim to love everyone, regardless of gender, nationality, and social class.



Say Word?

Judea. Joo-DEE-ah.



“Wherever there is a human being, I see God-given rights inherent in that being, whatever may be the sex or complexion.” - William Lloyd Garrison

The Reality TV-Style

Forget "Keeping Up With the Kardashians" or "Basketball Wives." Some of the original—and most scandalous—examples of "soap opera" and "reality TV" drama happened in the Old Testament narrative of Samuel.

By Natasha S. Robinson

Sex, scandal, soap operas, and reality TV...

Those were my thoughts while reading through the book of 1 Samuel over the past few weeks. This book is filled with murder, rape, and incest, as well as power plays, betrayal, and unceasing war.

The injustices against women are evident. Throughout the book, women are tossed around like property to be used and abused in whatever manner the men of power see fit. Consider King Saul's daughter, Michal, for example in 1 Samuel 18. Saul gave her away to David, which was a good selection for her since the Bible reveals that she was in love with David. Saul, on the other hand, simply used her as a pawn in his endless pursuit to capture and kill David. (She was actually the second daughter Saul tried to pass off to David.)

Nevertheless, Michal married David and proved herself faithful to him. David was forced to flee from Saul's jealousy. Saul took David's absence as an opportunity to marry Michal off to someone else (1 Samuel 25:44). By this time, David had married two other women. *Are the reality show themes setting in yet?*

Drama of the

Old Testament





After Saul's death on the battlefield, David Michal be returned to him. Therefore, his wife was taken and returned to David, as her second husband Palti went weeping behind her. Finally, Palti was forced to return home to grieve his loss (2 Samuel 3:13–16). Don't believe me? It's in the book, and this is just one of many scandals recorded. The poor guy was probably one of *The Young and the Restless*; David was suffering through the *Days of Our Lives*, and Michal was probably no longer part of *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

Which made me think...King Solomon, David's son, was right when he wrote, "There is nothing new under the sun" (from Ecclesiastes 1:9, NIV). Look how far we have fallen.

Then I wondered, *What is the difference between the life stories recorded in 1 Samuel and those shown in our current reality TV shows?*

People watch these shows for entertainment, and Christians read the Bible for a much deeper purpose. But is that all there is to say? We could tie a nice theological bow on this, but that would not promote dialogue, would it?

This question is an important one concerning culture and the church, and maybe how we can reconcile the two. It may also lead to questions as to why it's important to read the Old Testament. Why did God choose to include this historical book in the sacred text that is the Bible? What does He want us to learn? There are history lessons of course, worthy of the notable phrase, "Those who do not know their history are destined to repeat it." But what are the other purposes to consider? Finally, we must ask the question: So what?

Is our reading of the Bible too restrictive? Do we consign the Old Testament to the static role of exotic history book without considering its instructive aspects for today? Are there insights in the text to be found about responding to the hot messes in our own families and communities? What do these messes reveal about God? What do they teach us about ourselves?

Here's to seeing God's Word in a new light, and taking it at least as seriously as we do NeNe's latest outburst or Khloe Kardashian's latest social media beef!

"People watch these shows for entertainment, and Christians read the Bible for a much deeper purpose. But is that all there is to say?"



Lesson 11





Where We're Going

By the end of the lesson, participants will have a deeper understanding of what it means to have a friend, be a friend, and have a greater appreciation for a friendship with Jesus.



Get Them Going

How would you define a true friend? Discuss.



Keeping It Real

Ayesha and Shaheena have been friends since they were kids. They trust each other with their deepest thoughts and fears.

They text daily, sometimes hourly. And when they are texting, they share memes on social media.

One day, Ayesha saw Shaheena's boyfriend Mark out with another woman. She was heartbroken. It was obvious that the woman and Mark were quite comfortable with each other. She snapped a pic. She thought hard about whether she should say something, show the pic, or let it go. Shaheena would find out eventually anyhow, right? She was afraid that Shaheena might resent her for bringing it to her attention so she decided not to do anything for about a week.

Then, she saw Mark out again. This time with a different woman. The public display of affection was hard for her to watch. This time, she knew she had to tell her friend. She snapped another pic.

That night, she called Ayesha, told her everything, and texted her both pics. Shaheena knew how hard it was for her friend to tell her the truth about Mark. She thanked Ayesha for being such a good friend and having her back.



Real Talk

1. If you saw a friend being wronged, would you tell him or her or mind your own business?
2. How important are real friends who will be brutally honest with us?
3. Think about all the friends in your life. How many are true "ride or die" friends?



The Big Picture

Mary Magdalene received emotional support from the resurrected Jesus. When friends or family let us down, Jesus will pick us up and respond to our needs.



The Players

Demonic Possession. Demons are evil spiritual beings (Matthew 8:16; 12:43–45) who are enemies of God and can have certain influence over people (James 2:19; Revelation 16:14). They belong to the number of fallen angels "who did not stay within the limits" (Jude 6, NLT). Demonic possession is mentioned quite often in the New Testament with a variety of effects, such as muteness (Luke 11:14) and epilepsy (Mark 9:17). 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 how 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 (see Matthew 10:8; Mark 6:13; Acts 8:7). Sometimes multiple spirits possess a single person, such as Mary Magdalene and the legion of demons who possessed the man in Gennesaret (Mark 8:2, 30).



Make It Stick

“He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons” (from Luke 8:1–2, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Luke 8:1 Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him,

2 along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons;

3 Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.

Mark 15:40 Some women were there, watching from a distance, including Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome.

John 20:10 Then they went home.

11 Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in.

12 She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying.

13 “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”

14 She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him.

15 “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”

16 “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).

17 “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

18 Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.



Backstage

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 “immoral 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 the one Jesus cast out seven demons from and she became 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 spread the Gospel.

What transforming life experiences have shaped your relationship with Jesus?



Combing Through

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

Jesus’ earthly ministry would not have been possible without the support of the disciples and friends who traveled with Him as He proclaimed the Gospel. As seen in the Book 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 business manager, 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 ministries?

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 book 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 stayed with their Him 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 also feared that someone had taken the body, 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 from the dead 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?



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Luke 8:1-3; Mark 15:40; John 20:10-18, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. Why didn't Mary recognize Jesus when she first saw Him?
2. What do you think Mary was feeling before she realized the figure before her was Jesus?
3. Why did Jesus choose Mary to be the first witness of the Resurrection?



Next Steps

Ask the Lord to help you find a friend with whom you can be open and brutally honest. Sometimes we hold deep emotional secrets because we don't want others to know the real us. However,

we might be surprised to know that many people are facing similar emotional problems.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

In small groups, ponder how important it is to have a real friend. How dangerous are "yes" people? Should we be upset if people criticize our actions? Why or why not? Provide participants with paper or index cards so they can write brief answers to the questions. Designate someone to write down the collective answers to the questions. Have all the groups share their answers with each other.

B. Personal Application

Each person needs someone with whom they can share important events and experiences without feeling vulnerable or criticized when sharing. Participants need to cultivate meaningful relationships that will help them grow and mature in their relationship with the Lord.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Lord, help us to be honest with ourselves and with You.



Say Word?

Samaria. Suh-MAIR-ee-ah

WAG

(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

"A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future, and accepts you just the way you are." -Unknown

Lesson 12





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will review Paul's zeal for teaching the Gospel message and his friendship and co-worker relationship with fellow missionaries Priscilla and Aquila.



Get Them Going

Ask the students to reflect on Paul's life, thus far. He was a key Jewish leader who became a preacher of the Gospel. His conversion led him to preach to Jews and then to the Gentiles. Ask students to think about the range of emotions Paul must have experienced as he ministered in different settings. Then ask them to discuss their own feelings as they share the Gospel.



Speaking Out

Tasha loved talking to Ben. He was from New York City, seemingly a world away from the Southern city where she grew up. Ben had great stories to tell. He had graduated from Columbia University before finding an assignment in Nashville. Tasha met him at church and they often talked afterward.

Ben had been raised an atheist and his parents adamantly opposed belief in God. They were distraught when they found out that Ben had become a Christian in college. His mother felt that of all the religions, Christianity was the worst.

Going home was always difficult. As a Christian, Ben had a great desire to see his family accept Christ, but his attempts to share the Gospel usually resulted in heated debates and hurt feelings.

When Ben found a job in Nashville, he began attending Grace Church, where Tasha worshiped. Since joining Grace, Ben had started a young adult Bible study where he taught from the Scriptures each week. All the students, including Tasha, admired his wisdom and insight.

Because of Ben's teaching, Tasha studied the Bible every night. She regularly came to class with questions for the group to discuss. She felt that her growth as a Christian had been directly impacted by Ben's influence and teaching, as had so many others.

One evening Tasha stopped to talk to a group of friends, including Ben, after class. They were all telling him how they appreciated his willingness to share his gift of teaching.

Ben smiled and said how much their appreciation meant to him. There was a sadness in his voice, though.

When someone inquired, he explained that he wished that his family would have such a positive response.

The group could see how painful his family's rejection was, and they encouraged Ben to keep sharing with them.

After their conversation, the group laid hands on Ben and prayed for him. They prayed for his family and that Ben would continue to proclaim the Gospel boldly and fervently.



Real Talk

1. How was Tasha's life impacted by Ben's willingness to teach?
2. Why was Ben sad when he was having such a positive impact in his church?
3. Why is it important that the group prayed for Ben?



The Big Picture

Paul continues his ministry to the Gentiles. As was his custom, Paul began sharing the Gospel with the Jews. When they rejected him, he took his message to the Gentiles. He spent a year and a half in Corinth, where he met Priscilla and Aquila, working alongside the believers and teaching the Scriptures.



The Players

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 of God spread throughout that region. Paul's ministry hurt the sale of magical items and images, leading to an actual riot. After this, Paul left



Make It Stick

“Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus. In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches” (Romans 16:3–4, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Acts 18:1 Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

2 There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome.

3 Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.

Acts 18:18 Paul stayed in Corinth for some time after that, then said goodbye to the brothers and sisters and went to nearby Cenchrea. There he shaved his head according to Jewish custom, marking the end of a vow. Then he set sail for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him.

19 They stopped first at the port of Ephesus, where Paul left the others behind. While he was there, he went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews.

20 They asked him to stay longer, but he declined.

21 As he left, however, he said, “I will come back later, God willing.” Then he set sail from Ephesus.

24 Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt.

25 He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy. However, he knew only about John’s baptism.

26 When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately.

Romans 16:3 Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus.

4 In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches.

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?



Backstage

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?



Combing Through

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.

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 interdependent 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 is described as “an eloquent speaker who knew 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 co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus,” looking back to their love and aid when Paul arrived in Corinth. The apostle says that the couple 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 “so are all the Gentile churches” 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.



Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Acts 18:1-3, 18-21, 24-26; Romans 16:3-4, BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. How did Paul respond when the Jews opposed his message (Acts 18:6)?
2. What was the response when Paul preached to the Gentiles (v. 8)?
3. What did Paul do when he welcomed by the Gentiles (v. 11)?
4. Who are Priscilla and Aquila and what was their relationship to Paul? (v.18)



Next Steps

Sometimes opportunities to share our faith can be right under our noses. God may be highlighting someone to you at your work or in your neighborhood. One of the best contexts to get to know some-

one and share our lives is over a meal. Make a plan to sit down in the coming week and eat with one or two people who don’t know Christ. Pray for an opportunity to share the Gospel and watch what God does.



Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Have students think of some examples of people who have been in ministry for many years. Ask students to discuss the challenges of being in ministry for the long term. Finally, ask the participants to commit to being faithful to proclaiming the Gospel in their sphere of influence.

B. Personal Application

Ask participants to think of those who have inspired them or encouraged them in the faith. Encourage students to think of ways that they can help to teach and inspire others. Then ask the students to pray for those that share the Gospel, especially those that share it in difficult circumstances.



Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings

Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Thank the Lord for the opportunity to pray for those who are commissioned to share the Gospel.



Say Word?

Aquila. ah-KWI-luh.

WAG
(Spiritual Wisdom and Guidance)

“The Gospel is preached in the ears of all men; it only comes with power to some.” -Charles Spurgeon

When God Closes a Door

Like many journalists, Emeri O'Brien fell victim to the economic turmoil in the newspaper business. Here's how she coped with being laid off from her dream job.

By Emeri O'Brien



For weeks, I had dreaded Fridays at the large Chicago newspaper where I worked. Friday was the day that folks got tapped on the shoulder or called at home to tell them that they were being laid off. The company is going through a "reduction in force" to help keep the lights on. To pay the bills, employees were used as collateral. So far, nearly eighty in the newsroom were put on the block.

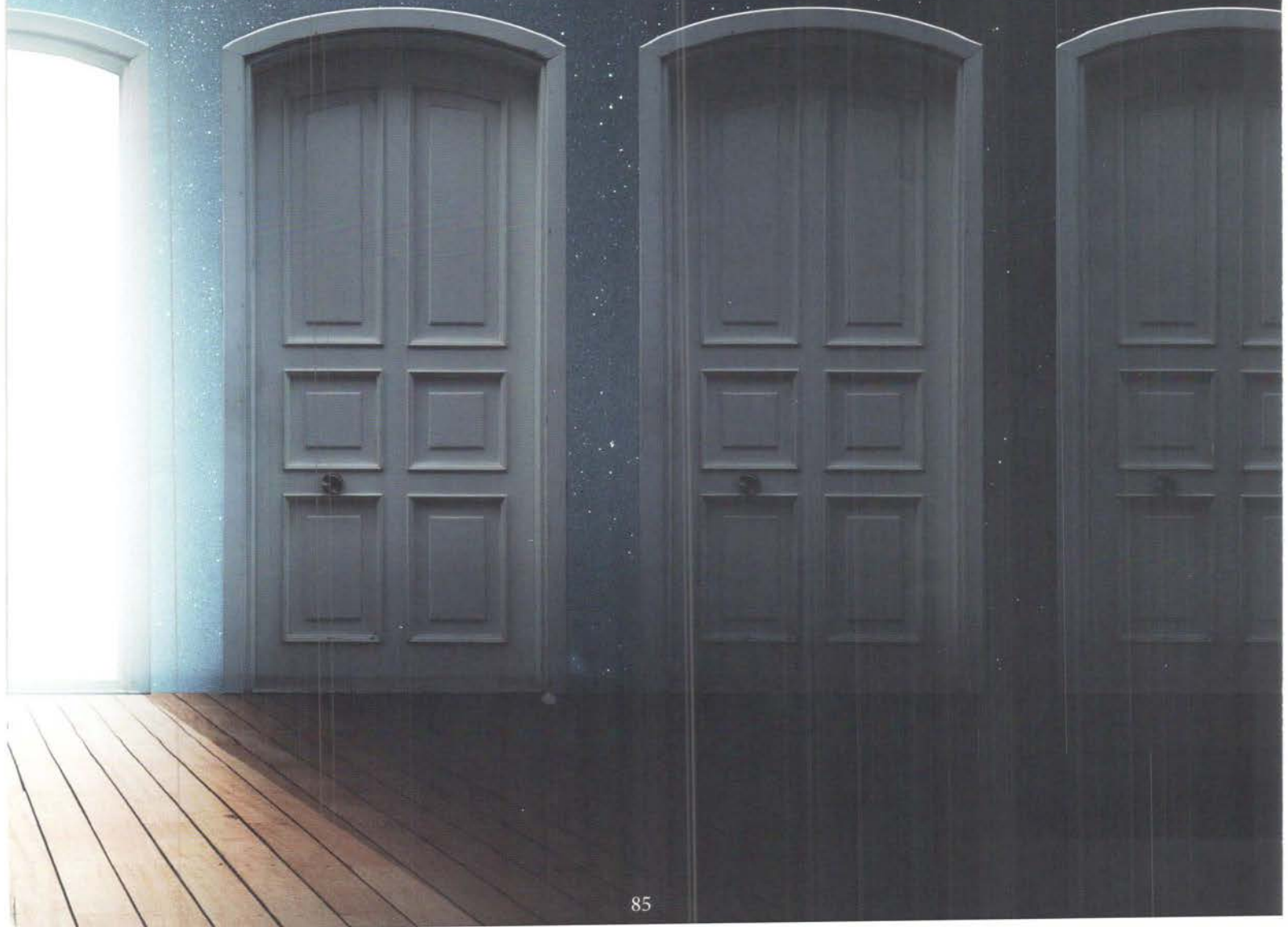
Working with an ax over one's head is enough to drive anyone mad. We each had our own logic about how it would go down. There were talks of employees being taken to off-site locations to hear that it was curtains. Others feared that they would take an elevator ride to the balcony, be given the news, and then forced to jump. I tried my best to be a reassuring voice in the midst of it all.

Then it happened. I got tapped. It was on a Friday. One of the managing editors caught me while I was in the middle

of editing a story for the Web. He said, "Emeri, do you have a minute?" I knew what was about to happen.

In one quick flash, my whole journalistic life passed before my eyes. I thought about my days as a cub reporter at a small paper in Louisiana. I thought about how I spent my first day as a copy editor editing stories on 9/11 at a news magazine in New York City. My mind drifted to the five years I spent at a large newspaper in Baltimore. Then, I thought about how proud I was every time I walked into my job. I loved my co-workers and the paper. Now, 11 months after reaching euphoria, it would all be gone.

I walked slowly to his office and took a seat. With no compassion or a hint of emotion, he looked at me and said, "Your position has been eliminated." Just like that. I felt like I was just a faceless person on the "Older Worker Benefit Protection Act List."



“I guess it’s true that when God closes a door, He opens a window ... God was putting me back on track to making my goal a reality.”

He didn’t care that I came to work nearly an hour early each day to get ahead. He didn’t know that I was the person who made that big catch in a story about a little girl’s death that made him so proud. Nor was he concerned that I worked my way up the chain to get to the mothership.

At the end of the day, I was just “Editor, Subject Asst. Age 30.” I was handed an envelope with my name on it. And after a brief talk, I placed my badge on his desk and walked out of his office. I could take being fired. At least when you are fired, you know that you have done something wrong. However, when you are laid off without any rhyme or reason, it’s much harder to swallow.

Maybe he thought I would finish my shift. I didn’t. I said goodbye quickly to the metro editor, logged off my computer, placed my nameplate in my bag, and left. Mama always taught me to never let them see you cry. I chatted briefly with a co-worker outside the building and hailed a cab. Once inside, I became human again and cried.

I informed my mother that the nightmare I had the night before about losing my job was now a reality. She reassured me that God didn’t bring me this far to leave me and that everything happens for a reason.

I got home at 10:50.

I opened the envelope and slowly pulled out the blue folder and arranged each bundle neatly on the floor.

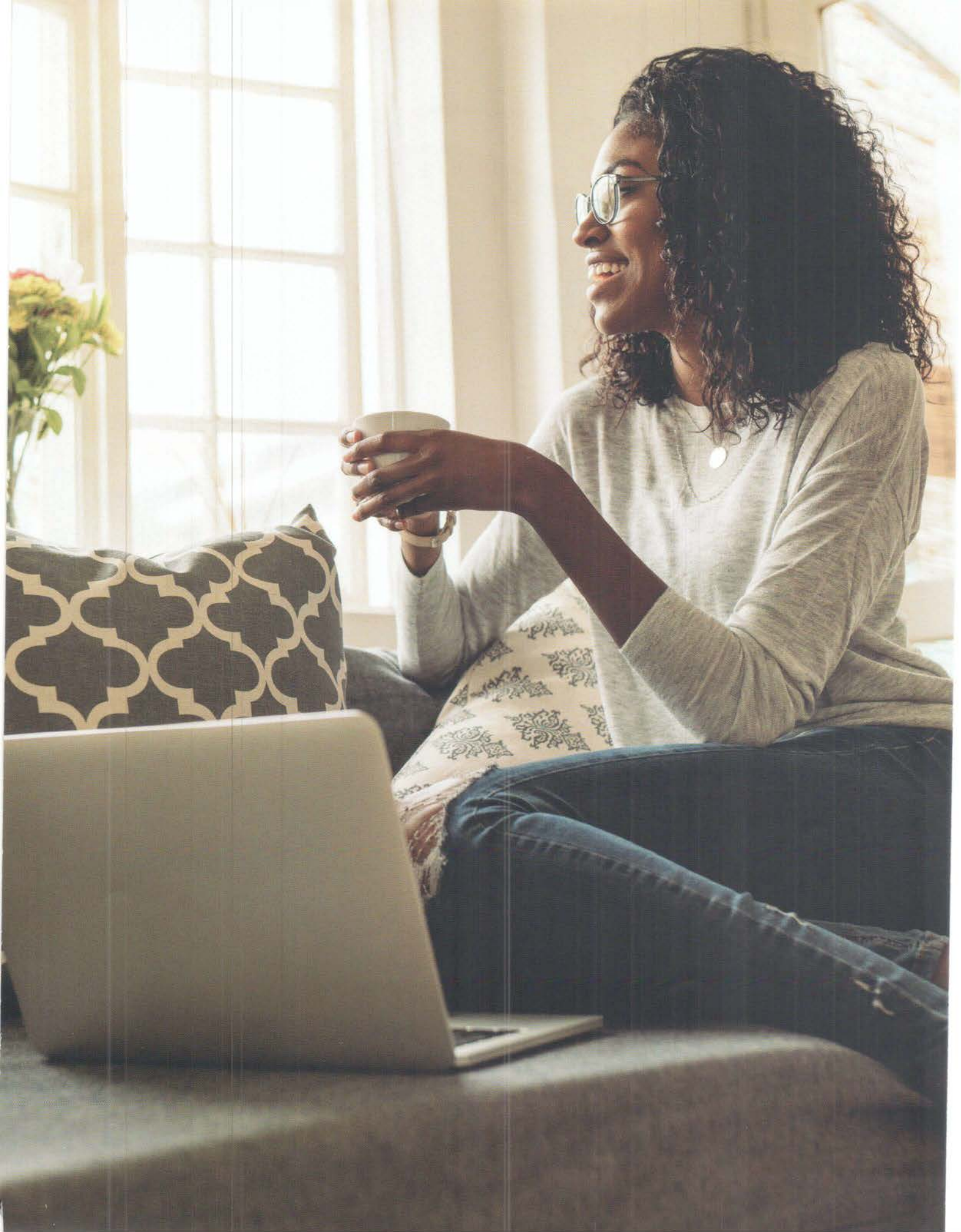
There was a ton of mind-numbing paperwork to sort through, and I couldn’t even wrap my mind around it. I took a deep breath, said a quick prayer and realized that while my position had been eliminated, I wasn’t. I had two degrees and was an adjunct professor at a local college. My ultimate goal was to make the transition from newspapers to academia.

I just didn’t know my path would shift so abruptly.

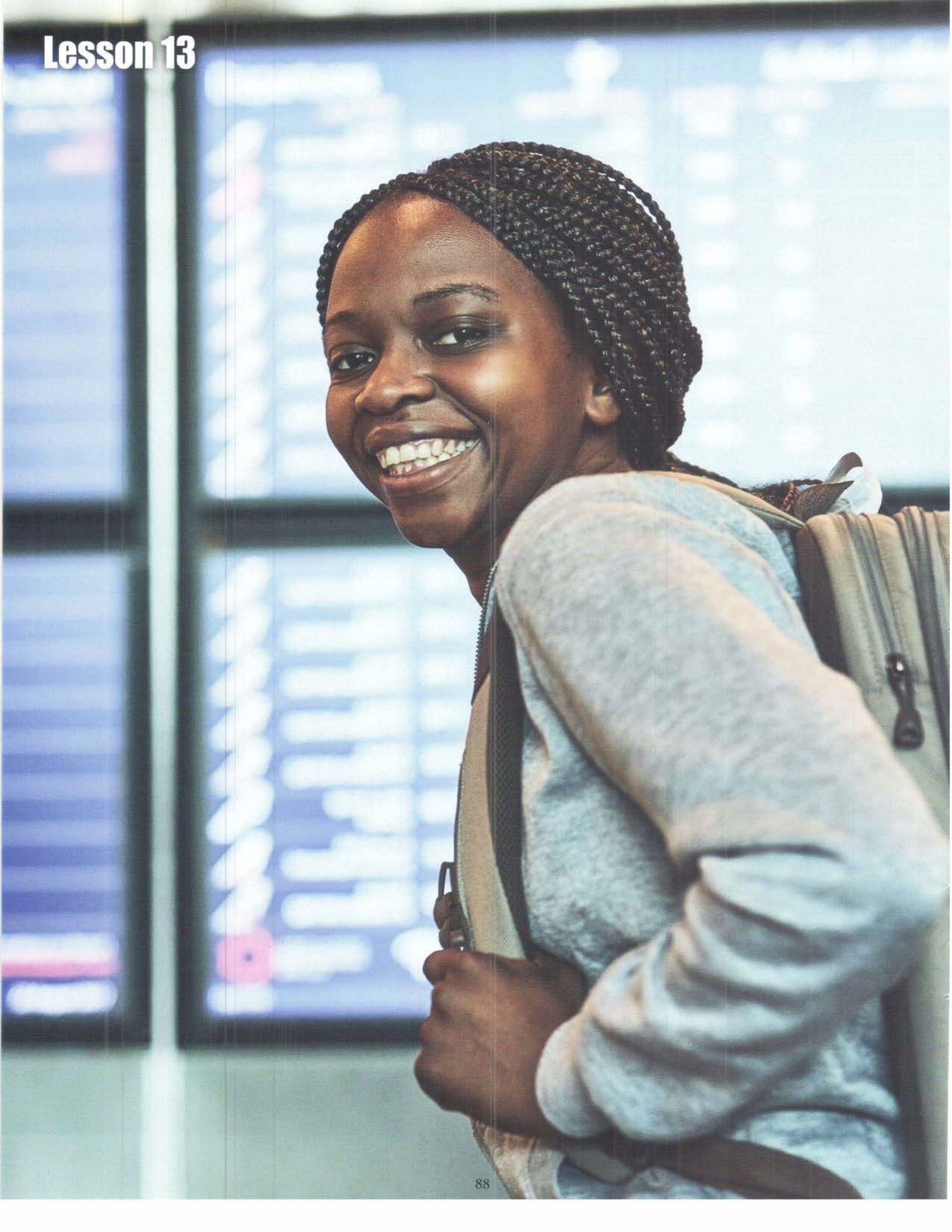
A simple email to my supervisor at the college turned into a blessing in the storm on that dark Friday. I wrote not asking for a job, but to just inform her of my situation. She gave me more classes to teach. I guess it’s true that when God closes a door, He opens a window. At 10:15 Friday morning, my position was eliminated. By 5:30 Friday evening, my other position had expanded.

God was putting me back on track to making my goal a reality. I cried again. This time not because I was broken, but because I was made anew.





Lesson 13





Where We're Going

By the end of this lesson, participants will recall Paul's missionary team and their labor in spreading the Gospel, including Lydia's conversion in Philippi.



Get Them Going

Ask the participants reflect how their lives have changed since accepting Christ. Have them describe some ways they shared the Gospel with others. Then ask them to discuss new ways they can share Jesus with others, as well as how they can pray for those who proclaim the Gospel.



Led by the Spirit

Lisa couldn't believe the way her life was changing. She became a Christian three years earlier at a campus youth group. Since that time, she had been studying her Bible regularly and had committed to living a life that pleased the Lord.

Lisa's youth leader saw her passion for Jesus and invited her to lead a Bible study on campus. After serving faithfully in that role, her group leader invited her to attend a church to meet a friend, Tony, who worked with churches overseas.

In his message, the minister recounted some of the experiences he had in Honduras. He traveled to Honduras every year to visit churches that his ministry, The Agape Mission, had planted. He told stories of lives changed and people being healed and set free as a result of hearing the message of Christ. He also spoke about the great need for more churches in the remote villages where people lived in poverty and despair.

While Tony spoke, Lisa's heart broke for the people of Honduras. She cried through most of his message as the Holy Spirit gave her a burden for that nation. After Tony finished preaching, Lisa went to tell him that she would be praying for his work in Honduras. Lisa was completely surprised when he asked her to accompany his team on the next trip there that summer.

Three months later, Lisa found herself on a flight to Honduras to minister to the churches in a small city on the coast of the Caribbean Sea. She prayed fervently in the months leading up to their trip that the church would be strengthened, that salvation would come to the people, and that she would be used by God. They ministered at one church for several days and then went to a nearby village where a church would soon be planted.

Their purpose in visiting the village was to train the church-planting team. During one of their breaks, the team visited a field where teens gathered to play soccer. During this time, the Holy Spirit prompted Lisa to ask to join the game. She played with them and was able to talk to them about Jesus after the game. The teens were very receptive to the message of Christ and three of them accepted Jesus. Lisa was thrilled to play a part in furthering the Gospel and was grateful for the opportunity to be used by God to change the lives of people in Honduras.



Real Talk

1. What caused Lisa's youth leader to invite her to hear Tony's message?
2. What caused Lisa to care so deeply for the people of Honduras?
3. Why is it important that Lisa prayed so fervently before the trip?



The Big Picture

In this week's passage, a disciple named Timothy is invited to join Paul's missionary team. Paul's team traveled to various cities, teaching and strengthening churches along the way. As they traveled, Paul received a vision from the Lord that he must travel to Macedonia. In Philippi, Paul ministered to many, including a group of women by the riverbank. Among them is Lydia, who believed in God. She heard the message and was baptized with the other members of her household. The obedience of Paul and his team to the Lord's vision serves as a model for us today.



Make It Stick

“She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. ‘If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my home.’ And she urged us until we agreed” (Acts 16:15, NLT).



The Word (NLT)

Acts 16:11 We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis.

12 From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there.

14 One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying.

15 She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed.

40 When Paul and Silas left the prison, they returned to the home of Lydia. There they met with the believers and encouraged them once more. Then they left town.

1 Corinthians 1:26 Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world’s eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you.

27 Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful.

28 God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important.

29 As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

30 God has united you with Christ Jesus. For our benefit God made him to be wisdom itself. Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.



The Players

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.



Backstage

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 to Macedonia. At this point, Luke (the writer of Acts) joined the team, 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. (see Acts 16:16–32)

Paul and Silas benefited from the hospitality of marketplace converts, but Paul also knew that most Christians did not have much worldly wealth or status to boast about. He wrote to the Corinthian church to explain how God uses that fact to His advantage so they 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.



Combing Through

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 riverbank, 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 become believers 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 the crown” he receives for his work (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 wealthy, 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 lowly 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, death, and the grave.

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 this far, 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 boast in Him. True wisdom is knowing that our rejoicing and boasting are 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, and 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?

Diving Deeper Quiz

Have the participants read Acts 16:8–15, 40, 1 Corinthians 1:26–30 BACKSTAGE, and COMBING THROUGH from the BIBLE STUDY GUIDE. Then have them answer the following:

1. According to the passage, why did Paul go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9)?
2. Why did Paul choose to go to Philippi and remain there (v. 12)?
3. Why did Paul choose to go to the riverbank (v. 13)?
4. What was the result of Paul's preaching in Philippi (v. 15)?

Next Steps

It can be hard to give up control of our plans for our lives. This can especially be hard after we've begun moving down a path that we believe God has led us down. Review your current goals and plans. Ask

God to reveal any areas where you've allowed your personal ideas and ambitions to crowd out what God may be leading you to do instead.

Put It Out There

A. Group Application

Have participants discuss the different stories they may have heard about being led by the Holy Spirit. Have them discuss ways they can become more sensitive to His voice and how they can participate in the work God is doing locally and around the world.

B. Personal Application

Ask the participants to spend time alone with God, reading His Word and listening for His direction. Ask them to ask the Lord to speak to them and direct them about how they can proclaim the Gospel with their lives. Encourage them to pray about their interests, gifts, and talents.

Wrap It Up

A. Daily Bible Readings


Remind the class to visit DAILY DIRECTION on the Urban Faith website for their daily Bible readings.

B. Talk to Him

Thank You, Lord, for the opportunity to work with You as You reconcile the world to Yourself.

Say Word?

Phrygia. froo-GEE-ah.



"The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed." – Hudson Taylor



Parting Shot

A few months ago I met a young man named Lynnzel. Right now he's a sophomore at Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, but that's not the trajectory he could have imagined his life was going to take even five years ago. Lynnzel had a tough upbringing in Chicago. His adoptive mother died when he was 14 and his guardian aunt died shortly after that.

He had no plan, but God did. He landed in a shelter with caring, God-filled people who saw his potential and inspired him to finish high school and go to college. They showed him how to apply for scholarships to pay for school and helped him move into his dorm. Now, he's studying theology. Lynnzel doesn't just say he's "blessed," he says he was "called" to be a minister.

Following God's call can sometimes be easier said than done. Unlike Lynnzel, with me it took a while before I figured out my spiritual gifts and what God would lead me to do. I know more than a few times over the years I was a bit weak, questioning, "Are you sure, God?" Well, of course He was sure. Sometimes it's just really scary to take that leap of faith. But I did. Lynnzel did. Will you?

I like how the lessons in this quarter touch on all aspects of finding your call—from discovering your purpose to understanding how it is weaved into the Kingdom and staying true to God's Word as you go through life. It encompasses what you need to do daily to stay connected to God, where and how you worship, and with whom.

But if you're still struggling with a direction for your life, there are a lot of really good books that can give you solid grounding, including one that we featured last quarter called "Enough Is Enough: What's in Your S.H.O.E.?" by Dr. Charles Ray, and also Rev. Dr. Bernice King's book "Life Is...: An Inspirational Book of Devotions, Prayers, and Empowerment." I would also encourage you to log onto UrbanFaith.com, where you'll find a number of commentaries from people of all ages talking about finding your call and leading a life according to God's plan.

As we start a new year in 2021 and another presidential term, this is the perfect time to reassess where your life is going and how you can be a change-agent in the communities around you. Embrace change, love abundantly, and have a happy new year!

Shari Noland
Editor, *Urban Faith*



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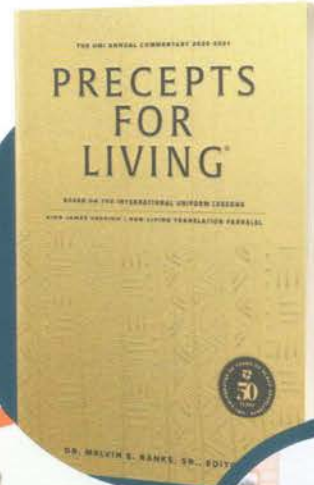
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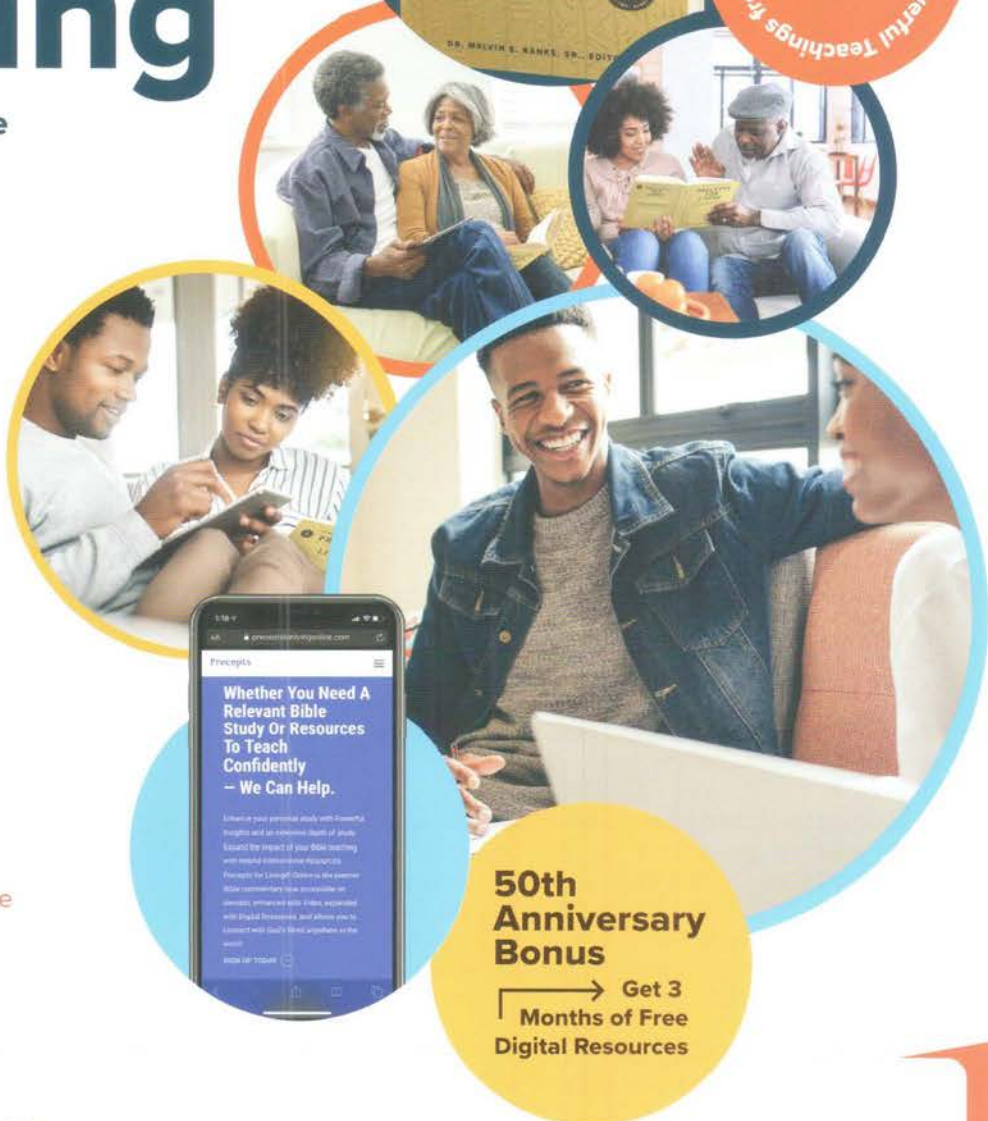
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