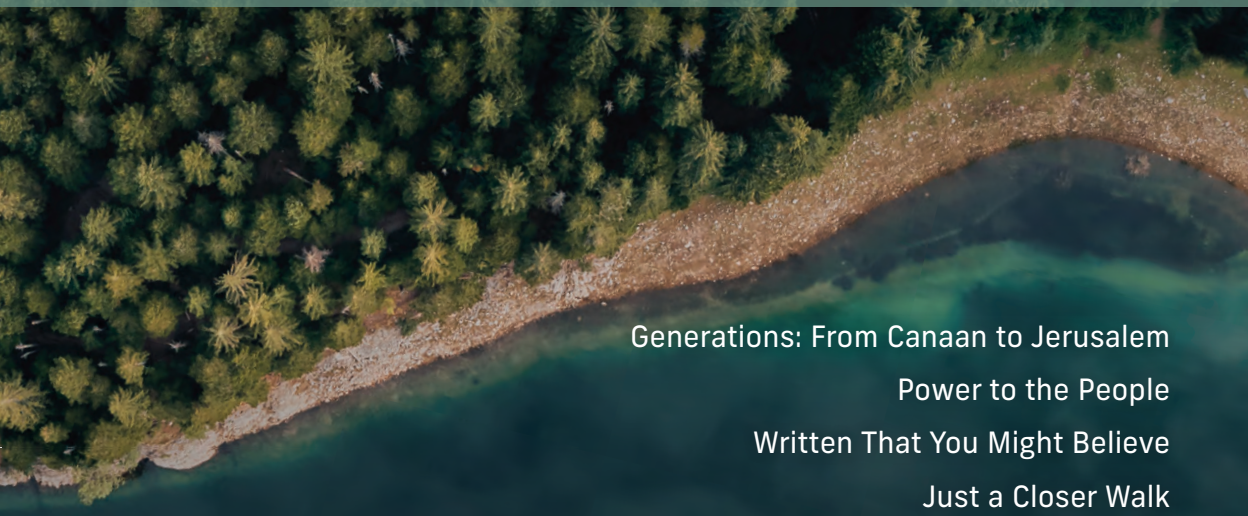
BESTSELLING Annual Bible Commentary

Standard LESSON COMMENTARY®



Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem

Power to the People

Written That You Might Believe

Just a Closer Walk

KJV SEPTEMBER–AUGUST 2026–2027

International Sunday School Lessons

BESTSELLING Annual Bible Commentary



Standard LESSON COMMENTARY®

KJV SEPTEMBER–AUGUST 2026–2027

KING JAMES VERSION

Editors
Taylor Z. Stamps
Bethany R. Tippin

Contributing Editors
Jason D. Hitchcock
Ronald L. Nickelson

Volume 74

Standard® PUBLISHING
part of the David C Cook family

In This Volume

Fall Quarter 2026 (page 1)

Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem

Lesson Development . . . . . Brenner S. Carlson (1–3, 5), Jon Weatherly (4, 10), K. R. Harriman (6–8), Adrien Keables Hayward (9, 11), Andrew J. Panaggio (12–13)
Verbal Illustrations . . . . . Kaylene Sasse (1–2, 5), Laura McKillip Wood (3–4), Petra L. Miller (6–8), Dara Searcy-Gardner (9–11), Victoria Saunders McAfee (12–13)
Involvement Learning and Activity Pages. . . . Mark A. Taylor (1–3), Kaylene Sasse (4–5), Connie Chandler (6–8), Angela E. Reed (9–11), Louise M. Sargent (12–13)
What Do You Think? . . . . . Editorial Team (1–13)

Winter Quarter 2026–2027 (page 113)

Power to the People

Lesson Development . . . . . K. R. Harriman (1–2, 4), Angela Spangler (3), Andrew J. Panaggio (5–8), Lee Douglas Hoffer (9), Joshua Seth Houston (10), R. D. Donell (11–12), Seth M. Ehorn (13)
Verbal Illustrations . . . . . David Graves (1–2), Victoria Saunders McAfee (3–4), Nadia Vermaak (5–6), Kaylene Sasse (7–9), Dara Searcy-Gardner (10–11), Petra L. Miller (12–13)
Involvement Learning and Activity Pages. . . . . Connie Chandler (1–3), Kaitlyn Depoister (4), Angela E. Reed (5–7), Kaylene Sasse (8–9), Mark A. Taylor (10–13)
What Do You Think? . . . . . Editorial Team (1–13)

Spring Quarter 2027 (page 225)

Written That You Might Believe

Lesson Development . . . . . Amber M. Dillon (1), Andrew J. Panaggio (2, 10–11), Jason A. Staples (3), R. D. Donell (4, 12), Abson Joseph (5, 9), Paul N. Anderson (6–7, 13), Jason D. Hitchcock (8)
Verbal Illustrations . . . . . Nadia Vermaak (1–2), Petra L. Miller (3–4), Kaylene Sasse (5, 8), Dara Searcy-Gardner (6–7), Laura McKillip Wood (9–10), Angela Spangler (11–12), David Graves (13)
Involvement Learning and Activity Pages. . . . . Connie Chandler (1–3), Louise M. Sargent (4, 11), Kaylene Sasse (5, 8), Kaitlyn Depoister (6–7), Mark A. Taylor (9–10, 12–13)
What Do You Think? . . . . . Joey Schwartz (1–13)

Summer Quarter 2027 (page 337)

Just a Closer Walk

Lesson Development . . . . . Andrew J. Panaggio (1, 5, 12), R. Jesse Pruett (2–3), Joshua Houston (4), Brenner S. Carlson (6–7), Abson Joseph (8), J. Ayodeji Adewuya, (9), Jason A. Staples (10), K. R. Harriman (11–13)
Verbal Illustrations . . . . . Dara Searcy-Gardner (1–2), Victoria Saunders McAfee (3–4, 6), Kaylene Sasse (5, 7), Nadia Vermaak (8–10), Laura McKillip Wood (11–12), David Graves (13)
Involvement Learning and Activity Pages. . . . . Connie Chandler (1–4), Mark A. Taylor (5, 8–12), Kaitlyn Depoister (6–7), Kaylene Sasse (13)
What Do You Think? . . . . . Joey Schwartz (1–13)

KJV Standard Lesson Commentary® is published annually by Standard Publishing, an imprint of David C Cook (DavidCCook.org), a ministry of Cook Media Global.

© 2026 by David C Cook, 4050 Lee Vance Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80918, U.S.A. Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum and David C Cook and its related logo are registered trademarks of David C Cook. All rights reserved.

Regular Print Edition ISBN 978-0-8307-9121-7. Deluxe Edition ISBN 978-0-8307-9123-1. Large Print Edition ISBN 978-0-8307-9124-8. Printed in the United States of America.

Scripture taken from the *King James Version*. Lessons and/or Readings are based on the *Uniform Series International Sunday School Lessons International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching* Copyright © 2026 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Digital products are subject to the End User License Agreement (EULA) found at DavidCCook.org/eula/ and any additional terms or restrictions that may accompany the product. Digital products cannot be returned, sold, or relicensed.

In this Volume: 2026–2027 Topics and Themes

This volume begins a new six-year cycle within the International Sunday School Lessons, a scope and sequence entitled *We Have a Story to Tell*. Lessons explore the record of God's faithfulness from Genesis to Revelation, and learners will discover how these ancient stories can become their stories too.

Fall: Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem

Beginning with a study of Joshua, this quarter looks at ancient Israel's entry into the promised land (Unit 1). Establishing Israel's presence in Canaan is as much a spiritual task as a military or political one. Although the Israelites enter Canaan, Joshua is unable to achieve unity for God's people. What Joshua leaves undone at the end of his life sets the stage for the period of Judges. Generation after generation struggles to follow God and keep the covenant. The three lessons on Judges (Unit 2) highlight Israel's propensity to ignore God, living in ways that were "right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6). In the five lessons of Unit 3, we meet Samuel. His faithfulness to the Lord as prophet and judge plays a pivotal role in Israel's history and faithfulness. He sets the stage for King David's glorious reign. As God's anointed ruler, David will unite the tribes of Israel geographically, politically, and spiritually, reigning from his capital city of Jerusalem.

Winter: Power to the People

The second quarter focuses on powerful living for a powerless people. The six epistles of 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, and Jude address the *diaspora*—the scattered church, persecuted and young in their faith—defending the way of Christ by advising readers to live holy lives. Churches comprised of mostly Gentiles had many women and enslaved people who were living in a culturally hostile environment. To those with scant social power and who occupy the margins of society, Peter says, "His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). Believers are to model compassion, humility, discipline, sobriety, and attentiveness to prayer. The Johannie letters, likewise, stress the importance of living in God's light and love. Jude's short letter urges believers to continue upholding the teachings of Jesus, living as if He might return at any moment.

Spring: Written That You Might Believe

The third quarter focuses on the Gospel of John. John uses rich imagery and metaphors to testify to the truth of who Jesus is: the Son of God, the Messiah. To align with the lead-up to Easter, the lessons in this quarter will bring readers to the foot of the cross and to the joy of the empty tomb. But first, Unit 1 begins with John's opening prologue, the testimony of John the Baptist, and also many stories of redemption. Lessons in Unit 2 study some of the "signs" that Jesus performed and the reactions they engendered. Unit 3 reviews the proclamations Jesus made in several "I am" statements and His promise of peace to those who believe and follow Him.

Summer: Just a Closer Walk

The summer quarter covers some of the New Testament letters of the apostle Paul, his "Prison Epistles": Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Unit 1 has four lessons that explore how believers are to interact with one another and the world in Christlike ways. People around will take notice when followers of Christ put off the old self and put on

continued on page V

Reading Scripture: A Whole-Self Endeavor

By Nicole Howe

Every year, about three thousand people attempt to hike the Appalachian Trail in its entirety, trudging through the mountains and valleys of the Eastern US. The complete trail stretches over two thousand miles of varied terrain from Georgia to Maine, and the total journey takes an average person about six months to complete. But barriers—like unpredictable weather, exhaustion, or improper training—keep most hikers from ever reaching their destination.

Those who *do* reach the finish line are called "thru-hikers." Millions of others, "section-hikers," prefer to approach various smaller pieces of the trail over shorter periods of time.

When it comes to reading Scripture, Christians are called to be thru-hikers. We must engage the whole scope of God's Word carefully in order to walk in whole-hearted obedience to its entire message. But the path isn't easy. The complete Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, spans thousands of years and has at least forty different authors. The Bible has its own barriers too—unexpected detours and difficult terrain—and no one starts out with the proper training. The journey is daunting!

So how might we devote ourselves to adequate preparation, to the habits that will put us in a position to reach our goal? And how can we resist the temptation to become section-hikers, sticking to only those parts of Scripture that are easiest or most comforting?

Listen and Respond

If we look to Scripture itself, specifically Deuteronomy 6:4–9, God gives a clear and repeated invitation to His newly-chosen people. The first word in this passage is to *hear* or *listen.* We will not be equipped for the rest if we do not first listen to the whole of God's story. Part of our training is to develop disciplined study habits. The message of God's work can be communicated at all levels, but intuitive reading strategies are not sufficient for those called to be students and teachers—whom God holds to the highest standards (see James 3:1). Faithful listening to Scripture requires attention to original languages, historical and literary contexts, patterns of biblical theology, and an honest reflection on any personal biases. Neglecting any of these could lead to error or harmful misapplication.

Not only do students and teachers need tools and resources to correctly handle the word of truth (see 2 Timothy 2:15), but our hearts must be properly oriented to the study of Scripture. To listen well is an act of love toward God and neighbor. In a Hebrew context, if you do not respond to—or obey—what you've heard, you haven't done all the work of listening. We can study Scripture thoroughly, dive into cultural context, and unpack every sentence, but if we never do what it says, it's like analyzing a map of the Appalachian Trail without ever lacing up our boots or setting out on the hike.

Heart and Soul

After calling His people to hear, God commands them to *love* God and neighbor with all their hearts and all their souls and to do this with all their strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). The call is to wholeness—responding to God's Word with the entirety of our being. Contrary to modern understandings of the word "soul," the ancient writers of Scripture understood this to include more than just the spiritual parts of us. It includes everything that makes us alive—even our bodies. The invitation is to love with everything we've got: our minds, emotions, wills, and actions.

There are broad implications for this when studying Scripture: it means we must bring our whole selves into our practice. If you lean toward the intellectual side, then you might need

to engage Scripture more reflectively, pondering its words in a way that stirs your emotions and imagination. But if you are more comfortable with devotional-style reading, you might need to sharpen your study habits, cultivate your curiosity, and probe deeper into what you *thought* you knew.



Private and Public

Loving God and reading His Word are deeply relational activities. Notice that in Deuteronomy, God first says that His commands "shall be" on their hearts (6:6). It doesn't say exactly how the commands will get there. But the idea gets picked up and expanded in other verses of Scripture, when God promises to be the one to put it there (compare Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10). God's commands will not only live on tablets of stone—or in our case, in the pages of the Bible—but will be etched into the deepest recesses of our beings. We can read Scripture with confidence that the Holy Spirit will meet us when we bring our whole selves into His presence. Scripture is working on us, being written on us from the inside as we read; for the Word of God resonates and reverberates with His indwelling Spirit.

The reading of Scripture is also a public affair! God's people were to take the commands they received and communicate them to their children. They were to talk about them when sitting, walking, lying down, and rising. Paul echoes this idea when he instructs followers of Christ to devote themselves to the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching (1 Timothy 4:13). Talking about, sharing, and displaying God's Word were all common practices for the ancient people of God. And we are called to the same. Not only is this deeply formative, but it can be corrective to realize that our study is not just about us and our personal enrichment.

Whole-Hearted Devotion

Reading Scripture requires dedication to proper training, ongoing commitment, and a full-body engagement of all that we are—and it is worth our efforts. God's Word spreads out before us in new and expansive ways as we participate in the fullness of the narrative. And even more, the story works *on* us as we enter it, forming us and shaping us to become more like Jesus. In John 5:39, Jesus says that as we search the Scriptures, we must never forget that what we are really looking for—what Scripture testifies to—is Him.

Jesus is our destination. And the views are spectacular.

Topics and Themes

continued from page VI

the new. Unit 2 offers four lessons from Paul's example of advocating freedom and justice. Paul asks believers to set aside all things of the world—which are destined to pass away—and encourages long-term faithfulness to Christ. Unit 3 describes the person and work of Christ: He is the one we should emulate. It is through Jesus that we receive forgiveness of sin, adoption into the family of God, and an eternal inheritance. Paul calls believers to a life of joyful camaraderie, steadiness in hope, and contentment in God's provision.

Index of Printed Texts

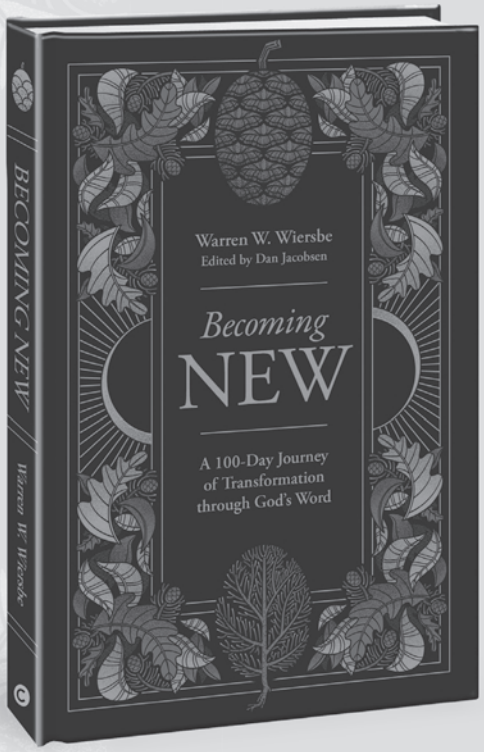
The printed texts for 2026–2027 are arranged here in the order in which they appear in the Bible.

REFERENCE	PAGE
Ex 3:9–10	401
Lev 20:26	129
Jos 1:1–11	9
Jos 2:8–13	33
Jos 4:14–24	17
Jos 6:16–17	33
Jos 11:6–9, 16–23	25
Jos 24:18–27	41
Jdg 2:6–15	49
Jdg 3:15–23	57
Jdg 3:30	57
Jdg 17:1–6	65
Jdg 18:18–19	65
Jdg 18:27	65
1Sa 3:8–20	73
1Sa 4:12–22	81
1Sa 7:3–11	89
1Sa 7:15–17	89
1Sa 16:4–13	97
2Sa 5:1–12	105
Mt 1:18–25	137
Jn 1:1–14	233
Jn 1:24–34	241
Jn 5:2–16	265
Jn 6:15–27	281
Jn 6:30–35	273
Jn 9:1–9	289
Jn 10:1–11	297
Jn 11:17–27	305
Jn 12:12–19	249
Jn 14:1–7	321
Jn 15:1–11	329
Jn 16:13–15	313
Jn 20:11–18	257
Jn 20:19–23	313
Eph 1:3–11	417
Eph 2:4–5	417
Eph 2:11–22	345
Eph 4:1–16	353
Eph 4:17–32	361
Eph 5:1–17	369
Eph 6:5–9	401
Eph 6:19–20	377
Php 1:12–14	377
Php 2:5–11	409
Php 2:14–18	425
Php 2:27–30	433
Php 3:1a	425
Php 3:20–21	433
Php 4:1	433
Php 4:4–7	425
Php 4:10–20	441
Col 1:15–18	409
Col 1:21–23	433
Col 2:9–10	409
Col 2:11–15	417
Col 2:16–23	385
Col 3:9–17	393
Col 3:22–25	401
Col 4:1	401
Col 4:2–4	377
Phm 15–17	401
1Pe 1:1–12	121
1Pe 1:13–21	129
1Pe 1:22–25	145
1Pe 2:1–10	145
1Pe 2:11–21	153
1Pe 3:1–12	161
1Pe 3:18–22	169
1Pe 4:1–7	169
1Pe 4:8–19	177
1Pe 5:1–11	185
2Pe 1:3–11	193
2Pe 3:10–13	193
1Jn 1:5–10	201
1Jn 3:6–8	201
1Jn 4:7–8	201
1Jn 5:3–4	201
2Jn 4–9	209
3Jn 2–6	209
Jude 3–8	217
Jude 12–13	217
Jude 20–21	217
Jude 24–25	217

Don't forget the visuals!

The thumbnail visuals in the lessons are small reproductions of 18″ x 24″ full-color posters that are included in the *Adult Resources* packet for each quarter. Order numbers 978-0-7847-3913-6 (Fall 2026), 978-0-7847-3963-1 (Winter 2026–2027), 978-0-7847-4013-2 (Spring 2027), and 978-0-7847-4063-7 (Summer 2027) from either your supplier, by calling 1.800.323.7543, or at www.standardlesson.com.

A Never-Before-Published Devotional from Warren W. Wiersbe



With daily, themed Scripture passages, reflections, and commentary from Warren W. Wiersbe and thought-provoking application questions from his grandson Pastor Dan Jacobsen, *Becoming New* offers an accessible 100-day journey of spiritual growth.

This is an ideal devotional for anyone seeking profound, lasting change, as Wiersbe's contagious love for the Bible inspires us day by day to draw closer to God and then share our joy with others.

Order your copy today!

Available wherever books are sold

DAVID C COOK®

BE SERIES

Trustworthy yet down-to-earth commentaries for whatever book of the Bible you're studying.



Warren W. Wiersbe had a knack for simplifying complex concepts which made him a favorite of Bible scholars and new Christians alike. His forty-plus years of experience inform his trusted instruction on God's Word through these chapter-by-chapter or verse-by-verse commentaries.

These commentaries are suitable for church leadership and laypeople alike, with study questions at the end of each chapter to aid in analysis and application.

Available wherever books are sold

DAVID C COOK®

Generations:
From Canaan to Jerusalem

Special Features

		Page
Quarterly Quiz		2
Quarter at a Glance	Editorial Staff	3
Get the Setting	Brenner S. Carlson	4
This Quarter in the Word (Daily Bible Readings)		5
Lesson Cycle Chart		7
Verse-by-Verse "Ultimate Guide" (Teacher Tips)	Editorial Staff	8
Activity Pages (annual Deluxe Edition only)		449
Activity Pages (free download)	www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages	
In the World (weekly online feature)	www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world	

Lessons

Unit 1: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

September 6	Joshua Leads Courageously	*Joshua 1:1–11*	9
September 13	Israel Remembers God's Deeds	*Joshua 4:14–24*	17
September 20	Joshua Fights for God	*Joshua 11:6–9, 16–23*	25
September 27	Rahab Welcomes Spies	*Joshua 2:8–13; 6:16–17*	33

Unit 2: From Settled People to Judges

October 4	A Renewed Covenant	*Joshua 24:18–27*	41
October 11	A Faithless Generation	*Judges 2:6–15*	49
October 18	An Unlikely Deliverer	*Judges 3:15–23, 30*	57
October 25	A Lack of Instruction	*Judges 17:1–6; 18:18–19, 27*	65

Unit 3: From Judges to Kings

November 1	The Prophet Is Called	*1 Samuel 3:8–20*	73
November 8	The Ark Is Lost	*1 Samuel 4:12–22*	81
November 15	Israel Recommits to God	*1 Samuel 7:3–11, 15–17*	89
November 22	David Is Anointed King	*1 Samuel 16:4–13*	97
November 29	The City of David	*2 Samuel 5:1–12*	105

Quarterly Quiz

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

Lesson 1

1. Moses led the Israelites across the Jordan River into the promised land. T/F. *Joshua 1:2*

2. God promised Joshua, "I will not fail thee, nor _____ thee." *Joshua 1:5*

Lesson 2

1. Where did Joshua set up the twelve stones taken from the Jordan River? (Jericho, Gibeon, Gilgal) *Joshua 4:20*

2. The memorial of stones reminded the people that "the hand of the LORD" is _____. *Joshua 4:24*

Lesson 3

1. God instructed Joshua to keep the enemy's chariots for future battles. T/F. *Joshua 11:6*

2. Which group made a peace treaty with the Israelites? (Hivites, Anakims, Amorites) *Joshua 11:19*

Lesson 4

1. After hearing of Israel's conquests, the hearts of the people in Jericho _____ in fear. *Joshua 2:11*

2. After the seventh time around Jericho, Joshua commanded the Israelite army to do what? (pray, march, shout) *Joshua 6:16*

Lesson 5

1. Joshua affirmed that God is a jealous God. T/F. *Joshua 24:19*

2. Which item served as a witness against the Israelites? (oak tree, book, stone) *Joshua 24:27*

Lesson 6

1. Joshua was buried in the territory of which tribe? (Judah, Ephraim, Benjamin) *Judges 2:9*

2. The Israelites provoked God to anger by worshiping false gods. T/F. *Judges 2:12*

Lesson 7

1. King Eglon of Moab was a very _____ man. *Judges 3:17*

2. Ehud drew a hidden weapon out of his left boot. T/F. *Judges 3:21*

Lesson 8

1. Micah was from which region? (Ephraim, Benjamin, Dan) *Judges 17:1*

2. How many shekels of silver did Micah's mother use to make an idol? (two hundred, six hundred, eleven hundred) *Judges 17:4*

Lesson 9

1. The Lord called Samuel, but Samuel thought Eli was calling him. T/F. *1 Samuel 3:8*

2. The Lord warned that His message would make people's ears _____. *1 Samuel 3:11*

Lesson 10

1. How old was Eli when the Philistines captured the ark of God? (100; 58; 98) *1 Samuel 4:15*

2. Phinehas's wife named her child "Ichabod" because the _____ had departed from Israel. *1 Samuel 4:21*

Lesson 11

1. Where did Samuel ask the Israelites to gather for intercession? (Mount Horeb, Gilgal, Mizpeh) *1 Samuel 7:5*

2. The Israelites assembled, drew water, and _____ it out before the Lord. *1 Samuel 7:6*

Lesson 12

1. What did the Lord look at when choosing a king? (heart, appearance, height) *1 Samuel 16:7*

2. David was anointed in the presence of his brothers. T/F. *1 Samuel 16:13*

Lesson 13

1. David made a covenant with the elders of Israel in _____. *2 Samuel 5:3*

2. David was _____ years old when he became king. *2 Samuel 5:4*

Quarter at a Glance

by Editorial Staff

The English writer George Orwell (1903–1950) points out a recurring trend among generations: "Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it." The quote highlights how each generation often overlooks lessons from the past and is short-sighted regarding the future. A pattern of forgetting also affects generations of God's people throughout the Old Testament.

Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

After Moses' death, the Lord establishes Joshua as Israel's leader and assures assures Joshua of His presence (Joshua 1:2–9; see Lesson 1). As the Israelites enter the promised land, Joshua encourages them to remember God's provision. Joshua compares their Jordan River crossing with the previous generation's crossing of the Red Sea (4:19–24; see Lesson 2).

Much of the book of Joshua records the destruction of various nations by the Israelites. While modern readers might find these passages problematic, Lesson 3 offers an opportunity to reexamine one of these violent narratives. The battles described are not an endorsement of violence and destruction. Instead, the accounts reveal a holy God fulfilling His promises in and through human history.

However, the book of Joshua also emphasizes hospitality and divine provision. The account of Rahab illustrates how God can use an unexpected person to accomplish His will and expand His people (Joshua 2:8–13; 6:16–17; see Lesson 4).

As Joshua nears death, the Israelites have transitioned from nomadic wanderers to a settled population. He urges them to remember the covenant commitments of previous generations and to claim them as their own (Joshua 24:18–27; see Lesson 5).

Settled People to Judges

Following Joshua's death, a new generation arises, one that "[knows] not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10; see Lesson 6). They fall into apostasy, seemingly forgetting Joshua's warning. The book of Judges records a cycle of infidelity to God that plagues the Israelites for generations. Recognition of their sinful ways happens periodically and includes repentance. The people call on God when trouble ensues. However, after God intervenes to rescue them, they turn away from Him and return to pagan gods.

Despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God remains faithful, raising judges like Ehud—a left-handed warrior who liberates Israel (Judges 3:15–23, 30; see Lesson 7). However, peace does not last. The people repeatedly fall back into the cycle of apostasy and lawlessness; everyone does "that which [is] right in [their] own eyes" (17:6; see Lesson 8). Chaos ensues, leading this generation to demand a king.

Judges to Kings

For years, the Israelites struggle against neighboring people groups to control the land God promised them. The Philistines' capture of the ark of the covenant reveals spiritual and political failures within Israelite leadership (1 Samuel 4:12–22; see Lesson 10). God responds by supplying Samuel as a transitional leader—he connects the generation of the Judges with that of the monarchy. Samuel is introduced as the first of Israel's prophets, receiving God's call at an early age (3:8–20; see Lesson 9).

One of Samuel's most significant displays of leadership occurs when the Israelites recover the ark (1 Samuel 7; see Lesson 11). He serves as God's prophet and judge, calling Israel to spiritual renewal. Samuel's leadership is further highlighted during a pivotal moment when he anoints David as God's chosen king (16:4–13; see Lesson 12), resulting in a unified kingdom and a center for both governance and worship (2 Samuel 5:1–12; see Lesson 13).

Each generation experiences God's provision and guidance. Some obey; others stray. Despite their inconsistency, God remains faithful, consistently raising leaders to guide His people.

Get the Setting

by Brenner S. Carlson

The book of Joshua can be one of the more difficult books of the Bible to appreciate. Many modern readers may even feel squeamish when reading of the violent warfare depicted within it.

It is essential that we understand how the writer of Joshua interpreted the Israelites' conquest of the land of Canaan. Perhaps surprisingly, the primary emphasis does not fall on God's judgment of the Canaanites for their sins—although their sin does play a role (compare Genesis 15:16; Leviticus 18:24–25). Instead, the Canaanites are presented primarily because of the *danger* they pose to Israel's holiness and the *obstacle* they present to the fulfillment of God's covenant promises (see Numbers 33:51–56; Joshua 21:43–45).

The conquest was not carried out to reward the Israelites with land. The Israelites are not portrayed as being more worthy of possessing the land than the Canaanites (see Deuteronomy 9:4–6); the spiritual weakness and pagan proclivities of the Israelites are evident (Joshua 7:10–12; 24:23; etc.).

Instead, the conquest is interpreted as preparation for God's presence. The promised land required reordering to make it a suitable dwelling for God's holy presence and to facilitate Israel's covenant-life with Him. Canaanite identity, worldview, and way of life had to be purged from the land because they conflicted with these purposes. The process of purging was to be accomplished by the ancient practice of *herem*.

Set Apart for Destruction

The Hebrew word *herem* appears most frequently in the book of Joshua, where it is often translated as "accursed" or "set apart" (examples: Joshua 7:11–12). This term broadly applies to cities, objects, and people (examples: 6:17–18). However, destruction is not the core meaning of *herem,* primarily because objects designated as such are not always destroyed (example: Leviticus 27:21). What, then, shall we make of this word?

When we explore why particular objects are designated as *herem*, set apart for destruction, we begin to understand the meaning of that word. Destroyed objects are deemed unusable for human purposes. In some contexts, objects are designated as "accursed" to the Lord, signifying that they are off-limits for human use.

For instance, in Joshua's instructions to the Israelites as they take Jericho, they are informed that the city and all therein "shall be accursed" and that they are to "keep . . . from" and not "take" any of the *herem* objects (Joshua 6:17–19). He explains that all silver, gold, bronze, and iron will be deposited in the Lord's treasury, as they are "consecrated unto the Lord." These material riches were intended for holy purposes rather than personal gain.

Herem and Humans

We often feel understandably uncomfortable when the concept of *herem* is applied to humans. In ancient warfare, the standard procedure for dealing with a captured city was to force its citizens to become enslaved to the conquerors. However, in the case of Jericho's destruction, the city's inhabitants were declared *herem*. This declaration prevented them from being enslaved by the Israelites. Similar to the material riches of Jericho, its inhabitants were not to be exploited for the Israelites' benefit. The Canaanite identity—qualities that made a Canaanite a *Canaanite*—was eradicated entirely from the land, even if all the Canaanites themselves were not (compare Joshua 11:8, 20–21; Judges 1:19).

Warfare and violence are tragic realities and complex subjects not overlooked in the pages of Scripture. The book of Joshua illustrates how God's purposes intersect with the world's violence. As we grapple with these challenging themes, let's remember that they were part of the divine plan for God's holy presence amid the Israelites. This, in turn, is part of an even greater plan to prepare for His Son's presence through the Spirit in our midst.

Mon, Nov. 16	**Blessings of a Righteous Ruler**	Proverbs 29:1–14
Tue, Nov. 17	**God Appoints Authorities**	Daniel 2:16–23
Wed, Nov. 18	**Anointed for God's Service**	Luke 4:14–21
Thu, Nov. 19	**God Rejects Saul**	1 Samuel 15:10–23
Fri, Nov. 20	**God's Righteous Servant**	Matthew 12:14–21
Sat, Nov. 21	**Do Not Judge by Appearances**	John 7:14–24
Sun, Nov. 22	**God Looks on the Heart**	1 Samuel 16:4–13
Mon, Nov. 23	**God Defends the Chosen King**	Psalm 2
Tue, Nov. 24	**Heir of God's Promises to David**	Acts 13:21–25, 32–39
Wed, Nov. 25	**A Deliverer out of Zion**	Romans 11:22–32
Thu, Nov. 26	**Look upon Zion!**	Isaiah 33:15–22
Fri, Nov. 27	**The Lord Has Chosen Zion**	Psalm 132:8–18
Sat, Nov. 28	**From Jerusalem to the Nations**	Luke 24:44–49
Sun, Nov. 29	**God Establishes David's Kingdom**	2 Samuel 5:1–12

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 2

Lesson 1—1. False. 2. forsake. **Lesson 2**—1. Gilgal. 2. mighty. **Lesson 3**—1. False. 2. Hivites. **Lesson 4**—1. melted. 2. shout. **Lesson 5**—1. True. 2. stone. **Lesson 6**—1. Ephraim. 2. True. **Lesson 7**—1. fat. 2. False. **Lesson 8**—1. Ephraim. 2. two hundred. **Lesson 9**—1. True. 2. tingle. **Lesson 10**—1. 98. 2. glory. **Lesson 11**—1. Mizpeh. 2. poured. **Lesson 12**—1. heart. 2. True. **Lesson 13**—1. Hebron. 2. thirty.

This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Aug. 31	**More Than Conquerors**	Romans 8:31–39
Tue, Sep. 1	**See What God Has Promised**	Genesis 13:14–18
Wed, Sep. 2	**The Promised Land Revealed**	Deuteronomy 34:1–12
Thu, Sep. 3	**God's Promised Rest**	Hebrews 4:1–11
Fri, Sep. 4	**God's New Covenant**	Hebrews 10:14–18
Sat, Sep. 5	**Whom Shall I Fear?**	Psalm 27
Sun, Sep. 6	**Be Strong and Courageous**	Joshua 1:1–11
Mon, Sep. 7	**Hold Fast to the Teachings**	2 Thessalonians 2:13–17
Tue, Sep. 8	**Victory at the Sea**	Exodus 14:21–31
Wed, Sep. 9	**The Lord Goes Before Us**	Numbers 10:29–36
Thu, Sep. 10	**Do Not Be Afraid**	John 6:15–21
Fri, Sep. 11	**Remember God's Mighty Deeds**	Psalm 77:10–20
Sat, Sep. 12	**Remember Jesus's Saving Work**	1 Corinthians 11:23–27
Sun, Sep. 13	**Crossing into the Promised Land**	Joshua 4:14–24
Mon, Sep. 14	**Live as Holy People**	Deuteronomy 7:1–11
Tue, Sep. 15	**God Will Love and Bless**	Deuteronomy 7:12–26
Wed, Sep. 16	**Strengthened in Every Circumstance**	Philippians 4:10–19
Thu, Sep. 17	**Armed for Spiritual Warfare**	2 Corinthians 10:1–5, 15–18
Fri, Sep. 18	**Christ Has Overcome the World**	John 16:23–33
Sat, Sep. 19	**God Fights for God's People**	Joshua 10:40–11:5
Sun, Sep. 20	**God Brings Victory**	Joshua 11:6–9, 16–23

Mon, Sep. 21	**Welcoming Strangers**	Joshua 2:1–7
Tue, Sep. 22	**Faith without Works Is Dead**	James 2:14–26
Wed, Sep. 23	**May the Nations Know God's Salvation**	Psalm 67
Thu, Sep. 24	**Faith to Live By**	Hebrews 11:1–2, 29–31
Fri, Sep. 25	**God Shows No Partiality**	Acts 10:34–48
Sat, Sep. 26	**Rahab's Faith in God**	Joshua 2:8–14
Sun, Sep. 27	**Rahab Is Spared**	Joshua 6:6–17, 22–23, 25
Mon, Sep. 28	**Hold Fast to the Lord**	Joshua 23:1–11
Tue, Sep. 29	**Reaffirming the Covenant**	Joshua 24:1–13
Wed, Sep. 30	**Obey Christ's Commandments**	1 John 1:8–2:5
Thu, Oct. 1	**No Turning Back**	Luke 9:57–62
Fri, Oct. 2	**The Greatest Commandments**	Matthew 22:34–40
Sat, Oct. 3	**God, Deliver Your People**	Psalm 25:12–22
Sun, Oct. 4	**We Will Serve the Lord**	Joshua 24:14–27
Mon, Oct. 5	**Christ Died for All**	Romans 5:1–10
Tue, Oct. 6	**Grace Abounds Despite Sin**	Romans 5:11–21
Wed, Oct. 7	**Worship at the Chosen Place**	Deuteronomy 12:1–14
Thu, Oct. 8	**Worship in the Chosen Way**	Deuteronomy 12:20–32
Fri, Oct. 9	**Put On the New Self**	Colossians 3:1–11
Sat, Oct. 10	**Clothe Yourself with Godliness**	Colossians 3:12–17
Sun, Oct. 11	**Faithfulness Despite Disobedience**	Judges 2:1–15
Mon, Oct. 12	**Courage to Live or Die**	Philippians 1:21–30
Tue, Oct. 13	**Let Your Light Shine**	Matthew 5:11–16
Wed, Oct. 14	**Blessed Is One Who Trusts the Lord**	Psalm 84
Thu, Oct. 15	**Let Us Strive for God's Rest**	Hebrews 4:11–16
Fri, Oct. 16	**Promise of Better Things**	Hebrews 6:1–12
Sat, Oct. 17	**God Tests God's People**	Judges 3:1–7, 12–14
Sun, Oct. 18	**Restoring Peace to the Land**	Judges 3:15–23, 30

Mon, Oct. 19	**No Other Gods but the Lord**	Exodus 20:1–7
Tue, Oct. 20	**One God and One Lord**	1 Corinthians 8:1–6
Wed, Oct. 21	**Worship God Alone**	Matthew 4:1–11
Thu, Oct. 22	**The Worship of Worthless Idols**	Isaiah 44:9–20
Fri, Oct. 23	**Return to the Lord**	Isaiah 44:21–28
Sat, Oct. 24	**No One Can Serve Two Masters**	Luke 16:13–17
Sun, Oct. 25	**The People Cast Off Restraint**	Judges 17:1–6
Mon, Oct. 26	**God Speaks Through the Prophets**	Amos 3:1–7
Tue, Oct. 27	**The Prophets Warn and Guide**	Hosea 12:7–14
Wed, Oct. 28	**Many Gifts, One God**	1 Corinthians 12:1–11
Thu, Oct. 29	**Orderly Worship**	1 Corinthians 14:1–5, 26–31
Fri, Oct. 30	**Here Am I; Send Me!**	Isaiah 6
Sat, Oct. 31	**Live Worthy of Your Calling**	Ephesians 4:1–13
Sun, Nov. 1	**The Lord's Servant Is Listening**	1 Samuel 3:8–20
Mon, Nov. 2	**The Holy City**	Revelation 21:1–4, 9–27
Tue, Nov. 3	**The Glory of the Lord**	Ezekiel 10:1–7
Wed, Nov. 4	**A Vision of God's Glory**	Ezekiel 10:15–19; 11:22–25
Thu, Nov. 5	**We Reap What We Sow**	Galatians 6:1–10
Fri, Nov. 6	**When All Is Lost**	1 Samuel 4:12–22
Sat, Nov. 7	**Promise of A New Body**	2 Corinthians 5:1–10
Sun, Nov. 8	**Rejoice in God's Glory**	1 Samuel 6:13–18
Mon, Nov. 9	**The Lord Is Patient**	2 Peter 3:9–13
Tue, Nov. 10	**Avoid Worldly Entanglements**	Colossians 2:8–15
Wed, Nov. 11	**The Lord Is with His People**	Deuteronomy 20:1–9
Thu, Nov. 12	**Remain Steadfast Under Trial**	James 1:1–12
Fri, Nov. 13	**God Hears and Rescues**	Psalm 34:15–22
Sat, Nov. 14	**The Lord Speaks to the King**	2 Chronicles 7:11–22
Sun, Nov. 15	**Cry to God for Deliverance**	1 Samuel 7:3–11, 15–17

Lesson Cycle Chart

International Sunday School Lesson Cycle, September 2026–August 2032

Year	Fall Quarter (Sep, Oct, Nov)	Winter Quarter (Dec, Jan, Feb)	Spring Quarter (Mar, Apr, May)	Summer Quarter (Jun, Jul, Aug)
2026 – 2027	**Generations: From Canaan to Jerusalem** Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel	**Power to the People** 1, 2 & 3 John, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude	**Written that You Might Believe** John	**Just a Closer Walk** Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon
2027 – 2028	**Our Beginnings** Genesis	**Reconciling Hostile People** Luke	**God's Redeeming Power** Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	**The Meaning and Significance of Grace** Romans
2028 – 2029	**Wisdom's Story: Listen and Live** Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon	**Jesus the Messiah** Matthew	**The Church: Revealing God's Love and Power** 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians	**God's Patient, Reformative Justice** 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Hosea, Amos, Micah
2029 – 2030	**A Power-Filled Story** Acts	**The Good News of God's New Kingdom** Psalms, Isaiah, Mark	**Agents of Change** Genesis, Ruth, Samuel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah	**Formidable Faith** Hebrews, James
2030 – 2031	**Lament and Hope** Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah	**Emmanuel: God With Us** Gospels	**Living in the Promise** 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Revelation	**God's Tenacious Prophets** 1 & 2 Kings, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum
2031 – 2032	**Learning to Lead** 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus	**Deliverance and Rebuilding** Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi	**We Serve a Risen Savior** Gospels	**TBA** TBA

Copyright © 2026 by Standard Publishing, an imprint of David C Cook, DavidCCook.org. 4050 Lee Vance Drive, Colorado Springs, CO, 80918, U.S.A. Based on *Uniform Series International Sunday School Lessons International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching* copyright © 2024 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verse-by-Verse "Ultimate Guide"

Teacher Tips by Editorial Staff

Standard Lesson Commentary and *Standard Lesson Quarterly* aim to provide you with a critical interpretation and explanation of biblical texts in a format that is both accurate and accessible. Each lesson is designed to point you and your group toward faithful understanding and application of the Scripture text. The commentary seeks to identify the original meaning(s) according to the text's historical and literary context(s) and bring them to life. Whether you use Standard Lesson for sermon preparation, group study, or personal edification, we pray that each lesson meets you at the intersection between life and learning.

Every lesson includes an **Introduction**, **Lesson Context**, **Verse-by-Verse Commentary**, and **Conclusion**. Each section is designed with you, *the teacher*, in mind.

> *Each section is designed with you,* ***the teacher****, in mind.*

Introduction

The literary **Introduction** is designed to fuel your creative engagement with the central theme. Each Introduction provides an anecdote that helps set the theme into motion. If you connect with this illustration, feel free to use it to open your teaching! Otherwise, let it remind you of a personal or historical example of your own, and step into your inventiveness and expression as a teacher.

Lesson Context

The **Lesson Context** is often broken into two sections: literary and historical. Use this information to set the scene for your conceptualization and group work. Let it orient you to the population, time, place, and culture to which the text was written. Some lessons require teaching a significant amount of background information before delving into the main text. In others, you may not need to mention contextual details at all—so use this information at your discretion.

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

The bulk of each lesson is given to **Verse-by-Verse Commentary**. Standard Lesson is committed to commenting on every portion of the assigned text. The teacher books do this by printing one verse at a time, then commenting beneath it. However, the student books follow a slightly different format. They give a complete section of printed Scripture, followed by a redacted section of commentary. Although you may read commentary directly to your class, that may be less than desirable. The curriculum aims to present you with detailed, in-depth information, enabling you to decide what are the best or most essential elements for your group to understand.

You will notice that commentary sections contain many cross references. These are meant to help you consider further research and reading, as well as to document concepts that are found throughout Scripture. They are intended for your information and need not be read aloud. It would take a long time for a class to look up each and every one of them. It is up to your discretion, as the teacher, whether a particular cross-reference is helpful to mention.

Conclusion

Standard Lesson saves application points for the **Conclusion**. Although this section is typically concise, it is a fundamental part of the lesson. You may want to spend considerable time discussing or processing ways that your group could employ the concepts they've learned. For ideas about how to present this material in a concrete way, see the "Into Life" section on the Involvement Learning page.

Joshua Leads Courageously

Devotional Reading: Daniel 10:18–21
Background Scripture: Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy 31:1–8; 34:1–12; Joshua 1

Joshua 1:1–11

1 Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,

2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

10 Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying,

11 Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it.

Key Text

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. **—Joshua 1:9**

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 1: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the vision of leadership that Joshua received from the Lord.
2. Explain parallels between the Lord's directives to Joshua and to Moses.
3. Write a definition of *courage* and make a plan to live courageously in the upcoming week.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Courage and Confidence
- B. Lesson Context

I. Commission (Joshua 1:1–6)
- A. Exhortation to Joshua (vv. 1–2)
- B. Extent of the Land (vv. 3–4)
- C. Encouragement to the People (vv. 5–6)

Daily Displays of Courage

II. Command (Joshua 1:7–9)
- A. Courage and Obedience (v. 7)
- B. Meditation and Obedience (v. 8)

The Risks of Rushing
- C. Courage and God's Presence (v. 9)

III. Crossing (Joshua 1:10–11)
- A. Ordering the Officers (v. 10)
- B. Preparing the People (v. 11)

Conclusion
- A. Courageously Committing to Obedience
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Courage and Confidence

A young family—a husband, wife, their three-year-old toddler, and their unborn son—left their hometown in northern Minnesota to move to a new city, sight unseen. Uncertainty abounded. Financial anxieties prompted the dramatic move. The parents were hopeful that a new environment would provide more opportunities. They left behind a well-established community of neighbors, coworkers, and friends from church, uncertain of finding a similar community in the new city. Feelings of despair were understandable, but the parents kept a flicker of hope alive.

Despite the parents' uncertainty, the family found a sense of community and support in their new city. Courage and confidence replaced uncertainty. The parents trusted that God would continue to provide for their needs.

Today's study introduces us to a group of people who were also on the move: the ancient Israelites. They were on the verge of entering the promised land after forty years of wilderness wanderings. Would Joshua, their leader, express uncertainty about the Lord's provision? Or would his courage strengthen the people as they moved?

B. Lesson Context

The Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years (Exodus 12:40–41). During this time, the descendants of Jacob became enslaved at the hands of the Egyptians. However, God redeemed His people and provided a way for them to leave captivity. Those who left Egypt did not go directly to the land that God promised to their ancestors. Instead, they stopped at Mount Sinai, where they received the law from God and constructed the tabernacle as the center of their worship (Exodus 19–27). But rather than obey God, the Israelites tested and disobeyed Him (Numbers 14:22).

In the second year after leaving Egypt, the Israelites departed from Sinai and moved toward the southern edge of Canaan (Numbers 10:11–12). Moses sent twelve spies into the land (13:17), and after forty days, they returned (13:25). Ten spies demonstrated a lack of trust in God to lead them

into Canaan. Only two spies, Joshua and Caleb, recommended entering the land (14:6–9). They trusted that God would be faithful to His promise that the people would possess it.

As a result of the lack of faith from the ten spies, God imposed punishment. First, the people had to spend forty years in the wilderness (Numbers 14:34). Second, out of the generation who left Egypt, only the two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb, lived to enter Canaan (1:46; 2:32; 14:30). This meant that Moses would not be a part of the generation allowed to enter the land (14:22–23; 20:12). Therefore, God and Moses established Joshua as Moses' successor to lead the people into Canaan (27:15–23; Deuteronomy 3:28; 31:7; 34:9).

As the book of Joshua begins, nearly forty years have passed since the Israelites left Egypt. At this point, they were camped in the plains of Moab at the edge of Canaan, across the Jordan River from Jericho (Numbers 22:1; 33:48–50; 36:13). Their presence in the area threatened local leaders (22:2–3). However, rather than obey the Lord and maintain holiness, some Israelites committed immoral acts and idolatry with the people of the land—an act that had deadly consequences (Numbers 25).

By the time Moses died, hundreds of years had passed since God first made promises to Abraham concerning the land. The people found themselves at a crucial juncture. They had yet to settle the land. Under the leadership of the newly commissioned Joshua, they needed to follow the Lord's commands to possess the land that had been promised to them.

I. Commission

(Joshua 1:1–6)

A. Exhortation to Joshua (vv. 1–2)

1. Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying.

Moses dies at age 120 (Deuteronomy 34:7), and what follows takes place after that death. The name *Joshua* appears more than two dozen times in the Pentateuch, the designation for the first five books of the Old Testament. In ancient Hebrew, the name means "The Lord saves" or "The Lord is salvation." Joshua is introduced in Exodus 17:8–13 as a warrior. He is further identified as being *the son of Nun,* a descendent of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8; 1 Chronicles 7:20, 27).

The word translated as the noun *minister* is actually a verb in the Hebrew text. This fact highlights Joshua's service to his elder and mentor. Joshua had done so since his youth (see Numbers 11:28). The designation also is found in Exodus 24:13 and 33:11. The designation draws a parallel between Joshua's service to Moses and Moses' position as *the servant of the Lord*, although the Hebrew words translated "minister" and "servant" are different.

2. Moses my servant is dead; Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.

The word of the Lord to Joshua affirms a change of leadership for the Israelites. *Moses* is *dead*, and now Joshua will become a leader who will speak for the Lord and guide *the children of Israel* into the land. Centuries earlier, God had promised Abram that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7; 15:8–13; 17:8). God reiterated the same promise to his son and grandson as well (26:3; 35:12). Moses received the same promise when the Lord called him to lead the Israelites to a land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8; compare Leviticus 20:24; Numbers 13:27; Deuteronomy 31:20). At the time of Moses'



Visual for Lesson 1. *Display this visual as you lead a conversation based on the discussion questions associated with Joshua 1:7a.*

death, the people had not yet taken any land west of the Jordan River. However, in a sense, the land had already been granted to them by the Lord, as it had been promised to their ancestors.

This crossing would have been relatively simple at the end of the dry season, as the *Jordan* River would be a quiet stream. However, it is now the end of the spring rainy season (Joshua 4:19). Heavy rains and melting snow have caused the Jordan to be in flood stage (3:15; 4:18). Despite these challenges, God will make the crossing possible. This miracle will validate Joshua's leadership and demonstrate the people's willingness to obey the Lord and take *the land* for themselves (see Lesson 2).

What Do You Think?

Have you ever had to follow in someone else's footsteps or take over a big responsibility? How did that feel?

Digging Deeper

In what ways will you prioritize being attentive to God's directives during seasons of transition?

B. Extent of the Land (vv. 3–4)

3. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

The Lord reiterates to Joshua the promises that He made to *Moses* regarding the land in Deuteronomy 11:24. The Israelites do not yet possess the land, but to receive such a promise from the Lord is almost the same as holding the title deed to it. Although conflict and battles will occur (Joshua 11:6–23; see Lesson 3), the victory ultimately belongs to the Lord and His people.

4. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.

The description of the extent of the territory aligns with previous statements (see Genesis 15:18–21; Exodus 23:31; Numbers 34:3–12; Deuteronomy 1:7–8; 11:24). The description begins in the southernmost region of the land *(the wilderness)* and extends to the northwest, where the mountains of *Lebanon* are located. To the northeast and east is the *Euphrates* River, often referred to simply as "the river" (Exodus 23:31) or "the flood" (Joshua 24:14–15). This river lies more than 400 straight-line miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee. The northern area is summarized by the phrase *all the land of the Hittites.* At the time of Joshua, in approximately the fourteenth century BC, the Hittites are a rising power. They controlled regions of what is now modern-day Turkey. The western boundary, *the great sea*, refers to the Mediterranean Sea.

C. Encouragement to the People (vv. 5–6)

5. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

When God issues commands, He often follows them with supporting information that provides assurance. The Israelites will not acquire the land through their own strength. Instead, they will take possession of it solely because the Lord has granted it to them.

This instance is not the first time the Lord has promised His presence to Joshua (see Deuteronomy 31:23). By ensuring that no one will *be able to stand* in Joshua's way, the Lord guarantees the fulfillment of His promises and presents Himself as a warrior fighting on behalf of His people.

Joshua has already experienced the realities of God's promise. During the final days of Moses, the Israelites captured sixty cities in the region east of Galilee (Deuteronomy 3:4). Additionally, the Israelites did not suffer any casualties in a previous battle with the Midianites (Numbers 31:49).

What Do You Think?

When was a time you felt that you needed a reminder that you were not forsaken by God? How did you grow spiritually in that time?

Digging Deeper

How will you encourage another believer by sharing the promise of God's steadfast presence (see Matthew 28:20)?

Daily Displays of Courage

Jesse faced tremendous challenges throughout her life. She survived toxic and abusive relationships that lasted for years, enduring much pain and heartbreak. Despite it all, she displayed significant courage. Through a series of letters we exchanged, she taught me that courage arises from many small choices. She learned to trust God daily, maintain hope in His promises for redemption, and seek God's presence amid her challenges. Her letters revealed God's faithfulness and the courage that she found as a result.

Witnessing God's faithfulness to others has a way of humbling us and inspiring us to lead lives of courage. Joshua saw how the God who was with Moses would also be with him. Because of this, Joshua could take courage, knowing he would also experience God's presence, guidance, and direction.

The God who was with Joshua also promises His presence to us (Matthew 28:20). We can take courage from this promise, and our courage will testify to others of God's faithfulness and provision. How has witnessing the courage of others encouraged you to deepen your trust in the Lord? —KS

6. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.

A form of the command *be strong and of a good courage* appears a total of eleven times in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 31:6–7, 23; Joshua 1:6–7, 9, 18; 10:25; 1 Chronicles 22:13; 28:20; 2 Chronicles 32:7).

Dictionaries offer several definitions of *courage.* A summary of them would be that courage is "the quality that enables one to meet danger and difficulties with firmness or valor, despite feelings of fear or inadequacy." Joshua may have feelings of fear or inadequacy as he leads the people. His mentor, Moses, definitely felt inadequate (Exodus 3:11).

Even so, the Lord has chosen Joshua and given him a task to accomplish. The promise *unto their fathers* that God has sworn to fulfill is recorded in Genesis 12:1–3; 15:18; 26:3; 28:13; 35:12.

II. Command

(Joshua 1:7–9)

A. Courage and Obedience (v. 7)

7a. Only be thou strong and very courageous.

The imperative *be strong and very courageous* is important enough to be repeated (see commentary on Joshua 1:6, above). This command serves as the "marching order" for Joshua and the Israelites preparing to enter the land of Canaan. To be cowardly instead of courageous would reveal a lack of trust in God.

What Do You Think?

When you are prone to feeling fear or inadequacy, what promises of God give you courage?

Digging Deeper

Where in your life do you feel God is asking you to step out in courage right now?

7b. That thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

Joshua will model courage and success by obeying *the law* the Lord gave the Israelites. The practices and promises offered by the pagan people who inhabit the land will be very enticing, as they already have been (Numbers 25). But Joshua must be determined not to go with them. His trust is not to be in a smorgasbord belief system—some of this and a little of that. He cannot swerve in any direction so as to taste what looks appealing.

As Joshua considers this requirement, perhaps he thinks of God's command found in Deuteronomy 28:14 (compare 5:32–33; 17:11, 20). Joshua's courageous leadership depends primarily on his willingness to obey the Lord. Before he can be a military leader of the people, he needs first to model spiritual leadership.

B. Meditation and Obedience (v. 8)

8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein

day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

The warning that *this book . . . shall not depart out of thy mouth* may sound somewhat unusual at first—as if Joshua should refrain from discussing *the law* with others. Joshua is to "keep" the law in his mouth so that he can do three important things: reflect on it, obey it, and enjoy the blessings of obedience. Success in conquering the promised land depends on this (Deuteronomy 29:9)!

Joshua will know the contents of the law by meditating on it *day and night*. As the newly appointed leader, he will need to make significant decisions throughout each day, but those decisions must be evaluated in light of what God has instructed. All hours of the day or night are good times to contemplate God's ways and His Word (compare Psalm 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148). By prioritizing these commands, Joshua and his leadership will experience blessings (compare 1:1–3).

The words translated *prosperous* and *success* each occur dozens of times in the Old Testament. But this is the only place where those two Hebrew words occur together. To be prosperous is not necessarily referring to financial success. Instead, it addresses the broader concept of "flourishing" (compare 2 Chronicles 14:7).

What Do You Think?

How can you better prioritize the study of and reflection on God's Word in Scripture?

Digging Deeper

How can you incorporate new ways to reflect on God's Word in the early morning or late at night?

The Risks of Rushing

I worked for a commercial insurance provider, spending my days answering customers' billing questions. My computer screens were filled with programs that gave me a picture of their accounts. One particular program displayed the history of changes made to each account. When responding to questions, I would review this program and complete a series of calculations to respond promptly.

However, sometimes, I rushed the calculations and accidentally entered incorrect numbers or transposed the figures on the computer screen. More than once, this led to my giving the customer a wrong answer, much to their aggravation. In those cases, I usually identified the error if I slowed down and reviewed my calculations.

The Lord commanded Joshua to meditate on God's Word day and night. Joshua was not to rush through five minutes of morning devotions. He needed to realize that his number one task was to prioritize, reflect on, and obey God's Word.

Are your days too busy to reflect on God's Word in Scripture? You may need to slow down! In what ways can you (re)focus on God's Word throughout your daily activities? —KS

C. Courage and God's Presence (v. 9)

9. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

The Lord reassures Joshua by posing a rhetorical question that should remove any doubt about the outcome. In this case, the Lord intends for the people's obedience to fulfill what He has planned for centuries: a provision of a particular land to Abraham and his descendants. The Lord would oversee the fulfillment of that promise Himself.

This is the third time in this chapter that the Lord encourages Joshua to *be strong and of a good courage* as he assumes leadership of the people. Moses had given Joshua the same challenge when appointing him as successor (Deuteronomy 31:7, 23). While Joshua previously benefited from the

How to Say It

Euphrates	You-*fray*-teez
Hittites	*Hit*-ites or *Hit*-tites
Midianites	*Mid*-ee-un-ites
Moab	*Mo*-ab
Pentateuch	*Pen*-ta-teuk
Mediterranean	*Med*-uh-tuh-***ray***-nee-un
victuals	*vih*-tulz

support and wisdom of Moses, that era has now changed. Joshua is on his own—with the promises of God as his blessed assurance.

III. Crossing

(Joshua 1:10–11)

A. Ordering the Officers (v. 10)

10. Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying.

Joshua's preparatory commands to *the officers* demonstrate his trust in God and his willingness to begin entering the land. This group may include elders and administrative leaders (examples: Numbers 11:16; Deuteronomy 1:13–16; 29:10; 31:28).

B. Preparing the People (v. 11)

11a. Pass through the host, and command the people, saying.

The word translated *host* refers to the camp of the Israelites, as it is translated both ways in Exodus 16:13. When the verse now before us is combined with the verse just before it, a threefold order of leadership for the Israelites is apparent: (1) The Lord directs Joshua; (2) Joshua gives commands to officers; and (3) the officers ensure that *the people* receive proper direction. In modern military parlance, this is called "the chain of command." This will remind those in the army of Israel—potentially more than 600,000 soldiers (Numbers 26:2, 51)—of who is in charge.

11b. Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the LORD your God giveth you to possess it.

As Joshua receives his marching orders from God, the Israelites are camped on the plains of Moab (Numbers 26:3, 63). That area is east of the *Jordan* River and just north of the Dead Sea. Historical hindsight tells us that their need to take food (*victuals*) is only a temporary, in-between step because of the coming shift from receiving manna to being able to eat from the produce of the land they are to enter (Exodus 16:35; Joshua 5:12). When the people approached the land decades earlier, they had backed down (see Lesson Context). This time, however, is to be different.

What Do You Think?

What might it look like for you to spiritually prepare for what God is calling you to do next?

Digging Deeper

Who is an accountability partner or spiritual mentor who can offer support and wisdom during your preparation?

Conclusion

A. Courageously Committing to Obedience

For the young family described in the Introduction, the courageous trust of the parents paid off—I should know because it's the story of my parents. Because of their courage and trust in God, my older sibling and I could thrive. The situation of my parents and that of Joshua with the ancient Israelites is significantly different. However, both reveal tremendous human courage by trusting that God would provide.

We discern two points of application. First, God can and will use anyone as an instrument to achieve His will. Second, God promises to provide for us as we follow His lead. In neither case is worldly measures of success guaranteed. Instead, God promises eternal, spiritual blessings when we follow His will. Courage and trust are what Joshua was to exhibit. Will you exhibit the same in whatever role God has assigned you?

B. Prayer

Lord God, we want to be strong and courageous. Show us how to trust Your will in all situations. Grant us peace in the uncertainty and in the waiting. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Be courageous as God leads you!

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 11) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Fall Quarter. Order ISBN: 9780784739136 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Write the following sentence on the board for class members to see as they arrive:

That took courage!

Distribute handouts (you create), each printed with a different news story describing an event that required a courageous response from an individual or group. At the beginning of class, divide participants into small groups and give each group one handout.

Direct group members to read the handout and ask a volunteer from each group to provide a one-minute summary to the whole class. After each volunteer has shared, lead a whole-class brainstorming session to discuss what made the individuals in the examples courageous.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "The individuals in these examples all demonstrated courage. In today's study, we'll review a passage of Scripture that illustrates courage and obedience to God."

Into the Word

Option. Distribute copies of the "Crossing Into Promise" activity from the activity page, which you can download. Read Joshua 1:1–11 and invite learners to complete it individually in a minute or less before reviewing responses with a partner.

Split the class into two groups: **Compare the Call Group** and **Orders to Joshua Group.** Distribute handouts (you create) with the following prompts or questions for in-group discussion based on Joshua 1:1–11. Encourage the groups to use lesson resources, notes in a study Bible, or Internet sources to formulate their responses.

Compare the Call Group. 1–What are the key directives of God's call to Joshua? 2–In what ways is God's call of Joshua similar to God's call of Moses in Exodus 3 and Deuteronomy 11:8–32? 3–In what ways are the calls different?

Orders to Joshua Group. 1–Summarize the commands given to Joshua in Joshua 1:1–11. 2–Summarize the resources, practices, and attitudes that Joshua needed to obey God successfully. 3–Summarize the results God promised would come to Joshua through his obedience.

Option. Display the map visual included in this quarter's *Adult Resources* packet, which you can purchase. Highlight the boundaries of the land God gave to the Israelites, and point out relevant locations on the map as you review the lessons from this quarter.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–Why did the Lord repeat the exhortation, "Be strong and of a good courage"? 2–Why was this a fitting exhortation for the task facing Joshua and the Israelites? 3–In what ways do the Lord's exhortations in Joshua 1:7–9 fit the experiences of the Israelites? 4–What can we learn from this passage about how God works in the lives of those who serve Him?

Into Life

Divide the class into groups of three and ask each group to develop a definition of the word *courage.* After three minutes, ask for a volunteer from each triad to share their group's definition. Write all the definitions on the board. Lead a group discussion to develop a singular definition of *courage* that considers all the definitions.

Write the following words on poster board, one word per board: *Work. Church. Family. Neighborhood. Health. Politics.* Place the posters around the classroom. Conclude class time by asking participants to consider each poster board and write on them ways to act courageously in the context written on the poster. Collect the posters and display them at the beginning of the next class time.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Spelling Out Courage" exercise from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs or small groups to complete as indicated.

Israel Remembers God's Deeds

Devotional Reading: Luke 8:35–39
Background Scripture: Exodus 14; Joshua 3:1–4:24

Joshua 4:14–24

14 On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.

15 And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying,

16 Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan.

17 Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan.

18 And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

19 And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho.

20 And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal.

21 And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones?

22 Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land.

23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over:

24 That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.



Key Text

When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. **—Joshua 4:21b–22**

Image © Getty Images

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 1: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Describe Joshua's act of remembrance at Gilgal.
2. Compare the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan River to their crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14).
3. Make a plan to remember God's acts of faithfulness.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Monuments of Memory
- B. Lesson Context

I. God's Proclamation (Joshua 4:14)
- A. Joshua's Reputation (v. 14a)
- B. People's Reaction (v. 14b)

II. God's Provision (Joshua 4:15–18)
- A. Commanding the Priests (vv. 15–17)
- B. Carrying the Ark (v. 18)

III. God's Promises (Joshua 4:19–24)
- A. Sacred Ground (v. 19)
- B. Significant Stones (vv. 20–23)
  - *Ink and Stone*
  - *Fifty Years of Faithfulness*
- C. Sovereign Strength (v. 24)

Conclusion
- A. Memory by Monuments
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Monuments of Memory

Etched into the interior stone walls of the Lincoln Memorial is the following statement, visible to all who visit the ninety-nine-foot-tall structure in Washington, DC: "In this temple, as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever."

The influence of the sixteenth US president is undeniable. He played a significant role in ending the Civil War, establishing freedom for thousands of enslaved people through the Emancipation Proclamation, and helping to ensure the integrity of the struggling union. Two years after his death, Congress passed the first bills to begin the process of designing a memorial to honor the slain president. Today, this memorial commemorates his service and accomplishments, inviting visitors to reflect on his efforts to create a nation characterized by "liberty and justice for all."

Memorials and monuments help people remember influential people or significant events. Some memorials serve a distinctly spiritual purpose in reminding people of God's faithfulness and work. As the ancient Israelites entered the promised land, they commemorated their history and the mighty acts of the Lord for just such a purpose.

B. Lesson Context

Following the death of Moses and his generation, a change in Israelite leadership occurred (see Numbers 27:12–23). Details of that transition, from Moses to Joshua, are noted in the Lesson Context of Lesson 1.

Important events take place between the text for last week's lesson (Joshua 1:1–11) and the text of this week's study. Before entering the land of Canaan, Joshua sent spies to explore the land in general and the city of Jericho in particular (2:1). The lives of these spies were saved by Rahab, a Canaanite woman in Jericho (2:2–22; see Lesson 4). When the spies returned to Joshua, they reported that Israelite victory in the land was certain (2:24).

Having received the positive news, Joshua led the people from Shittim to the Jordan River, about

five miles west, where they camped for three days (Joshua 3:1–2). We might wonder why there is a need to camp for this time after a (perhaps) three-hour walk. One possible answer to that question considers the sheer number of people involved. An earlier census indicates that there were more than 600,000, counting only men aged twenty and older (Numbers 26:2, 51). That number could easily have been tripled or more by adding women and children. Time is required to communicate with and coordinate everything for so many people (Joshua 3:1–6).

What followed was the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. Every miracle was intended to highlight the presence of the Lord with Joshua and the Israelites (Joshua 3:7).

Priests carrying the ark went ahead of the people and entered the river. At that moment, the waters upstream stopped flowing, just as Joshua had promised (Joshua 3:14–16). As long as the priests and the ark remained in the riverbed, the Israelites could cross over on dry ground. Joshua then selected twelve men, one from each tribe, and instructed them to each choose a stone from the middle of the temporarily dry riverbed (4:1–3). These stones were arranged in such a way as to serve as a sign or memory device to following generations regarding the Lord's deliverance at that very location (4:6–7).

As today's lesson begins, almost all the Israelites have crossed the Jordan River on dry ground. Those who hadn't completed the crossing—namely, the priests with the ark of the covenant—exit last (Joshua 4:10–13).

I. God's Proclamation

(Joshua 4:14)

A. Joshua's Reputation (v. 14a)

14a. On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel.

This half-verse fulfills an earlier promise from *the Lord* to "magnify [Joshua] in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee" (Joshua 3:7). The Hebrew word translated *magnified* carries the idea of becoming in some way "greater" (examples: Genesis 12:2; 1 Kings 1:37). The Lord's exaltation of this newly installed leader gives complete confidence to *all Israel*. Although the Israelites belong to distinct tribes, they are united as one nation; they all put their trust in Joshua as their leader.

B. People's Reaction (v. 14b)

14b. And they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.

The underlying Hebrew word translated *feared* can mean either feelings of terror (examples: Joshua 8:1; 10:8, 25) or reverential respect (example: Psalm 111:9). *Moses* had led the Israelites through the Red Sea and into the wilderness, and the people showed him reverential respect (Exodus 14:31). Now, Joshua is something of a "new Moses"—someone in the vein of Moses who would lead the Israelites. At this point, Joshua has only led the people across the Jordan River and barely into the promised land (see Lesson Context). But having just experienced a miracle, they obey and respect him as they did Moses (compare Joshua 1:16–18). Their future as a nation depends on their obedience to Joshua, the Lord's appointed leader.

Not all leaders of ancient Israel received the same level of respect and support from the people. God chose other leaders, only for those leaders to falter. The examples of Saul, David, and Solomon come to mind (1 Samuel 15:23–24; 2 Samuel 12:7–9; 1 Kings 11:9–10). Although Joshua would later act imperfectly (Joshua 7:2–5; 9:14–15), he served God and Moses faithfully throughout his life.

The record of that service describes him as a "young" assistant to Moses (Numbers 11:28). Moses had trusted him implicitly with important tasks (Exodus 17:8–14; 24:13; 33:11; Numbers

How to Say It

Abib	*A*-bib
Asherah	Uh-*she*-ruh
Baal	*Bay*-ul
Canaan	*Kay*-nun
Canaanite	*Kay*-nu-***nite***
Gilgal	*Gil*-gal (*G* as in *get*)
Nisan	*Nye*-san
tabernacle	***tah***-burr-*nah*-kul

13:16). Moses gently rebuked Joshua on one occasion (11:28–30), but such is the relationship between mentor and protégé. By the time of the death of Moses, Joshua has had years of experience and servant leadership with the people.

II. God's Provision

(Joshua 4:15–18)

A. Commanding the Priests (vv. 15–17)

15. And the LORD spake unto Joshua, saying.

As the era of Joshua's leadership continues, *the Lord* is again communicating His will for the new leader of the Israelites. Indeed, the Lord continues to do so throughout the book (compare Joshua 1:1–9; 3:7–8; 4:1–3; 5:2, 9; 6:2). *Joshua* cannot claim ignorance regarding his knowledge of the Lord's commands.

16–17. Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan.

The *ark* is a rectangular wooden box, overlaid with gold, that contains the stone tablets of the law that were given to Moses (see Exodus 25:10–22; 37:1–9). It serves as the focal point of tabernacle worship because it is the location for God's presence and revelation for the Israelites. As they travel through the wilderness toward the promised land, the ark leads them (Numbers 10:33–36; Joshua 3:3, 6, 15–16). *Priests* from the tribe of Levi are responsible for carrying the ark through the wilderness and for taking care of the various vessels of the tabernacle (Deuteronomy 10:8; 31:9; Numbers 3:30–32; Joshua 3:3).

The ark is referred to by several names in Scripture, including "the ark of God" (1 Samuel 3:3) and "the ark of the covenant" (Joshua 3:3; etc.). The designation, the *ark of the testimony*, emphasizes the testimony of God's covenant promises to His people. The testimony can refer to the actual stone tablets inscribed by God, given to Moses, and housed in the ark. The ark and its contents symbolize the relationship between God and the Israelites, reminding the people of His presence. As Joshua and the Israelites cross the Jordan River and enter the land of Canaan, it is crucial that they remember God's promises and prioritize their obedience to His word.

B. Carrying the Ark (v. 18)

18. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

The priests in charge of carrying *the ark* are both the first ones to set foot on the Jordan River's dry riverbed and the last to finish the crossing (Joshua 3:14, 17). The detail that *the waters of Jordan . . . flowed over all his banks, as they did before* indicates that the river was at the flood stage in the spring (see next verse). These details and others suggest that the absence of a water obstacle is not simply a natural occurrence such as a drought; God's power created the pathway.

Several decades earlier, the Lord had made a way for the Hebrews to escape slavery by parting the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21–22). That miraculous event instilled fear in the inhabitants of Canaan (Joshua 2:9–10). Now the Lord has miraculously made a way for the people to pass through another body of water unharmed; this results in additional fear on the part of the land's inhabitants (5:1).

What Do You Think?

How has God worked miraculously throughout your life to lead you to the next part of His plan?

Digging Deeper

How do you remain attentive to God's leading, even in situations that seem impossible?

III. God's Promises

(Joshua 4:19–24)

A. Sacred Ground (v. 19)

19. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho.

Our conclusion in the previous verse that the

crossing occurred in *the first month* is confirmed. The further specification that it is *the tenth day* of that month recalls that the Lord had instructed the enslaved Israelites to prepare for Passover observance on that day (Exodus 12:3).

The name of the month under consideration is given as "Abib" in Exodus 13:4; 23:15; 34:18; and Deuteronomy 16:1. This month corresponds with late March and early April. Considering 1 Chronicles 12:15 allows us to see the connection between the exact month and day of the year, the river's water level (Joshua 4:18, above), and the fact that this is the time of a harvest (3:14–15). The name of this month became "Nisan" during the Babylonian exile centuries later (Esther 3:7). The month of Abib/Nisan marks the beginning of the "religious year" for the Israelites.

There is more than one town named *Gilgal* in the Old Testament. One such town is about twenty miles northwest of Jericho. That is the Gilgal of 1 Samuel 7:16 and 2 Kings 2:1, so it is not the one mentioned here. The name *Gilgal* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "circle" or "rolling." The Lord designates this site on *the east border of Jericho* with this name because "this day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you" (Joshua 5:9).

B. Significant Stones (vv. 20–23)

20. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal.

Joshua had commanded twelve Israelites to collect *twelve stones*, one for each tribe, from the *Jordan* riverbed as they passed through it (Joshua 4:1–8; see Lesson Context). Previously, Joshua had arranged the stones in the riverbed where the priests were standing (4:9). Now, having crossed to the other side of the river, *Joshua* erects the stones as a monument to commemorate God's provision to cross the river. The Law of Moses prohibits the use of cut stones for constructing altars (Exodus 20:25; compare Joshua 8:30–31). However, this directive is not a total prohibition on constructing monuments. The exact arrangement of the stones is unknown. But it is built in such a way that it would be visible to others so that they could also remember the Lord's mighty act of deliverance (next verse).

21–22. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land.

The content of these verses repeats Joshua's earlier words in Joshua 4:6–7, though the phrasing is slightly different here. *These stones* stand as a memorial for the benefit of future generations, symbolizing God's provision that enabled the people of *Israel* to cross the *Jordan* River *on dry land*. Additionally, this memorial would remind future generations that it was the one true God of Israel, not the fictitious pagan gods Baal or Asherah, who brought the people into the promised land.

What Do You Think?

How do you intentionally share with younger generations about your faith in God and His transforming mercy?

Digging Deeper

What is one action you can take in the upcoming week to build a spiritual legacy within your family?

Ink and Stone

Early in our marriage, my husband noticed several stacks of loose letters, cards, and drawings scattered around my office. He asked, "Why are you keeping all this stuff? If it really means something to you, we can just scan them and throw the originals away." He sees pieces of paper as a bother, and he'll always prefer digital versions to physical copies.

I, on the other hand, love physical paper copies. I love seeing the ink blotches on a handwritten letter. I cherish seeing and touching notes, photos, and gifts from the past. Holding a handwritten note from a dear friend, written twenty years ago, helps me remember the feel of her hug, hear her laughter, and delight in the blessing of her presence. Physical items have the power to evoke significant memories.

The stone monument on the banks of the Jordan River was one such physical reminder for the



Visual for Lesson 2. *Display this visual as you ask participants to share with a partner a story of how they have experienced God's faithfulness.*

Israelites. The people could see the stones and be reminded of God's faithfulness, guidance, and direction.

Ink and stone—both serve as physical reminders of the past. What is a physical reminder of God's past faithfulness and blessing toward you? —KS

23. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over.

This verse highlights some important points regarding the crossing of the *Jordan*. First, it emphasizes that it is made possible by the power of *the Lord*, not simply the result of a natural phenomenon. The Law of Moses sharply contrasts allegiance to *your God* with allegiance to "their gods" (examples: Deuteronomy 7:16, 25; 12:31; 20:18). It is the one true God who created a path through the river for the people to cross, not the fictitious gods of the peoples the Israelites came to conquer. The absolute power of the one true God has been—and will be—demonstrated time and again (example: 1 Kings 18:16–38). During the creation of the world, God separated the waters from dry land (Genesis 1:9). He has total control over the waters, the winds, and all parts of creation (compare Matthew 8:23–27). No body of water can oppose Him!

Second, this verse notes the parallel between the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan River and their ancestors' crossing of the *Red sea* some forty years earlier. The Lord has given this new generation of Israelites a way through the waters, as He did for the previous generation. This new generation is experiencing a "new Exodus" also marked by the crossing of waters—theirs is an exodus out of wilderness wanderings into the promised "land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3).

What Do You Think?

What are the points of similarity and dissimilarity between the Israelites' crossing of the Jordan River and their crossing of the Red Sea?

Digging Deeper

What do these events teach us about God and His relationship with His people?

Fifty Years of Faithfulness

My dad has faithfully served as a minister of God's Word for over fifty years. Throughout his lengthy ministry, he has witnessed numerous examples of God's faithfulness. For instance, there was a time when our family needed a second vehicle, but we did not have the money to buy one. God, in His faithfulness, moved the heart of another believer to donate a car. While the vehicle was far from luxurious—it was at least twenty years old and barely running—it served as a tangible example of God's provision. It met our needs and allowed us to help others. My dad can still recall multiple examples like this one when the Lord's faithfulness was evident.

How often do you take time to reflect on God's faithfulness? To fail to do so is to face the consequences of forgetting God (see Psalm 78). As the Israelites entered the promised land, they remembered God's faithfulness to them—from the deliverance out of Egyptian bondage, to the crossing of the Red Sea, to their passage through the Jordan River.

What needs to happen for you to shift your focus from the troubles of the moment to the power and faithfulness of God? —KS

C. Sovereign Strength (v. 24)

24. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

This verse reveals God's plans and purposes for the memorial of stones. One purpose is to communicate to *all the people of the earth* about what the Lord has done for the Israelites. *The hand of the Lord* brought the Israelites out of enslavement and guided them to the land (Exodus 13:3, 9, 14; Deuteronomy 6:21; 7:8; 9:26; see Jeremiah 32:21).

The phrase *the hand of the Lord* is anthropomorphic, which means attributing human characteristics. Scripture often refers to the Lord in terms of human features (examples: Deuteronomy 8:3; Judges 2:11; Psalm 18:15; Isaiah 53:1). These are to be taken figuratively since God does not have a physical body (John 4:24).

Second, the memorial is to be a tangible reminder for the Israelites to live in honor and obedience to the Lord. To *fear the Lord* means to live in reverence of the Lord and His will. This fear is not a sense of dread or terror; rather, it is respect and reverence based on the Lord's identity and faithfulness. Reverent fear forms the foundation for obedience to the Lord. This kind of fear is the beginning of both knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). On the other hand, to have no fear of God is to invite dire consequences (Psalms 36:1–4; 55:19).

Therefore, as the Israelites enter the land, they construct a memorial recognizing the Lord's sovereign strength—His mighty hand that had brought them thus far. Everyone in the land, whether Israelite or not, will come to know His strength firsthand.

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take to cultivate greater reverence or "fear" of the Lord?

Digging Deeper

How is fear of the Lord related to obedience to the Lord?

Conclusion

A. Memory by Monuments

We create monuments of various sorts to commemorate significant leaders, historical events, and consequential actions. But how often do we build memorials to celebrate God's work?

Scripture provides several examples of God's people constructing memorials to remember and celebrate God's work. These memorials come in different forms, including physical structures (example: Genesis 28:18–22), sacred ceremonies (example: Exodus 12:14), and specific days of observance (example: 20:8–11). Despite such differences, these memorials serve a common purpose: to remember and celebrate God's faithfulness.

One of Joshua's first actions as leader was to institute the memorial at Gilgal. Before the people went further into the land, they collectively paused to ensure remembrance of the Lord's providing a way to cross the Jordan River.

Think about that sequence: (1) God provides, then (2) the people ensure remembrance, then (3) the people move on. Do we follow that same pattern, or do we skip step 2?

If we pay attention to God's work, we will find moments where He has provided for us. When we notice God's work, we can build our own memorials to God's work. Although we may not construct a stone monument, other ways exist to remember and celebrate God's work and faithfulness.

What Do You Think?

What memorial can you create to remember and celebrate God's work?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do the practice of baptism and the observance of the Lord's Supper serve as such memorials?

B. Prayer

Lord God, You have done mighty works for Your people, culminating in Your saving acts through Jesus Christ. Strengthen our resolve to remember these acts so that we can fully understand and celebrate Your steadfast faithfulness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Create reminders of God's steadfast faithfulness!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before class begins, write the following statements on the board for everyone to see:

1. *I know that others are a faithful source of support because . . .*
2. *An example from history of a faithful person is . . .*
3. *Unfaithful people hurt others by . . .*

Divide the class into three small groups and assign one statement to each group. Invite willing participants in each group to complete the assigned statement and share their responses with the group.

After five minutes, reconvene the class and ask volunteers to share their responses. Then lead a brainstorming session to create a definition of the word *faithful.* Write the definition on the board.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "God has been faithful to His people throughout history. In today's study, we'll see how the ancient Israelites responded to God's faithfulness."

Into the Word

Divide the class into two groups: **Red Sea Group** (Exodus 13:17–14:31) and **Jordan River Group** (Joshua 3–4). Direct each group to silently read the Scripture texts associated with their designated group. Distribute a pen and a handout (you create) with the following questions to each group:

1. Who led the crossing of the body of water?
2. Why did the Israelites need to cross that body of water?
3. In what ways did the Lord intervene in the crossing?
4. How did the Israelites demonstrate faith despite risk and danger?
5. What encouragement did the Israelite leader give before the crossing?
6. How did the Israelites commemorate or celebrate the successful crossing?
7. In what ways did God show faithfulness to His people?

Ask a volunteer from each group to write their group's responses on the handout. After calling time, ask volunteers from each group to present their findings before the class.

Then, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–How is God's provision through the waters a display of His faithfulness? 2–What was the significance of the memorial at Gilgal? 3–What kinds of memorials throughout history have people created to remind them of God's faithfulness?

Option: Distribute copies of the "Responding to Faithfulness" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Direct learners to work in pairs to complete it as indicated. If time allows, ask volunteers to share their responses before the whole class.

Into Life

Lead into the final section of the lesson by saying, "We've studied how the Israelites created a stone memorial to celebrate God's faithfulness. Even though we may not have access to stones, we can still create our own 'monument of memory' to celebrate God's work in our lives."

Based on the interests of your class members, choose one or more of the following activities to help them remember and celebrate God's faithfulness.

Illustrating Faithfulness. Distribute poster board and markers to the class. Invite participants to create an image depicting how they have each experienced God's acts of faithfulness.

Stories of God's Work. Distribute an index card and pen to each participant. Direct them to write a brief report detailing a time when they experienced God's work of faithfulness. Then ask volunteers to read their examples for the class.

Great Is Thy Faithfulness. Distribute copies of the "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" activity from the activity page. Have learners work with a partner to complete as indicated before discussing conclusions as a whole class.

Joshua Fights for God

Devotional Reading: Psalm 108
Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 7; Joshua 6; 8:1–29; 10:28–43; 11:1–23

Joshua 11:6–9, 16–23

6 And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.

7 So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them.

8 And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.

9 And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

16 So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same;

17 Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them.

18 Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

19 There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle.

20 For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

21 And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities.

22 There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.

23 So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.

Key Text

For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. **—Joshua 11:20**

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 1: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify challenging phrases and contexts in the text.
2. Explain how Joshua's actions made way for the receipt of the Lord's inheritance.
3. Discuss why this text presents challenges to modern readers.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Brazen Audacity
- B. Lesson Context: Historical
- C. Lesson Context: Literary

I. At the River (Joshua 11:6–9)
- A. The Lord's Assurance (v. 6)
  The Battle of Thermopylae
- B. Joshua's Action (v. 7)
- C. The Lord's Power (v. 8)
- D. Joshua's Obedience (v. 9)

II. Through the Land (Joshua 11:16–23)
- A. Waged War (vv. 16–19)
- B. Hardened Hearts (v. 20)
- C. Certain Conquest (vv. 21–22)
- D. Integral Inheritance (v. 23)
  Follow the Directions

Conclusion
- A. Sobering Events of Salvation History
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Brazen Audacity

One observer described the two-man action as "surreal." Another called it an act of "brazen audacity." But war often creates shortages, and wartime shortages lead people to take actions they wouldn't otherwise contemplate.

Such was the case during the war in Ukraine in 2024. After a failed Russian attack, Ukrainian defenders came across an abandoned Russian T-72 tank on the battlefield. The Ukrainians needed a tank, so two soldiers went after it while under enemy fire in the darkness of night. They found the tank was in perfect working condition, aside from being immobilized by wire entangled in the treads. They removed the wire, started the engine, and the tank was theirs.

The wartime actions in today's lesson are equally brazen, if not more so. At first glance, it might appear that the Israelites wasted valuable wartime resources. However, a different story emerges when we consider their source of power.

B. Lesson Context: Historical

After crossing the Jordan River (see Lesson 2), Joshua led the Israelites through the land of Canaan. This campaign included the victories at Jericho (Joshua 6; see Lesson 4) and Ai (8:1–29). However, the Israelites were deceived by the Gibeonites, resulting in an inappropriate covenant with them (Joshua 9). In the cases of both Ai and the Gibeonites, Joshua's decisions revealed a key spiritual weakness by his deciding courses of action without consulting the Lord first (7:3–5; 8:1; 9:14–15). Despite this shortcoming, Joshua and the Israelites defeated many kings and their armies in the southern parts of Canaan (10:16–43).

Having heard of the Israelites' advances, rulers in the northern Canaan formed an alliance (Joshua 11:1–5). Although the leaders of this coalition were each designated as a "king," their respective kingdoms were comparatively small and weak in power. By coming together, they thought they could present an effective, united front that could not be overcome—at least it seemed to be so.

C. Lesson Context: Literary

The book of Joshua is part of the section of the Old Testament designated as the Historical Books; there are twelve of these. The principle of writing a coherent historical account requires that the included elements come together to reveal a narrative regarding plot development and character development. The book of Joshua is no exception to this principle. Many accounts in this book emphasize the unity of the Israelites and their obedience to God, while other accounts pinpoint instances of the people's disobedience and resulting consequences (example: Joshua 7). Together, these accounts convey the central message of the book of Joshua: the Israelites' obedience to God results in their success in taking the land, thus solidifying a unified identity.

Additionally, modern readers might view the text of Joshua as a testimony to God and His people. This testimony reveals God's redemptive power despite human sin. At times, the narrative of Joshua delves into the depths of human depravity experienced by individuals before their rescue. The details, albeit negative, enhance the remarkable nature of God's actions—the greater the transformation from sin to righteousness, the more honor God receives.

What Do You Think?

What other literary genres can you identify in Scripture?

Digging Deeper

How do these genres shape the way we read and interpret Scripture?

I. At the River

(Joshua 11:6–9)

A. The Lord's Assurance (v. 6)

6a. And the LORD said unto Joshua, Be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel.

In response to the threat of the kings in northern Canaan (see Lesson Context), *the Lord* speaks to *Joshua*. We don't know the exact place where this communication occurs. But it must be close to the waters of Merom because that is where the enemy is located (Joshua 11:5), and the Israelites will attack them there *tomorrow*. This communication seems to occur after a multi-day march of over sixty miles northward, from the area of Jericho and Gilgal (10:43).

This instance is not the first time Joshua has heard God say *be not afraid*. Joshua heard the same command when he led the people into battle in southern Canaan (Joshua 8:1; 10:8, 25). As Joshua faces the Canaanite coalition from the north, he is again reminded that God's presence empowers him to rise above fear (compare 1:9).

Considering the armies Joshua faces (see Lesson Context), it is understandable why he might be fearful. The collective size of the enemy force is impressive, numbered "as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many" (Joshua 11:4). Even so, the Lord promises swift military success; in less than twenty-four hours, He will *deliver* the enemies of *Israel* over to them.

What Do You Think?

Can you recall a time when you sensed God encouraging you to "be not afraid"?

Digging Deeper

How does the promise of God's presence and provision give you strength when the future feels uncertain?

6b. Thou shalt hough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire.

Joshua and his army fought during the period when the Late Bronze Age (1550–1200 BC) was giving way to the Early Iron Age. People had already been aware of and used iron for hundreds of years (example: Genesis 4:22), but its application in weaponry did not predominate until about 1200 BC. The presence of "chariots of iron" among the Canaanites gave them a significant technological advantage (Joshua 17:16, 18; compare 1 Samuel 13:19–22).

The two commands in this half-verse may seem puzzling at first. If the Israelites end up capturing *horses* as well as *chariots*, wouldn't it be advantageous to keep them? However, God instructs the

Visual for
Lessons 3 & 4



Display this map as you discuss the places mentioned in Lessons 3 and 4.

Israelites not to capture and keep them. This directive is likely intended to keep the Israelites focused on God as their source of strength, rather than relying on weapons and animals of war (contrast 1 Kings 4:26; 10:26). Thus, the chariots are to be burned and the horses hamstrung (the meaning of the older English word *hough*).

The Battle of Thermopylae

A significant battle of the Greco-Persian Wars (492–449 BC) is the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC. Thermopylae was a strategic pass through the mountains near the Aegean Sea. In this location, a Greek force of about 7,000, led by 300 Spartan warriors, faced the Persian army, which numbered about 120,000 by modern estimates.

The Spartans had two key advantages: military skill and their position on the terrain. The mountain pass was a "choke point," too narrow for Persian troops to advance as a large group. This advantage enabled the outnumbered Spartans to hold their ground against overwhelming odds. The Greeks eventually were outflanked when a traitor revealed an alternate route. But the defense at Thermopylae lasted long enough for Greek commanders to make further preparations elsewhere.

The first part of the battle is notable in demonstrating effective military strategy. In contrast, the Israelites' success during the conquest of Canaan was directly tied to the Lord's power and provision.

Thus, effective service would seem to rely on being "wise as serpents" in using our skills while we are "harmless as doves" in relying on God's power (Matthew 10:16). Where are you in that dynamic? —BC

B. Joshua's Action (v. 7)

7. So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them.

The word *suddenly* indicates an unexpected, surprise attack (compare Joshua 10:9). The enemy is the Canaanite coalition led by Jabin, king of Hazor (11:1; see Lesson Context).

The exact location of *the waters of Merom* is unknown. This account is the only place in Scripture that mentions the site (compare Joshua 11:5). Commentators suggest that it points to some local springs of water a few miles west of the Sea of Galilee.

C. The Lord's Power (v. 8)

8. And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephothmaim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining.

The book of Joshua does not provide the specifics of this battle. The lack of details is yet another way the narrative de-emphasizes the Israelites' success in conjunction with their planning or military strength. Instead, their surprise attack against a much stronger military force succeeds because *the Lord* delivers the enemies into their *hand*.

The attack causes the coalition of Canaanites to fragment in several directions. The Phoenician city of *Zidon* (also known as Sidon; Genesis 10:19) along the Mediterranean coastline about fifty miles north-northwest of the battlefield. Others flee to *Misrephothmaim,* about twenty miles due west. Still others escape *eastward* to *the valley of Mizpeh*.

The text implies that Joshua divides his forces to pursue each element of the now-fractured Canaanite coalition as they retreat. This goes against the typical principles of warfare, since dividing forces introduces the risk that those forces will be more

easily defeated. But Joshua's taking of this risk reveals his trust in the Lord. The result is that the enemy alliance is destroyed to the point that *none* remain. This status also applied to the kingdoms of southern Canaan (Joshua 10:28–42).

However, later accounts indicate that the Israelites were unable to entirely remove the Canaanites from the land (Joshua 15:13–15; Judges 1:19). Therefore, we may interpret this phrase—and others that follow (Joshua 11:20–21, below)—as examples of intentionally hyperbolic language frequently found in ancient Near Eastern war narratives.

Despite the hyperbolic language, the Israelites' conquest is effective. It removes the Canaanites' collective identity, characterized by violence and immorality, from the land (see Leviticus 18:24–30; Deuteronomy 9:4–5). This removal ensures that the region would be purified from sin, allowing God's holiness to be manifest in and through the Israelites and the land.

What Do You Think?

How might you respond to someone who sees this verse as evidence that God is violent or unloving?

Digging Deeper

How will your response balance human sin with God's holiness?

D. Joshua's Obedience (v. 9)

9. And Joshua did unto them as the LORD bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.

Joshua obeys the Lord's command regarding the *horses* and *chariots* of the enemy (see commentary on Joshua 11:6, above).

II. Through the Land

(Joshua 11:16–23)

In the intervening verses not part of today's lesson text, attention is paid to Joshua's destruction of the city of Hazor and the execution of its king, since it was he who had initiated the coalition. Joshua is depicted as obeying the commands that the Lord initially gave to Moses (see Numbers 33:50–52; Deuteronomy 7:2). Resources are plundered, livestock taken, and inhabitants killed.

A. Waged War (vv. 16–19)

16. So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same.

This verse and the next offer a parallel to what is stated in Joshua 10:40–41: what Joshua did to the kingdoms of the northern cities, he has also done to the kingdoms of the southern cities. While we may not know the exact location of some of these areas, they would have been familiar to the original audience.

The land spans from *the hills* near Galilee in the north to *the south country* of the Negev, including the valley, the plain, and the foothills of *the mountain of Israel* in *Goshen*. Of note, this "Goshen" is not the same location as the place in Egypt where Jacob settled (Genesis 47:27). Instead, it is a district in southern Palestine (Joshua 10:41) and a particular village (15:51). *Joshua* and the Israelites now control the northern and central parts of Canaan.

How to Say It

Ai	*Ay*-eye
Anak	*Ay*-nak
Anakims	*An*-a-kims
Ashdod	*Ash*-dod
Baalgad	*Bay*-ul-gad
Gath	Gath (*a* as in *bath*)
Gibeon	*Gib*-e-un (*G* as in *get*)
Goshen	*Go*-shen
Halak	*Hay*-lak
Hazor	*Hay*-zor
Hermon	*Her*-mun
Hivites	*Hi*-vites
Jabin	*Jay*-bin
Misrephothmaim	Miz-re-foth-*ma*-im
Mizpeh	*Miz*-peh
Negev	*Neg*-ev
Phoenician	Fuh-*nish*-un
Seir	*See*-ir
Zidon	*Zye*-dun

17a. Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baalgad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon.

More specifics are noted. *Mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir,* marks the southernmost border of Israel. Seir is another name for Edom, the neighboring country located south and east of the Dead Sea (Genesis 32:3). To the north, the conquered land extends to *Baalgad*, near the foothills of *mount Hermon* in *Lebanon*. The described region is extensive.

17b–18. And all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.

The summary continues. The conquest of Canaan began with an advance into the central region of the land, starting with the destruction of the cities of Jericho and Ai (Joshua 5:13–6:24; 8:1–29). From there, the Israelites shifted their focus to the southern area of Canaan, where they defeated the kings of that region (10:28–42). Subsequently, Joshua and the Israelites focused on removing the coalition of northern kings and their cities. Joshua 12 features a complete list of the kings and cities defeated. The last verse of that chapter says that there were thirty-one such kings.

19. There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle.

The people and events in this verse refer to the events mentioned in Joshua 9. Hivite messengers deceived the Israelites (Joshua 9:3–6). Through this deception, *the Hivites* negotiated a *peace* treaty with Joshua (9:15). After discovering the Hivites' deceit, the leaders of the Israelites agreed to uphold the treaty and vowed to protect *the inhabitants of Gibeon*. This decision was in direct disobedience to earlier commands (see Deuteronomy 7:1–2; 20:16–17).

B. Hardened Hearts (v. 20)

20. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

We may wonder about the phrase *for it was of the Lord to harden their hearts.* Does this mean that it was not of the Canaanites' own free will that they resisted? Not at all. The Canaanites had rejected the true God; their sins had become "full" (Genesis 15:16). With hardened hearts, they fought in allegiance to their fictitious gods.

The spies Joshua sent to Jericho reported that the people were filled with fear (Joshua 2:11, 24). Instead of this fear driving the Canaanites toward God, it positions them against Him. The heart-hardening from the Lord may be interpreted as the Lord giving the Canaanites the courage of their convictions. The concept is similar to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in Egypt (Exodus 4:21; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17; compare Romans 9:18).

What Do You Think?

What are ways we can guard against developing hardened hearts toward God?

Digging Deeper

How can regular prayer, repentance, Bible study, and community help keep your heart open and responsive to God?

C. Certain Conquest (vv. 21–22)

21–22. And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained.

The Anakims, descendants of Anak (Numbers 13:22, 28, 32–33), reside near *Hebron*. That city lies about twenty miles south of the town later known as Jerusalem. Hebron and nearby *Debir* and *Anab* are located in Canaan's hill country west of the Dead Sea. When the twelve Israelite spies investigated the land, the presence of the Anakims instilled great fear (Numbers 13:31–33; Deuteronomy 1:28; 9:2).

Although none of the Anakims remain in *the land of the children of Israel*, the victory is not total since some manage to escape to *Gaza*, *Gath*, and *Ashdod*.

D. Integral Inheritance (v. 23)

23a. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes.

This verse serves as the halfway point for the book of Joshua; it repeats the main themes and events of the book thus far. The promises made by *Moses* regarding the land have come to fruition (see Exodus 23:27–31; 34:11). The Lord keeps His promises, and Joshua takes *the whole land* of Canaan by relying on God (see Joshua 10–11). The phrase "the whole land" is meant to be understood as "the whole land as described thus far." Joshua 13:1–7 makes clear that there's more work to do. The second half of the book will recount how Joshua divided the land and its cities among various *divisions* and *tribes*.

Follow the Directions

My family often teases me about my struggles with the GPS navigation app on my smartphone. More times than I would like to admit, I miss the app's cues for turns at intersections and exits on the interstate. On occasion, I doubt the app's directions and, instead, rely on my intuition. However, no matter how much I trust my instincts, they can't compare to the guidance provided by the app (as long as the map software is up to date).

Joshua heard and obeyed God's directions for conquering the land. He followed God's instructions, no matter how challenging they seemed. The result was victory and a renewed collective identification as God's people.

What must happen for you to rely less on your intuition and knowledge and more on the wisdom and power of God? —LMW

23b. And the land rested from war.

Parts of the land have yet to be conquered (see Joshua 13:1–6), but widespread conflict stops. In something of a footnote, Joshua 14:6–15 discusses further the conflict with the Anakims. That section also concludes with the phrase *and the land had rest from war* (compare Deuteronomy 12:10; 25:19; Joshua 1:13, 15).

Conclusion

A. Sobering Events of Salvation History

Scripture's accounts of the conquest of Canaan raise questions and concerns for modern readers. The themes of extreme violence, scorched-earth warfare, and the merciless destruction of cities and people challenge our sensibilities. We wonder why God would not only allow but also command such things.

However, as we read these accounts, it's essential to consider the context in which they were written. These warfare texts should not be read as glorifying senseless destruction and violence. Instead, they were written for the Israelites at a particular time to remind them of the necessity for spiritual purity in the land.

The sin of the Canaanites had stained the land, and if they remained in the land, their pagan practices could lead others into sin (Numbers 33:55–56). Thus, their corrupting influence needed to be removed to provide God with a specific location where His holy purpose and presence might be established—a purpose and presence focused on bringing the Messiah into the world. Is that how you view the sometimes-sobering events of salvation history?

What Do You Think?

What aspects of today's lesson might feel challenging or unsettling to modern readers of Joshua?

Digging Deeper

How has this study shaped how you will approach the book of Joshua in the future?

B. Prayer

Lord God, grant us wisdom when we study challenging passages of Scripture. Help us be better attentive to the leading of the Spirit to comprehend how You have worked through Your people in history. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Scripture reveals God's work in history.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Write the following sentences on the board for the whole class to see:

1–I could never worship a god who directed someone to kill without mercy.
2–God wants peace, not violence.
3–Since God is good, I don't believe He has ever wanted someone to suffer.
4–I understand most of the Bible and don't worry about the difficult parts.

Divide participants into small groups to discuss whether they agree or disagree with each sentence and their reasons for their responses. After a few minutes of discussion, reconvene the class and invite volunteers to share responses to the sentences.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "In today's study, we'll see how Joshua followed God's directives. Although we may be uncomfortable with some of the details we read, we'll examine why these particular directives were significant."

Into the Word

Distribute pens and handouts (you prepare) that include the statements below for small-group work. Have participants work together in study pairs or triads to (1) determine whether each statement is true or false, (2) jot a verse reference beside each statement to indicate where in the narrative the answer is found, and (3) write a few words that would make the false statements become true statements. (*Expected conclusions*: all statements are false.)

1–The Lord promised to deliver the enemies of the Israelites within a month.
2–The Lord encouraged Joshua to seize the enemy's chariots and horses for future battles.
3–After Joshua and the Israelites launched an attack at the waters of Merom, the Israelites retreated.
4–Following the battle, Joshua rode the enemy's horses and took command of their chariots.
5–Joshua defeated the enemy armies and imprisoned their kings.
6–Most Canaanite cities established covenants of peace with the Israelites.
7–The Lord softened the hearts of the Canaanites, leading them to worship Him.
8–Joshua eliminated the tribal divisions among the Israelites so that everyone could share in the land.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Questions, I've Got Questions" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Encourage learners to work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–Why did the Lord command Joshua to disable the horses and burn the chariots? 2–Why did the Lord harden the hearts of the Canaanites? 3–What was the significance that the Lord directed the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites completely? 4–Why was the land called an "inheritance"?

Into Life

Begin by saying, "Today's Scripture text includes some of the most challenging passages we might encounter. When we read texts that include violence, we might want to ignore the violence or accept the violence without a critical perspective."

Invite volunteers to share why today's Scripture texts challenge modern readers. Write responses on the board. (*Possible responses may include warfare, the destruction of people, and God's hardening of the hearts of Canaanites.*)

Invite participants to work with a partner to discuss how they respond to challenging passages of Scripture. To inspire discussion, write the following possible responses on the board:

1–I ignore the challenging texts.
2–I reject those sections of Scripture and concentrate on the teachings of Jesus.
3–I study commentary that helps me better understand Scripture.
4–I trust God for what I don't understand and worship Him for what I know about Him.

Allow time for pairs to discuss and make a plan for how to approach difficult passages of Scripture.

Rahab Welcomes Spies

Devotional Reading: Matthew 25:31–46
Background Scripture: Joshua 2; 6:16–25; Matthew 1:5; James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31

Joshua 2:8–13

8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11 And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

Joshua 6:16–17

16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

17 And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.



Key Text

The city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. **—Joshua 6:17**

Image © Getty Images

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 1: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize what Rahab and the people of Jericho knew about God.
2. Explain how Rahab's knowledge of God influenced her and led to Jericho's defeat.
3. Recall an instance when God used an unexpected person to accomplish His will.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Help in Surprising Places
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Lord's Reputation (Joshua 2:8–13)
- A. Feeling Fearful (vv. 8–9)
  Courage in Unexpected Places
- B. Melting Hearts (vv. 10–11)
  Aid from Unexpected Allies
- C. Swearing Kindness (vv. 12–13)

II. The Lord's Victory (Joshua 6:16–17)
- A. The Final Lap (v. 16)
- B. The Results (v. 17)

Conclusion
- A. Faith Prompts the Unexpected
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Help in Surprising Places

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the United States, resources were developed to help liberate people experiencing enslavement in the South. One such resource was an informal network called "The Underground Railroad." It was never an actual railroad but a series of safe houses and routes that assisted enslaved people in their escape to free states and Canada. Along the route, many people risked their lives and livelihoods to aid those traveling along the "railway."

One notable "conductor" was an abolitionist named Levi Coffin, Jr. (1798–1877). Born in North Carolina, Coffin was an unexpected figure in the abolition movement, having been born and raised on a farm in the South. Despite this background, he and his family opposed slavery and took significant steps to educate enslaved individuals and shelter those who had escaped. In 1826, Coffin moved to Indiana, where, for the next twenty years, his home was a significant stop on the Underground Railroad. Travelers designated the stop as the "Grand Central Station of the Underground Railroad."

God often uses people in surprising ways. Last week's lesson covers the events of the Israelite conquest of northern Canaan (Joshua 11; see Lesson 3). In today's lesson, however, we take a step back in the timeline to examine how a non-Israelite surprisingly chose to assist the Israelites as they entered the land of Canaan.

B. Lesson Context

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites were on the verge of crossing the Jordan River into the promised land. Moses had died, and the new leader, Joshua, initiated the conquest by sending two spies on a reconnaissance mission to evaluate the land of Canaan in general and the city of Jericho in particular (Joshua 2:1). During Moses' leadership, the Lord commanded that twelve spies be sent into the land (Numbers 13), one of whom was Joshua himself (13:8; 14:6, 30, 38; etc.). However, this time, the decision to send spies was likely Joshua's. He undoubtedly

wanted to know more about Jericho's fortifications and its inhabitants. Cities in the ancient world were situated in locations that favored three things: defensibility, access to water, and access to trade routes. Jericho was no exception.

The city of Jericho mentioned in the Old Testament was located northwest of the Dead Sea and about five miles west of the Jordan River. Freshwater springs are in the region, causing the city to experience fertility in the wilderness, leading to the city's nickname, "the city of palm trees" (Deuteronomy 34:3; 2 Chronicles 28:15). Archeology reveals that there is more than one location for Jericho as the city was rebuilt from time to time (compare Joshua 2:1; 6:26; 8:2; Judges 3:13; 2 Kings 2:4). The complex rebuilt by Herod is mentioned in the New Testament (examples: Mark 10:46; Luke 19:1). The modern city of Jericho includes more than one of the ancient sites.

The Israelite spies entered Jericho and went to the house of a woman named Rahab. The text refers to her as a "harlot" (Joshua 2:1), an older English word for "prostitute." The underlying Hebrew word has a broad range of meanings, including "prostitute" or "innkeeper." Centuries later, the writers of the New Testament, who wrote in ancient Greek, identified her as a prostitute (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Regardless of her profession, she was an independent woman with financial means whose house may have been similar to a modern-day hostel or motel.

As a bit of speculation, the spies may have gone to Rahab's place because (1) strangers going to her home would not be unusual, (2) the location of her home on the wall could facilitate an emergency escape, and/or (3) the Lord led them there because she was an astute individual who was developing a faith in the God of Israel.

But the spies *were* noticed. During the ensuing investigation, Rahab lied to the king and misdirected the pursuers (Joshua 2:2–7). Our lesson text begins with Rahab's revealing of her motives for hiding the Israelite spies.

How to Say It

Amorites	*Am*-uh-rites
Canaanite	*Kay*-nu-***nite***
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-*ahn*-uh-me
Elohim (Hebrew)	E-*lo*-heem
Herod	*Hair*-ud
Jericho	*Jair*-ih-co
Rahab	*Ray*-hab
Sihon	*Sigh*-hun
Yahweh (Hebrew)	*Yah*-weh

I. The Lord's Reputation

(Joshua 2:8–13)

A. Feeling Fearful (vv. 8–9)

8. And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof.

The rooftops of ancient houses were typically flat, in contrast to the multi-pitched roofs of many modern structures. Ancient rooftops often served multiple functions, including spaces for household members to live, work, or store items. The rooftop was the most private and secluded part of an ancient house (examples: 1 Samuel 9:25; 2 Samuel 11:2), making it suitable for hiding the two Israelite spies.

9. And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

The men to whom Rahab speaks are the two spies sent out by Joshua. Rahab could easily expose the spies' presence to the authorities of Jericho. Instead, she hides them on her rooftop and directs the authorities elsewhere (see Lesson Context). What Rahab says now in the verse before us reveals the motive for her act of treason against the king.

First, she realizes that *the Lord*, the God of Israel, has *given* the *land* of Canaan—the land on which Jericho sits—to the Israelites. The title *LORD* (with a large capital letter and three small capital letters) reflects God's identity, often transliterated as "Yahweh," meaning "I that I am" or "I will be what I will be" (see Exodus 3:13–14). It conveys God's reliability to be Himself, not fickle or changing like people or pagan gods (compare James 1:17). Rahab could instead use the word *Elohim,* a designation used for both pagan gods

and the true God (example: Leviticus 19:4), but the text doesn't indicate that she does.

Events that result in *terror* and hand-wringing among *all the inhabitants of the land* have had a further effect on Rahab personally: the events draw forth her recognition of who is behind it all. The nature of those events is described in our next verse.

What Do You Think?

Can you recall a time when you sensed God at work in a situation before others did?

Digging Deeper

How did your awareness of God's work affect your actions, choices, or relationships in that moment?

Courage in Unexpected Places

He was not someone people would expect to become a hero. In 2013, seventy-one-year-old William Ayotte was watching television in his home in Manitoba, Canada. Suddenly, he heard a woman's screams outside. Looking out his window, he saw a large bear grasping his neighbor, waving her in the air.

Ayotte grabbed a nearby shovel, ran to the bear, and slammed the shovel into the bear's eye. That was enough to startle the bear into letting go of the woman—and turning to attack Ayotte. Other neighbors joined the struggle, using gunshots and trucks to scare away the bear before worse injuries occurred. Ayotte did not act alone, but had he not responded first, the woman may have been killed. An elderly man with a shovel was not necessarily the type of person expected to lead the charge against an aggressive bear.

Exceptional courage sometimes can be found among the people we would least expect to see it. Rahab demonstrated remarkable courage, protecting the Israelite spies from the authorities. In what ways is God calling you to show exceptional courage that is countercultural? —JW

B. Melting Hearts (vv. 10–11)

10. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

Rahab reveals the basis of the people's anxiety. The first of two victories she mentions, the parting of *the water of the Red sea*, was a key feature of the escape from enslavement in *Egypt*. In the Israelites' moment of need, the Lord *dried up* the water, allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land (Exodus 13:17–14:31).

The second victory occurred in the region east of the *Jordan* River, where Kings *Sihon* and *Og* led the *Amorites* in an attack against the Israelites. However, through the power of the Lord, the Amorite forces were defeated and *utterly destroyed* (Numbers 21:21–35; Deuteronomy 2:31–3:11).

Not to be overlooked is that these two events occur about forty years apart! Rahab's knowledge of the defeat of the kings is easy to understand, having recently happened. But where does her knowledge of the decades-past parting of the Red Sea come from? Some who live in Canaan and Jericho may remember having heard of that miracle when they were much younger. In any case, Rahab recalls something about God's power that the Israelites themselves often seem to forget (compare Numbers 14:11).

What Do You Think?

What accounts of God's power—either from Scripture or your own experience—have deepened your understanding of who He is?

Digging Deeper

How will you share these stories with others to build their faith?

11a. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you.

At this point, the Israelites have not yet crossed the Jordan River to enter the land of Canaan. To outside observers, it appears they have been stalled for some forty years on the other side of that river (see Numbers 14:20–25, 34). But news of the recent defeat of Kings Sihon and Og has alarmed

the Canaanites, shaking them from their complacency; this is a fulfillment of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 2:24–25.

As a result of having *heard these things* their *hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man*. This melting of hearts and disappearance of courage will only intensify as events progress (Joshua 5:1; 7:5; 14:8). The Canaanites' lack of *courage* is not to be mirrored by the Israelites—quite the opposite. The courage leaders exhibit is contagious, and Joshua is personally challenged several times to act courageously in his role as a leader (Deuteronomy 31:4–8, 23; Joshua 1:6–7, 9, 18). As the military campaign progresses, he will model courage for the people to emulate (10:25).

11b. For the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.

Rahab again refers to *the Lord* by His unique designation (see commentary on Joshua 2:9, above). Scripture does not explicitly state that she completely abandons her loyalty to the pagan gods of the Canaanites. However, she does acknowledge to the spies that their *God* rules both *heaven above* and the *earth beneath.* This confession reveals her awareness of His supremacy and power over all creation (see Deuteronomy 4:39). Any lesser "god" must be subservient to Him (compare Exodus 15:11; 18:11; Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalms 135:5; 136:2).

Any appeal for deliverance she might make to a pagan deity would be a failure to take into account the absolute authority of the Lord God. Rahab's confession of the Lord's authority is undoubtedly unexpected, as it opposes the norms of the inhabitants of Jericho and Canaan. Centuries later, another woman of Canaanite heritage will demonstrate persistent and surprising faith, becoming an example for others (Matthew 15:21–28).

What Do You Think?

What "lesser gods" (idols, distractions, or misplaced priorities) tend to compete with your focus on God's authority?

Digging Deeper

What practices or habits help you cultivate a sense of awe in the Lord as the true God of heaven and earth?

Aid from Unexpected Allies

In the 1990s, my husband and I served as missionaries in the former Soviet Union. Much of our work relied on the assistance of local translators, and we often collaborated with unbelievers. My husband worked with one such translator, Igor. This translator helped my husband answer people's questions about faith, God, and the Bible. Since the same questions came up repeatedly, Igor started anticipating and answering the questions himself. Although he did not consider himself a follower of Jesus, he became skilled at explaining the significance of faith in Christ to others.

Igor and many other translators did not begin working with missionaries out of love for Jesus or a passion for the church. Most viewed the work as an opportunity to earn money and gain career experience. However, many became unexpected allies over time as they learned the gospel and committed to following Christ.

Rahab was also an unexpected ally. She was not a Hebrew but a citizen of a hostile people. However, she acknowledged the Lord God and protected the Israelite spies. This aided them in taking possession of the land. Are you attentive to "unexpected allies" who God may place in your life? Are you alert to opportunities to be such an ally? —LMW

C. Swearing Kindness (vv. 12–13)

12. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token.

In this context, the word *pray* is an old English word meaning "to make a request." Having acknowledged the supremacy of *the Lord*, Rahab negotiates with the spies in terms of a *quid pro quo* ("something for something else"). The statements about a mutual showing of *kindness* elegantly understate a brutal reality: lives are at stake! The two spies recognize this instantly in their reply, "Our life for yours" (Joshua 2:14).

Rahab has already demonstrated the type of kindness she has in mind by misdirecting the search party, having done so at significant personal risk (see Lesson Context). In modern terms,



Visual for Lessons 3 & 4

Display this map as you discuss the places mentioned in Lessons 3 and 4.

we might say that the Israelites "owe her" a guarantee of personal safety in return. But she is asking for more than that. She wants the guarantee to extend also to her *father's house*.

The *true token* she seeks is a physical item representing her request. We might think of it in terms of collateral of some sort (compare Genesis 38:15–18). The text does not reveal the nature of that token. Later verses state that a cord of scarlet thread hung from her window as a signal to the Israelites regarding the location of her household (Joshua 2:18). The word translated *token* is occasionally connected with covenants in the Old Testament (examples: Genesis 9:12, 17; 17:11). If the idea is more along the lines of "covenant," the reference may be to the oath that the spies take in Joshua 2:17.

13. And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

Rahab's request for safety extends well beyond that of her own life. We do not know whether her family members have affirmed the supremacy of the Lord God as she has. Eventually, she will have to reveal to her family the agreement she made to protect the Israelite spies. On the one hand, Rahab is guilty of the high crime of treason. On the other hand, that very act results in the saving of several family members (Joshua 6:22–23). It comes down to the issue of conflicting loyalties. When loyalties conflict, courage and clear thinking are called for.

The spies outline three conditions Rahab must meet for her request to be granted. These are listed in Joshua 2:14, 17–19, not in today's printed text.

II. The Lord's Victory

(Joshua 6:16–17)

After the rooftop conversation, Rahab helps the spies escape through a window in her house that is connected to the city wall (Joshua 2:15). After three days in hiding, the spies return to the Israelite camp and share with Joshua the findings of their reconnaissance mission (2:23–24).

The crossing of the Jordan River and its effects come next (Joshua 3:1–5:1; see Lesson 2). Passover is observed (5:2–10), and the Israelites begin living off the produce of the land (5:11–12).

As the Israelites near Jericho, the Lord instructs the Israelite fighting men to march around the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day (Joshua 5:13–6:7). Our lesson text resumes on the seventh of those seven circuits.

A. The Final Lap (v. 16)

16. And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

The Israelites' actions reflect the directives of Joshua 6:6–9. Per those instructions, seven *priests* carrying *trumpets* went ahead of the ark of the covenant. The ancient Israelites have two kinds of trumpets. The most common ones are made from rams' horns. Mention of this kind of trumpet occurs about seventy times in the Old Testament, and that is what is in view here. Another kind of trumpet is made from silver (example: Numbers 10:2).

The functions of these two kinds of trumpets can overlap, as both are used to signal impending action. In this verse, the ram's horn conveys military signals during battle. An example of the other kind of trumpet also being used in this manner can be found in Numbers 31:6.

On this, the *seventh* circuit on the seventh day, Joshua issues a command different from those of the other days. At first, the Israelites were to keep silent while the horns blew. But at Joshua's command, the

army was to *shout,* the wall would collapse, and the army would rush in (Joshua 6:5, 10). Joshua speaks confidently, knowing that *the Lord* will provide victory by giving *the city* to the Israelites.

What Do You Think?

When has God asked you to act in faith before you saw the results?

Digging Deeper

What is God calling you to do right now that requires bold, obedient faith—your version of the command "Shout!"?

B. The Results (v. 17)

17a. And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD.

The Hebrew term translated *accursed* appears dozens of times in the Old Testament. More than one-third of those are found in the book of Joshua (here and in Joshua 6:18 [twice]; 7:1 [twice], 11–13 [four times], 15; 22:20). The word refers to the complete destruction of material wealth, cities, and even people within the context of conquest. The verb form of the word appears in Joshua 2:10, where it is translated as "utterly destroyed" (see above). By setting certain things aside for destruction, those things are dedicated *to the Lord.*

This word expresses a sacred process intended to establish the holiness God desired for both the land and the people (compare Leviticus 27:28–29; Joshua 6:18–19). The ancient inhabitants of the land had defiled it through idolatry, violence, and immorality. As the Israelites entered the land, God wanted them—and the land—to be undefiled by sin (Leviticus 18:3, 24–30). Therefore, God gave the command for destruction to a particular people in a specific time and context. The purpose of this destruction was to remove any and all influence that could lead the Israelites into sin and idolatry.

17b. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

Joshua intends to honor the agreement his spies made with Rahab—and he does. While Jericho is destroyed (Joshua 6:21, 24), *Rahab* and *all that are with her in the house* are spared (6:25). Through the blessing and hospitality shown to this Canaanite woman and her family, we see an early example of the fulfillment that God promised the nations through the seed of Abraham (see Genesis 12:2–3).

Conclusion

A. Faith Prompts the Unexpected

Rahab's faith and bravery serve as an example for the people of God yet today. The writer of Hebrews cites her faith for receiving and protecting the spies (Hebrews 11:31). Additionally, James extols Rahab's actions, calling her "righteous" (James 2:25). The Gospel of Matthew mentions her as an ancestor of King David and, ultimately, of Jesus the Messiah (Matthew 1:5–6, 16).

When we examine the account of Rahab, the Israelite spies, and the destruction of Jericho, we may find our expectations turned upside down. We don't expect a woman in Jericho to offer hospitality to Israelite spies. Nor do we anticipate that a strategy involving marching, shouting, and blowing horns could destroy a city.

But God often works in unexpected ways. The next time He unexpectedly taps you on the shoulder, how will you react—by looking to your weaknesses or to His strength?

What Do You Think?

In what ways will you be more attentive to recognizing and responding to God's unexpected work?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take this week to trust God's direction over your own?

B. Prayer

Lord God, You fulfill Your will through unexpected people and in ways that confound our expectations. Empower us through Your Spirit to expect Your unexpected ways so we can be better conduits of your grace and mercy. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Work with God in His unexpected ways.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Start the class by writing the following heading on the board:

Important lessons to share about God . . .

Ask participants to give responses to the heading. Write each response on the board. After gathering responses, ask each participant to choose the two responses they consider most important from the list. Make tally marks next to each response chosen. Discuss the conclusions as a whole class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "What I Know, How I Learned" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before sharing responses with a partner.

Transition into Bible study by saying, "We have all learned about God through various sources. Today, we will study a woman who learned about God's power and strength. Let's explore how she responded to her knowledge of God in a way that was different from her neighbors."

Into the Word

Divide learners into pairs. Distribute handouts (you prepare) and pens to each pair with the following questions:

1–Where did Rahab meet with the spies to ask for a significant favor?
2–What words describe the emotions or feelings of the Canaanites when they heard of the Israelites' advances?
3–What acts of God had the inhabitants of the land heard about prior to the spies' arrival?
4–How were God's power and presence evident to the inhabitants of Jericho?
5–What favor did Rahab request of the spies?
6–What actions did the priests take prior to Joshua's speech to the people?
7. What instructions did Joshua give the Israelites regarding the seventh circuit around the city on the seventh day?

Invite pairs to read Joshua 2:8–13 and 6:16–17 and write responses to the questions on the handout. After calling time, reconvene participants and discuss conclusions as a whole class.

Option. Direct pairs to reread the Scripture text and brainstorm three more questions that help them understand what Rahab and the people of Jericho knew about God. Invite pairs to write these questions on the handouts. Collect the handouts with the new questions and redistribute them to new pairs for study and response.

Ask the following question for whole-class discussion: "How would you describe the relationship between Rahab's knowledge of God, her confession of God's majesty, and her acts of hospitality toward the spies?"

Into Life

Remind learners that the account of Rahab illustrates how the Lord can use unexpected people to accomplish His will. Say, "Let's take a moment to reflect on the people we might view as unexpected candidates to accomplish God's will." Invite participants to share with their previous partner about a time when God used an unexpected person to accomplish His will in their lives.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Unexpected in God's Great Hands" exercise from the activity page. Encourage learners to complete the activity as a take-home during the upcoming week. To encourage completion, state that you will allow time at the beginning of next week's class for learners to share responses.

Conclude class with a prayer, asking the Lord to inspire class members to be "unexpected people" who serve God and accomplish His will in the lives of others.

A Renewed Covenant

Devotional Reading: Jeremiah 31:27–34
Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 29:1–20; Joshua 23–24

Joshua 24:18–27

18 And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God.

19 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

20 If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.



21 And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD.

22 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.

23 Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.

24 And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

25 So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

26 And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.

27 And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.

Key Text

[Joshua said] Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. **—Joshua 24:14b**

Image © Getty Images

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 2: From Settled People to Judges

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Joshua's warning and witness to Israel.
2. Compare the covenant commitments made in Deuteronomy 29:1–20 and Joshua 24:18–27.
3. Make a plan to memorialize their commitment to God.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Picking and Choosing
- B. Lesson Context

I. He Is Our God (Joshua 24:18–24)
- A. Divine Delivery (v. 18)
  Spiritual Lessons in Soapy Water
- B. Word of Warning (vv. 19–20)
- C. Sworn to Serve (vv. 21–24)
  Idolaters Anonymous?

II. We Give Our Witness (Joshua 24:25–27)
- A. Promise of Obedience (v. 25)
- B. Stone of Accountability (vv. 26–27)

Conclusion
- A. We Will Serve the Lord
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Picking and Choosing

"We go to the foreign doctors to cure our malaria," the refugees told the mission staff. "But we go to the witch doctors if we have hepatitis or other problems."

Having access to modern health care was new to these North African refugees. It came about after they had walked for days, fleeing war in their homeland. In the refugee camp, several aid organizations operated medical clinics. The refugees would let the foreign doctors diagnose them and give them medicine for certain health issues. Some refugees would then pay their traditional healers who practiced witchcraft for certain other ailments.

With options available, the refugees quickly tabulated the perceived success rate of each treatment option. Before long, they had decided under what circumstances they would go to the witch doctors or the foreign doctors.

The Israelites under Joshua may have been tempted to employ similar syncretic tactics. "The God of Abraham is good at wars, but Baal is good at crops," they might decide. They could pick and choose which deity—real or imagined—to follow when.

But Joshua would have none of it. In his later years, Joshua forced them to choose. Would they serve God with all their hearts or not?

B. Lesson Context

By the time of the events in today's lesson, the Israelites had defeated various coalitions of Canaanite kings (Joshua 10:28–12:24). However, some parts of the land remained unconquered (13:1–5). Despite this fact, the Lord instructed Joshua to divide the land among the tribes of Israel (13:8–19:51). By allocating the land at this point in time, Joshua demonstrated his trust that God would continue to drive out the other nations and be faithful to His promises to the Israelites (see 23:4–5).

The latter half of the book of Joshua depicts his having become elderly (Joshua 13:1; 23:1). We estimate that Joshua was near the age of 85 (14:10). The land and the people were in a season of peace. The elderly leader gathered the leaders of Israel for

what some see as a final address. It may not have been all that "final" since Joshua lives to be age 110 (24:29)! In any case, this speech took place at Shechem in the central hill country of Palestine, situated between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim (compare Deuteronomy 27:11–13; Joshua 8:30).

In this address, Joshua recounted the history of God's provision, the Lord's faithfulness, their deliverance from Egypt, and, ultimately, their victories in Canaan (Joshua 24:1–13). This history lesson had a point: it encouraged the Israelites to revere God as their only Lord (24:14). The address culminated in a covenant renewal ceremony, referring to the covenant established at Sinai (Exodus 19–24; Deuteronomy 5–6).

I. He Is Our God

(Joshua 24:18–24)

A. Divine Delivery (v. 18)

18. And the LORD drave out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve the LORD; for he is our God.

Seven groups of people are acknowledged to be foes to overcome in the conquest of the promised land (see the complete listing in Deuteronomy 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 24:11). Of these, *the Amorites* seem to be the most troublesome. And the book of Joshua uses the word *Amorites* more than any other book of the Bible.

During the time of the conquest, Amorites lived both east and west of the Jordan River. Before Joshua led the Israelites across that river to attack Jericho, Moses had led the Israelites to defeat two prominent Amorite kings, namely Sihon and Og (Numbers 21:21–35; compare Joshua 2:10). However, even after that conquest was complete, there were five more Amorite kings to be defeated, west of the Jordan (10:1–27). Credit to *the Lord* for these victories predominates those accounts, as it does here. Sadly, Amorite spiritual pollution remains in parts of the land, posing a threat to Israel's allegiance to God (Judges 6:10).

The Israelites recognize the miraculous works of the Lord as a demonstration of His power. They follow Joshua's example and commit to loyal obedience to the most powerful *Lord* and *God* (see Joshua 24:15).

Spiritual Lessons in Soapy Water

One of my earliest memories of doing household chores dates back to when I was three years old. I recall standing on a chair in the kitchen, covered in soapy water, helping my mother wash the dishes in the sink. Over the years, my responsibilities expanded, and my mother began asking me to take on more of the household chores. She taught me the importance of completing the work with a happy, thankful heart.

However, as I entered my preteen years, I began to notice that I did not *feel* happy or thankful while doing chores. I frequently felt like grumbling or complaining instead. My negative attitude led to many arguments between my mother and me. These continued until I understood that maturing meant obeying my mother without complaining. Once I realized this, I made a greater effort to follow her requests and do what she asked.

In the presence of Joshua, the Israelites pledged to serve the Lord and obey His voice. This generation of Israelites had put aside the grumbling tendencies of earlier generations. Having witnessed the Lord's provision of land, the attitudes of this generation changed, and they committed to obeying the Lord.

Are you prone to grumbling before the Lord? If so, what steps can you take to choose to trust and obey? —KS

B. Word of Warning (vv. 19–20)

19a. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD.

With the wisdom of his many years, elderly *Joshua* senses that *the people* of Israel do not fully grasp the nature of their promise. His response may seem harsh or out of place, but his warning that they *cannot serve the Lord* stems from his experience with them. Although they commit themselves to obedience to the Lord (example: Exodus 24:3, 7), their history shows that such commitment tends to be temporary (example: 32:1–6). Therefore, Joshua seems rightly concerned that while the Israelites

have the capacity to serve the Lord in obedience, their willingness to do so may diminish.

Joshua challenges the Israelites to deepen their devotion. Now is the time to make their faith solely in the one true God.

19b. For he is an holy God.

Joshua's warning to the people comes from his knowledge of God's distinct nature as contrasted with the pagan gods of the conquered nations. The Bible often stresses God's unique holiness in different ways. One way is in reference to His transcendent nature; He alone stands apart from creation in the very essence of His being (1 Samuel 2:2; Revelation 15:4; etc.).

Another way to understand God's holiness is to understand it in terms of His complete separation from sin. God's people in both the Old Testament and New Testament eras are to strive for such holiness themselves (Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; quoted in 1 Peter 1:15–16).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to pursue holiness in light of your identity as one who belongs to a holy God?

Digging Deeper

What obstacles do you face in striving for holiness, and how can Scripture, prayer, and accountability help you overcome them?

19c. He is a jealous God.

The Old Testament describes the Lord as *a jealous God* in several other places (Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24; 5:9; 6:15; etc.). We may usually think of the words *jealous* and *jealousy* in negative terms, as in being envious of someone else and coveting what they have. But in God's self-description, the words refer to being intolerant of rivals (compare 32:15–16). The Israelites would enjoy the blessings of the Lord so long as they remained faithful to Him and Him alone (Exodus 20:6).

19d. He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

This warning pertains to the conditions in the Lord's covenant with Israel. If the Israelites fail to comply with these conditions, the Lord will not simply forgive them without consequence. Instead, He will hold them accountable for their *transgressions* and *sins* (see Exodus 34:7; Deuteronomy 28:15–68; Joshua 23:16).

20. If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good.

The ultimate purpose for God's setting apart the promised land was to prepare the way for the Messiah (Deuteronomy 18:15, quoted in Acts 3:19–23). In receiving the land, the ancient Israelites were to realize the necessity to live lives of holiness (Leviticus 20:24, 26). Such lives would reflect their covenant relationship with the Lord (11:44–45; Deuteronomy 7:6–11).

Should they *forsake the Lord*, abandoning their covenant responsibilities and turning to the *strange gods* of the surrounding nations, they would sever the very relationship that was to define them (Deuteronomy 8:19–20). Pagan gods might seem appealing, offering the illusion of benefits such as fertile crops, abundant families, or national safety. However, such idolatry would defile the Israelites' covenant with the Lord as it would violate His explicit command to worship Him alone (Exodus 20:3–5, 23; Deuteronomy 6:14–15).

If the Israelites choose to worship these pagan gods, the Lord will *consume* them with punishment and take away the *good* blessings that He has given them (Joshua 23:15; Deuteronomy 28:64). Such curses will include exile and dispersion among the nations (28:63).

C. Sworn to Serve (vv. 21–24)

21. And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the LORD.

How to Say It

Amorites	*Am*-uh-rites
Canaanite	*Kay*-nu-***nite***
Ebal	*Ee*-bull
Gerizim	*Gair*-ih-zeem or Guh-*rye*-zim
Shechem	*Shee*-kem or *Shek*-em
Sihon	*Sigh*-hun

In response to Joshua's challenge, *the people* of Israel reaffirm their commitment to *the Lord*. The scene is reminiscent of an important event that occurred at Mount Sinai several decades earlier. There, the Lord established His covenant with the Israelites. During that occurrence, Moses read the book of the covenant to them, and they responded, "All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Exodus 24:7).

Another parallel is the previous covenant renewal ceremony at Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30–35) as previously commanded by Moses (Deuteronomy 11:26–32; 27:12–26). Joshua was likely present at these two events, so he has heard the repeated promises of the people!

22. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you the LORD, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses.

The concept of being a witness occurs more than one hundred times in the Old and New Testaments together. Many things are said to serve as witnesses against the peoples, including "heaven and earth" (Deuteronomy 30:19), the "book of the law" (31:26), a "stone" (Joshua 24:27, below), and the Lord Himself (Jeremiah 42:5). The concept is so vital that in several places Scripture points out the impact, motives, or destiny of false witnesses (examples: Deuteronomy 19:17–21; Proverbs 19:9; Acts 6:12–14; 1 Corinthians 15:13–17).

In this case, Joshua does not call upon an external witness. Instead, he appoints the people themselves as *witnesses against* their own testimony. If they turn away from the Lord and start worshiping other gods, they will be their own accusers. As such, they will face the consequences that Joshua stated in Joshua 24:20, above. The people agree to the stated terms, declaring, "*We are witnesses*."

23a. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you.

Joshua's command reveals that idolatry is still present among the Israelites, and its continued presence poses a serious threat to their spiritual health. This had been an issue in the past and continues to be an enduring problem, given how the Old Testament people were inclined to follow *strange gods* (here and Genesis 35:2, 4; Deuteronomy 31:16; 32:16; Joshua 24:20; Judges 10:16; 1 Samuel 7:3; 2 Chronicles 33:15; Jeremiah 5:19; etc.).

What Do You Think?

What are the false gods of contemporary culture that compete for our loyalty to the Lord?

Digging Deeper

What practices help believers resist the temptation to follow these gods?

23b. And incline your heart unto the LORD God of Israel.

The negative thing to stop doing now gives way to the positive thing to start doing. The necessity of properly attuned hearts is also expressed in 1 Kings 8:58 and Psalm 119:36. This refers to a person's total submission to the authority and guidance of *the Lord God of Israel*.

What Do You Think?

Why is it sometimes difficult to fully surrender one's heart to God, even after professing faith in Him?

Digging Deeper

What habits and practices help you soften your heart more fully to God?

Idolaters Anonymous?

Both men admitted to being hopeless drunks. So they set a goal to stay sober and help others overcome addiction to alcohol. Thus was born Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), founded in 1935 by two alcoholics—one a New York stockbroker, the other an Ohio surgeon. Today, there are over two million AA members in about 180 countries.

The success of AA has led to the founding of other "anonymous" groups. These groups are for drug addicts, compulsive shoppers, and even those who cannot seem to control their use of profanity! The literature of these "anonymous" groups often recognizes that the source of the cure is a higher power. That may be a little vague for those who think the reference should be specifically to God.



Visual for Lesson 5. *Display this visual at the close of class as you ask volunteers to share how they put God first.*

But what if you could start a movement that would head off alcoholism before it even got started in a person? It would not be far off the mark to state that God was, in effect, trying to start an "Idolaters Anonymous" movement to prevent idolatry before it could get a toehold. God knew the enticing power that idolatry would have on the Israelites. God also knows the seductive power of idols yet today. Such idols need not be of a physical variety, as we see in 1 Kings 12:28–30 and Isaiah 44:12–20. The more dangerous and challenging to recognize are idols of the heart (Ezekiel 14:3–4, 7). What early warning system can you put in place to avoid this sin? —CRB

24. And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

This is the third time *the people* express the desire to *serve* the *Lord* (compare Joshua 24:18, 21, above). It is easy to give allegiance to the Lord as one goes along with a crowd of people who are doing so. But it is much more challenging to translate that pledge into everyday actions and choices that align with that professed allegiance.

II. We Give Our Witness

(Joshua 24:25–27)

A. Promise of Obedience (v. 25)

25. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.

At *Shechem* (see Lesson Context), the Israelites have committed three times to serve the Lord and have agreed to bear witness against themselves should they fail to uphold this commitment. *Joshua* holds them accountable to these promises. He does so by reaffirming the earlier *covenant* made at Mount Sinai during the leadership of Moses (Exodus 19–24). That initial covenant was first reaffirmed as the Israelites prepared to enter the promised land (Deuteronomy 29). Now that they have settled in the land, Joshua leads them in renewing that covenant, highlighting the continuity in their relationship with the Lord across the generations.

The text does not provide details regarding the specific content of the *statute* and *ordinance*. The two underlying Hebrew words occur in the Old Testament several dozen times in their plural form but only five times in singular form (here and in Exodus 15:25; 1 Samuel 30:25; Ezra 7:10; Psalm 81:4). Joshua is not modifying or changing God's earlier covenant law. Instead, he calls the people to recommit to what has already been promised—to serve and worship the Lord God alone.

What Do You Think?

How can we make our faith commitments more intentional and accountable in public and private ways?

Digging Deeper

In what ways might you create a physical memorial to the faithfulness of God and your commitment to Him?

B. Stone of Accountability (vv. 26–27)

26a. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God.

Scripture rarely uses the description *the book of the law of God* (Nehemiah 8:8, 18; 9:3). In those instances, it may refer to the entirety of the Law of Moses. Another possibility is that it is an early form of the book of Deuteronomy (compare Joshua 1:8; 23:6). A third possibility is that it is a distinct document recording God's histor-

ical dealings with the Israelites. In either case, by writing *these words* in a book, future generations of Israelites will have a record of the promises their ancestors made to worship and obey God alone.

26b. And took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the LORD.

Joshua sets up *a great stone* as a physical reminder of the people's promises to the Lord. This act follows the tradition of establishing physical memorials. These often mark significant encounters with the Lord (compare Genesis 28:18–22; Joshua 4:1–9; see Lesson 2).

Since the time of Abraham, large *oak* trees have been present in Shechem (Genesis 12:6; 35:4). Ancient people often viewed groves of trees as sanctuaries where gods resided. However, in this instance, *the sanctuary of the Lord* likely refers to the tabernacle that had been erected near a specific oak tree. The stone will be a silent but enduring witness to the covenant promises the Israelites reaffirmed.

What Do You Think?

What visible or tangible spiritual reminders have helped anchor your journey of faith?

Digging Deeper

How will you share these reminders with others?

27. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the LORD which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.

These are the last recorded words of *Joshua* before his death at age 110 (Joshua 24:29; Judges 2:8). His declaration foreshadows the sobering realities that the Israelites will face. They would experience prosperity and peace due to their obedience to the Lord (Joshua 24:31; Judges 2:6). However, their commitment is short-lived. Even though they had sworn loyalty to *the Lord . . . God*, they will soon be seduced by the worship of pagan gods. They will break their covenant promises, fail to worship the Lord God, and *deny* Him as God (2:6–13; see Lesson 6).

As promising as the conclusion to the book of Joshua is, the conclusion to the book of Judges is disheartening: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). For the most part, the Israelites refuse to obey the Lord and accept the blessings.

Conclusion

A. We Will Serve the Lord

Notably, the names *Joshua* and *Jesus* come from the same Hebrew verb, meaning "to save." Joshua brought the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan. Jesus, the "captain of [our] salvation" (Hebrews 2:10), leads us toward our promised land of eternal life with God. And as one ponders Joshua's words and the commitment to the Lord that he called for, it is not difficult to recognize similarities to Jesus' teaching about what is required to be His disciple (Luke 14:25–33).

For us to express commitment to serving God means we will honor Jesus as Lord and demonstrate that commitment by serving Him faithfully. Like Joshua's audience, we too must reject the "gods" that threaten to undermine that commitment. Those gods to us are not likely to be statues or images of pagan deities but rather devotion to pursuits—status, wealth, prestige, and comfort—that undermine our commitment to the Lord. We are all guilty of that at times. How do we recognize those times?

B. Prayer

Lord God, You have shown us mercy and revealed Your salvation through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Forgive us for the times we have failed to honor You as our sovereign Lord and God. Expose the false gods that threaten to undermine our commitment to You. Help us be attentive to the Holy Spirit's leading to incline our hearts toward You alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Choose this day who you will serve.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Lead a whole-class discussion about modern covenants and agreements. Begin the conversation by asking the following questions: 1–What are some types of modern covenants or agreements? (Note: the marriage covenant is one of the most common examples of a modern covenant. Other examples of agreements include political treaties, non-disclosure agreements, union contracts, or ordination vows.) 2–What terms might be included in these covenants or agreements? 3–What are the possible consequences of breaking these terms?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Can I Get a Witness?" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in small groups of two or three.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "The Old Testament includes many stories of covenants and agreements. Sometimes, people needed reminders of the promises they had already made. In today's study, we'll examine how Joshua reminded the people of one such covenant and renewed its stipulations."

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups: **Faithful Followers Group** (vv. 18–21), **Witnessing Worshipers Group** (vv. 22–24), and **Covenant Keepers Group** (vv. 25–27). Write the following headers and prompts on the board:

Observe: *Read through Joshua 24:18–27 and focus on your group's assigned verses. What words and details in those verses stand out to the group?*

Explore: *Discuss the significance of your assigned verses within the context of the whole passage.*

Ask*: What question(s) do you have regarding the content in your assigned verses?*

Reflect*: What do the passage and the assigned verses teach you about the Lord and your walk with Him?*

Ask learners to silently read and discuss the prompts. Distribute a sheet of paper and pen to a volunteer from each group. Ask them to write their group's responses to each prompt.

After the allotted time, reconvene the class and invite a volunteer from each group to share a summary of their findings. Record on the board responses related to the themes of covenant, witness, and devotion to the Lord.

Next, invite participants to silently read Deuteronomy 29 and compare the commitments that Moses commanded with those that Joshua commanded in the lesson text. Bring the class back together to discuss their conclusions.

Into Life

Lead into the activity by saying, "God prioritizes His relationship with His people, believers in Christ Jesus. God has invited us into a new covenant with Him through Christ Jesus. Therefore, God asks us to commit to following Him and not be distracted by other 'lesser gods.'"

Encourage participants to work with a partner to brainstorm potential distractions that prevent them from remembering their commitment to God. Write their responses in one column on the board. Ask the pairs to brainstorm ways to overcome those distractions and write those ideas in a second column. Finally, invite the pairs to think of ways to memorialize their commitment to the Lord and write those responses in a third column.

Afterward, invite participants to pray for their partner to encourage them to remember their commitment to the Lord in the upcoming week.

Option. Distribute copies of the "My Stone, My Commitment" exercise from the activity page. Invite participants to complete the exercise at home during the upcoming week. To encourage participation, inform them that time will be allotted at the beginning of the next class period for volunteers to share what they wrote.

A Faithless Generation

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1–14
Background Scripture: Judges 1–2

Judges 2:6–15

6 And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

7 And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

8 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old.

9 And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

10 And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

11 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.



Key Text

The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim. **—Judges 2:11**

Image © Getty Images

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 2: From Settled People to Judges

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the consequences of a faithless generation in Israel.
2. Compare the strengths and weaknesses of Israel's wilderness generation, those who entered the promised land, and the generation of the judges.
3. Write a personal statement of faith and commitment to the Lord.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Caught in a Loop
- B. Lesson Context

I. Generation Gathered (Judges 2:6–9)
- A. Dismissal (vv. 6–7)
- B. Death (vv. 8–9)

II. Generation Grown (Judges 2:10–15)
- A. Disobedience (vv. 10–13)
  Differing Priorities
- B. Defeat (vv. 14–15)
  Coverage

Conclusion
- A. Spirals of Life
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Caught in a Loop

If you need a humorous response to those who express concern about your love of certain sweet or salty snacks, try this one-liner: "I can resist anything except temptation." All joking aside, addiction is serious. It involves the compulsive urge to engage with substances and behaviors (or activities) that simulate reward despite adverse consequences. A sense of immediate gratification overrides an awareness of long-term harm. Addiction changes one's brain chemistry, rewriting the reward system to perpetuate the dependence. People with addiction, therefore, live in a destructive feedback loop.

My experience with years of compulsive negative behavior was not severe, but the difficulty of breaking any cycle is fierce. Some people never escape the loop. Others try but relapse. Sometimes the attempted rehabilitation and relapse become a part of an extended loop. However, it is possible to break negative cycles. A few fortunate people find their way out.

The book of Judges tells the story of an extended negative feedback loop that was experienced nationally. It warns us against temptation and tendencies while displaying God's steadfast faithfulness to His people. The book recounts events roughly between 1380 and 1050 BC.

B. Lesson Context

Joshua had no successor. After his death, God's people became a tribal confederacy, without a central political leader (Judges 21:25). Their shared ancestry, tradition, and service to God bound them to one another. However, the Israelites in the period of the judges regularly neglected their distinctive history. God's covenant was the structure for reinforcing their memories, but the people fell (or jumped!) away. They became more and more like the surrounding nations in this process.

The author of Judges is unknown but exhibits familiarity with previous books—especially Exodus and Deuteronomy. The book of Judges notes God's relationship with the ancestors of Israel through the story of the exodus (Judges 2:1, 12; 6:8–10; 11:13–27). It also cites Joshua's leadership (1:1; 2:6–8,

21–23), God's covenantal relationship with Israel (2:1–3, 20; 3:4; 5:5), and specific elements of devotion such as the Nazarite vow (13:4–7; compare Numbers 6:1–21). It emphasizes portions of God's law given through Moses by focusing on remembrance of what God has done (6; 8; 32:7–11). It also reiterates the blessings and curses for national obedience and disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:1–68).

The focus of today's lesson comes from the book's introduction, a portion of historical review that leads into a doctrinal admonition. It supplies a framework for understanding the narratives of the specific judges that follow (Judges 3:7–16:31). Judges presents a repetitive cycle of sin often referred to as "the Judges cycle": (1) a generation passes away, (2) the next generation ignores God's expectations, (3) the people follow false gods, (4) God is provoked to anger, (5) the Israelites experience oppression under foreign rule, (6) they cry out to God in their distress, (7) the Lord raises up a deliverer for the people, and (8) peace is restored to the land (2:10–19). On a simplified level, one may remember this cycle as *duplicity*, *disaster*, *distress*, and *deliverance*, or, using a different alliteration, *sin*, *suffering*, *supplication*, and *salvation*.

I. Generation Gathered

(Judges 2:6–9)

A. Dismissal (vv. 6–7)

6. And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land.

The book of Joshua concludes with a parallel passage to this verse and the three that follow (Joshua 24:28–31). As his final recorded act of leadership, *Joshua* had called the twelve tribes of Israel together in Shechem to renew their covenant with God. The specifics of this covenant renewal are recorded in Joshua 24:1–28 (see Lesson 5).

The departure of every man *unto his inheritance* refers to the land distribution that is described in Joshua 13:8–19:51. Each tribe except Levi received a portion of Canaan in which to settle.

Until this point in Israel's history, the people have moved together as a cohesive whole. There has been evident unity under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. But now, for the first time, the Israelites are dispersed across a larger region as *every man* departs to *possess* a slightly different portion of the *inheritance*.

What Do You Think?

Can we "do" faith on our own, or is formal Christian community necessary for faithful obedience to God?

Digging Deeper

How do Acts 2:42–44; Galatians 6:1–2; and Hebrews 10:24–25 influence your answer?

7. And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.

Piecing together various data points, *the days of Joshua* ended around 1400 BC. Allowing twenty years or so for *all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua*, we come to the period of the judges, which began in roughly 1380 BC (see Introduction).

The Hebrew word translated *served* occurs in various contexts to depict subservience, either to other people (example: Judges 9:28) or as the worship of a deity. The writer intends the latter sense here. The word can also signal the worship of pagan gods (see 2:11, below). Service unto God was the original indication of God's faithfulness promised to Moses when God spoke to him through the burning bush (Exodus 3:12). The Israelites accepted their identity as God's people ("a peculiar treasure") when they gathered at mount Sinai to receive God's commands (19:5; 20:1–17). Under Joshua's leadership, *the people* worked for God and worshiped Him as well. They continue faithfully for a generation.

How to Say It

Ashtaroth	*Ash*-tuh-rawth
Astarte	A-*star*-te (first *a* as in *had*)
Baalim	Bay-uh-*leem*
Gaash	*Gay*-ash
Timnathheres	*Tim*-nath-***hee***-reez

The word *elders* does not signify age alone; the term also applies to local leadership. Elders adjudicate disputes and administer justice as community-recognized authorities (example: Deuteronomy 21:18–21). The elders who *outlived* Joshua most likely represent the end of the second generation after Egyptian bondage. The first generation—the generation of the exodus itself—was sentenced to forty years in the wilderness for lack of faith; only two people from that generation entered the promised land: Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:20–24; 26:65; 32:10–13; Deuteronomy 1:34–35). Therefore, the second generation would be those who followed Joshua's leadership after Moses. Those of the second generation had crossed the Jordan River with him when God miraculously stopped the waters, and the riverbed became dry ground (Joshua 3:9–17; 4:22).

What Do You Think?

How are worship of God and service to God connected?

Digging Deeper

How do Deuteronomy 10:12; Psalm 100:2; and Romans 12:1 affect your answer?

B. Death (vv. 8–9)

8. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died, being an hundred and ten years old.

The book of Joshua describes Moses as *the servant of the Lord* more than a dozen times. We see that characterization echoed here, now applied to *Joshua* (compare Joshua 24:29). Scripture designates a handful of other people in a similar way. These include Abraham (Genesis 26:24), David (2 Samuel 7:5, 8), Caleb (Numbers 14:24), and Job (Job 1:8). To be God's servant should be the goal of every believer.

Like his ancestor Joseph, Joshua dies at *an hundred and ten years old*. Interestingly, their ages are each recorded twice (Genesis 50:22, 26; Joshua 24:29; Judges 2:8). Someone who lives that long today is called a "supercentenarian."

9. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash.

This verse repeats Joshua 24:30 almost word for word. Joshua is *buried* in the place he personally inherited after the allotment of lands to the tribes (Joshua 19:49–50). He is buried *in the mount of Ephraim* because he is from the tribe of Ephraim (1 Chronicles 7:22–27). The allotment of land for this tribe is described in Joshua 16:5–9. It was a relatively small area, given that Ephraim was the second smallest of the twelve tribes (Numbers 26:12–56).

The precise location, including *the hill Gaash*, is disputed (compare 2 Samuel 23:30).

II. Generation Grown

(Judges 2:10–15)

A. Disobedience (vv. 10–13)

10. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel.

A generational shift occurs, and the first element in "the Judges cycle" emerges (see Lesson Context). The reference to *all that generation* applies to the second generation of the exodus; the phrase *another generation* refers to the third since escaping Egypt (see commentary on Judges 2:7, above). The text poetically notes the deaths of those in the second generation as being *gathered unto their fathers*. Similar descriptions are found in Genesis 49:33, 2 Kings 22:20, etc.

The new generation hasn't experienced God's miraculous *works* in the same way as either the first or second generations. A breakdown seems to have occurred: the second generation failed to transfer what they *knew* about *the Lord* to their children in a way that compelled them to accept and live by it (contrast Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

The word *knew* in this context points beyond information in and of itself. It includes the concepts of recognition and acknowledgment. This new generation is not unaware of the Lord, but the people do not pledge their undivided loyalty to Him

as their God. For example, Eli's sons, who were priests, certainly knew God's requirements—so the phrase "they knew not the Lord" means that they failed to obey Him (1 Samuel 2:12–17).

What Do You Think?

What is the role of Psalm 78 in the spiritual life of the Israelites?

Digging Deeper

What are you purposefully doing to shape the understanding, belief, faith-life, and moral choices of the next generation?

11. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim.

A form of the phrase *did evil in the sight of the Lord* occurs dozens of times in the Old Testament. In the book of Judges, such behavior signals the second aspect of "the "Judges cycle" (see Lesson Context; compare Judges 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). It refers primarily to idolatry (examples: 1 Kings 11:6–7; 2 Kings 21:1–5). Prior to the judges, Scripture uses the saying to characterize the Israelites who died in the wilderness because of doubt, fear, and a lack of faith in God's deliverance (Numbers 32:13).

The phrase *the children of Israel* refers to the third generation of Israelites counted from the people's release from Egypt, the new generation presented in the previous verse. Although God claims them as His *children*, this new generation repeats the rebellion of their ancestors, ignoring warnings the Lord gave about forsaking Him for other gods (Exodus 20:3–5; Deuteronomy 4:25–26). God is aware of the evil they do; He sees what is happening despite any belief otherwise (Psalms 10:11; 94:7). The Israelites' acts are not hidden from Him. God is watching and evaluating His people in His wisdom.

The plural word *Baalim* refers to fictitious gods known individually by the designation *Baal*, which means "lord" or "master." Among the Canaanites, the Baals are gods of storms, weather, and fertility. Since agriculture was a fundamental building block of ancient Near Eastern society, Baal was understandably popular. In this instance, the *Baalim* generally represent all Canaanite gods or the various local manifestations of Baal present in the region. Baal is the most frequently mentioned false god that the Israelites rebelliously worship throughout the Old Testament. Ancient people worshiped Baal to receive agricultural abundance; therefore, the Israelites' idolatry is directly connected to whom they choose to credit for their provision and prosperity.

What Do You Think?

Are false gods present in modern society? If yes, list examples.

Digging Deeper

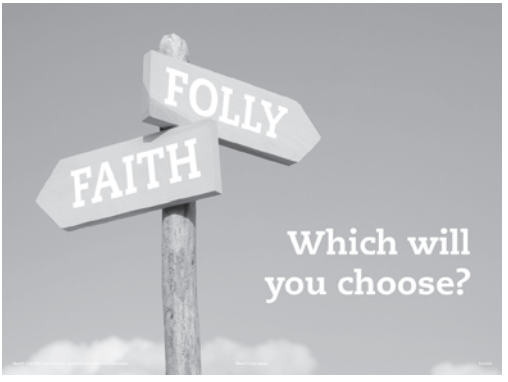
What tools has God given believers to overcome the temptation of worshiping false gods? What strategies will you personally implement to protect yourself?

12a. And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them.

The action implied by the word *forsook* in the book of Judges includes the concept of abandonment and the replacement of that which is abandoned with something else (compare Judges 2:13; 10:6, 10, 13). The Israelites of this third generation do what the second generation swore not to do (Joshua 24:16). God is faithful, but the Israelites are not (compare Judges 2:1).

The text commemorates God, who rescued the people from bondage in *Egypt*. After setting them free, God identified Israel as His covenant people and Himself as their God (Exodus 6:6–7). He is the *God of their fathers*—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (3:6). This designation should tie Israel's generations together as it speaks to God's faithfulness. But God knew in advance what His people would do as they lived among the land's inhabitants (23:32–33).

The Israelites succumb to the temptation of other gods because the people around them negatively influence them. The Israelites' actions exemplify a theme that spans from Genesis to Revelation: allegiance versus assimilation.



Visual for Lesson 6. *Place the visual in a prominent place. Point to the visual and ask students to consider which way their lives are headed.*

Differing Priorities

Years ago, I worked for a well-known credit card company. A prominent businessman owned it and purchased the controlling shares to save the business from going bankrupt. He cared deeply for the company and all its employees, nurtured it, and worked hard to keep it healthy. When the businessman died, his son became the CEO. He callously sold the company to the highest bidder, who closed the doors for good.

Similarly, when the founder of a well-known discount mart died, the employees who worked under him reported a decline in integrity after his son assumed leadership. They missed the family-like atmosphere the founder developed and encouraged. Under the son, they felt they were no longer known and valued. They sensed a significant shift in priorities.

In both situations, the sons did not know their employees like their fathers did. The new generation made business decisions based on values and priorities other than those of their fathers.

Whether we look at a modern case like those above or one such as in Judges 2:10–12, we naturally wonder, *"Whose fault was it?"* Perhaps those in the older generation bear some responsibility for not having instilled proper values in their children (compare Deuteronomy 6:6–9). Yet, history affirms that people are personally responsible for their actions. For many reasons, a new generation of Israelites emerged who did not know the Lord, and evil resulted. How does this stark fact affect your priorities? What might you need to reprioritize or reorder? —PM

12b–13. And provoked the LORD to anger. And they forsook the LORD, and served Baal and Ashtaroth.

God's displeasure at His people's disobedience results in *anger*. The Hebrew word translated here as *provoked* means to be vexed, sorrowful, and troubled. The people's choice to turn away from God grieves Him.

Ashtaroth is the plural for the Canaanite goddess Astarte, who is associated with war, sexuality, and healing. She is imagined to be the consort of Baal, and some people believe that together they bring fertility to the land and humans.

B. Defeat (vv. 14–15)

14. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

Anger is often described as "burning" (*hot*) in Hebrew. The root image is a blast of hot air from the nostrils. The Lord's anger is caused by Israel's failure to be exclusively loyal to Him. Israel's violation of the covenant is serious. Hundreds of years later, this continuing tendency will be likened to sexual immorality (Jeremiah 3:6–10; 9:2; 23:10–14; Hosea 2:1–6; 4:12–13).

Consequence kicks in as God gives His people over to oppression by *their enemies*. God had warned Israel through Moses that they would face such domination by adversarial nations as a curse for their disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15–68; 31:16–21). Therefore, they face raiders who loot and plunder their wealth. They become subject to local rulers and live in oppression.

When the Israelites entered Canaan, the hearts of the land's pagan kings "melted" in fear (Joshua 5:1). The Canaanites lost their courage because of God's power and might. They yielded to the Israelites both voluntarily and involun-

tarily. In this place and time, God now gives the Canaanites the upper hand.

15. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

The declaration regarding *the hand of the Lord* is an anthropomorphism, which means using a human characteristic to describe God. Other texts use this technique regarding God's eyes and ears (Psalm 34:15), His mouth (Isaiah 62:2), and His face (Exodus 33:20). Here the word *hand* signifies God's power and might. His hand brought Israel out of Egypt; Scripture declares this in other places by using the words *hand* and *arm* as near synonyms (examples: Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 26:8). His hand was with Israel when they entered the promised land (Joshua 4:24), but now it is turned *against* them *for evil*. This verse doesn't refer to a moral evil since God doesn't tempt people to sin (James 1:13). Rather, it relates to physical distress; the same Hebrew word is translated as "adversities" in 1 Samuel 10:19.

What Do You Think?

How does God correct waywardness in modern times?

Digging Deeper

What are the consequences of sin? How do Isaiah 59:2 and Romans 6:23 impact your answer?

Coverage

Hailstorms in Colorado are sometimes so severe that insurance companies only write policies with a high deductible for hail damage. This requirement can come as a rude shock to the unaware. The financially wise person reads the policy beforehand, so there are no surprises.

The generation of Israelites in view here had one of two problems: either they weren't aware of the costly "deductible" present in God's covenant (the Law of Moses), or they *were* aware of it but chose to ignore it. Either way, the price of their folly was inexcusable. They decided to do what was evil and suffered the consequences.

As modern believers, we also face consequences for disobedience. God is our ultimate insurance and assurance; He is our protector and provider. Thankfully, Jesus Christ purchased God's coverage for you; by Jesus, our "sins are covered" (Romans 4:7). How much time do you spend studying the terms of that coverage? —PM

Conclusion

A. Spirals of Life

There may or may not be a valid indictment against the older generation for failure to adequately teach their descendants (Deuteronomy 6:20–25). Yet, the choice to follow God must be personally accepted and enacted. Unfortunately, humans are inconsistent and bent toward sinfulness. We make bad choices and fail to follow God's rules. Like the Israelites, we struggle to do what is right and often find ourselves stuck in negative spirals.

The book of Judges depicts a series of vicious downward spirals that exemplify the problem (see Lesson Context). Wherever God's people dwell, there is a temptation to absorb negative aspects of the cultural environment. These cultural pressures tend to pull us away from allegiance to God. The tension clouds our vision and degrades our decision-making. When God's Word is not kept faithfully in the forefront of our minds and a relationship with Him is not a priority, we fail. What are you doing to protect yourself from the sinful influences of the surrounding culture? How can you support the next generation in resisting as well?

B. Prayer

Father God, our provider, protector, and deliverer—thank You for giving us examples of both what to do and what to avoid. Help us remember who You are and recount the miraculous and wonderful things You have done. Empower us to set aside temptations, false gods, and cultural tendencies that will corrupt us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Every person must choose God deliberately and personally.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Welcome participants to class and invite the group to play "Telephone Pictionary." Ask all participants to stand in a single-file line. Secretly show the person at the back of the line (Participant A) a simple geometric drawing (house, cat, flower, etc.). Instruct Participant A to trace the drawing with their finger on the back of the person in front of them (Participant B). Ask Participant B to secretly determine what they think the picture is and trace it on the back of the person in front of them (Participant C). Continue the game this way until the drawing reaches the front of the line. Ask the last participant to draw the picture they received on the board. Then reveal the original image and compare them. Gather for group discussion and ask, "What was the most challenging part of this activity?"

Say, "As we study today's passage, consider why it is important for us to pass along the legacy of our faith in a way that is received accurately, remembered appropriately, and shared faithfully."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Judges 2:6–9 aloud. Divide participants into two groups: **First Gen** and **Second Gen**. Have the **First Gen** read Deuteronomy 1:26–39 and the **Second Gen** read Joshua 1:1–11, 16–18. Instruct each group to identify the main points in their passage. Say, "The Deuteronomy verses are about the first generation, who came out of Egypt; the verses in Joshua are about the second generation, who grew up in the wilderness." Draw three columns on the board and label them *1st generation*, *2nd generation*, and *3rd generation*. Ask each group to report their main points and write them in the appropriate column.

Ask a volunteer to read Judges 2:10–13 aloud. Complete the third column as a class. Invite participants to discuss: 1–What benefits or blessings did this generation lack? (*Expected answer:* They did not experience the miracles of the plagues, deliverance, provision, and victories first-hand.) 2–What benefits or blessings did this generation enjoy? (*Expected answer:* They saw the fulfillment of God's promises.)

Option. Divide participants into small groups of three or four and distribute the "How Not to Forget" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow several minutes for groups to complete this exercise as indicated. Then allow groups to share their reflections with the class.

Ask a volunteer to read Judges 2:14–16 aloud. Draw a horizontal line below the words that populate your three columns, creating six sections on the board. In the empty lower sections, ask a representative from each group to come forward as a scribe. Ask these volunteers to write what God did for the first and second generations because of their response to Him. Then have the whole group discuss the consequences the third generation faced (consider Judges 2:14–16).

Into Life

Pass out index cards and pens. Ask participants to find a partner. Instruct pairs to read Deuteronomy 30:11–20 quietly to themselves and then share words or phrases that stand out as significant to them and why. Using this passage as an inspiration, ask each participant to write a personal statement of faith on their index card. Encourage partners to pray for one another, asking the Lord to help them remain strong and steadfast in their commitment to Him.

Alternative. Distribute the "Personal Commitment" exercise from the activity page. Give participants a few minutes to work on the exercise. Encourage participants to post their responses somewhere they will see them regularly and be reminded of their commitment.

An Unlikely Deliverer

Devotional Reading: Ecclesiastes 7:1–13
Background Scripture: Judges 3

Judges 3:15–23, 30

15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

16 But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

17 And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man.

18 And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

19 But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

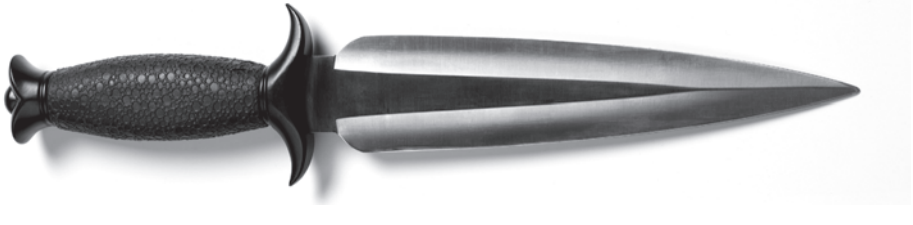
20 And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat.

21 And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

22 And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

23 Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them.

30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.



Key Text

When the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded. **—Judges 3:15a**

Image © Getty Images

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 2: From Settled People to Judges

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Ehud's role in liberating Israel.
2. Explain the role of judges in Israel's history and leadership.
3. Write a prayer asking God to deliver them from a difficult situation (or specific place of oppression).

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Surprising Solution
- B. Lesson Context: Literary
- C. Lesson Context: Historical

I. Public Tribute (Judges 3:15–18)
- A. Deliverer with a Mission (v. 15a)
- B. Delegate with a Weapon (vv. 15b–18)

Know Your Enemy

II. Private Message (Judges 3:19–23)
- A. Deceit (vv. 19–20)
- B. Dispensation (vv. 21–23)

III. Peace Regained (Judges 3:30)

Masterful Strategy

Conclusion
- A. Uniquely Equipped
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Surprising Solution

It was my last Sunday at the church I attended through college. It was the weekend of my graduation. The minister called me to the front of the church and announced my plans for further education at a seminary hundreds of miles away. What he didn't know was that although my departure date was imminent, I was stressed because I didn't know where I was going to live. The new university did not have on-campus housing set aside for seminary students, and I had only briefly visited the town before acceptance. I was unfamiliar with the area and had no connections.

After the church service, my friends and family said goodbye and wished me well. An older couple hung back and approached me at the very end. They were unknown to me and knew nothing about my plans before that day. The couple told me they used to live in a town not far from my future school, and they still owned a house there. They offered it to me on the spot as a place to live while I attended seminary. I was thoroughly surprised by God's method of provision!

God often prepares help for us long before we know what we need. Sometimes, that help shows up in unexpected ways or through unlikely people.

B. Lesson Context: Literary

When we hear the word *judges,* the first image that may come to mind is that of officials adjudicating legal disputes. But that was not their primary task in the book of Judges. Their recorded actions reveal that they were chiefly *deliverers* or (in an earthly sense) *saviors*. Judges 2:16 reveals this meaning: "Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." The book of Judges is largely a compilation of narratives depicting these valiant deliverers for the Israelites during times of oppression. The book begins with events just before Joshua's death. The parallel information in Joshua 24:28–31 and Judges 2:6–10 purposefully links the books chronologically.

C. Lesson Context: Historical

Joshua 5:13–12:8 details the Israelites' military exploits in taking possession of the land that God promised; this was in accordance with God's instructions in Deuteronomy 20:16–17 (see Lessons 3–4). But even after the Israelites defeated thirty-one kings (Joshua 12:24), the Lord cautioned that there was much more to conquer (Joshua 13:1–17). The caution became an accusation in Judges 1:1–2:3, as the narrative describes a mixture of success and failure. At a place called Bochim (meaning "weeping"), the angel of the Lord reminded the Israelites that their failure to finish the conquest amounted to disobedience (Judges 2:2).

The long-term result of the Israelites' disobedience was a repeated need—over more than three hundred years!—for strong leaders to be deliverers because of a cyclical pattern of sin. As noted in Lesson 6, the resulting "sin cycles" were characterized by the four-stage sequence of *duplicity*, *disaster*, *distress*, and *deliverance* (see a fuller explanation in last week's Lesson Context).

The first recorded deliverer-judge was Othniel, who served forty years in that capacity (Judges 3:7–11). His time frame was perhaps 1373 to 1334 BC. But after his death, the Israelites needed another savior. The Israelites found themselves subjugated by King Eglon of Moab. With help from his neighboring allies, the Ammonites and Amalekites, King Eglon ruled over a portion of the territory of Benjamin and the region assigned to the tribe of Reuben. Eglon's base of power was "the city of palm trees"—that is, Jericho (compare Deuteronomy 34:3; Judges 1:16). We speculate that he set up court there to better keep an eye on the Israelites, whom he oppressed for eighteen years.

How to Say It

Ehud	*Ee*-hud
Gera	*Gear*-ra (*G* as in *get*)
Gilgal	*Gil*-gal (*G* as in *get*)
Joab	*Jo*-ab
Othniel	*Oth*-ni-el
Reuben	*Roo*-ben

I. Public Tribute

(Judges 3:15–18)

A. Deliverer with a Mission (v. 15a)

15a. But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded.

God is rescuing the *children of Israel* through the efforts of a man named *Ehud* (Judges 3:12–14). He is the second recorded *deliverer* of God's people during the period of the judges, serving in that capacity from approximately 1319 to 1239 BC (Judges 3:30). Scholars consider him a "major" judge because his recorded account includes extensive details. The same Hebrew letters for Ehud's name are found in Psalm 28:7, where the word is translated "praise."

The Israelites are subject to oppression by the Moabites. The root of their oppression is the declaration in Judges 3:12 that the Israelites "did evil." Elsewhere, this phrase is followed by an identification of the evil as idolatry; therefore, it's reasonable to conclude that the sin here is the same (compare Judges 2:11–13; 3:7; 10:6). The fictitious gods the Israelites have been serving have not helped them. So, as a last resort, they cry out to *the Lord*, and He raises *them up a deliverer*.

The text provides what may strike us as a peculiar detail about Ehud: he is *lefthanded*. This detail is essential later in the account (Judges 3:21, below). It's natural to think that this description refers to Ehud's dominant hand being his left. However, it could also mean his right hand is limited or disabled. Another possibility is that Ehud is a warrior purposefully trained to utilize his left hand for battle (compare Judges 20:16). Or it may be that Ehud is ambidextrous (compare 1 Chronicles 12:1–2). For the mission ahead, however, he will use his left hand for a specific reason (see below).

There is a certain irony here in that Ehud is also a *Benjamite* because the Hebrew name "Benjamin" means "son of my right hand." In ancient Near Eastern culture, the right hand signifies a place of honor, trust, and authority (examples: Psalms 45:9; 110:5; compare Acts 7:55–56). By contrast, being positioned at a person's left hand could signify

dishonor (example: Matthew 25:41). But neither of these meanings seems to be in view here.

Ehud's left-handedness, paired with his identification as a member of the tribe of Benjamin, holds significance when considered in light of Judges 20:13b–16 and 1 Chronicles 12:1–2 (noted above). The Benjamites' capability of ambidextrous warfare gives them a significant advantage. Soldiers of the era typically held their shields in their left hand and their weapons in their right hand, making them vulnerable to opposing soldiers who did the opposite.

Unlike many other judges, the text gives no indication of God's Spirit coming upon Ehud for empowerment (compare Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 15:14). Rather, Ehud's divine commission flows from the gifts God has already given to him: valor, weaponry, skill, and cunning. These are all things Ehud has cultivated, which God puts to use at the right time.

What Do You Think?

Is it more common for God to empower someone suddenly for an immediate task or utilize previously honed skills?

Digging Deeper

Are there skills you sense God calling you to increase?

B. Delegate with a Weapon (vv. 15b–18)

15b. And by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

In the ancient Near East, subordinated people sent tribute to ruling powers. Israel's *present* to *Eglon the king of Moab* indicates Moab's control over them. A typical tribute might be sent to appease ruling forces, but it also took the form of oppressive taxes of precious metals, grain, livestock, or unusual artifacts (examples: 2 Kings 16:7–8; 17:3–5; 2 Chronicles 17:11). At worst, tribute could be demanded by those in power in the form of forced labor (example: 1 Kings 4:21).

The territory of *Moab* is on the eastern side of the Dead Sea, near its southern end. As the first generation of Israelites who escaped from Egyptian bondage made their way toward the promised land, they were careful not to provoke the Moabites (Deuteronomy 2:9). Even so, Numbers 22–25 record hostility and undue fraternization between the Moabites and God's covenant people as the Israelites made their way to the Jordan River.

Know Your Enemy

"We have met the enemy, and they are ours!" declared Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry after his naval victory on Lake Erie in the War of 1812. A century and a half later, a 1970 Earth Day poster restated his proclamation with a twist: "We have met the enemy, and he is us!"

Remembering when you were your own worst enemy is usually not too difficult. You spoke when you should have kept quiet. You didn't speak up when necessary. You let emotions govern your response to a situation. The list is endless. But these examples raise a question: Should we try to forget or remember such failures?

One can make the case either way, and it is important to consider the terms and context carefully. The book of Judges reveals that the ancient Israelites were their own worst enemies because they did not remember and learn from their sinful past. They squirm under the consequences of their mistakes and call out to God. He often rescues them, but just a few verses later, they are depicted as falling back into the cycle of sin. The neighboring nations may oppress them, but God allows it because of their actions and decisions. Sometimes, the only person to blame is oneself. Are you in that camp? —RLN

16. But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

Our modern concept of a *dagger* is that of sharp, pointed knife. But the word being translated here is also translated as "sword" in numerous other places (example: Judges 4:15). Perhaps to keep his mission and intent a secret, Ehud *made* the blade himself. *A cubit* translates to about eighteen inches. Scholars guess this *length* is probably a "short cubit," closer to fourteen inches—the span from one's elbow to the knuckle of a closed

fist. Certainly, the knife's size and shape fit Ehud's frame so that he could carry it on his *thigh*.

Soldiers draw swords from across their bodies, typically reaching for the hilt with their dominant hand. The majority are right-handed. Therefore, they draw their swords from their left side. Royal guards might, thus, inspect only the left side. In any case, Ehud's intent to hide the weapon is obvious.

17. And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man.

Traditionally, translators and scholars consider the description of *Eglon* to mean he is very obese. The word translated as *fat*, however, is sometimes a signal of health (example: Psalm 73:4). It can refer to plumpness (compare Genesis 41:2). But it also describes the excellent health given to Daniel and his friends after they ate only vegetables and drank water for days (Daniel 1:15). In Eglon's case, the description follows the abundance and prosperity he enjoys as the reigning and oppressive king; he savors the plentiful life.

18. And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

Ehud travels with an entourage. The way Ehud arrived and now departs gives the visit an air of being official. He and his companions appear deferential. The group's presence is also necessary to bring the entirety of their *present* to the *king*—assuming it is heavy enough to require a crew to *bare* it. Ehud and his retinue present the tribute to Eglon together. The reason Ehud then *sent away* his traveling companions is explained next.

What Do You Think?

Is it easier to follow through with obedience to the Lord in a group or as an individual? Why?

Digging Deeper

How does individual responsibility factor into the spiritual life?

II. Private Message

(Judges 3:19–23)

A. Deceit (vv. 19–20)

19. But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

We get the impression that Ehud initially departs with his retinue but then appears to change his mind after traveling the short distance to *Gilgal*. There is more than one town named Gilgal in the Old Testament. One such town is about seventeen miles northwest of Jericho. That is the Gilgal of 1 Samuel 7:16 and 2 Kings 2:1, so it is not the one mentioned here.

The name *Gilgal* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "circle" or "rolling" with connotations of a "circle of stones." It suggests this town is connected with nearby *quarries* and is a prominent landmark outside Jericho. In this location, such stones would be erected in dedication to the cultural gods of the area (compare Deuteronomy 7:5, 25; 12:3; 2 Kings 17:41; 2 Chronicles 34:3–4). They would also be used as a memorial or monument and could stand as a boundary marker.

Since this particular Gilgal stands near Jericho (Judges 3:13), its location coincides with where the Israelites set up camp after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 4:19; see Lesson 2). There, Joshua commanded God's people to erect twelve stones from the Jordan River to memorialize their entrance into the promised land. The action was to help them remember that God brought them across on dry ground (4:20–24).

Regardless of the geographic marker's significance, Ehud returns alone to the palace to accomplish his real mission. The tribute has established trust with Eglon, giving the impression that Ehud is a dutiful, subservient Israelite. Ehud uses that trust to obtain the king's attention and earn a private audience. The idea of a *secret* entices the king. He sends his royal attendants away.

What Do You Think?

Why do secrets pique human interest? What is it about them that entices us?

Digging Deeper

Are secrets always bad? Consider these "secret" places of hiddenness in God (Psalms 27:5; 31:20; 91:1; 139:15).

20. And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat.

The *summer parlour* is a private space for the king. Translated literally from the Hebrew, it means "roof-chamber of coolness." It is a well-ventilated upper room built on a flat rooftop with many windows for breezes. We don't know the time of year this meeting occurs, but the average daily temperature from late May through early October in modern Jericho exceeds 90°F. The chamber is separate from the king's main audience chamber on the ground level, making it an excellent place for a personal conversation. Judges 3:24 implies that this room includes Eglon's chamber for toileting.

Ehud evokes Eglon's interest, and the king rises from *his seat*. Ehud uses a plural word for *God*, which may tempt Eglon to believe he will receive an oracle from "the gods." He is so interested in it that he stands up! Kings do not usually change their posture in the presence of underlings. His choice to rise is even more surprising, given his obesity. Ancient kings deeply desired knowledge of future events to maintain control.

What Do You Think?

What is the role of anticipation or expectation in delivering a message? What makes a message compelling?

Digging Deeper

How might your answer influence the delivery of the gospel through preaching? Evangelism?

B. Dispensation (vv. 21–23)

21. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.

With the king moving toward him, Ehud takes full advantage of the situation and acts quickly. Ehud can lunge forward faster than the obese king can move backward. As with Joab's murder of Amasa (2 Samuel 20:9–10), the motion of his *left hand* draws no suspicion—at least, none in time for a suitable reaction.

22. And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

On the nature of *the dagger*, see the commentary on Judges 3:16 above. Such weapons have three primary parts: a handle (or *haft*), a *blade*, and a cross guard to separate the handle from the blade. As the phrase *cross guard* implies, its function is to guard the user's hand from crossing into the sharp blade. In doing so, it also limits the penetration depth of the weapon. The fact that Ehud's *blade* enters Eglon's belly completely, handle and all, indicates that the sword lacks such a cross guard.

What Do You Think?

Ehud used cunning and strategy to defeat Eglon. Is strategy appropriate in our spiritual lives?

Digging Deeper

What role might strategy play in gaining maturity, defeating enemies, or trampling temptation?

23. Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the parlour upon him, and locked them.

The details of Ehud's escape are not clear. The departure hinges on the meaning of the word *porch*, but this is the only place in the Old Testament where this Hebrew word is used. Perhaps it is a roof exit. In any case, Ehud somehow leaves the king's chamber without raising an alarm and locks the doors. Because the doors are locked, the servants give the king privacy. As they wait, believing Eglon is using the restroom, Ehud flees (Judges 3:24–26).

III. Peace Regained

(Judges 3:30)

After Ehud flees from Jericho, he calls the Israelites to arms and leads them into battle (Judges 3:26–29). Ehud boldly asks Israel to follow him because he knows the Moabites are demoralized.

30. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Like many judges who govern after Ehud, he assists God's people in subduing their enemies (compare Judges 4:23; 8:28; 11:33). The term *subdued* signifies bending the knee—the Moabites now submit to Israelite power and rule for the next eighty years. This period probably represents two generations and is the longest span of peace recorded in the book of Judges.

Masterful Strategy

During the Trojan War, the Greek leader Odysseus led his army in a shrewd and cunning maneuver. After a ten-year-long siege on the city of Troy, which brought little success, the Greeks concocted a new scheme. They built an enormous wooden horse, hid soldiers inside, and pretended to desert the war. The Greek army sailed away.

When the Trojans found the wooden horse, they believed it was abandoned. They dragged the giant equine into their city and declared victory. During the night, the hidden Greek soldiers emerged. They traveled to the city gates and opened them, enabling the rest of the Greek army to return and sack the city.

Victory often requires dexterous problem-solving and creativity. What is the role of acumen, shrewdness, and wise perception in the life of a modern believer (consider Matthew 10:16)? —BRT

Conclusion

A. Uniquely Equipped

King Eglon fell to a single blow without struggle—the fatal stroke made by a man he failed to perceive as a threat. The secret "message" was a verdict of judgment executed by Israel's deliverer: the oppression of God's people was terminated. Although the Israelites once again had done evil in God's sight, when they cried to Him in their misery, He faithfully answered (Judges 3:12, 15). Ehud's proficiency with his left hand specially positioned him in this situation. He faithfully honed his unique talents and bravely used them when God asked him to move on Israel's behalf.

Ehud's story, like all of Israel's judges, illustrates the cycle God's people repeated time and time again after the era of Joshua's leadership.



Visual for Lesson 7. *Display this visual in a prominent place. Utilize it to assist in teaching this lesson's Thought to Remember.*

Through the judges, God showcases His desire for partnership with humanity. Although God seeks, saves, empowers, and redeems, He often desires to employ people in the process. Sometimes He finds a willing person (example: Isaiah 6:8), sometimes He finds a reluctant person (example: Exodus 4:13), and sometimes He finds no one (Ezekiel 22:30).

There is a cliché in Christian circles that says, "God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called." Sometimes, God prepares people for work they will do long before they know the details. Ehud emerged to solve an eighteen-year-long subjugation. He planned diligently before acting boldly. Waiting upon the Lord is a fundamental exercise of faith, and it can take years before the Lord's solution arrives. In the meantime, we must keep the faith, follow the commands He gives, and trust the work He is doing.

B. Prayer

Father God, You are our rescuer and redeemer. Thank you for preserving Your people despite cycles of faithlessness. Thank you for hearing us when we cry out to You. Prepare us for devoted service to You and others. Hone our skills and talents so we will be ready when You call us to action. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God uses people you wouldn't expect.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite participants to think of a fictional story—from a book, play, or movie—in which an oppressive ruler or villain is killed. Ask them to summarize the plot. (Examples: *The Wizard of Oz The Lion King; Sleeping Beauty; Star Wars; Macbeth; The Manchurian Candidate;* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe)* As time allows, have learners share a variety of plots, noting their similarities.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Oppressors and Deliverers" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have small groups of three or four work together to complete as indicated. Then invite groups to share their conclusions with the whole class.

Transition into Bible study by saying, "We enjoy heroic stories in which evil is destroyed and oppressed people are set free. In today's lesson, consider the villain and deliverer symbolically. What might they represent for the nation of Israel and in our lives?"

Into the Word

Divide the class in half, designating one half as **Group Ehud** and the other half as **Group Eglon**. After a volunteer reads Judges 3:15–18 aloud, invite each group to list all the details they know about their character and his appearance. (Advise **Group Eglon** to also consider verses 12–14.) Ask the following question for in-group discussion: What qualities might they assume about their character, based on the information provided? (Examples: Eglon was overindulgent with food, and Ehud was smart and strategic.) When they finish compiling their lists, invite groups to share their information.

Pass out pens and index cards. Ask a volunteer to read Judges 3:19–22 aloud. Instruct participants to find a partner and transcribe what they think God's message was for Eglon. Call the class together and ask pairs to share their answers. Work as a large group to compose one common statement. Write the statement on the board. Discuss: How does this message fit with Ehud's role as a judge?

Ask a volunteer to read Judges 3:23, 30 aloud. Return participants to their previous groups and ask them to discuss the following:

Group Eglon. Read verses 24–26. How did Ehud ensure the success of the assassination?

Group Ehud. Read verses 27–29. How did Ehud lead the Israelites to defeat their enemies?

After calling time, bring the groups back together to talk about the conclusion—that the land had peace for eighty years. As a large group, discuss what this peaceful period looked like for the Israelites: 1–How might their strength and energy be spent? 2–How might their relationships change with one another, God, and other nations? 3–How might a new generation who only knows peace and freedom think and behave?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Before and After" exercise from the activity page. Have participants complete it in pairs before discussing their conclusions in small groups.

Into Life

Conduct a whole-class reflection session. Ask participants to consider: When we turn away from God and lean into sinful tendencies, what sort of things oppress us? Write the group's responses on the board. (Potential answers: fear, worry, anxiety, depression, envy, resentment, unforgiveness) Say, "Think of King Eglon as a symbol of these tendencies, growing bigger and more settled in your heart, keeping you captive and helplessly oppressed."

Then invite participants to choose a partner. Ask partners to share about a difficult situation or place of oppression they are facing or have faced in the past. As time allows, distribute pens and index cards. Ask participants to write a prayer to God, describing their oppression and asking God to deliver them from it. Encourage partners to pray over one another before closing class time.

A Lack of Instruction

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 6:10–16
Background Scripture: Judges 17–18

Judges 17:1–6

1 And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

2 And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.

3 And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

4 Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

5 And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

6 In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Judges 18:18–19, 27

18 And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

19 And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

27 And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.



Key Text

In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.
—Judges 17:6

Image © Getty Images

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 2: From Settled People to Judges

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Recount the story of Micah and his mother.
2. Compare Micah's worship with proper Levitical procedure (Exodus 20:4; 29:4–9; Numbers 3:5–13).
3. Listen to the hymn "Be Thou My Vision" and pray for God's directives to guide their life.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Muddling Along
- B. Lesson Context

I. Misguided Worship (Judges 17:1–6)
- A. Stolen Silver (vv. 1–2)
  Resolved Mystery
- B. Imaged Idol (vv. 3–4)
- C. Private Priest (vv. 5–6)
  Shrine of the Times

II. Misguided Engagement (Judges 18:18–19, 27)
- A. Persuaded Priest (vv. 18–19)
- B. Cruel Conquest (v. 27)

Conclusion
- A. Maintaining Continuity
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Muddling Along

I took a job one summer that lacked training and access to information. It meant that one afternoon, I found myself hopelessly driving around, trying to locate a storage unit. The only tip I had was a street name. After an extended search, I learned it was the wrong street. Ultimately, I broke down and called my predecessor, who told me where to find it—but I'd wasted a lot of time on a futile hunt!

There are numerous reasons people "muddle through" tasks. Although lacking in expertise, organization, or preparation, a person may take on an unfamiliar project out of a sense of pride, a commitment to self-teaching, or feeling bothersome asking questions. It's a human tendency to put our heads down and move forward with brute force.

Today's text narrates an egregious case of muddling through religious rites and practices.

B. Lesson Context

An accurate understanding of the book of Judges hinges on knowing the covenant God established with the Hebrew people. God gave instructions for holy living and proper worship. For example, He expressly prohibited the making of carved images and idols (Exodus 20:4; 34:17; Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 5:8; 27:15). God inaugurated the tabernacle as the central place of worship for Israel (Exodus 26:1–37; 36:8–38; 40:1–38; Deuteronomy 12:1–14). He established a priesthood (Exodus 28:1; Numbers 3:5–10). He consecrated and ordained the priests to be the purveyors and administrators of the covenant, overseeing the sacrificial system (Exodus 29:1–9; compare Leviticus 9:22–24; Numbers 1:47–51). God also gave regulations concerning the priests' attire (Exodus 28; 39:2–31). From all these and others, we see a picture of required faithfulness and obedience through attention to detail.

The book of Judges focuses on the Israelites' repeated apostasy. Apostasy is what happens when faith is abandoned—whether through the willful and outright refusal to conform to the conditions of the covenant or as a gradual slipping away

from obedience and faithful practice. The events surrounding Micah's household and the conquest of Laish happened early in the judges' era, even though they are not mentioned until late in the book. This is established by comparing Joshua 19:47 (where the town of Laish is called "Leshem") with Judges 1:34; 18:1, 27–29. Therefore, Micah lived during the days of Othniel, Israel's first judge, in the mid-1300s BC (Judges 3:7–11).

I. Misguided Worship

(Judges 17:1–6)

A. Stolen Silver (vv. 1–2)

1. And there was a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

Mount Ephraim does not refer to a specific mountain peak but rather to a hilly, forested region that extends from Bethel to the plain of Jezreel (Joshua 16:5–9). The name is associated with the tribe of Ephraim, named after one of the sons of Joseph (Genesis 41:52). The region spreads approximately sixteen miles from north to south and twenty-seven miles from east to west. Ephraim's locality is central to the land claimed by God's people.

The name *Micah* means "Who is like the Lord?" In naming their son in association with the Hebrew God, Micah's parents identify themselves as Israelites. There is more than one individual named Micah in the Old Testament, and we should not get confused about which one the text refers to here. The Micah of today's lesson is not the Micah of the biblical prophetic book that bears that name; that Micah won't come on the scene for another five hundred years or so.

2a. And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it.

Micah's story begins midstream with a verbal response to a spoken curse. A large sum of *silver* was stolen from Micah's *mother*, and in reaction, she condemned the person who took it. She harbors a desire for retribution and wishes injurious harm on the thief—whoever he is.

The sum of *eleven hundred shekels of silver* represents remarkable wealth. It is one hundred ten times more than the annual stipend offered to Micah's priest (Judges 17:10). In terms of weight, 1,100 shekels weigh more than twenty-three pounds! Additionally, this specific and sizable amount matches what each Philistine ruler paid Delilah to betray Samson in the previous chapter (Judges 16:5). There is no direct link between the two events or amounts (Delilah's total is multiplied by five). Still, readers naturally connect the figures and are meant to do so. In both instances, the sum is linked to betrayal, faithlessness, and grand liberality.

Micah admits that he heard his mother's curse and that he is the thief. Presumably, he does so because he wants her to withdraw the denunciation. Otherwise, he fears it spells his doom. People throughout the ancient Near East understood such declarations as effective in revengeful power.

Micah may be assumed to be the head of this household because the narrative does not mention his father.

What Do You Think?

Why does Micah confess to his theft?

Digging Deeper

What is the function of confession in human relationships? In the spiritual life?

2b. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.

Micah's mother quickly blesses him, hoping to reverse the curse she previously pronounced. As with curse formulae, residents in the ancient Near East believed declarative blessings like this to be effective in power. She invokes the name of *the Lord*, suggesting her devotion to the God of Israel.

The Lord's name is used similarly, however, even in non-biblical writings of the time, alongside the fictitious gods of other nations. Ancient artifacts like scrolls of magic and stone inscriptions named deities in such ways. So, we can't assume the level of this woman's fidelity from her words alone. The Law of Moses addresses this irreverent use, warning the Israelites not to take the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11).



Visual for Lesson 8. *Lead a prayer time centered around asking for God's vision rather than doing what is right in our own eyes.*

Micah's mother is doing everything she can to revoke her earlier wish for harm.

Resolved Mystery

Many years ago, my diamond and sapphire ring disappeared. I often wondered if I had misplaced it. Every time I searched for it, the thought crossed my mind that someone might have taken it. If that were the case, I knew my search was in vain.

If someone stole it, only one person could have done so. Each time the thought flashed through my mind, I pushed it away. He was my son—I couldn't bear to consider it seriously. However, I knew my son was lost and trying to find his way. He was barely an adult and making unwise decisions. He'd done a lot of things, but stealing? From me?

A few years later, my son came to me and confessed. He had indeed taken that ring, and it was gone for good. Unexpectedly, I was relieved and thankful. It wasn't my inattentiveness that had lost such a beautiful gift from my husband! I finally knew what had happened to it. The admission birthed newfound respect for my son, and our relationship began mending.

Micah's mother met his confession with thankfulness rather than anger. More than that, she gave him a blessing. That forgiveness, that relief, that blessing—they resonate with me. When your flesh tells you to hate—to retaliate—do you have the strength to bless instead? —PM

B. Imaged Idol (vv. 3–4)

3. And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the LORD from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

To further avoid the repercussions of the curse, Micah returns the money, and his mother claims that it was *dedicated* to *the Lord*. In the process of making idols, it was considered necessary to first dedicate (or sanctify) the materials used. They were consecrated, or set apart, for this particular use. Micah's mother's words are confusing because they twist the idea of things declared holy *unto the Lord* with an action expressly forbidden by the law. Silver can certainly be sanctified for the Lord's purposes, as with offerings for use in the tabernacle (compare Exodus 25:3; 26:19–21; 31:4; 38:19–27). But the law prohibits making idols (Exodus 20:23; Deuteronomy 7:25). Nevertheless, the Israelites frequently struggle against forming idols—or worse, they *don't* struggle against doing so (Exodus 32). Such figurines were common in the ancient Near Eastern cultures that surrounded them.

While idols of various types could be either *graven* or *molten*, the description of the image made here denotes both a sculpting process and the overlay of molten metal. Ancient idol makers often carved an image out of wood and covered it with bronze, silver, or gold (compare Jeremiah 10:2–4; Revelation 9:20).

The text mentions two restorations: Micah returns the silver to his mother, and then she states she will return it to him. It is unclear whether she is communicating that she intended the silver for use in constructing an idol before it was stolen or that her intention is new. If the purpose is new, Micah's mother desires the idol's creation as an additional protection against the curse she uttered.

4. Yet he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

After Micah returns the funds, *his mother* moves forward with her plan and uses a portion

of *the money* to make the idol. The difference in sums is confusing. Although the woman claims she's dedicated the full amount to making an idol, she ultimately uses only *two hundred shekels*. The remaining nine hundred units disappear from the story.

The term *founder* signifies a worker who specializes in refining metal. These craftsmen purified, poured, shaped, dipped, and cast metals (compare Isaiah 40:19). Occasionally, Scripture refers to the Lord utilizing a similar refining process as He molds, shapes, and purifies His people (Psalm 66:10; Isaiah 48:10; Malachi 3:3).

The metal worker specifically makes a *graven image* for Micah's family. The creation of this idol goes directly against God's second command to Israel: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4). The specific form of this image is unknown, but idols in the region often take anthropomorphic (human-like) shapes (Psalm 115:4–7; Isaiah 44:13). The family not only commissions the creation of the false god, but then they set it in a prominent place in Micah's *house*!

C. Private Priest (vv. 5–6)

5a. And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim.

A *house of gods* was a sacred space in an ancient Near Eastern home that was designed for the residence of a deity. A shrine like this one, on a family's property, is thought to be a way to secure divine favor. The Hebrew phrase translated *house of gods* here is the same as is used to refer to the tabernacle at Shiloh (Judges 18:31).

The Lord prohibited setting up sanctuaries like Micah's as alternatives or even supplements to His designated place of worship (Deuteronomy 12:1–7). There was to be a single place of worship for the Israelites as a protection against the pagan worship practices of the surrounding nations. Despite his family's relative proximity to Shiloh and God's instructions, Micah creates a personal shrine.

The sacrilege goes on: Micah makes *an ephod*. This is a garment the priests wear while serving in the tabernacle (Exodus 28:2–14; 39:2–7). Micah's replication of this priestly attire copies pieces of God's instructions but is a departure from God's stated intentions. The exact use of such an item outside of the tabernacle is unclear.

The exact nature of *teraphim* remains debated as well. It is a plural Hebrew word that elsewhere refers to idols (example: 1 Samuel 15:23). The most common interpretation is that they were representations of ancestors who maintained a link with the family beyond the grave. This veneration of the dead was yet another prohibited practice (Leviticus 19:28; Deuteronomy 14:1–2).

5b. And consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

The word *consecrated* translates a Hebrew idiom also found in Leviticus 16:32. It refers to what may be called ordination; the same term also appears, with slightly different Hebrew spelling, in Exodus 29:9. The expression is literally "filling the hand," symbolizing endowing the person with authority. Either physically or metaphorically, Micah places the idol(s) in his son's hands, installing him as a *priest* over their household cult.

What Do You Think?

What was wrong with Micah's choices in worship?

Digging Deeper

How do Exodus 20:4 and 29:4–9 enlighten your answer?

Shrine of the Times

My husband and I had dinner at a friend's house one evening. The conversation turned to hockey, a very well-loved subject for the men. During their discussion, the friend showed my husband his "hockey room" devoted to celebrating the LA Kings. There were signed jerseys on the wall, albums of hockey cards neatly shelved, patches galore, and pendants lined up like crown molding. Bobbleheads, ornaments, signed pictures, and game pucks filled the room. Honestly, it was a bit overwhelming, and the *reverence* on this man's face was unmistakable. Even my husband was taken aback—and the Kings are his favorite team as well!

My husband's friend didn't have a personal relationship with the team. He venerated their iconography and identified himself with them—but he wasn't a player. There is a line between fandom and idolatry. We must be on guard to know the difference. What or who holds the highest priority in your life? —PM

6. In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

This verse summarizes the core problem: *Israel* lacks a central authority, and the people choose to dismiss God's laws in favor of personal options. It is the first appearance of a refrain that echoes throughout the book of Judges (18:1; 19:1; 21:25). God explicitly declared that the Israelites were not to live this way—"every man [doing] whatsoever is right in his own eyes"—after entering the promised land (Deuteronomy 12:8). Rather, God calls His people to do what is right in God's eyes (Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 12:25–28; 13:18). Micah, his family, and the Israelites as a whole are mired in a place that God warned them to avoid.

What Do You Think?

Is choosing personal options over God's directives a universal problem in all times and places?

Digging Deeper

What "guard rails" are necessary to help communities choose God's ways over human ways?

II. Misguided Engagement

(Judges 18:18–19, 27)

A lot happens in the twenty-four verses that intervene between our lesson texts. A Levite from Bethlehem travels into the hill country and encounters Micah (Judges 17:7–8). Micah invites him to stay, and the opportunistic Levite is inducted into priestly service for Micah in the household shrine. Micah pays him an annual salary plus room and board (17:10–12). Micah believes the result will be to encourage the Lord's blessings (17:13).

Eventually, spies from the tribe of Dan show up at Micah's house (Judges 18:2). They are on a scouting mission, looking for a new place for their tribe to settle (18:1). The Danites have been assigned land like the other tribes (Joshua 19:40–48), but they have been unable or unwilling to take possession of it by overcoming the Amorites who dwell there (Judges 1:34). Therefore, the tribe looks elsewhere for suitable habitation.

While spending the night in Ephraim, the spies recognize the Levite's voice and ask him to inquire of God whether their journey will be successful (Judges 18:3, 5). The Levite tells them what they want to hear (18:6). So, the spies return home, gather six hundred troops, and head back into the region of Ephraim to acquire the land (18:9–11). En route to their destination, the Danite army stops at Micah's house and loots his sanctuary (18:17).

A. Persuaded Priest (vv. 18–19)

18. And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye?

The Danites are no more attentive to the commands of God than Micah. Instead, they approach Micah's house as pillagers. The word *these* refers to the five men who initially visited Micah's house and shrine (Judges 18:2). They observe the standard practice of conquerors in the ancient Near East as they strip the "temple" of its valuables. The Danites take Micah's idols as talismans of favor for their mission. With a "might makes right" mentality, they act with impunity because they have six hundred armed men guarding the entrance (18:16–17).

The Levite protests the theft and sacrilege, blind to the irony of his complaint. His question, *What do ye?*, could be asked of him too, as an illegitimate priest administering a household cult.

What Do You Think?

What blinds humans to the irony of our complaints?

Digging Deeper

How can believers guard truth and right practice?

19. And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?

The offer the Danites make to the Levite is the same as the one Micah made—be *a father* and *a priest* to us (Judges 17:10). The position of a *father* means acting as an authoritative voice and advisor (compare Genesis 45:8). They ask him to halt his objection and then offer him a deal, which the opportunistic Levite takes (Judges 18:20). The Danites' offer amplifies the Levite's perceived influence.

What Do You Think?

What was wrong with the Danites' invitation to the Levite?

Digging Deeper

How does Numbers 3:5–13 affect your understanding?

B. Cruel Conquest (v. 27)

27. And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure: and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire.

Micah realizes his idols and priest are gone and calls his neighbors together, hoping to fight the looters (Judges 18:22). After catching up to them, the Danites easily convince Micah to return home, lest he suffer worse loss (18:25–26).

As the army arrives at the town of *Laish,* the men are well beyond the area designated as Dan's inheritance (Joshua 19:40–47). Their position marks the northernmost part of Israel.

The army's pillaging continues. The Danites overpower the people of Laish and eventually settle there themselves (Judges 18:28, not in today's text). At first glance, their actions toward the city resemble God's instructions regarding entering the land and taking possession (Deuteronomy 7:1–5). Yet the Danites act against the Law of Moses, as Judges 18:28–31 indicates.

Conclusion

A. Maintaining Continuity

Micah, his mother, the Levite, and the Danites all illustrate the problems associated with each person doing what is "right" in their "own eyes" rather than that which is right in God's eyes (Judges 17:6; compare Deuteronomy 12:28). There is a danger in establishing one's own rules—and every person plays a role in either furthering obedience to God or perpetuating degradation and dishonesty.

Unfortunately, the choices of the players in today's account resulted in a cult being established in the northern region of Israel. Micah's idol(s) and the illegitimate priesthood led by his Levite are both reiterated and reinforced by later generations (compare 2 Kings 17:32). Hundreds of years later, first Jeroboam and then Jehu describe Dan as a pilgrimage site for idol worshipers (1 Kings 12:28–30; 2 Kings 10:29).

God's covenant emphasized remembrance and the responsibility each family must take to pass along God's instructions (Deuteronomy 6:6–7). Errors occur because of both pride and ignorance. It takes humility to correct and to be corrected. It takes time and intention to teach the ways of God. Believers must positively—not passively—reinforce consistency in faith. True discipleship requires lifelong learning, submission to instruction, regular remembrance, and communal accountability.

B. Prayer

Father God, we thank You for preserving Your Word. Help us receive guidance from it in every way. May we remember Your miraculous and loving provision from one generation to the next. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Know Scripture and put it into practice.

How to Say It

Amorites	*Am*-uh-rites
ephod	*ee*-fod
Laish	*Lay*-ish
Micah	*My*-kuh

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite participants to play an alternative game of "Simon Says." Instead of doing the thing Simon says to do, tell them they must do something completely different. Example: If "Simon says, hop on one foot," a player should do anything that doesn't involve hopping on one foot. If they *obey* Simon, they are "out." Add in complex actions such as, "Simon says, do a hula dance" or "Simon says, pretend you are a chef preparing a meal." In addition, say the commands quickly. Play until everyone is "out." At the end of the game, discuss what made this basic game challenging as an adult.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Basic Instructions" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Distribute a black marker to each group. Have participants work in groups of four to complete as indicated.

Say, "Following instructions may seem tedious at times, but if we don't pay attention, things can quickly become confusing and chaotic. In today's lesson, notice what happened when people neglected God's instructions."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Judges 17:1–4 aloud. Allow time for learners to give a quick summary. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–How do you see Micah's response reflecting what he observed and learned from his mother? 2–What do you know about Micah's attitude toward God and God's instructions for worship?

Ask a volunteer to read Judges 17:5–6 aloud. Divide participants into four groups and provide them with the following cross-references. Ask each group to discuss the differences between God's intentions and Micah's implementation.

Shrine Group. Read Exodus 25:8–9; 29:44–46.
Ephod Group. Read Exodus 28:1–14.
Idols Group. Read Exodus 20:1–6, 22–23.
Priests Group. Read Numbers 16:1–5; 17:1–10.

After calling time, have groups share their findings. Ask: "What incorrect mindset or attitude did Micah have that led him to justify his actions as 'right'?"

Ask a volunteer to read Judges 18:18–19, 27 aloud. Give the four small groups new themed names and provide them with these cross-references:

Rachel Group. Read Genesis 31:14–19.
Aaron Group. Read Exodus 32:1–6.
Gideon Group. Read Judges 8:22–27.
Israel Group. Read 1 Samuel 4:1–11.

Ask groups to share a summary of their passage with the whole group. Identify as a class the commonalities between the passages and Judges 18:18–19, 27. Have a volunteer read Romans 1:21–25 to the group and ask: "When people exchange the glory of God for man-made idols, what does this indicate about their thoughts and beliefs?"

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Choose This Day" exercise from the activity page. Ask small groups to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Before the lesson, find a recording of the hymn "Be Thou My Vision." Have the lyrics available and be prepared to play it for the class.

Distribute index cards and pens. Say, "The people in this story lost sight of God and His commands. They went their own way. Sometimes, we also forget God's directions." Allow a couple of minutes for silent reflection. Ask participants to identify ways they have deviated from God's commands and write a prayer of confession. Then play the hymn, "Be Thou My Vision." Encourage participants to write down phrases from the hymn that stand out to them. End the lesson with a prayer for all participants. Ask God for wisdom and the courage to faithfully follow and obey Him.

Option. Print out (or bring songbooks) and distribute the lyrics of "Be Thou My Vision" to all participants. Sing the hymn together.

The Prophet Is Called

Devotional Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5:11–22
Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 1:1–28; 3:1–4:1a

1 Samuel 3:8–20

8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.

9 Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.

11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

15 And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

16 Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.

17 And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

18 And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

19 And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

20 And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

Key Text

Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. **—1 Samuel 3:9a**

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 3: From Judges to Kings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Describe the historical background of Samuel's prophetic ministry.
2. Compare God's call of Samuel to the call of later prophets (such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.).
3. Identify ways to make truth-telling speech a part of everyday life.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Sunday Prayers
- B. Lesson Context: Historical
- C. Lesson Context: Literary

I. God Calls (1 Samuel 3:8–14)
- A. Eli Perceives (v. 8)
  Wise Mentors
- B. Eli Instructs (v. 9)
- C. Samuel Responds (v. 10)
- D. The Lord Reveals (vv. 11–14)

II. Prophet Speaks (1 Samuel 3:15–20)
- A. Samuel's Fear (vv. 15–16)
- B. Eli's Question (vv. 17–18)
- C. God's Blessing (vv. 19–20)
  With Us

Conclusion
- A. The Courage to Serve
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Sunday Prayers

When I began leading worship at our church, I was both honored and nervous. The biggest hurdle was my apprehension associated with leading congregational prayer. As a part of our regular services, attendees may respond to the sermon or share prayer requests from an open mic. Congregants often voice praise, thanksgiving, or petitions regarding difficult times and situations. Concerns range from the very personal to the global. The worship leader's job is to conclude this collaborative time by responding to the requests, acknowledging what was shared, and praying over the concerns.

The pressure I felt was deeply uncomfortable. The first time, my hands shook. My mind raced with thoughts like, *What if I say the wrong thing? What if I forget someone's name?* I wondered whether taking this position was a terrible mistake; I considered praying for the fire alarm to go off! However, I knew God had called me to this place and opportunity. I knew He'd asked me to serve.

The fire alarm did not go off, and I got through that first service. It wasn't perfect, and I've made some mistakes. But God is always with me. I'm grateful for the courage to follow Him obediently and trust His call on my life.

B. Lesson Context: Historical

Prophets filled one of the three essential roles in ancient Israel, the other two being priest and king. Prophets had close relationships with the Lord and received His words directly. Therefore, they spoke in the name of God, proclaiming and interpreting God's words to whomever He directed. Usually, this was to the people of Israel; at other times, it was to ungodly nations. Prophets were often attached to places of worship or royal courts. They spoke truth to power, challenging authorities on ethical grounds when they neglected God's justice or mercy. The Bible shares the stories of many prophets. A short list includes Moses, Miriam, Deborah, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Some served only in prophetic ministry; others had political, military, or leadership

roles alongside their prophetic responsibilities. Samuel was one of the latter, being acknowledged today as the last judge of the era of the judges and the first prophet of the era that followed. The time frame of his ministry was about 1067–1043 BC.

C. Lesson Context: Literary

Today's lesson picks up partway through what scholars call Samuel's "prophetic call narrative" (compare Exodus 3–4; Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 1). The chapter begins by noting that it was uncommon for the people of Israel to hear from God directly or to see Him (1 Samuel 3:1). God was not absent from the Israelites, but it may have felt like it. A later prophet will describe such times as a "famine" (Amos 8:11–12).

Samuel was being raised in the tabernacle, the tent structure that housed the ark of the covenant at Shiloh, because his mother had promised him to God. Samuel's mother, Hannah, could not conceive and prayed for God to grant her a child (1 Samuel 1:10). She vowed to dedicate him to God's service if God answered her prayer (1:11).

Eventually, young Samuel was old enough to "minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest" (1 Samuel 2:11), although he was still a "child" in that capacity (2:18; 3:1). One night, while Samuel was asleep in the tabernacle, he heard a voice calling his name (3:3–4). Assuming it to be Eli, Samuel hurried over to his elderly mentor's bed to see what he needed (3:5). Eli sent Samuel back to sleep. A little while later, Samuel heard his name called a second time and rushed over to Eli—and again Eli sent him back to bed (3:6). Today's text begins with the third calling of Samuel's name.

I. God Calls

(1 Samuel 3:8–14)

A. Eli Perceives (v. 8)

8. And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the LORD had called the child.

Repetition indicates importance—one is to pay attention. For *the third time* this night, Samuel rises from a place close to the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 3:3). He navigates through the tabernacle to Eli's usual sleeping quarters (3:2). After this third disruption to his sleep, Eli finally discerns who is calling Samuel. Imagine Samuel's bewilderment, waking up repeatedly because an unknown person calls his name!

Samuel is still a *child.* The Hebrew word here refers to a preadolescent. Samuel's experience of God is limited to what Eli has taught him. Although he serves in the tabernacle, Samuel does not yet have a personal relationship with God (1 Samuel 3:7).

What Do You Think?

What is the role of repetition in growth and learning?

Digging Deeper

How has God utilized repetition in the development of your spiritual life?

Wise Mentors

I approached a mentor of mine once when I was distressed. I wanted guidance about a particular choice. I had spent a lot of time in prayer but sensed no answer. Actually, I perceived a pointed silence on the part of the Lord.

My mentor prayed with me and then was silent for a while herself. When she spoke, she said she thought the Lord wanted me to decide. She reminded me that sometimes there is no right or wrong decision. In those times, God wants us to grow beyond our chronic distrust of our knowledge, wisdom, and motivations. My mentor counseled me to make the choice myself without fear.

In this case, my mentor helped me recognize the Lord's silence. In Samuel's case, his mentor helped him recognize the Lord's voice. How long would Samuel have run back and forth, looking for who was speaking to him, without Eli's wise counsel? Do you have a mentor who can help you seek a deeper understanding of God's words and His silences? Can you be or become such a mentor?

—DS-G

B. Eli Instructs (v. 9)

9. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie

down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Eli, an experienced priest, instructs Samuel to return to bed. He coaches Samuel through his response to God's presence. Samuel returns to an inner area of the tabernacle. It may be where Samuel regularly slept, but it is also possible that Samuel was practicing "incubation." Incubation involves spending the night in a temple or holy space in hopes of experiencing a divine dream or vision. Many ancient Near Eastern cultures practiced it—Egyptians, Hittites, Canaanites, and Israelites—but Samuel's lack of understanding when the Lord calls him indicates an unexpected experience. The name *Samuel* means "God hears" or "God asks" (1 Samuel 1:20); we see the latter happening here.

What Do You Think?

What is the purpose of wise mentorship in spiritual development?

Digging Deeper

How has mentorship shaped your life as a believer?

C. Samuel Responds (v. 10)

10a. And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel.

The fourth call from *the Lord* comes with a visitation. Previously, God had only called out to Samuel. This time, two additional verbs describe the Lord's presence with Samuel as a manifestation. We use the term *manifestation* because no one can see God's face and live (Exodus 33:20). A more scholarly term for this type of event is a *theophany.*

The way Samuel hears God's voice invites us to consider how other prophets heard His voice in similar and dissimilar ways. For additional study, see Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 2; Hosea 1; etc.

God speaks Samuel's name twice in succession. The repetition echoes God's call to Abraham (Genesis 22:11), Jacob (46:2), and Moses (Exodus 3:4).

10b. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for they servant heareth.

This moment changes Samuel's life forever. It is one thing for God to call someone, but the call remains incomplete until the person answers. Samuel's words echo Eli's advice. He asks the Lord to *Speak* and acknowledges himself as God's *servant*. He lets God know that he is poised to listen. This may be the reason the Lord initiates His communication at night. The distractions of the day are past, and the Lord has Samuel's full attention.

What Do You Think?

What circumstances and environment best assist you in giving God your full attention?

Digging Deeper

What distractions may God be asking you to set aside or avoid?

D. The Lord Reveals (vv. 11–14)

11. And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

This verse begins a section that some scholars call "Samuel's dream." Samuel's encounter with the Lord doesn't seem to be in a dream, like Solomon's encounter, which comes centuries later (1 Kings 3:5). In contrast, Samuel is awake while receiving this message! In the ancient Near East, however, sleep was not required for an encounter to be classified as occurring in a dream. It counted as a dream if it happened at night when the recipient would usually be asleep (compare Job 33:14–18).

In any case, God begins to reveal His plan to Samuel. He starts with a call to pay attention—the Hebrew word translated as *behold* indicates that what comes next is essential. In modern English, we might say, "Listen up!"

Tingling *ears* symbolize hearing the terrible news of God's anger. The description is powerful and occurs only in two other places in the Old Testament: when God speaks of bringing disaster upon Judah and Jerusalem and when God prophesies that the valley of the son of Hinnom will be renamed the Valley of Slaughter (2 Kings 21:12;

Jeremiah 19:3). The details of this verse's particular bad news come next.

12. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

God knows what has happened regarding Eli's wicked sons (1 Samuel 2:12–17). Eli also knows, and his weak attempt to correct his sons' behavior has been ineffectual (2:22–25). Since Eli won't stop their sin, God will do so Himself. This message is not God's first communication to Eli on the subject (2:27–36).

The phrasing of *begin . . . end* indicates totality—God's corrective action will be comprehensive.

13. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

God *will judge* against both "sins of commission" (actively committing sin) and "sins of omission" (failing to do something that one should do). Eli's two *sons* are guilty of the former; Eli himself is guilty of the latter. The sons were guilty of thievery that amounted to contempt (1 Samuel 2:12–17). Their sins also included adultery and dishonoring their father (2:22, 25). These corrupt priests did not operate in secret; ordinary Israelites knew about their mishandling of offerings (2:24).

Eli bears responsibility—and God is holding him to it. Eli heard about his sons' behavior, and while he did protest, his sons did not listen (1 Samuel 2:22–25). Eli did nothing more to stop them. As the head of the household, Eli was obligated to discipline his sons.

What Do You Think?

Are sins of commission or sins of omission more prevalent for modern believers?

Digging Deeper

Which are more dangerous? Do you struggle with one or the other?

14. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

God has decided to act, and His decision is final. No *sacrifice* or *offering* will cause Him to change His mind. What was and is prophesied will indeed come to pass (1 Samuel 4:12–18).

II. Prophet Speaks

(1 Samuel 3:15–20)

A. Samuel's Fear (vv. 15–16)

15. And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

After receiving the message from the Lord, *Samuel* does not immediately go to Eli—he stays in bed *until the morning*. When dawn arrives, he performs his regular duty of opening *the doors of the house of the Lord* to begin a new workday.

The message God gave Samuel is not easy to digest. As Samuel goes about his daily routines, he feels fear when he thinks about recounting it to *Eli*. We can easily imagine this because of Samuel's closeness with the elderly priest.

What Do You Think?

Is fear a legitimate emotion in a life dedicated to God's service?

Digging Deeper

How do 1 Samuel 21:10–15; Psalm 27:1–3; and 2 Timothy 1:7 impact your answer?

16. Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.

We wonder whether Eli experienced any insomnia after he sent Samuel back to receive the Lord's message! *Eli* waits out the night and then summons *Samuel*, identifying him as *my son*. He may be putting some pressure on Samuel by reminding him of the nature of their relationship. Samuel answers promptly, with the same response he had throughout the night: *Here am I* (1 Samuel 3:5–6, 8).

B. Eli's Question (vv. 17–18)

17. And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also,



Visual for Lesson 9. *Point to the visual and ask, "How will you make space to listen for God's promptings this week?"*

if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

Eli couches his demand to know what Samuel heard in the language of a threat. Dire repercussions will ensue if Samuel doesn't tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Given the content of the revelation, we may easily imagine Samuel's reluctance to tell Eli plainly. Samuel thus faces a test of his integrity. Will he relay the fullness of God's words to Eli?

18a. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him.

Young *Samuel* performs a challenging aspect of prophecy: faithfully passing along what God has said. It is an unpleasant message, yet Samuel holds nothing back, passing his integrity test (compare Revelation 22:18–19). Samuel accepts the Lord's calling as he steps into his role as a prophet for Israel, whether he realizes it or not.

18b. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

Eli is the *he* in this verse. To his credit, he receives the Lord's message and does not blame Samuel. Today we might say that Eli does not "shoot the messenger."

One way to understand the concept of Old Testament prophecy is to compare it to a child telling their sibling, "Dad says to get inside right now!" The child speaks the words, but the authority comes from the parent. Eli recognizes God's authority over Samuel's message and accepts God's word. He submits to the Lord's determination of what is *good*. In this context, good represents that which is right, reasonable, and commendable.

C. God's Blessing (vv. 19–20)

19. And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

As *Samuel* grows up, he conveys God's will for the people of Israel. Samuel's growth speaks of maturing not only physically but also spiritually. He will be the first of the prophets to foresee the outpouring of the time of the Messiah (see Acts 3:24).

After the initial call, *the Lord* does not leave Samuel alone but remains *with him,* giving direction and faithful support. Samuel's encounter with God is not a one-and-done situation but the beginning of a lifetime spent on God's mission.

The phrase *did let none of his words fall to the ground* is unique. It only appears in precisely this way here. The Hebrew phrase seems to mean that people listened to Samuel, and God fulfilled the things He spoke through Samuel, marking him as a faithful prophet. Daniel 8:12 speaks of a time and situation when the truth is "cast . . . to the ground." The opposite is the case here.

With Us

On this side of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, we have the privilege of a personal relationship with God. The Spirit of God lives in us (Romans 8:9)! God promises to draw near to those who draw near to Him (James 4:8). Yet, it can be difficult to feel connected to the Lord, especially when transitions happen.

I used to meet with God in the cool stillness of early morning, before the world was quite awake. There was habit, trust, and comfort in our routine. But when I became a mother, exhaustion obliterated that space. Suddenly, I was no longer a morning person, and I struggled to connect with God during other times of the day.

Graciously, God brought something new. My children could not sleep unless they were in motion, so I started going on hours-long walks. I found that walking in the fresh air, with the peace of my children's contentment nearby, was another

blessed stillness where I could hear God. Where do you go or what do you do to know God is with you?
—DS-G

20. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

The phrase *from Dan even to Beersheba* is another way of saying "from border to border." The towns of Dan and Beersheba denote the northernmost and southernmost cities in Israel, respectively (compare Judges 20:1; 2 Samuel 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25). Thus, the phrase points to the totality of Israel in acknowledging Samuel *to be a prophet of the Lord*.

The Hebrew word translated *established* indicates that the Israelites confirm Samuel's ministry as being from God. The idea is that of "being verified" (compare Genesis 42:20). There is proof that Samuel hears from God (contrast Deuteronomy 18:22; Jeremiah 14:14).

As *Samuel* steps into God's larger purpose for his life, a new period in Israel's history dawns. Samuel will be the last of the judges, bringing that era to a close (1 Samuel 7:15; see Acts 13:20). He becomes the first of the prophets to foretell the days of the Messiah. The people will have a new kind of leader—a pivotal one.

Conclusion

A. The Courage to Serve

In the Old Testament, prophets were called to proclaim God's word. Young as he was, Samuel proved himself to be a faithful prophet, receiving the word of the Lord and declaring all of it despite the difficulty of the message. Perhaps his mother's determination to fulfill her vow to God weighed into his understanding and actions (1 Samuel 1:11, 24–28).

Many other Old Testament prophets also faced the challenge of giving hard messages. Jeremiah, for example, spoke God's words to the prophet's personal detriment (Jeremiah 37:1–38:9). However, the honor and respect each prophet gave God in faithfully serving and obediently speaking is worthy of emulation.

The human perspective is skewed when it comes to the consequences of sin. God's justice requires righteousness, which results in negative consequences for those who refuse to obey Him. Sometimes, what God deems "good" feels ugly, harsh, or disappointing. The prophet's role was often to foretell unpleasant outcomes when people refused to heed warnings. This ministry was difficult—it required great fear of the Lord, a desire to serve Him alone, and a substantial love for the people to whom the message pertained. Their call was vitally related to the commandments on which Jesus would say that "all the law and the prophets" hang: (1) "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" and (2) "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matthew 22:37–40). Still today, there is substantial love in a willingness to obey God by proclaiming hard-to-accept truth.

B. Prayer

Father God, thank You for prompting Samuel's faithful response to Your call. Like Samuel, may we have the courage to serve You obediently, even when—or especially when—it is difficult. May we hear and know Your truth. May we faithfully speak when we sense Your Spirit is prompting. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Serve the Lord faithfully—even when (or especially when) it is difficult.

How to Say It

Beersheba	Beer-*she*-buh
Canaanites	*Kay*-nu-***nites***
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-*ahn*-uh-me
Ezekiel	Ee-*zeek*-ee-ul or Ee-*zeek*-yul
Hinnom	*Hin*-um
Hittites	*Hit*-ites or *Hit*-tites
Isaiah	Eye-*zay*-uh
Israelites	*Iz*-ray-el-ites
Jeremiah	Jair-uh-*my*-uh
Samuel	*Sam*-you-el
theophany	the-*ah*-fuh-nee

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Begin the lesson by asking participants to silently reflect on a time they felt a strong inner prompting, a sense of direction, or a feeling that something was being communicated to them.

Talk about how that feeling could be a "calling." As a class, discuss the following: What does it mean to you to "be called" by God?

Say: "Today's Bible study tells the story of how young Samuel was called by God. Pay attention to how Samuel learns to recognize God's voice and how his mentor Eli helps him."

Into the Word

Option. Distribute copies of the "A Deep Dive into History" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Divide learners into four small groups to complete as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 3:8–10. Then ask: 1–Why do you think it took Samuel three times to realize God was calling him? 2–What does Samuel's eventual response signify? 3–What does his answer reveal about his attitude? 4–Why was Eli finally able to discern that it was the Lord?

Divide the class into three groups: **Isaiah Group**, **Jeremiah Group**, and **Ezekiel Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) of the questions below for in-group discussion.

Isaiah Group. Read Isaiah 6. 1–How does God call Isaiah? 2–What is the same or different between Isaiah's call and Samuel's call?

Jeremiah Group. Read Jeremiah 1:4–10. 1–Describe God's call to Jeremiah. 2–What is the same or different between Jeremiah's call and Samuel's call?

Ezekiel Group. Read Ezekiel 2. 1–How does God call Ezekiel? 2–What is the same or different between Ezekiel's call and Samuel's call?

Call groups together to share their discoveries.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Word Study" activity from the activity page. Have each group complete one section as indicated before discussing conclusions as a large group.

Invite another volunteer to read 1 Samuel 3:11–16. Talk through the following: 1–What does God's message to Samuel reveal about the nature of divine judgment? 2–How does the message conveyed in these verses reflect the state of Eli's household? 3–What does God's pronouncement against Eli and his sons tell us about the consequences of neglecting one's responsibilities? Discuss how God's message would have been difficult for Samuel to hear—and even harder to deliver. Invite learners to shout out the emotions Samuel might have been experiencing when he heard God's message. Write them on the board. Talk about the ethical dilemma Samuel faced: obedience to God versus the potential for conflict or rejection.

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 3:17–20. Continue the discussion with the following: 1–Why do you think Samuel told Eli everything God had revealed? 2–What does this demonstrate about Samuel's willingness to serve God? 3–How does Eli's response to Samuel's revelation demonstrate his acceptance of God's will? 4–How important is it to be faithful to the message that God has given you, even when it is difficult?

Into Life

Talk about how Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Samuel all had to have courage to serve God and speak uncomfortable truths. Emphasize that despite their difficulties, they served the Lord faithfully.

Lead a brief brainstorming session about why it might be difficult to tell the truth in our everyday lives. Write the class's responses alongside the emotions list you made earlier in the lesson.

Using Samuel as an example, lead a second brainstorming session on ways to make truth-telling a part of our everyday lives. Challenge learners to adopt one of the ideas on the board to use throughout the week. Conclude with prayer.

The Ark Is Lost

Devotional Reading: Psalm 29
Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 4:2–7:2

1 Samuel 4:12–22

12 And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

13 And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out.

14 And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli.

15 Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

16 And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?

17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

19 And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her.

20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it.

21 And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.

22 And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

Key Text

[Phinehas' wife] said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken. **—1 Samuel 4:22**

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 3: From Judges to Kings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Describe the circumstances that led to the loss of the ark of the covenant.
2. Examine what led to failure and dishonor for the Israelites.
3. Compose a personal lament for times when seeking personal success and glory has led to harm.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Good Luck Charm
- B. Lesson Context

I. Death of a Father (1 Samuel 4:12–18)
- A. Benjamite Messenger (vv. 12–13)
- B. Battlefield News (vv. 14–16)
- C. Israel's Losses (v. 17)
- D. Eli's End (v. 18)

II. Death of a Wife (1 Samuel 4:19–22)
- A. Woman Near Death (v. 19)
  Domino Effect
- B. Despair Over Capture (v. 20)
- C. Departure of Glory (vv. 21–22)
  What's in a Name?

Conclusion
- A. Good Question, Wrong Answer
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Good Luck Charm

During times of war, soldiers have been known to carry good luck charms. These talismans remind them of home, family, love, and normality. Some may believe they bring good fortune or protection. But in general, the objects remind soldiers who they are, where they are from, and that life continues away from the conflict.

Throughout World War I, soldiers from Ireland wore tiny pig charms carved from bog oak. British and Japanese soldiers carried Chinese soapstone monkeys. A US soldier in Iraq reported packing a little teddy bear his wife had given him, scorched by explosions but still intact. Historically, soldiers, sailors, and airmen from various cultures carried rabbits' feet for good luck. Some men brought family mementos: prayer books or dog tags belonging to relatives who returned safely from previous conflicts. One man had a receipt from a burrito-eating contest he won back home!

For the ancient Israelites, the ark of the covenant was to be a reminder of God's faithfulness and power. It was designed by God as a visual aid to help them remember that God dwelt with them. But in Israelite practice, it fell far short of that ideal.

B. Lesson Context

Today's lesson takes us to about the year 1067 BC. It was a year of transition for the tribes of Israel: one judge's rule ended (Eli), a new judge emerged (Samuel), and the community lost the ark of the covenant to the Philistines in battle. The Israelites had built the ark from plans God gave Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 25:10–22). Thus, the ark had been a distinctive part of Israelite identity for some 380 years.

Across those centuries, the ark had traveled with the Israelites as they moved through the wilderness; it had rested in the tabernacle as they settled in a location. It served as a substantial visual aid as the people crossed the Jordan River (Joshua 3; Lesson 2) and followed God's instructions in the fall of Jericho (6:2–13; Lesson 4).

Joshua set up the tabernacle with the ark at Shi-

loh after he assigned the tribes their allotments of land (Joshua 18:1). The city was centrally located and reasonably accessible to all twelve tribes. It was nestled in the hills of Ephraim, approximately halfway between Bethel and Shechem (Judges 21:19). The ark resided in Shiloh for most of the 380 years noted above.

During the latter part of the period of the judges, the Philistines became a major opponent of Israel, beginning about 1080 BC. As today's lesson opens, the Israelites battle against the Philistines once again. The Philistine army defeated the Israelites at the two-day Battle of Aphek, where the Israelites lost about four thousand men on the first day (1 Samuel 4:1–11).

Reflecting on the day's losses, Israel's leaders looked for an explanation. They concluded that the Lord wasn't with them because the ark of the covenant hadn't been present with the soldiers during the battle's first day (1 Samuel 4:3). Therefore, the Israelites sent men to Shiloh to requisition the ark. The round-trip distance between Ebenezer (the camp of the Israelite army) and Shiloh was about forty miles. A walking pace of 3 miles per hour would require over thirteen hours for a trip to Shiloh and back. Therefore, the two days of battle referred to in 1 Samuel 4 may not have been two consecutive days (compare 17:16).

The fact that the ark was present for the second day of battle reveals the Israelites' determination to make this plan happen. Hophni and Phinehas, the wicked sons of Eli the high priest (1 Samuel 2:12–15), accompanied the ark to the Israelite camp (4:4). The presence of the ark intimidated the Philistines (4:5–8). But it also inspired them to fight with fervor (4:9). On the disastrous second day of the Battle of Aphek, Israel lost an additional 30,000 soldiers, the ark of the covenant was captured, and Eli's two sons died (4:10–11).

I. Death of a Father

(1 Samuel 4:12–18)

A. Benjamite Messenger (vv. 12–13)

12. And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

Israel's battle with the Philistines occurred about twenty miles from *Shiloh* (see Lesson Context). One soldier leaves the battlefield and runs to Shiloh as a messenger. Experienced marathon runners today run at 9 or 10 miles per hour. If this *man of Benjamin* is in this category, the trip takes at least two hours. But that pace is unlikely. More realistic is half that fast, a very brisk walk at 4.5 miles per hour—a four-hour trip before dark to complete the journey *the same day* the battle occurred. He brings news of the terrible defeat.

The fact that the soldier wears torn clothes and has dirt on *his head* signals bad news. People in the ancient Near East expressed grief and mourning in various ways, and we see one of those here. The same two words translated *rent* (as in "torn") and *earth* (as in "soil") are also found together in 2 Samuel 1:2 and 15:32. Other methods of mourning include fasting, wailing, donning sackcloth, and placing ashes on one's head (examples: Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 13:19; Esther 4:1–3). Those who see the man approach know instantly that his news is not good.

The man is a member of the tribe *of Benjamin*. The Benjamites are descendants of the youngest of Jacob's twelve sons (Genesis 35:18). The tribe becomes well-known for training warriors with innovative battle skills, including archery, slinging rocks, and ambidextrous fighting (Judges 3:15–16; 20:15–16; 1 Chronicles 12:1–2; see Lesson 7).

What Do You Think?

What modern signals do we use to indicate bad news?

Digging Deeper

Do apparent, physical signs help or hinder messages of woe, warning, and grief?

13a. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God.

Living in a time before televised news and instant internet reports, those at the tabernacle and Shiloh wait anxiously for a messenger to bring an account. *Eli*, in dual roles as high priest and judge, is specifically named as one of those

watchers. His deep concern is evident in his posture *upon a seat by the wayside watching.*

Eli's active presence beside the road goes hand in hand with the agitation of *his heart*. He is uneasy about the vulnerable position in which he and the Israelite elders have placed *the ark of God*. The ark goes by various names in the Old Testament; "ark of God" appears more than thirty times, as does "ark of the Lord." The designation "ark of the covenant" is even more numerous; "ark of the testimony" occurs the least.

Ironically, Eli's active watching contrasts starkly with his previous inattention to God's warning. Although Eli serves as high priest and judge, he fails to control the actions of Hophni and Phinehas, his two sons. See more about them in the commentary on 1 Samuel 4:17, below.

What Do You Think?

Do televised news and instant internet reports help or hinder our reception of news?

Digging Deeper

How do you watch and wait for information that matters deeply to you? What things calm your anxiety? What increases it?

13b. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out.

For some reason, *the man* does not first inform Eli of the situation upon arriving in *the city* of Shiloh. In later incidents, bad news borne to leaders gets the messengers killed (examples: 2 Samuel 1:1–16; 4:5–12). However, the facts are somewhat different in this case.

B. Battlefield News (vv. 14–16)

14–15. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

Although *Eli* is nearly blind, there seems to be nothing wrong with his hearing. In that regard, he is alerted by the anguished cries of the people as they perceive bad news. Their vocalizations express their grief. We don't know if the messenger has said anything up to this point. Perhaps *the noise of the crying* indicates the crowd's discernment of the news, based on the man's appearance (torn clothes, etc.) and demeanor. Eli misses these visual cues.

Eli's request for an explanation of *this tumult* is authoritative. Consequently, there is no delay on the messenger's part in laying out the details of the battlefield loss for him. The messenger recounts the particulars next.

16a. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army.

To flee from one's *army* during battle is to open oneself to a charge of cowardice or treasonous desertion (compare 2 Kings 25:11; Jeremiah 37:12–15). We may wonder whether the army had predesignated this soldier as the bearer of battle news, good or bad. If so, then he's not open to the two potential accusations. The text doesn't say either way.

Rather than go directly to his home in the tribal territory of Benjamin, the man goes instead to Shiloh, a town within the boundaries of Ephraim. The messenger explains that he did not merely leave the battle; he *fled*, running for his life. But this is not the kind of information *Eli* seeks.

16b. And he said, What is there done, my son?

Eli is interested in the message, not the messenger! So he asks a second time for more information. His question is the equivalent of, "How did it go?" Eli wants the truth, even if it is what he fears.

Eli appeals to the soldier as *my son*, a term used to stress interconnection. A figurative use of the designation "my son" is also found in 1 Samuel 3:6, 16, and elsewhere. Eli wants to know the complete details, no sugarcoating or leaving things out. We might imagine his unspoken questions bubbling just below the surface: *How bad was the defeat? What has happened to my sons? What about the ark?*

C. Israel's Losses (v. 17)

17. And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

The soldier gives the essential details, each rev-

elation being progressively worse. We may imagine the strain this messenger feels as he relays the news. Not only must Eli's heart break for the numerous lives lost in *Israel,* but his sons are among the dead.

Hophni and *Phineas*, two selfish priests (1 Samuel 2:12–17), were present at this battle because the Israelite army insisted on taking *the ark* (4:4; see Lesson Context). In association with their position, Hophni and Phineas accompanied the ark to the battlefield. Perhaps they were among those who carried it.

Scripture refers to those two men as "sons of Belial" with no regard for the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12). The word *Belial* is translated "wicked" in Deuteronomy 15:9 and Nahum 1:11, 15, and that is the sense here. Some commentators think it also represents a demonic figure akin to Satan by reflecting a personification of wickedness. God warned Eli twice that devastation would hit his house (1 Samuel 2:34; 3:13–14). Perhaps recalling God's sign that "in one day they shall die both of them" influences the trembling of Eli's heart.

The last bit of news is the worst news of all—the Philistines have captured *the ark of God*. It is not coming home. The tabernacle's most holy place will remain empty.

In the ancient Near East, capturing images of enemies' gods was considered a demonstration of the superiority of the victorious army, people group, and their gods. Though the ark was not an image of Israel's God, nor His dwelling place, it did symbolize God's presence and provision. God dwelt "between the cherubims" (1 Samuel 4:4). To the Philistines, the capture of the ark meant that Israel's God had lost—perhaps He was not the fearful almighty the Philistines first presumed (4:7–8). For Israel, the loss must raise the questions, "Has God's presence left us? Is the covenant null and void?"

Eli lost both his physical and spiritual heritage that day. As father and high priest, the people and structures he was called to lead, guide, nurture, and protect met tragic ends.

D. Eli's End (v. 18)

18. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

The text now reveals where Eli was positioned physically: he's right at the entrance to the city, beside the city *gate*. The news he receives there is so devastating that it shakes him to the core. Thus, he loses his balance and falls from his stool. Intense grief sometimes triggers physiological responses like this as the body reacts to external stimuli. With a sudden change in heart rate and blood pressure, Eli may have experienced medical fainting, a seizure, or a stroke. His age and his *heavy* weight combine with the fall to bring about his demise.

The statement that Eli *had judged Israel* formally connects his leadership to the sequence of leaders depicted throughout the book of Judges. The designation of *forty years* represents his influence over a generation (compare Numbers 32:13; Psalm 95:10). Samuel officially takes the position of judge and priest in future chapters (1 Samuel 7:3–17).

What Do You Think?

If someone recorded one summative sentence about your life at your death, what would it be?

Digging Deeper

What is your influence over the next generation?

II. Death of a Wife

(1 Samuel 4:19–22)

A. Woman Near Death (v. 19)

19. And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her.

The devastation continues. The bitter news reaches *Phinehas' wife,* and her body responds to the trauma by going into labor. She faces the struggle of childbirth while actively grieving a threefold loss.



Visual for Lesson 10. *Point to the visual and ask, "Do you have grief, broken places, or complaints you need to take to God today?"*

Domino Effect

I remember setting up long lines of dominoes on my grandparents' kitchen floor. My brothers and cousins would help by contributing their time and energy. We ensured the youngest relations stayed far from our efforts because they were sure to set off a reaction prematurely!

When every game piece was in place—perfectly equidistant from one another—and everyone was paying attention, Grandpa would announce: "On your mark. Get set. Go!" The chosen participant would tap the first tile, and we'd watch in awe as a wave of seemingly perpetual motion toppled piece after piece.

Similarly, our actions can affect those around us like a chain reaction. When the Israelite elders chose to take the ark from Shiloh to the battlefield, they began a series of events that resulted in negative consequences all around. Will the consequences of your contemplated actions result in blessings or curses? —BRT

B. Despair Over Capture (v. 20)

20. And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it.

Childbirth is a stress and strain, even with modern medical technology. In ancient times it was downright dangerous. Maternal and infant deaths were dreadfully common for our premodern ancestors.

As Phinehas's wife's life slips away, some interesting connections may be noted. Rachel died while giving birth hundreds of years earlier, but her child lived, being (re)named Benjamin (Genesis 35:18). Now, as the wife of Phinehas dies, her child lives, and her death is prompted by news brought by a descendant of Benjamin!

Usually, the birth of a boy would be greeted with joy, even if the mother's well-being tempered the good news. However, Phinehas's wife is inconsolable and refuses to respond to the midwives' encouragement.

C. Departure of Glory (vv. 21–22)

21. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.

This newborn is Phinehas's second male child, the other being Ahitub (1 Samuel 14:3). They are the last of Eli's priestly line (compare 2:30–33).

Fathers typically named newborn children in ancient Israel. But this child is now fatherless, so the duty falls to the dying mother. Names often carry meaning, and in her dying anguish, Phinehas's wife names their son *Ichabod*, which literally means, "Where is the glory?" That brings up another interesting parallel with Rachel. As she was dying, she also gave her newborn son a negative name, but in that case, her husband changed it (Genesis 35:18).

In the Old Testament, God's *glory* often refers

How to Say It

Afizere	Ah-fee-zer-*eh*
Aphek	*A*-fek
Belial	*Bee*-li-ul
Bethel	*Beth*-ul
Ephraim	*Ee*-fray-im
Hophni	*Hoff*-nye
Ichabod	*Ik*-uh-bod
Philistines	Fuh-*liss*-teenz or *Fill*-us-teenz
Phinehas	*Fin*-ee-us

to the manifestation of His presence and power (Exodus 14:17–18; 40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:10–11; etc.). Phinehas's wife translates the battlefield loss as quite the opposite.

What's in a Name?

The cultural practice of the Afizere tribe in Nigeria is to name children after unimportant or negative things. They do this to protect their children from evil spirits. The belief is that the spirits will hear the names and, therefore, undervalue the children, thus leaving them alone. For example, the name "Abus," which means "trash," is common amongst the tribe.

Ichabod was named on his mother's deathbed. She labeled him according to the grief of the moment, reflecting the departure of God's glory. Thus, the boy grew up attached to a constant reminder of tragedy. Yet, his name also bears reminders of the presence of God.

Do you harbor negative nicknames for others?

—DS-G

22. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

This verse seems redundant, but the repetition conveys at least two points. First, we note who is speaking: Phinehas's wife *said* that the ark's capture means God's *glory* has left them. Her perspective may well represent many in Israel and even seem generally true. However, the verse reminds us that this opinion comes from a bereaved woman who is succumbing to childbirth. Her words affirm the depth of her despair.

Second, repetition underlines a point. The name "Ichabod" is not just a footnote of history. It expresses the abject disappointment that God did not deliver the Israelite army as they had hoped.

This section of the account ends with a focus on the loss of the ark of the covenant. Perhaps if God were still visible among His people, they could hold hope for restoration. Instead, they face defeat.

The multiple tragedies that befall Eli's household fulfill God's previous message to Eli: "I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house" (1 Samuel 2:31; compare 3:13).

What Do You Think?

How does repetition show up in your spiritual life?

Digging Deeper

What is the role of repetition in the following Scriptures: Psalms 62, 136; Ecclesiastes 1:2; 3:1–8; Isaiah 6:3; and John 21:15–17?

Conclusion

A. Good Question, Wrong Answer

The chain of events in today's lesson is traceable to a good question and a wrong answer in 1 Samuel 4:3. The good question there, posed after the defeat on the first day of battle, is "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to day before the Philistines?" The wrong answer comes next: "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant . . . it may save us." Sadly, this would not be the last time the Israelites used a physical object as a good luck charm (Jeremiah 7:4; Ezekiel 13:18, 20; etc.). The tragedies that befell the Israelites in general, and Eli's household in particular, should have been received as a clear message: God will not be used or manipulated. What changes in your life need to be made to reflect this fact?

What Do You Think?

Are there any items you tend to rely on for a sense of security or confidence?

Digging Deeper

What might God ask you to substitute for these physical objects to increase your reliance on Him?

B. Prayer

Father God, we repent of the times we've tried to manipulate You for our advantage. In Your mercy, forgive us for our arrogance. Help us submit to Your will and Your way. May we desire, like our Lord Jesus, "Not my will but Yours be done." In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God is to be trusted, not manipulated.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask, "What is the ark of the covenant, and why was it so important to the Israelites?"

Option. Before class, look online for images of what the ark of the covenant may have looked like. Print copies to use during the lesson.

Briefly review the construction and purpose of the ark by reading Exodus 25:10–22 out loud. Discuss the symbolism of its various elements. Talk about what the ark symbolized.

Transition into the lesson by saying, "In today's lesson, we will learn about the devastating consequences of the Israelites' misplaced confidence."

Into the Word

Begin by summarizing the events that led up to today's lesson in 1 Samuel 4:1–11. Use notes from the Lesson Context to help. Explain why the Israelites brought the ark to the battlefield. Then ask the class, "What does the Israelites' response to defeat reveal about their understanding of God and their current relationship with Him?"

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 4:12–18 aloud. Then ask the following questions for discussion: 1–What does the capture of the ark symbolize? 2–What does this passage teach us about the nature of God's presence and power? 3–What does it mean to trust in God fully? 4–What causes failure and dishonor for the Israelites?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Eli's Fall" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated. After calling time, invite groups to share their headlines with the class.

Divide the class into pairs. Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 4:19–22 aloud. Have pairs answer the following questions: 1–What does the name "Ichabod" symbolize in this context? 2–How does Phinehas's wife's statement regarding the departure of glory from Israel reflect the nation's spiritual state? 3–When have you felt a sense of "Ichabod"? How has that experience shaped your faith and understanding of God?

Option. Return to the picture(s) of the ark. Discuss the concept of God's presence and sovereignty, visually represented by the ark. Discuss how the capture of the ark symbolizes the loss of God's presence among the people and its connection to their rejection of His rule. Then ask: "What are the consequences of neglecting God's sovereignty and presence?"

Into Life

Lead into the activity by saying, "'Ichabod moments' still occur today. Removing God from His rightful place in our daily lives is possible. When we realize our folly, the appropriate response is lament—an expression or prayer of grief and sorrow."

Write the following on the board:

LAMENT

- **Turn to God** (*Address God*)
- **Voice Complaint** (*Express pain, confusion, or disappointment*)
- **Ask for Help** (*Ask for God's deliverance*)
- **Express Trust** (*State confidence in God's faithfulness*)

Ask the class to participate in an activity designed for self-reflection and prayer. Distribute index cards and pens. Ask learners to use the elements of lament written on the board to direct their prayers. Instruct them to compose a lament for a time when they sought personal success and glory over God's will and glory. Suggest that laments may be expressed in many ways—as written prayers, poems, letters, or songs. Invite learners to use their laments to pray throughout the week. Close with a collective time of praise for a loving and faithful God.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Responding to Loss" activity from the activity page. Have learners work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Israel Recommits to God

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:50–58
Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 7

1 Samuel 7:3–11, 15–17

3 And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

4 Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.

5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.

6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

7 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

9 And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.

10 And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar.

15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

16 And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

17 And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

Key Text

Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. **—1 Samuel 7:15**

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 3: From Judges to Kings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Samuel's instructions to the Israelites to rid themselves of idolatry.
2. Compare the leadership of Samuel to the roles of prophet and judge in ancient Israel.
3. Write a prayer of intercession, requesting God's favor and deliverance for their nation, local community, and church congregation.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Comeback Kid
- B. Lesson Context

I. First of the Prophets (1 Samuel 7:3–4)
- A. What and Why (v. 3)
- B. Rejection and Acceptance (v. 4)
  Countercultural

II. Actions of a Priest (1 Samuel 7:5–9)
- A. Intercessory Prayer (vv. 5–8)
- B. Animal Sacrifice (v. 9)

III. Last of the Judges (1 Samuel 7:10–11, 15–17)
- A. Rout and Pursuit (vv. 10–11)
  Long-Awaited Victory
- B. Role and Actions (vv. 15–17)

Conclusion
- A. Humble Hearts
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Comeback Kid

Austrian-German weight lifter Matthias Steiner competed at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens. There, he experienced some success, finishing seventh. The following year, however, Steiner struggled at the European Championships, failing three snatch attempts and ultimately finishing in the B bracket of the competition. His disappointing performance, along with additional conflict between officials and coaches, led him to quit the sport altogether.

For several years, Steiner stayed away from weight lifting competition. He experienced personal devastations and challenges during this time, including the death of his wife. Despite the hardships, he decided to compete in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. With an incredible lift of 1,016 pounds combined in the snatch and clean and jerk, he won the gold medal! His comeback was especially inspirational given the personal troubles that preceded it.

Failure is an inherent part of the human experience. We make wrong choices, face setbacks, and try things that don't work out. We endure lengthy periods of waiting or feeling stuck. The Israelites suffered a significant defeat in battle against the Philistine army and lost the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 4; see Lesson 10). But their story wasn't over—defeat was not the end.

B. Lesson Context

The intervening verses between Lessons 10 and 11 describe how the Philistines took the ark of the covenant from the Israelite settlement at Ebenezer and moved it to the temple of Dagon in the city of Ashdod (1 Samuel 4:11; 5:2). However, to put it mildly, things did not go well for the people of Ashdod after the ark's arrival (see 5:3–6)! The inhabitants of Gath fared no better when the ark was transferred to their city, about twelve miles east of Ashdod (5:7–8). Neither did the citizens of Ekron, about eleven miles due north of Gath (5:8–12).

These three relocations occurred over a period of seven months. It took that long before the Phi-

listines realized that the ark was far from being a good-luck charm (see 1 Samuel 6:1–2). Therefore, with great fear and trepidation, the Philistines sent the ark to the Israelite settlement at Bethshemesh, about eight miles due east of Ekron (6:3–18).

God quickly made His displeasure known, however, as seventy Israelites looked into the ark and died (1 Samuel 6:19–20). The ark was to contain the tablets of the Law and may have also housed other items (see Exodus 40:20; Deuteronomy 10:5; compare Hebrews 9:4). But *what* they saw wasn't the point. Rather, the offense was their imposition on God's holiness. God had assigned holiness to the ark when He specified its location to be in "the holy place." The holy place had highly restrictive entrance requirements (Leviticus 16:1–2; Hebrews 9:1–5). In contrast, the residents of the town treated the ark like a tourist attraction.

Therefore, residents of Bethshemesh asked the people of Kirjathjearim, about eight miles away, to accept the ark. The ark remained at Kirjathjearim (approximately seven miles west of Jerusalem) for twenty years (1 Samuel 7:2a). During this time, the Israelites repented, turning their hearts back to the Lord (7:2b).

I. First of the Prophets

(1 Samuel 7:3–4)

A. What and Why (v. 3)

3a. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only.

The nation had begun to recognize *Samuel* as a prophet (see 1 Samuel 3:20–21). Prophets spoke in the name of God, interpreting dreams, visions, and oracles (see Lesson 9). The New Testament refers to him as "Samuel the prophet" (Acts 13:20).

In the verse now before us, he emerges as an authoritative spiritual leader for *all . . . Israel*. This is not the first time the people have needed to turn their hearts away from idols and back to *the Lord* (example: Judges 2:10–13; see Lesson 6). Nor will it be the last time (example: 2 Chronicles 19:4).



Visual for Lesson 11. *Use this visual as a focal point while leading your class in a time of quiet confession and repentance to the Lord.*

The change of allegiance must be directed away from *strange gods* in general and from *Ashtaroth* in particular. The latter goes by various designations. "Ashtaroth" is the plural form of the name; "Ashtoreth" is the singular form. The plural form likely refers to the multitude of idols that honor her. The Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, refers to her as "Astarte" (compare Judges 2:10–15, Lesson 6).

The Old Testament markedly intertwines service and worship (examples: 1 Kings 9:6; 16:31; Jeremiah 13:10). To *prepare* for resolute service and unadulterated worship, the people's *hearts* must return to *the Lord* (see Isaiah 29:13, quoted in Matthew 15:8; Mark 7:6). Right hearts require the active pursuit of holiness. God will restore Israel's sanctity if they confess their wrongdoing, turn from sin, seek forgiveness, and commit to steadfast obedience.

3b. And he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

The threat posed by *the Philistines* is the catalyst for the Israelites' crisis of faith. The book of 1 Samuel describes several such conflicts (1 Samuel 4:1–11; 13:3–7, 16–22; 14:1–23; 17:1–53). To be in *the hand* of someone or something means to be under their power (see Jeremiah 18:6; etc.). God will be the Israelites' protector and deliverer when they live in a covenant relationship with Him.

What Do You Think?

Are the Israelites turning to God because of crisis and extreme stress or because they are truly convicted toward change?

Digging Deeper

Does the concept of "foxhole faith" apply here? Explain your answer.

B. Rejection and Acceptance (v. 4)

4. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.

The word *Baalim* is the plural form of *Baal*, the Canaanite god of storms and fertility. *Ashtaroth* is supposedly one of Baal's consorts. These fictitious gods were the "lords" or "masters" of the ancient Near Eastern cultures that populated the region. These ancient populations sought help from these false gods for agricultural abundance, fertility, and success in war.

Samuel's call to *put away* these pagan gods is significant. It represents a deliberate return to wholehearted trust in God by *the children of Israel* for protection, provision, and prosperity. The decision the Israelites face is one of either-or, not both-and; God will not tolerate any rival deities.

Countercultural

A common experience among the people of God across every culture is the call to move away from cultural norms and into God's way of thinking and acting. Sinful choices exist all around us that humans consider normal but that God asks us to reject. In Roman times, dominant culture supported infanticide as a way to handle unwanted, sickly, female, or disabled children. The first-century Stoicist Seneca frankly admitted to considering it good to destroy those "who at birth are weakly or abnormal." However, God called Christians of the time to oppose such practices. Roman culture viewed Christian respect for individuals with disabilities as strange and subversive.

What standards or established practices are you called to oppose? In what way is God calling you to be countercultural? —DS-G

II. Actions of a Priest

(1 Samuel 7:5–9)

A. Intercessory Prayer (vv. 5–8)

5. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.

In response to the people's return to the Lord, Samuel calls for a large-scale gathering at *Mizpeh*, located just a few miles north of his home in Ramah (1 Samuel 1:19; 7:17 [below]; 8;4). There are multiple towns named "Mizpeh" (also spelled "Mizpah"), but this specific one is situated in the mountainous territory inherited by the tribe of Benjamin (see Joshua 18:26). The name *Mizpeh* means "place of watching," indicating that its location provides a good view of the surrounding countryside. During the period of the kings, it will become Judah's northernmost border fortress (1 Kings 15:22; 2 Chronicles 16:6).

The type of prayer Samuel intends to offer is intercession. Intercessors mediate between two parties; in this case, Samuel arbitrates between *the Lord* and *all* the people of *Israel*. Samuel serves the people by helping to reconcile their fractured relationship with God. To *pray for* (intercede for) others is one of the most important functions of Old Testament prophets (examples: 1 Kings 13:1–6; Amos 7:1–6). Samuel is later recognized, along with Moses, as one of Israel's greatest intercessors (Psalm 99:6; Jeremiah 15:1).

What Do You Think?

How does intercessory prayer differ from other types of prayer?

Digging Deeper

Who is qualified to act as an intercessor in modern Christianity?

6. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

The Israelites begin a series of actions, obeying Samuel's instructions. First, the people gather at *Mizpeh*, the first gathering of its kind in more than two hundred years (compare Judges 20:1).

The assembly signifies a reconnection of Israel as a whole, rather than as fragmented tribal entities.

Second, they use *water* as a symbol of their repentance and cleansing *before the Lord*. In the ancient Near East, idol worshipers often poured out water as an offering to care for their gods. But this example is different. Rather than giving God something He needs, the people offer Him something essential to sustain their lives. In this, their offering connects to their *fasting*. It is an act of penitence and proof of sincerity.

Some scholars connect the pouring out of water to ancient customs of requesting rain and a fertile growing season. In this context, it could signify their rejection of local pagan gods in favor of trusting the Lord as their provider. In either case, water is a precious commodity in an arid climate and, therefore, a costly sacrifice.

Third and fourth, the people fast and confess their sins. Fasting involves abstaining from food or drink to focus on spiritual matters. The time usually devoted to preparing and consuming physical sustenance is instead dedicated to prayer and worship. These actions contribute to the overall cleansing process. The people have already "put away" their false gods (1 Samuel 7:4, above). They intend to purify themselves before the Lord.

This verse describes the first time Samuel plays the role of judge for *the children of Israel*. A form of the Hebrew word translated as *judged* is found throughout the book of Judges to depict leaders and their actions (Judges 2:16; 4:4; 10:2; etc.). This is the first time that the word applies to Samuel. He has been described as a priest (1 Samuel 2:18) and a prophet (3:20), and now he is a judge (compare 7:15).

What Do You Think?

How does fasting relate to confession and repentance?

Digging Deeper

Is fasting an integral part of life with God? What is your experience with fasting?

7. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

The *children of Israel* find themselves in a vulnerable position. Their gathering at *Mizpeh* is highly visible to their long-standing enemy. Word of an Israelite assembly reaches *the lords of the Philistines*, a group that likely includes the leaders of the five key Philistine cities listed in Joshua 13:3.

It was common in the ancient Near East for religious gatherings to precede battles, allowing leaders to request favor from their deities. Because Israel has assembled on a day unaffiliated with a known holiday or festival, the gathering alarms the Philistines. They assume the gathering is a precursor to war and, therefore, launch a direct assault *against Israel*.

8. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.

In response to their fear, *the children of Israel* turn to their leader. They fervently ask *Samuel* to intercede on their behalf, hoping his prayers will initiate their deliverance. Since the Israelites' gathering is not for battle, they are wholly unprepared. Rather than feeling strong and fortified, the people are weak from fasting and repentance. This time, they appropriately place their faith in *God* to *save* them.

B. Animal Sacrifice (v. 9)

9. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.

Samuel responds by making *a burnt offering* to cleanse the people of their guilt and to mediate their prayers as a pleasing aroma to *the Lord* (compare Leviticus 1:13). The phrase *sucking lamb* means "lamb of milk" in Hebrew, indicating that the lamb is still quite young. A lamb could be sacrificed after it was at least seven days old (Exodus 22:30; Leviticus 22:27). The offering is entirely consumed by fire, leaving no part for Samuel or the people to consume.

Some might identify Samuel's role in making an offering as that of a priest. Samuel's role in this

sense is informal. Priests had to be from the tribe of Levi (1 Kings 12:31; etc.), but Samuel was from the tribe of Ephraim (1 Samuel 1:1). Nevertheless, Samuel offered sacrifices and prayers on behalf of the people as priests did (compare 1 Samuel 2:18).

III. Last of the Judges

(1 Samuel 7:10–11, 15–17)

A. Rout and Pursuit (vv. 10–11)

10. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.

Concurrent with Samuel's *burnt offering* and the Philistines' advance *against Israel*, the Lord responds. We do not know whether God speaks in an audible voice that sounds like *thunder*, or if He sends a powerful weather system at just the right moment. Writers of the Old Testament often describe the voice of God as sounding like thunder (2 Samuel 22:14; Job 37:4–5; Psalm 29:3; etc.). Years before this event, Samuel's mother, Hannah, had prayed for the Lord to "thunder upon" His adversaries (1 Samuel 2:10). Now, as her son is a leader of the people, his cries for deliverance bring her hopes to fruition.

The Lord demonstrates His power in a way that *the Philistines* might expect from Baal, the false god of storms. However, this *great* thunder alarms the Philistines and throws them into a panic (the meaning of the word *discomfited*). The Lord stirs up fear among the Israelites' enemy.

11. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Bethcar.

In the last recorded battle between the Israelites and the Philistines, the Israelites fled after the capture of the ark (1 Samuel 4:10). On this occasion, however, *the men of Israel* chase down the army of *the Philistines*. Israel's fighting men begin pursuit in *Mizpeh*, where they had gathered with Samuel (1 Samuel 7:6, above). This is the only mention of *Bethcar* in Scripture, and its exact location is unknown; however, some commentators believe it is situated west of Mizpeh. The term *under* suggests that the destruction of the Philistines takes place at a lower elevation than that of Bethcar.

What Do You Think?

Where is the line between God's responsibility and human responsibility in facing life's battles?

Digging Deeper

What helps you discern between waiting on the Lord and acting?

Long-Awaited Victory

Following the destruction of the Philistines, Samuel erects a stone called Ebenezer (1 Samuel 7:12, not in our printed text). His declaration, "Hitherto hath the LORD helped us," brings closure to a twenty-year-long defeat (compare 4:1–3).

When I was four, my family served as missionaries, and we had plans to go to Ethiopia to translate the Bible. Unfortunately, civil war broke out in Ethiopia just months before our departure. We spent fourteen years in Nigeria instead.

Twenty-five years later, my father and I partnered with Ethiopia's largest evangelical church. We trained leaders on effective follow-up with new believers. The gospel was spreading into prisons and throughout rural villages with incredible results!

Although it came about in a way we didn't expect—through unforeseen circumstances and significant delay—God fulfilled His purpose of using our family to support believers in Ethiopia. What personal stories of defeat-turned-victory do you need to tell? —DS-G

How to Say It

Ashdod	*Ash*-dod
Ashtaroth	*Ash*-tuh-rawth
Astarte	A-*star*-te (first *a* as in *had*)
Baalim	Bay-uh-*leem*
Ekron	*Ek*-run
Kirjathjearim	*Kir*-jath-***jee***-uh-rim or jee-*a*-rim
Ramah	Ray-muh

B. Role and Actions (vv. 15–17)

15. And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

The Israelites achieve such a victory that the Philistines cease invading (1 Samuel 7:13). The end of conflict brings relief for other groups in neighboring territories and, therefore, establishes peace in the land (7:14).

The conclusion of this narrative section summarizes Samuel's faithful service. He has already been recognized as a prophet of Israel (1 Samuel 3:20). This section identifies him as a leader similar to Eli and other judges of Israel (compare Judges 3:10; 4:4; 10:2; 1 Samuel 4:18; etc.). Judges served as leaders of Israel prior to the institution of the monarchy. They held various roles, including those of political leaders, administrators of justice, and military leaders (see Lesson 7). Samuel, as a transitional figure, has often been called "the last of the judges, and the first of the prophets" (compare Acts 3:24; 13:20).

Instead of specifying a particular time frame, this verse emphasizes Samuel's complete devotion—he serves *Israel* and God, *all the days of his life*.

16. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places.

Samuel leads differently than his predecessor, Eli. Instead of remaining in one location and requiring the people to come to him as Eli did in Shiloh, Samuel travels. His influence is not confined to a single city or site. His circuit, which starts from his home in Ramah and extends to three other cities, spans approximately thirty miles. The towns of *Bethel* and *Mizpeh* are likely located north of Ramah in Ephraim. There is more than one town named *Gilgal* in the Old Testament. The one mentioned here is probably located in the Jordan River valley near Jericho.

What Do You Think?

What are the benefits of a "circuit riding" style of ministry or judicial system?

Digging Deeper

Contrast circuit riding with long-term service to a single population.

17. And his return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the LORD.

Although Samuel travels, he makes his home in *Ramah*, the place of his birth (1 Samuel 1:19). With Eli's passing and the ark's new residence in Kirjathjearim (see 4:18; 7:2), Samuel has no reason to remain in Shiloh. This suggests that Shiloh had been destroyed in war (4:12; compare Psalm 78:60). So, Samuel establishes a new place of worship near his home.

Conclusion

A. Humble Hearts

Under Samuel's leadership, the people of Israel demonstrated honest repentance and renewal. They identified themselves with the Lord, and He responded with swift provision. The story that began with defeat and despair, culminating with the capture of the ark of the covenant, concludes with recommitment.

And yet, the account is not free from conflict. The Israelites' humble request for intercession indicates that their reconciliation with the Lord is genuine.

Hearts and lives attuned to the Lord and purified from unrighteousness are poised to see God's deliverance. But righteous living requires sacrifice. God still asks His people to reject the idols that culture offers. God still wants our whole hearts. Are you living in right relationship with both the Lord and the community of faith? Do you humbly ask for assistance when danger arises?

B. Prayer

Father God, we return to You with all our hearts, minds, and strength. We confess our sins and ask You to help us set aside anything that separates us from You. We humbly admit that we need Your grace and provision. Protect us, Lord, and deliver us from our enemies. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God requires wholehearted allegiance.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Warmly acknowledge everyone's presence in class. Then invite learners to think about a significant turning point in their lives—a moment that marked a change in direction, a new beginning, or a shift in perspective. (*Examples:* a new job, a new relationship, the end of a season, the end of a relationship, a move, etc.) Encourage learners to share about these crossroads, and ask them to include details like: 1–What led up to this pivot? 2–What were the key decisions or events involved? 3–How did this change affect them? 4–How did it affect their relationship with God?

Invite students to share and write keywords or phrases on the board that capture the essence of their comments. Ask the class to look for common themes or patterns in their experiences.

Alternative. Set up a station with a towel, a small stone set inside a bowl, and a pitcher of water. Distribute copies of the "Water of Renewal" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Transition into Bible study by explaining that today's passage from 1 Samuel 7 describes a turning point in Israel's history.

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 7:3–6 out loud. Work together as a whole class to list the actions the Israelites took to rid themselves of idolatry. Then discuss: 1–How did the Israelites' actions show that they were serious about turning back to God? 2–When you've turned back to God, how do you ensure that the moment leads to lasting change? A deeper commitment to following God? 3–What is the role of humility in repentance?

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 7:7–11 out loud. Discuss the following questions as a class: 1–What were the Israelites' fears? 2–How did Samuel respond to their fears? 3–What does Samuel's response reveal about his faith in God? 4–What does this passage teach us about the relationship between fear and faith? 5–How does prayer play a role in overcoming fear?

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 7:15–17 out loud. Look at Samuel's role as a leader. Write *Prophet / Judge* as the headers of two columns on the board. Ask students to identify how Samuel fulfilled each of these roles. (Be prepared to give hints from the commentary.) Then discuss: 1–What qualities of Samuel's leadership are evident in his words and actions? 2–How did Samuel guide the Israelites toward repentance and renewal? 3–What does Samuel's example teach us about effective spiritual leadership? 4–What key principles of godly leadership does Samuel showcase? 5–How might you apply these principles in your leadership (within families, churches, workplaces, communities)?

Option. Distribute copies of the "Anatomy of Trust" exercise from the activity page. Have learners work with partners to complete as indicated.

Into Life

As a class, talk about the power of Samuel's intercession. Remind and encourage students that they too can intercede for the lives and souls of others. Divide the class into three groups: **Nation**, **Community**, and **Local Congregation**. Invite each group to write a short prayer of intercession, asking for God's favor and deliverance for those represented by their group name.

After a few minutes, call time and ask the groups to come back together. Gather prayer requests. Write these requests down and make a plan to send your class members an email or text message during the week, reminding them to pray for one another.

Close your class time by having a volunteer from each group read their petition.

David Is Anointed King

Devotional Reading: Micah 6:1–8
Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 9:1–2; 15:10–16:13

1 Samuel 16:4–13

4 And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?

5 And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.

7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

9 Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

10 Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these.

11 And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

12 And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

Key Text

[Jesse] sent, and brought [David] in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. **—1 Samuel 16:12**

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 3: From Judges to Kings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize how David was chosen as God's anointed one.
2. Explain the significance of anointing in Scripture.
3. Compose a prayer of thanksgiving for God's ability to see the potential in every person regardless of what the world sees.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Books and Their Covers
- B. Lesson Context

I. Seeking God's Anointed (1 Samuel 16:4–11)
- A. Samuel's Arrival (vv. 4–5)
- B. Seven Sons (vv. 7–10)
  5'16" Tall
- C. David's Location (v. 11)

II. Finding God's Anointed (1 Samuel 16:12–13)
- A. Physical Features (v. 12a)
- B. Spiritual Presence (vv. 12b–13)
  Oil Averse?

Conclusion
- A. People Think, God Knows
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Books and Their Covers

Have you ever noticed how behavior and wisdom don't always align? For example, consider the pithy axiom, "Don't judge a book by its cover." The wisdom of the saying is evident through both personal experience and the observation of others. Yet, a 2023 study found that 57 percent of North Americans buy or read books based solely on their covers! Today's text reminds us that humans have struggled against superficial perceptions for thousands of years.

B. Lesson Context

Today's lesson takes us back to approximately 1025 BC. The exodus from Egypt (1447 BC) was more than four hundred years in the past. The dismal period of the judges (approximately 1380–1050 BC) came to an end and gave way to something different but not necessarily better: an era of a united monarchy for Israel, which lasted approximately 120 years (1050–931 BC).

The Israelites' desire for a human king meant the rejection of God as king (1 Samuel 8:7). It was a time of transition—some might say Israel reached a "tipping point." Samuel had served honorably as judge and prophet for many years (7:15–17). But his two sons, the "heirs apparent," were dishonorable. The elders of Israel had grown weary of the sons' misdeeds. The elders' solution was to ask for a king (8:1–5, 19–20). Neither the wise and elderly Samuel nor their all-knowing God thought a monarchy was a good idea. But Samuel gave the people what they wanted when God directed him to do so (8:21–22).

Saul became the first king of Israel. He was a member of the tribe of Benjamin (1 Samuel 9–10). Saul's reign started well enough, but he succumbed to disobedience after a short time (13:11–14). Following a second episode of failing to follow God's instructions (15:1–21), God rejected him as king.

Establishing a replacement for Saul took about fifteen years to finalize. Today's lesson text takes us to the beginning of that process. The Lord spoke to Samuel and told him it was time to stop

mourning over Saul's disobedience. God pushed Samuel to quickly complete the task of anointing a new king (16:1).

I. Seeking God's Anointed

(1 Samuel 16:4–11)

A. Samuel's Arrival (vv. 4–5)

4a. And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem.

Samuel leaves his hometown in Ramah and travels between ten and twenty miles southward to *Bethlehem.* His trek is in preparation for an anointing (see Lesson Context). The word *Bethlehem* means "house of bread."

4b. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?

The elders' trembling over Samuel's arrival and their subsequent question prompts a natural sense of wonder in scholars and readers alike. Some suggest that Samuel's appearance with a heifer implies that there is an unsolved murder in the region that needs cleansing (Deuteronomy 21:1–9; compare 1 Samuel 16:2). Others think that the elders remember Samuel's execution of King Agag of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:32–33). Most likely, however, the elders know of the recent discord between Saul and Samuel (15:10–29). Samuel's arrival in Bethlehem could put them in an awkward and potentially dangerous position with their king.

5a. And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD.

Samuel's immediate response de-escalates the tension. He knows that if the public discovers the details of his real mission, it will draw the ire of Saul (compare 1 Samuel 16:2a). Samuel is ready with a cover story: he is there *to sacrifice unto the Lord*. This reasoning comes directly out of his conversation with and instructions from God (16:2b).

Under the Law of Moses, a sacrifice unto the Lord has prerequisites that validate it. First, Levitical priests are to perform these acts of worship (Exodus 29:44; Numbers 3:10; 18:1–7; etc.). Second, the place of sacrifice is not up to the one bringing it (Deuteronomy 12:13). God chose a single place for sacrifice for all the tribes—and it was not Bethlehem (12:11–12, 14).



Visual for Lesson 12. *Place this visual in a prominent place. Point to it and say, "God looks beyond outward appearance and into the heart."*

At first glance, Samuel seems to be out of compliance with these prerequisites. He is not a Levitical priest because he is not from the tribe of Levi (1 Samuel 1:1), and he is not sacrificing at the tabernacle. These apparent violations, however, disappear when we remember that God gave the Law of Moses and has the right to grant exceptions. We see God pronounce those two exceptions in 1 Samuel 16:2.

5b. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

Sacrifices bring people into close contact with holy objects and into the presence of God. Therefore, participants need to be *sanctified,* that is, made ritually clean before participating (compare Exodus 40:9–11; Leviticus 20:7). Joshua called Israel to similar preparation for God's movement and presence as they arranged themselves for entrance into Canaan (Joshua 3:5). Yet, there are no delineated steps for Samuel's process. Proper sanctification seems to depend on individual circumstances (Leviticus 14:8–9; 15; Numbers 19:11–22). At a minimum, sanctification entails washing up (examples: Exodus 19:10; 29:4; 30:17–21; Leviticus 11:26–28; 15:4–6).

Samuel gives the elders instructions and then separately prepares *Jesse and his sons* for *the sacrifice.* The division between the groups may indicate that Jesse is not an elder in Bethlehem. Thus, he may not be a prominent person there. For generations,

elders served as local leaders (examples: Exodus 3:16; 19:7; Joshua 24:1; Ruth 4:2; 1 Samuel 8:4). In contrast to Jesse's presumably humble status, when Saul was anointed, his father's "power" and influence were emphasized (9:1).

Regardless, the separate actions of sanctification between the elders and the family create a pocket of private time for Samuel and Jesse's household.

What Do You Think?
What sanctifies modern believers?

Digging Deeper
What practices prepare you for proper worship? In what ways do you pursue consecration and purity?

B. Seven Sons (vv. 6–10)

6. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.

God told Samuel that the mission of this journey was to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the next king (1 Samuel 16:1). But God didn't specify which one. Thus, it is natural for Samuel to speculate that *Eliab* is it, as he is the oldest (17:13). Tradition places rights and responsibilities upon the firstborn in Israel (Exodus 13:1–16). Another basis for Samuel's assumption comes next.

7. But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

The Lord intervenes to correct Samuel's assumptions (and ours as well). Eliab is tall and handsome. Kings certainly benefit from such characteristics. People like leaders they can look up to, both literally and figuratively. Samuel noted Saul's height twice (1 Samuel 9:2; 10:23). He called the people to "see" Saul and his stature as exceptional (10:24). But here, the Lord identifies an essential difference between humans and God: we perceive differently.

This chapter uses a word derived from the Hebrew root "to see" nine times between verses 1–18. Right here, in the center of the passage, the concept appears four times. In English, it shows up as the verbs *seeth* and *looketh*. The characteristics that most catch Samuel's attention are not part of the Lord's criteria for making the selection (compare Isaiah 53:2).

Humans care deeply about how things and people look on the outside. But God asks Samuel to look deeper. God explains that He looks beyond *outward appearance* and into *the heart*. In the ancient Near East, the heart was believed to be the seat of a person's thoughts, emotions, reason, and conscience. It was perceived as a sort of human command center. So God was looking for a leader with a strong core and character over a powerful physique. After Saul's disobedience, Samuel warned him that his reign was over. The ending came because God was seeking something greater, as indicated by the phrase, "The LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14).

What Do You Think?
What leadership characteristics come from the heart?

Digging Deeper
How do Micah 6:8; 1 Corinthians 13:1–7; Galatians 5:22–23; Colossians 3:12; and 2 Peter 1:3–7 influence your answer?

5'16" Tall

Height-based assumptions pepper my life experience. My 6'4" stature places me in the top 1 percent of adult males regarding physical height. I lost count of the times people have assumed I play basketball. Truth is, I play chess instead.

People often ask me, "How's the weather up there?"—as if it's the first time I've ever heard that query. But that's not the worst of it. Clothes are hard! There is a severe limitation to my clothing choices, and frankly, they are more expensive.

But I've learned to let go of such annoyances. I now hold a healthy sense of humor regarding my height. Today, when people ask how tall I am, I respond that I'm 5'16". Their reactions are always delightfully amusing! Additionally, it is gratifying to be asked by short-in-stature people to reach items on the top shelf in grocery stores.

We may not prevent others from forming conclusions about our physical stature or outward appearance. However, what is infinitely more important is our spiritual stature. Consider what Scripture says about Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 10). Who do you consider to be a spiritual giant? How might you emulate them? —RLN

8–9. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

Samuel continues the process of selection, leaning into divine disclosure. Jesse's sons parade past Samuel in birth order (1 Samuel 17:13). As with their elder brother, Samuel rejects the second and third oldest sons as the Lord leads.

10. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these.

The process of discernment continues until Samuel disaffirms all *seven* of Jesse's *sons*. In ancient Hebrew tradition, the number seven represents completion and fullness. The point here is not necessarily the specific number of Jesse's sons but rather the idea that Samuel has seen them all. In the Old Testament, the number seven often characterizes an idealized number of sons within a family (Ruth 4:15; 1 Samuel 2:5; Job 1:2; 42:13). Jesse presents a whole house full of sons, but the Lord selects none of them.

This verse hints at the truth that Jesse has more children. First Samuel 17:12 records that Jesse has eight sons in total. Curiously, this differs from the numbering in 1 Chronicles 2:13–15, which attributes only seven sons to Jesse. Three theories address the resolution of this inconsistency.

First, one of Jesse's sons may have died. Second, genealogies do not always list every member of a family line; the author of Chronicles may have deliberately ignored one son for an unspecified reason. Third, this may be an example of the biblical formula of "a number plus one;" compare the two "seven . . . eight" combinations found in Ecclesiastes 11:2 and Micah 5:5. For various reasons, biblical genealogies are not exhaustive records of every family member or ancestor (example: Matthew 1:1–17). We find out about Jesse's eighth son next.

How to Say It

Abinadab	Uh-*bin*-uh-dab
Amalekites	*Am*-uh-leh-kites or Uh-*mal*-ih-kites
Eliab	Ee-*lye*-ab
Shammah	*Shaw*-mah

What Do You Think?

How do you think it felt to be the brothers who were not chosen by God?

Digging Deeper

What dynamics do you think this might have brought to the conflict happening in 1 Samuel 17?

C. David's Location (v. 11)

11. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

The word translated here as *children* refers to young males. The same Hebrew word is translated as "lad" numerous times in 1 Samuel 20:35–40. Jesse's daughters are not in view here, unlike 1 Chronicles 2:13–17.

In wisdom, Samuel asks whether anyone is missing. He finds out that *Jesse* has excluded his *youngest* son from the lineup. As the household gathers to meet with Samuel, responsibilities remain. In the absence of the seven older sons, someone still must watch *the sheep*. The logical choice for this task is the youngest. Given the "pecking order" of birth position, it is a generally safe assumption that the youngest will be least likely to fulfill the role Samuel has in mind.

Samuel is aware that his mission to Bethlehem is unfinished. He makes his request to *send and fetch* the remaining son with urgency. He communicates the magnitude of his demand by declaring that they *will not sit down till he come hither.*

There will be no moving on to other tasks until this one is finished!

What Do You Think?

Why does God upend cultural standards or hierarchies (e.g., birth order)?

Digging Deeper

What other Scriptural examples showcase God's choice of younger, smaller, or less experienced over older, bigger, or expected by human standards?

II. Finding God's Anointed

(1 Samuel 16:12–13)

A. Physical Features (v. 12a)

12a. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.

The word *he* refers to the father, Jesse; the word *him* refers to the eighth and youngest son, David (although he isn't named until the next verse). As with the oldest son Eliab (above), the text makes observations regarding David's physical features.

The word translated *ruddy* is rare in the Old Testament. It is used in Genesis 25:25 (there translated "red") and in 1 Samuel 17:42 (also referring to David). The description may characterize David's complexion after spending all day outside in the sun, engaging in physical activity and tending the sheep.

This final son of Jesse's presents well (compare 2 Samuel 14:25; contrast Isaiah 52:14; 53:2)—but his appearance does not qualify him for the job.

B. Spiritual Presence (vv. 12b–13)

12b. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he.

Samuel again hears the word of *the Lord*. God is clear that this youngest son is the chosen one.

The Old Testament mentions anointing more than one hundred times. The act of anointing involves pouring oil over an object or a person. It can signify that the anointed thing or person is set apart for the Lord. It can also designate healing or protection. The people of the Old Testament anointed altars (Exodus 29:36), the tabernacle (30:26), and articles in the tabernacle (40:9–11). They set certain people apart for a particular task or role through anointing. Examples include priests (28:41), some prophets (1 Kings 19:16), and some kings (1:34). Anointing is also mentioned in the proper care of sheep (Psalm 23:5). The act of anointing a person symbolizes the Lord's special presence on them and that the anointed person is in a unique relationship with the Lord. To be anointed is closely related to both consecration and sanctification.

Not every king in Israel received an anointing. Instead, the Israelites reserved this practice for certain kings in unique cases: the first king, Saul (1 Samuel 10:1); the beginning of a new dynasty (1 Samuel 16:12–13; 1 Kings 19:16); and to identify the legitimate heir in a situation of conflict (1:34, 39). Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord's anointed one, often translated from Hebrew to English as "Messiah," gained symbolic meaning (Isaiah 61:1). By New Testament times, the people of Israel were awaiting a new anointed one, which is translated from Greek to English as "Christ."

13a. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward.

Readers of this text know that David's anointing was toward kingship (1 Samuel 16:1). However, Samuel does not directly mention that detail here. Scholars believe that at this moment, *David* is about fifteen years old. But he does not ascend to the throne until age thirty (2 Samuel 5:4). Therefore, the events recorded between 1 Samuel 16:14 and 2 Samuel 5:1–4 occur over fifteen years.

Samuel anoints David amid *his brethren*, an official designation by a prophet of God before his family. The event marks a significant change in David's life as *the Spirit of the Lord* comes upon him. The same happened when Samuel anointed Saul (1 Samuel 10:6, 10). However, the Spirit eventually leaves King Saul (16:14). In contrast, the Lord's Spirit remains on David throughout his life (compare Psalm 51:11). The Spirit comes first as a sign of David's divine election and second to equip David for the task.

What Do You Think?

Why did God anoint David fifteen years before he ascended to the throne?

Digging Deeper

Have you ever had to wait for the fullness of a promise from God? In what ways does the Spirit empower or enable us toward patient waiting?

Oil Averse?

It may be strange or unusual, but I've never really liked oil—of any kind. As a child, I would watch my grandmother pour cooking oil into a frying pan, preparing to fry catfish. As the thick yellow substance flowed out, I remember feeling squeamish inside.

When I became a mother, I received many bottles of baby oil as gifts. Those bottles lined my shelf, unused because I always reached for lotion instead. Even now, I avoid anything that looks oily when shopping for salad dressings. No, thank you!

When I read about anointing oil in the Bible, I can hardly imagine someone pouring oil over another person's head. Just the thought of it sends chills down my spine! I wonder how David felt as he returned to his sheep, his hair coated from his anointing?

Yet, I take great comfort in knowing that I'm anointed in a spiritual sense (2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 John 2:20, 27). Despite my aversion to physical oil, Scripture makes it clear that anointing is a precious gift. Do you take delight in your spiritual anointing? Or are you "oil averse"? —VM

13b. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.

Samuel completes David's anointing and returns home. *Ramah* is Samuel's place of origin (1 Samuel 1:1; *Ramathaimzophim* is a variant spelling of the same city). After Samuel's service in the tabernacle at Shiloh and Eli's death, Samuel makes Ramah his home once again (7:17; 15:34; 25:1). The Israelites come to Samuel in Ramah when they need assistance from their judge (8:4), and David comes to him seeking refuge there (19:18).

The abruptness of this text seems to indicate haste.

Conclusion

A. People Think, God Knows

God chose David based on his heart (1 Samuel 13:14; quoted in Acts 13:22). God had both divine insight regarding David's character and divine foresight concerning his faithfulness. Despite human expectations of fitness, God selected the youngest child from an insignificant family as Israel's next king. David is an example of a long-standing tradition in which God chooses to work through unlikely people and circumstances. The Lord loves to select people that the world does not deem valid or worthy. Therefore, we may be encouraged that God can use us too. However, our lesson text should also temper our confidence in human ability or beauty. While God can use these things, they do not qualify us for God's work.

Despite what humans see and perceive, the Lord looks not at outward appearances but at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Time and again, we see people in the Bible embracing the first part of this axiom and neglecting the second part. We see it yet today. The perceived importance of appearance and reputation can blind us to God's opinion of what truly matters.

Honesty requires us to admit that too often, we posture, polish, and perform, hoping to gain the attention of those in power. We grapple for authority and social influence. It is easy to look to superficial cultural criteria to evaluate our effectiveness, productivity, or ability.

We do not have a window into other people's hearts, but we do have a window into our own. How is your heart? In what ways are you valuing inner wisdom, peace, and integrity over outward appearance?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, help me to trust that Your choices are best. Help me to see with Your eyes, focusing not on outward appearances but on character—especially my own. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The Lord looks at the heart.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Draw a large heart shape on the board or cut out a large heart from paper and post it in your classroom. Have a marking pen available. Say, "We know our physical heart is the organ that pumps blood throughout our body. However, we also use the word *heart* figuratively to refer to the center of our moral and emotional lives. For example, we might ask someone to 'have a heart,' or we might extend 'heartfelt thanks.'" Ask your class to brainstorm other words or phrases that use the word *heart* in a figurative way. Write their ideas on the large heart as students make their suggestions.

Transition into Bible study by saying, "Between last week's lesson and this week's, several years have passed. The people of Israel demanded a king to lead them, and they received Saul. But Samuel now has new instructions from God. He is poised to anoint a new king."

Into the Word

Identify several members of your class who are willing to participate in acting out today's Scripture (*Characters:* Narrator, Samuel, Elders of Bethlehem, Jesse, Seven Brothers, David). Ask the Narrator to read 1 Samuel 16:4–13, pausing periodically to allow the other characters to dramatize each act. Encourage lightheartedness. (*Tips:* Your actors may pantomime, or characters could read their "lines" from the Bible. Encourage your actors and actresses to look puzzled or surprised by Samuel's words and actions. Samuel might cock his head and appear to be listening when God speaks.)

Make a chart on the board. Write *What Happened / What Was Surprising* as the headers of two columns. Down the left side, write: *Elders / Jesse / Samuel / Brothers / David*. Divide learners into five groups that correlate with the characters on the left side of the chart. Ask a volunteer to read the text out loud again. As the Scripture is read, ask each group to listen for the specifics of what happened and what surprised their assigned character(s). After the Scripture reading, give the groups time to summarize and identify what was unexpected in this episode of Samuel's ministry. Bring the groups together to present their conclusions. Write their responses on the board. At the end of the discussion, ask, "What surprised you as you visualized this episode?"

Option. Distribute copies of the "Three-Word Summary" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before comparing conclusions in small groups.

Then ask your class to conduct a quick word search in their Bibles for the word *anoint.* If your classroom has the capability, you might also suggest an online search. Or, consider having research aids like Bible commentaries available. Discuss: Why was it significant for Samuel to anoint David in verses 12–13?

Option. Distribute copies of the "Anointing: Set Apart for God's Purposes" exercise from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Talk about how God saw the potential in David when others did not. Invite learners to close their eyes and ask God to bring to mind someone they know who is dealing with an unexpected challenge or is being pushed to reassess their potential (this might include themselves).

Share how Paul wrote a prayer of thanksgiving for God's ability to see the potential in people. Have students open their Bibles to Ephesians 1:15–23 and ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Distribute paper and pens. Encourage students to craft a prayer of thanksgiving, modeling their prayer after Paul's. Invite learners to use their written prayers throughout the week to pray for the person God brought to mind.

The City of David

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 12:18–29
Background Scripture: Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21; 2 Samuel 5:1–6:23; 24:18–25; 1 Kings 15:5

2 Samuel 5:1–12

1 Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh.

2 Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.

3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel.

4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.

5 In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.

6 And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither.

7 Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David.

8 And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.

9 So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.

10 And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him.

11 And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house.

12 And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.

Key Text

David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake. **—2 Samuel 5:12**

Generations:

From Canaan to Jerusalem

Unit 3: From Judges to Kings

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. List the roles in which David served Israel.
2. Explain the significance of the covenant David made with the elders of Israel.
3. Write a prayer of intercession for a shepherd or leader in their life.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Wearing Different Hats
- B. Lesson Context

I. Anointed King (2 Samuel 5:1–5)
- A. Tribes Assemble (vv. 1–2)
  Shepherd's Care
- B. Covenant Drawn (v. 3)
- C. David Reigns (vv. 4–5)
  Waiting with Purpose

II. Conquering King (2 Samuel 5:6–12)
- A. The Jebusites' Boast (v. 6)
- B. David's Victory (vv. 7–8)
- C. The City of David (vv. 9–10)
- D. An Exalted Kingdom (vv. 11–12)

Conclusion
- A. Victory Comes from God
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Wearing Different Hats

An editor of this publication has a collection of seven hats that reflect his various jobs, ministries, and interests over the years. His Greek fisherman's hat represents the expectations of Mark 1:17. The hexagonal-shaped hat, known as a "tam," represents his years of academic studies. Three military hats signify the different positions he held in the Air Force. The Union "kepi" highlights his interest in studying significant historical events. Finally, a baseball cap with a built-in ponytail reveals an attempt at being a comedian.

Metaphorically speaking, we each wear different "hats," each representing the various roles we take on in life. Whether as a friend, neighbor, parent, grandparent, spouse, sibling, coworker, or volunteer, these roles or "hats" persist throughout the various stages of life. Some of these roles come of our own accord; others come by no choice of our own. Changes in these roles can lead us down paths that may be appreciated or regretted. This is no less true for Bible characters such as David.

B. Lesson Context

David's path to the throne took many long and tortuous turns as he transitioned from one role to another. He was anointed king by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1–13), but it would be years before he actually took on that role. Instead, he was thrust into the role of musician for the reigning king, with concurrent roles as shepherd and warrior (16:14–23). The latter role became particularly prominent during his showdown with Goliath (17:48–53; 18:7).

David then became a successful military commander (1 Samuel 18:30). During that time, he accepted the additional role of son-in-law to the king (18:17–27). However, this position came with the unfortunate consequence of becoming the king's enemy (18:8–11). As a result, David found himself in the long-term role of fugitive (19:1–22:23; 23:7–26:25).

After the death of Saul and the ensuing civil war in Israel, David stepped into the role of king over the tribe of Judah (2 Samuel 2:1–11). This role was about to change as the narrative in 2 Samuel 5

begins. A parallel passage of today's lesson text is 1 Chronicles 11:1–9.

David's long, meandering road to kingship might seem to be the product of life's chances and David's resilience. But David and all of Israel came to see God behind it all.

I. Anointed King

(2 Samuel 5:1–5)

A. Tribes Assemble (vv. 1–2)

1a. Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron.

We should not take this statement to imply that every Israelite in each of the twelve *tribes* comes before *David*. Rather, "all the elders of Israel" come as representatives of *all the tribes of Israel* (2 Samuel 5:3). A civil war among the Israelites had prevented David from assuming the throne over all twelve tribes immediately after Saul's demise (2:8–10). Now, representatives from each come to acknowledge David as their leader.

The significance of *Hebron*, located about twenty miles south of Jerusalem, dates back to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom were buried there (Genesis 49:31; 50:12–13). After Saul's death, the Lord sent David to reside in Hebron, where he was anointed as king by the tribe of Judah (2 Samuel 2:1–4).

1b. And spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh.

The tribal representatives now begin to explain the basis of their submission to David's rule. This first claim is an acknowledgment of familial linkage; they are of the same *bone* and *flesh* as David. Notably, their acknowledgment comes only after a lengthy civil war that left the representatives with little choice but to fall in line with David's ascendancy (2 Samuel 2:8–4:12; see Lesson Context).

2. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.

The representatives then acknowledge David's military leadership (see Lesson Context, above). Their final acknowledgment is the weightiest: *the Lord said* that David would be the one to *feed my people Israel*, drawing on shepherding as an image to symbolize leadership (Numbers 27:15–17; 2 Samuel 7:7; 1 Kings 22:17; etc.). Indeed, the word translated "feed' is rendered "shepherd" in other places (example: 1 Samuel 17:40). David had originally been a literal shepherd for his family's flocks (16:11). The Lord extends this role figuratively to expand the scope of David's care to the whole of Israel. The designation *captain over Israel* concretizes this idea.

What Do You Think?

How does the example of Israel's recognition help us understand the importance of remembering God's work?

Digging Deeper

What past moments has God used to confirm His plan? How can recalling those help you trust Him in the present?

Shepherd's Care

W. Phillip Keller (1920–1997) grew up in the farmlands of East Africa as the son of missionaries. As a young boy, he observed firsthand the devotion of local shepherds tending their flocks of sheep. Their diligence left a lasting impression on Keller, and as a young adult, he moved to Canada to study agriculture and animal husbandry. He intended to return to East Africa to support his family's mission work. But God had other plans. Years later, Keller, his wife, and kids developed a plot of land on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. There, Keller applied his training and experience to become both a shepherd and an expert in livestock management.

In this role, Keller began to develop observations regarding spiritual life. He noticed how sheep—helpless, timid, fearful, and prone to folly—depend entirely on their shepherd for survival. Drawing on these insights, Keller wrote the now-classic book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*.

When the Israelite leaders came to David, they were like sheep in need of a shepherd. As a former shepherd himself, David was uniquely positioned to care for them and lead them as king. But to lead well, he would need to submit to the care of the

Good Shepherd. Are you living with awareness of your need for the Good Shepherd (see Psalm 23)?

—VM

B. Covenant Drawn (v. 3)

3. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel.

Now the terminology shifts from generalizations to specifics. "All the tribes of Israel" of 2 Samuel 5:1a become *all the elders of Israel.* Likewise, "captain" of 5:2 becomes "king" here. The elders, those with leadership roles representing the people, come *to the king*. This is the first time that all Israel calls David "king."

The word translated *league* refers to a covenant, which is how the word is often translated (example: 2 Samuel 15:24). The murdered Abner was the one who broached the idea of establishing this covenant so that David could rule all the tribes (3:21).

Covenants typically outline the responsibilities of all parties involved. The ruler is often expected to provide for common defense and to treat subjects justly. In return, subjects swear allegiance to the ruler. The exact stipulations of this covenant are unknown. But that this covenant is agreed to *before the Lord* indicates the sincerity of both parties. They understand that to renege would be to invite God's judgment.

The purpose of the covenant is clear: it is to anoint *David king over Israel*. David has been anointed twice before—first by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:12–13) and then by the tribe of Judah (2 Samuel 2:1–4). Although this is David's third anointing, it is the first time that all Israel acknowledges him as king.

C. David Reigns (vv. 4–5)

4. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.

Son, shepherd, musician, warrior, commander, husband, son-in-law, fugitive, king—those are enough roles for two lifetimes! Yet David had labored in all of them by age *thirty*. We do not know how much time passed between Samuel's anointing of David in Bethlehem and the anointing in Hebron; some commentators suggest at least a decade.

The number *forty* is often used symbolically in biblical narratives to signal completion; it is also the number of years the biblical authors use for the span of a generation (example: Numbers 32:13). There is no indication in the verse before us that David's reign of *forty years* is anything but literal (compare 1 Kings 2:11). Elsewhere in Scripture, other kings have forty-year reigns (1 Kings 11:42; 2 Chronicles 24:1; contrast 1 Samuel 13:1). But that does not preclude this number from also having symbolic significance. The mention of this number in the verse before us may be intended to communicate to the original audience the significance of Israel's period of a unified monarchy and to encourage the audience to look for God's involvement as the monarchy develops, strengthens, but ultimately falls apart during the reign of David's son.

What Do You Think?

In what ways have you seen God use a long or difficult season to prepare you for future service to Him?

Digging Deeper

What steps can believers take to strengthen faith and develop perseverance during seasons of waiting?

How to Say It

Gihon	*Gye*-hahn
Hebron	*Hee*-brun or *Heb*-run
Jebusites	*Jeb*-yuh-sites
Joab	*Jo*-ab
Millo	*Mill*-o
Zeruiah	*Zer*-oo-***eye***-uh
Zechariah	*Zek*-uh-***rye***-uh

Waiting with Purpose

I recall yearning to establish a ministry centered on the transformative power of forgiveness. Dreaming of this ministry, I envisioned writing a book and traveling across the country to speak in front of audiences, sharing the power of forgiveness.

Looking back on those aspirations, I am grateful that God did not grant me that ministry right away.

I was naïve and inexperienced, having a limited understanding of biblical principles of forgiveness. Now, nearly forty years later, I have experienced both giving and receiving forgiveness. Those experiences couldn't be rushed; they came only with time.

Scripture provides numerous accounts of individuals who inexplicably wait for long periods. Sarah waited for a child. Jacob waited for a wife. Moses waited for deliverance. And David waited to become king. He may have just been a teenager when the prophet Samuel anointed him king over Israel. Can you imagine a sixteen-year-old with a *license to reign*? If David hoped to get the keys to the throne that day, he was severely disappointed. Knowing that the next decade would involve not only waiting for the throne but also enduring suffering, he might have wondered if one of his brothers would have made a better choice.

The young shepherd boy had to wait and wait before being crowned. During this time, God used the delays to help David deepen his trust in Him. Are you waiting? What is God growing in you during this time? —VM

5. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.

That David reigns *over Judah* for *seven years and six months* suggests that Israel's civil war lasts at least that long (compare 2 Samuel 2:8–4:12). When we think of David's kingship, we may automatically associate him with his reign over all Israel in Jerusalem. But nearly a fifth of his kingship is over only Judah in Hebron! The reason is simple: up to this point, Jerusalem is not yet under Israelite control. But that situation is about to change.

What Do You Think?

Throughout this quarter, how have you noticed God's faithfulness displayed among the generations of Israelites?

Digging Deeper

How has God's faithfulness been evident among the generations of your family and your church community?

II. Conquering King

(2 Samuel 5:6–12)

A. The Jebusites' Boast (v. 6)

6. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither.

This verse begins the narration of an impressive list of achievements that occur under David's leadership and by God's power. David's first order of business is to continue the divine mandate to dispossess *the inhabitants of the land* (compare Deuteronomy 11:22–25; Joshua 1:1–6). A complete list of enemy groups to expel is found in Deuteronomy 7:1; Joshua 3:10; 24:11.

Due to its inherent desirability, the city of *Jerusalem* is David's strategic starting point for fulfilling the conquest. In the ancient world, sites for cities were chosen with three primary factors in mind: (1) defensibility, (2) access to water, and (3) proximity to trade routes. Being located on a hill, near the Gihon Spring, and along prominent east-west and north-south roads, Jerusalem checks all three boxes.

The city is located just inside the territory of Benjamin and near the border with the tribe of Judah (Joshua 18:11, 16). Both tribes had previously tried and failed to dislodge *the Jebusites* from Jerusalem (15:63; Judges 1:21). These two failed attempts may explain the Jebusites' "trash talk" occasioned by this third attempt to remove them once and for all. The taunt makes fun of the supposed weakness of David's army. The Jebusites believed that even their weakest members, including *the blind and the lame*, could thwart Israel's strongest combatants. Furthermore, they were confident in their city's defenses, believing that *David cannot come in hither*.

B. David's Victory (vv. 7–8)

7. Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David.

Despite the Jebusites' favorable position and justified confidence, *David took the strong hold*.

The narrator announces David's significant victory with minimal fanfare and without a detailed description of the battle.

This verse is the first appearance of the word *Zion* in the Old Testament. The origin of the name remains uncertain; it might have been the Jebusites' name for the fortress, the hill on which it stood, or the city as a whole. In Hebrew literature, "Zion" eventually becomes interchangeable with "Jerusalem" (Psalm 147:12; etc.). David establishes the city as the administrative and political capital of his kingdom, transforming the Jerusalem of the Jebusites into *the city of David*.

8. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.

The narrator describes David's battle strategy, which involves exploiting a weak point of the Jebusites' otherwise favorable position. Because Jerusalem is situated on a hill, the city lacks immediate access to a river for water. In ancient times, the city's main source of water was the nearby Gihon Spring. It is located in the valley on the city's east side and features a *gutter* (channel) for access to its water. This channel represents a weak point in the ancient city's defenses, and the Israelite attackers exploit it to invade the city. The Jebusites apparently do not consider this as they taunt David's army.

David's harsh words in response are simply him turning the Jebusites' taunts against them. They had taunted his army by suggesting they were unable to defeat their weakest members, so David countered by calling their entire community weak. It is important to note that David also shows kindness to those suffering from physical ailments at other times (see 2 Samuel 9).

The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 11:6 mentions that the person who led this attack is "Joab the son of Zeruiah" (compare 2 Samuel 8:16).

C. The City of David (vv. 9–10)

9. So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.

Jerusalem becomes the place where *David* takes up his royal residence. The word *Millo* is a transliteration (not a translation) of the word in the original language. The word refers to stepped stones, what we might call terraces. These stepped stones may serve as a defensive structure. Throughout the centuries, they are mentioned as part of various building and rebuilding projects in Jerusalem (1 Kings 9:15, 24; 11:27; 2 Chronicles 32:5).

10. And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him.

Before becoming king, David was already growing "stronger and stronger" (2 Samuel 3:1). And, in the verse before us, David continues that trajectory as he grows greater still (compare 8:1–14). The Hebrew wording of the majestic divine title, *the LORD God of hosts,* occurs throughout the Old Testament. Rarely is it used as it is in the verse before us: an affirmation of the Lord's empowerment of a specific person (compare Amos 5:14).

D. An Exalted Kingdom (vv. 11–12)

11. And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house.

Tyre, a port city in Lebanon on the Mediterranean Sea, is approximately one hundred miles north of Jerusalem. The generosity of King *Hiram* is a response to David's growing power and military strength. The *cedar trees* from Lebanon are renowned in the ancient world for their beauty and durability (1 Kings 4:33; 5:6; Ezekiel 27:5; Hosea 14:5). Hiram maintains a friendly relationship with David throughout David's kingship and into the reign of Solomon, David's son (see 1 Kings 5).

What Do You Think?

How does God's decision to use a foreign king to bless David broaden our understanding of how God works?

Digging Deeper

How will you cultivate humility and trust in God's sovereignty to be open to receiving help from unexpected sources?

12. And David perceived that the LORD had

established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.

Those who are in power can sometimes be tempted to see themselves as "self-made" (see the example of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:28–32). However, that *David perceived* his success to be due to the Lord's strength and favor is a credit to his spiritual awareness. Rather than claim credit for his rise from shepherd to king, David acknowledges the Lord as the source of his victories and prosperity (compare 2 Samuel 7:8–9; Psalm 18:1–2).

We often imagine David as a larger-than-life figure—a leader who slays giants and triumphs over numerous enemies (see 1 Samuel 17; 2 Samuel 8:1–14). But before these victories, David was on the run, hiding in caves, witnessing the death of friends, and seeking refuge in enemy nations (1 Samuel 18–31). Even as the Lord's anointed one, he could not make himself king. It required the Lord's power, in the Lord's timing, for David's kingship to become a reality.

What Do You Think?

How does David's realization that "the LORD had established him as king" model humility and a correct perspective on success?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do you express gratitude to God for your accomplishments, successes, or blessings?

Conclusion

A. Victory Comes from God

We're drawn to the stories of "self-made" people—rags to riches, zeroes to heroes. Commonly cited examples include Abraham Lincoln, Steve Jobs, and Beyoncé Carter-Knowles. They inspire us, reminding us that we are capable of more than we think we are. But what about "God-made" people?

Today, King David would certainly make *Forbes* magazine's "30 Under 30" list. He is a shepherd-turned-warrior-turned-king whose success is unmatched and seemingly unstoppable. All of it sounds impressive. But none of it comes from David.

The only explanation for David's unlikely, spectacular success is God. What's inspiring about David's story is not that he was a *self*-made man but a *God*-made man. What David could do, maybe we can't. But what God did for David, He can still do for us.

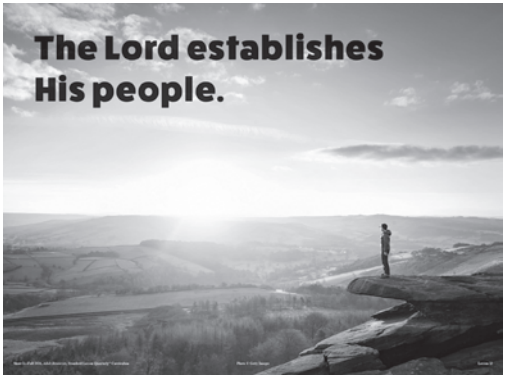
In our day, we can be encouraged that God continues to work out His purposes through individuals. The Lord remains committed to His people and will one day establish His kingdom in fullness. When we encounter success, it is easy to take the credit. We might begin to think that it was our own persistence or skill that made all the difference. In such times, we can remind ourselves that David's success was won because the Lord was with him. We can also remember Zechariah 4:6: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to trust that You are faithfully at work in our lives, in both good and difficult times. Thank You for the assurance of our ultimate victory that is ours by grace through Christ Jesus. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God establishes us in His timing.



Visual for Lesson 13. *Display this visual and ask for examples from this quarter of how God establishes His people.*

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Draw a timeline on the board. At the left end of the line, write the phrase *Samuel anoints David.* At the right end, write *David becomes king.*

Invite learners to work in small groups to fill in the timeline with key events from David's life and Israel's history. Encourage participants to review notes in a study Bible, or online commentary resources and skim 1 Samuel 16–2 Samuel 4 for assistance. (*Possible responses*: David made music; David killed Goliath; David fought Philistines; David grew in popularity; Saul sought David; David married Michal; David sheltered with his enemies; etc.)

Once the timeline is complete, invite volunteers to identify some of the roles in which David served. Ask, "What do these tell us about David's life?"

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Wearing Many Hats" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "David served God and Israel through various roles. This week, we'll see how he steps into one specific role through the request of the elders and by the power of God."

Into the Word

Before class time, complete an Internet search for various maps depicting Jerusalem throughout the centuries. Look for maps that show the boundaries of the original Jebusite settlement, the "city of David," Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah, and Jerusalem during the first century AD. Display the maps for the class and facilitate a whole-class discussion with the following questions: 1–What is a significant feature regarding the terrain around the city*? (The terrain is hilly, and the city is located on an elevated position.*) 2–What implications would this have for David's capture of the city? *(David would have to approach the city from a downhill position—a significant disadvantage.)* 3–Where are the primary sources of water for the city? *(The Gihon Spring and the Pool of Siloam, located just outside the walls of the city.)* 4–What implications would this fact have for David's capture of the city? *(It explains why David said that the gutters would need to be used to conquer the city.)* 5–What is significant about the usage of the word *Zion* in verse 7? *(This is the first time the word* Zion *is used to name this location.)*

Next, divide the class into two groups: **Anointed King Group** (vv. 1–5) and **Conquering King Group** (vv. 6–12). Instruct each group to read their sections and draft three to five discussion questions for the whole class. After calling time, have each group present their questions in whole-class discussion. Use the commentary to correct misconceptions that may arise.

Into the Word

Write the following words on the board: *Lead, Feed, Dwell, Build*. Introduce the activity by saying, "These four verbs refer to the actions that would be required of David as he stepped into the role of king. To complete each of these actions, David needed to be attentive to the needs of the people and the directives of the Lord."

Distribute an index card and pen to each participant. Invite them to work in pairs to write a prayer of intercession for a leader in their church, community, or nation, incorporating these four verbs into their prayers. After calling time, reconvene the class and invite volunteers to pray their prayers aloud. Encourage participants to place their index cards in a visible location where they can see them throughout the upcoming week and remember to pray for leaders.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Praying the Psalms" exercise from the activity page. Encourage learners to complete the activity as a take-home assignment, referring to it during prayer times throughout the upcoming week.

Power to the People

Special Features

		Page
Quarterly Quiz		114
Quarter at a Glance	Editorial Staff	115
Get the Setting	Abson Joseph	116
This Quarter in the Word (Daily Bible Readings)		117
An Outline of 1 Peter (Chart Feature)		119
10 Tips for Lesson Preparation (Teacher Tips)	Editorial Staff	120
Activity Pages (annual Deluxe Edition only)		465
Activity Pages (free download)	www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages	
In the World (weekly online feature)	www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world	

Lessons

Unit 1: Living with God's Power

December 6	Attaining Christian Hope	*1 Peter 1:1–12*	121
December 13	Conforming to a Holy Family	*Leviticus 20:26; 1 Peter 1:13–21*	129
December 20	Seeking "God with Us"	*Matthew 1:18–25*	137
December 27	Living as Royal Priests	*1 Peter 1:22–2:10*	145

Unit 2: Power to Endure

January 3	Power for Righteous Living	*1 Peter 2:11–21*	153
January 10	Power to Be Humble	*1 Peter 3:1–12*	161
January 17	Power in Suffering	*1 Peter 3:18–4:7*	169
January 24	Power to Serve	*1 Peter 4:8–19*	177
January 31	Power to Resist	*1 Peter 5:1–11*	185

Unit 3: Living in Perilous Times

February 7	Confirm Your Calling	*2 Peter 1:3–11; 3:10–13*	193
February 14	Walk in Light	*1 John 1:5–10; 3:6–8; 4:7–8; 5:3–4*	201
February 21	Love One Another	*2 John 4–9; 3 John 2–6*	209
February 28	Contend for the Faith	*Jude 3–8, 12–13, 20–21, 24–25*	217

Quarterly Quiz

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

Lesson 1

1. Peter writes that our faith is more precious than _____. *1 Peter 1:7*

2. Peter notes that the Spirit of Christ inspired the prophets. T/F. *1 Peter 1:10–11*

Lesson 2

1. Peter tells believers to imitate God's joy. T/F. *1 Peter 1:15–16*

2. We are _____ by the precious blood of Christ. *1 Peter 1:18–19*

Lesson 3

1. Mary told Joseph to name the baby "Jesus." T/F. *Matthew 1:21*

2. Which name means "God with us"? (Jesus, Joseph, Emmanuel) *Matthew 1:23*

Lesson 4

1. Believers are _____ by "obeying the truth." *1 Peter 1:22*

2. Believers are described as being "lively _____." *1 Peter 2:5*

Lesson 5

1. Which does Peter say "war against the soul"? (lusts, malice, hypocrisies) *1 Peter 2:11*

2. Peter directs readers to question earthly rulers before giving them honor. T/F. *1 Peter 2:17*

Lesson 6

1. Peter likens wives to being daughters of which Old Testament woman? (Eve, Sara, Rebecca) *1 Peter 3:6*

2. Both husbands and wives are counted as _____ to the "grace of life." *1 Peter 3:7*

Lesson 7

1. According to Peter, how many people were saved by the flood of Noah? (four; eight; twelve) *1 Peter 3:20*

2. Because "the end of all things is at hand," we are to do which two things? (fast and tithe, preach and teach, be sober and watch) *1 Peter 4:7*

Lesson 8

1. Charity (love) covers a multitude of _____. *1 Peter 4:8*

2. Peter calls believers to rejoice as they participate in Christ's sufferings. T/F. *1 Peter 4:13*

Lesson 9

1. Which title does Peter designate that Jesus is "chief"? (Servant, Elder, Shepherd) *1 Peter 5:4*

2. Peter tells all believers to "be clothed with _____." *1 Peter 5:5*

Lesson 10

1. God has given "precious _____" so we can participate in His divine nature. *2 Peter 1:4*

2. Our hope is for new heavens and a new earth, where _____ dwells. *2 Peter 3:13*

Lesson 11

1. Our love proves that we are "born of God." T/F. *1 John 4:7*

2. Our love for God is demonstrated by keeping His commandments. T/F. *1 John 5:3*

Lesson 12

1. The elder writes to whom regarding the command "from the beginning"? (the antichrist, the lady, the Father) *2 John 5*

2. One who denies the human nature of Jesus is considered a/an _____. *2 John 7*

Lesson 13

1. Jude refers to angels who maintained their positions of authority. T/F. *Jude 6*

2. Which of these is **not** one of the metaphors used to characterize opponents? (wandering pilgrims, fruitless trees, rainless clouds) *Jude 12–13*

Quarter at a Glance

by Editorial Staff

This quarter focuses on powerful living for a powerless people by studying the New Testament's General Epistles. Through a study of 1 Peter, followed by a cursory look at the other epistles, students will come to understand that living holy lives demonstrates the way of Christ to the world.

The original audience of these writings consisted predominantly of Gentile believers, including women and slaves who were living in a culturally hostile environment. To these social outcasts, this quarter's Scriptures promise that "[God's] divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3).

Living with God's Power

The lives of God's people reflect a paradox—a contradiction of terms. The apostle Peter describes believers as "strangers" (1 Peter 1:1, Lesson 1), highlighting our spiritual status as that of outsiders living in a foreign land. Although we may encounter rejection, alienation, and even persecution, we can endure with a "lively hope" because of the promised inheritance that awaits (1:3). This living hope arises from the assurance of "God with us"; that is, God is present with us through the incarnation of Jesus (Matthew 1:18–25; Lesson 3).

God calls His people to live with purpose and holiness (Leviticus 20:7; 1 Peter 1:15–16; Lesson 2). This purpose becomes clearer when we understand God's plan of spiritual construction. Peter uses the metaphor of "lively stones" to describe God's people (2:5, Lesson 4). God uses these living stones to construct His spiritual house upon the cornerstone, who is Christ Jesus. This edifice of salvation is uniquely designed for offering spiritual sacrifices to God, praising Him for His merciful salvation and transforming power (2:9).

Power to Endure

The study of 1 Peter continues into the second unit, which focuses on the behavior of God's holy people. Peter addresses godly living among various groups, including slaves (1 Peter 2:18–21, Lesson 5). It is important to note that the construct of slavery in Peter's era differs from the race-based chattel slavery that existed in the United States. Nevertheless, slavery, in every era, has consistently reflected cruel and dehumanizing cultural systems. Peter does not affirm slavery; instead, he wants his fellow Christ-followers to endure and persevere. To this end, he encourages enslaved Christians to follow the example of Christ, who also suffered unjustly.

The apostle continues by addressing the qualities of a transformed spiritual life. Compassion and humility are to be evident in all believers (1 Peter 3:1–9, Lesson 6). Transformed lives are also marked with discipline and sobriety, as well as attentiveness to prayer and worship (4:1–7, Lesson 7).

Peter urges believers to demonstrate "fervent" love in anticipation of Christ's return (1 Peter 4:8–19, Lesson 8). Until that time, we should be "sober" and "vigilant," remaining cautious of the devil's deceptive and devouring tendencies (5:8, Lesson 9).

Living in Perilous Times

Second Peter, along with 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude, serve as an ancient commentary on living faithfully in dangerous times. There are threats in the world around us and within ourselves; however, God has provided "precious promises," enabling us to walk in Him without stumbling (2 Peter 1:3–11, Lesson 10; see 1 John 1:5–7, Lesson 11).

God desires that His people remain in His truth and experience prosperity. However, believers should not measure this wealth by earthly standards but by God's standards of love and hospitality (2 John 4–6; 3 John 2–6; Lesson 12).

The quarter concludes by studying one of the most overlooked texts in Scripture. Jude's letter encourages believers to defend God's Word and to live in God's love. By doing this, we will strengthen ourselves in the "most holy faith" (Jude 20, Lesson 13).

Get the Setting

by Abson Joseph

Scholars group the letters of James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Jude under the title "General Epistles." This categorization indicates two key aspects of the letters: a broad audience and universal themes. The specific readers of these letters were scattered throughout the Roman Empire and likely circulated the messages within their respective regions. First-century believers faced active persecution and marginalization while also feeling like they were strangers in a foreign land.

We know that becoming a follower of Jesus is a life-changing decision. First-century believers faced significant pushback from Greco-Roman culture. Traditional Roman households were structured around specific roles, rules, and cultural norms, including notions of honor and shame. Believers faced the challenge of reorienting their behavior to align with God's kingdom values. Followers of Jesus lost relationships, status, power, resources, and freedom. The writers of the General Epistles wrote to encourage believers to persevere in their faith in the face of trials.

Household Codes

The household was a microcosm of the Roman Empire. Therefore, heads of household invested considerable effort in maintaining order within the family unit. The government believed that if households remained orderly, then state structures would follow. A "Household Code" was a set of rules that outlined the expectations of how members of a household should relate to one another. In the Roman context, the head of the household, known as the *paterfamilias*, held all authority. He was responsible for protecting and providing for the family. In return, household members had to obey and show loyalty to him. Every member of the household represented the family's interests within the larger society.

The New Testament contains several examples of "Household Codes" that the apostles contextualized—some may even say *subverted*—to help early Christians maintain healthy relationships with one another, as well as informing their greater interactions within society (1 Peter 2:13–3:7; compare Colossians 3:18–4:1; Ephesians 5:22–6:9).

Honor and Shame

Two key cultural elements at work in the background of the General Epistles are honor and shame. These principles shaped individual behavior and social interactions. Honor represented well-being, acceptance, and positive reputation. Shame occurred when group expectations were unmet or disgrace was brought upon one's family. Perceptions and social standing played significant roles in how one was regarded and treated by others. Therefore, families went to great lengths to avoid public contempt or ostracization. A person's identity and value were closely tied to their connection with others.

The Household of God

Becoming a follower of Christ had a destabilizing effect on a person's life. Conversion created a new reality whereby the person could no longer live mindlessly according to the rules of Greco-Roman culture. Instead, the principles of God's household took primacy. Suddenly, God became the *paterfamilias* who offered protection and provision, the one who deserved loyalty and obedience. Therefore, Christians were to treat one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. This shared status superseded all other rankings (Galatians 3:28).

Changes in Christians' behavior created tension with the outside world. The texts for this quarter helped early Christians navigate the new reality of living in accordance with God's will and way despite the resistance they experienced from cultural norms. May we all reshape our understanding of the real source of honor, status, and power: our alignment with the Lord, Jesus Christ!

Mon, Feb. 15	**Remember God's Commands**	Deuteronomy 6:4–9
Tue, Feb. 16	**Walk as One Approved**	2 Timothy 2:14–19
Wed, Feb. 17	**Unashamed of the Gospel**	Romans 1:13–21
Thu, Feb. 18	**The Lord Upholds**	Psalm 145:14–21
Fri, Feb. 19	**God, Lead Me in Your Truth**	Psalm 25:1–8
Sat, Feb. 20	**Guard Against False Teachers**	Acts 20:26–32
Sun, Feb. 21	**Walk in God's Truth**	2 John 4–9; 3 John 2–6
Mon, Feb. 22	**Be Strong in the Lord**	Ephesians 6:10–17
Tue, Feb. 23	**Avoid the Ways of Sinners**	Leviticus 18:1–5
Wed, Feb. 24	**Beware of False Prophets**	2 Peter 2:1–11
Thu, Feb. 25	**Warning Against Sin**	2 Peter 2:12–22
Fri, Feb. 26	**God Is My Rock and Fortress**	Psalm 18:1–6
Sat, Feb. 27	**God Keeps My Feet from Slipping**	Psalm 18:27–36
Sun, Feb. 28	**Contend for the Faith**	Jude 3–8, 12–13, 20–21, 24–25

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 114

Lesson 1—1. gold. 2. True. **Lesson 2**—1. False. 2. redeemed. **Lesson 3**—1. False. 2. Emmanuel. **Lesson 4**—1. purified. 2. stones. **Lesson 5**—1. lusts. 2. False. **Lesson 6**—1. Sara. 2. heirs. **Lesson 7**—1. eight. 2. be sober and watch. **Lesson 8**—1. sins. 2. True. **Lesson 9**—1. Shepherd. 2. humility. **Lesson 10**—1. promises. 2. righteousness. **Lesson 11**—1. True. 2. True. **Lesson 12**—1. the lady. 2. antichrist. **Lesson 13**—1. False. 2. wandering pilgrims.

This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Nov. 30	**A Healthy Mindset**	Philippians 4:1–9
Tue, Dec. 1	**God Rejoices Over You**	Isaiah 61:10–62:5
Wed, Dec. 2	**Righteousness, Peace, and Joy**	Romans 14:11–18
Thu, Dec. 3	**Filled with All Joy**	Romans 15:7–13
Fri, Dec. 4	**The Joy of the Lord**	Nehemiah 8:6, 9–12
Sat, Dec. 5	**God, Our Deliverer**	Psalm 91:7–16
Sun, Dec. 6	**Rejoice in Salvation**	1 Peter 1:1–12
Mon, Dec. 7	**God Is Holy**	Leviticus 19:1–10
Tue, Dec. 8	**Rules for Holy Living**	Leviticus 19:11–18
Wed, Dec. 9	**Holy and Acceptable Worship**	Romans 12:1–5
Thu, Dec. 10	**Search My Heart, O God**	Psalm 139:1–12, 23–24
Fri, Dec. 11	**The Highway of Holiness**	Isaiah 35
Sat, Dec. 12	**Perfecting Holiness**	2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1
Sun, Dec. 13	**Be Holy**	1 Peter 1:13–21
Mon, Dec. 14	**The Lord Goes Before You**	Deuteronomy 31:1–8
Tue, Dec. 15	**Blessed Through Abraham**	Genesis 12:1–9
Wed, Dec. 16	**God's Promise Is Christ**	Galatians 3:6–18
Thu, Dec. 17	**David's Throne Established Forever**	2 Samuel 7:4–17
Fri, Dec. 18	**The Hope of Glory**	Colossians 1:21–29
Sat, Dec. 19	**The Church of the Living God**	1 Timothy 3:14–4:5
Sun, Dec. 20	**God with Us**	Matthew 1:1, 17–25

Mon, Dec. 21	**A Kingdom of Priests**	Exodus 19:1–8
Tue, Dec. 22	**A Share in God's Inheritance**	Colossians 1:3–12
Wed, Dec. 23	**The Kingdom of God's Son**	Colossians 1:13–20
Thu, Dec. 24	**The Righteous Branch**	Jeremiah 23:1–8
Fri, Dec. 25	**Go and See**	Luke 2:1–15
Sat, Dec. 26	**God Shines from Zion**	Psalm 50:1–6
Sun, Dec. 27	**Reborn by the Word of God**	1 Peter 1:22–2:10
Mon, Dec. 28	**Wise Living**	Ephesians 5:15–21
Tue, Dec. 29	**Serve Others as if Serving the Lord**	Ephesians 6:1–9
Wed, Dec. 30	**A Light for the Gentiles**	Isaiah 42:1–7
Thu, Dec. 31	**God Is with Us**	Isaiah 43:1–7
Fri, Jan. 1	**God Gives Hope for the Future**	Jeremiah 29:1–14
Sat, Jan. 2	**Pay Your Dues**	Romans 13:1–7
Sun, Jan. 3	**Live Good Lives**	1 Peter 2:11–25
Mon, Jan. 4	**Humble Yourself Before the Lord**	James 4:1–10
Tue, Jan. 5	**Commit Your Way to the Lord**	Proverbs 16:1–8
Wed, Jan. 6	**Be of Humble Spirit**	Proverbs 16:16–20
Thu, Jan. 7	**Pursue Peace with Everyone**	Hebrews 12:11–17
Fri, Jan. 8	**The Humble will Be Exalted**	Luke 14:7–11
Sat, Jan. 9	**Praise the Lord**	Psalm 149
Sun, Jan. 10	**Seek Peace**	1 Peter 3:1–12
Mon, Jan. 11	**My Spirit Fails**	Psalm 143
Tue, Jan. 12	**Suffering for Salvation**	2 Timothy 2:1–13
Wed, Jan. 13	**Freedom in Christ**	John 8:31–38
Thu, Jan. 14	**God Will Rescue You**	Jeremiah 39:11–18
Fri, Jan. 15	**Renewed Strength**	Isaiah 40:26–31
Sat, Jan. 16	**The Son of Man Must Suffer**	Mark 8:31–37
Sun, Jan. 17	**Live According to the Spirit**	1 Peter 3:18–4:7

Mon, Jan. 18	**Trust in the Lord**	Proverbs 3:1–8
Tue, Jan. 19	**Many Gifts in One Body**	1 Corinthians 12:12–26
Wed, Jan. 20	**We Will Not Bow to Idols!**	Daniel 3:1–6, 8–9, 12–18
Thu, Jan. 21	**God Is Present in the Fire**	Daniel 3:19–30
Fri, Jan. 22	**Serve One Another in Love**	Galatians 5:1, 13–26
Sat, Jan. 23	**Teaching Despite Resistance**	Mark 6:1–13
Sun, Jan. 24	**Use Your Gifts to Serve**	1 Peter 4:8–19
Mon, Jan. 25	**An Example of Humility and Endurance**	Acts 20:17–25
Tue, Jan. 26	**Seek the Lord and His Strength**	1 Chronicles 16:8–14
Wed, Jan. 27	**Teach Sound Doctrine**	Titus 2
Thu, Jan. 28	**Avoid Foolish Controversies**	Titus 3
Fri, Jan. 29	**God Is My Portion Forever**	Psalm 73:21–28
Sat, Jan. 30	**Rejoice in the Lord**	Habakkuk 3:1–2, 16–18
Sun, Jan. 31	**Be an Example to the Flock**	1 Peter 5:1–11
Mon, Feb. 1	**Exhort One Another to Holiness**	Hebrews 3:7–14
Tue, Feb. 2	**God's Word Lights Our Path**	Psalm 119:105–112
Wed, Feb. 3	**God's Steadfast Love Holds Me Up**	Psalm 94:17–23
Thu, Feb. 4	**Follow the Path of the Righteous**	Proverbs 4:18–27
Fri, Feb. 5	**We Have an Advocate**	1 John 2:1–6
Sat, Feb. 6	**God Will Keep Us from Stumbling**	Psalm 121
Sun, Feb. 7	**God Will Guide Us in Holiness**	2 Peter 1:3–11
Mon, Feb. 8	**God's Word Gives Light**	Psalm 119:129–136
Tue, Feb. 9	**Alive in Christ**	Romans 6:1–12
Wed, Feb. 10	**Set Free from Sin**	Romans 6:13–23
Thu, Feb. 11	**God, Wash Me and Cleanse Me**	Psalm 51:1–13
Fri, Feb. 12	**Arise, Shine; Your Light Has Come**	Isaiah 60:1–7
Sat, Feb. 13	**Confess the Lord of Light**	1 Timothy 6:13–19
Sun, Feb. 14	**God Is Light**	1 John 1:5–10; 3:6–8; 4:7–8; 5:3–4

Chart Feature



AN OUTLINE OF 1 PETER

Introduction of Salvation (1:1—2:10)

1:1–2	Preface of the Letter	Lesson 1
1:3–9	Praise for Salvation	
1:10–12	Privilege of Salvation	
1:13–16	Called to Holiness	Lesson 2
1:17–21	Called to Redemption	
1:22–25	Sanctified Community	Lesson 4
2:1–3	Strengthening Infants	
2:4–8	Spiritual House	
2:9–10	Special People	

Invitation to Holiness (2:11—5:11)

2:11–12	Peter's Petition	Lesson 5
2:13–17	Message to All	
2:18–20	Message to Lowly Workers	
2:21–25	Live for Righteousness	
3:1–6	Message to Wives	Lesson 6
3:7	Message to Husbands	
3:8–12	Message to All Believers	
3:13–17	Prepared to Answer	
3:18–22	Christ's Suffering	Lesson 7
4:1–6	Believer's Suffering	
4:7	Soberly Pray	
4:8–11	Above All	Lesson 8
4:12–19	Fiery Trial	
5:1–4	Message to Elders	Lesson 9
5:5–7	Message to Younger	
5:8–9	Message to Spiritual Family	
5:10–11	Message of Restoration	

Peter's Farewell (5:12—14)

Sheet 1—Winter 2026–2027, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum Photo © Getty Images Lesson 1

10 Tips for Lesson Preparation

Teacher Tips by Editorial Staff

The text you are holding is intended for preparatory study. There is generally too much information packed into each lesson commentary to include it all within an hour-long session. There is certainly too much for a twenty-minute sermon! Therefore, one suggested approach to preparing yourself for an instructional presentation is as follows. May these ten tips guide your discernment.

1. Read through the lesson in its entirety to gain familiarity with the text and the general interpretive concepts.

2. During this read-through, spend time circling or highlighting places where you have questions, curiosity rises, or something particularly resonates with you.

3. Prayerfully reread the lesson, asking God to help you discern which points to emphasize *and what you may be able to skip* to leave margin in your time.

4. Write down words or phrases that stand out to you: Is there a central theme or statement that you feel called to emphasize? Is there anything further you feel led to research or to add?

5. Consider the lesson aims and take notes on how you might best teach the material to fulfill the aims.

6. Don't forget to start with Scripture! Consider incorporating new and different voices by asking various learners to read sections aloud.

7. Follow what is interesting and pertinent to you and your audience. Remember that when you are passionate, your group has a greater chance of catching your enthusiasm and responding with eagerness.

8. When you find geographic location information helpful, consider utilizing a visual—try the *Standard Bible Atlas* (available at Shop.DavidCCook.org) and take advantage of the maps or charts available for each quarter in the Standard Lesson Resources. You can also find alternative maps online to print or project.

9. Consider mentioning places where you learned something new or where you felt convicted toward change.

10. Be confident in the gifts and skills you possess. There is no single "right way" to present information or to communicate. Be yourself and offer your perspective and connection with the materials as a gift and invitation to others.

May God bless your exploration and comprehension of Scripture, and may you teach with grace-filled confidence and courage!



Psalm 119:15–16: I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

Attaining Christian Hope

Devotional Reading: Psalm 37:27–40
Background Scripture: 1 Peter 1:1–25

1 Peter 1:1–12

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

Key Text

Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. **—1 Peter 1:8**

Power to
the People

Unit 1: Living with God's Power

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the source of hope for the Christian.
2. Explain why believers have reason to rejoice amid suffering.
3. List ways to practice Christian hope during times of personal suffering.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Renewed Hope
- B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Man
- C. Lesson Context: Peter and Rome

I. Preface of Letter (1 Peter 1:1–2)
- A. From Peter (v. 1a)
- B. To the Elect (vv. 1b–2)

II. Praise for Salvation (1 Peter 1:3–9)
- A. Past Provision (vv. 3–5)
  More than Arrowheads and Pennies
- B. Present Trials (vv. 6–7)
- C. Predicted Glory (vv. 8–9)

III. Proclamation of Prophets (1 Peter 1:10–12)
- A. The Search (vv. 10–11)
  Seeking Greater Treasure
- B. The Revealed (v. 12)

Conclusion
- A. The Anchor of Hope
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Renewed Hope

As a lifelong fan of the Texas Rangers baseball team, I've endured many disappointing seasons. The team rarely made the playoffs. And on the rare occasions when they did, exits were quick.

The early 2000s promised a more hopeful future for my beloved team. Multiple postseason runs, including a World Series appearance, sparked excitement for the possibility of success. But the six-year period 2017–2022 yielded an unbroken series of losing seasons.

The 2023 season seemed headed toward being yet another disappointing finish. The Rangers went from holding a commanding regular-season lead to barely making the playoffs. Key pitchers suffered injuries. Batters entered slumps at critical moments.

Then everything changed during that season's historic playoff run. The team came together, overcoming adversity to win the organization's first World Series. While the championship did not erase past disappointments, it helped fans like me to reconsider the narrative surrounding our team. Renewed hope transformed our outlook.

Hope has a unique way of helping us look at challenging situations from different perspectives. As we delve into the introduction of 1 Peter, pay attention to the importance of hope and how it helps believers make sense of a world marked by disappointment and suffering.

B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Man

Today's lesson begins a study of the New Testament letters attributed to the apostle Peter. He had been a fisherman from Bethsaida, a village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44). One day while fishing, Peter and his brother were called by Jesus to become "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:18–19; Mark 1:16–17; Luke 5:10). As a disciple of Jesus, Peter often acted impulsively and rashly (examples: Mark 9:5–6; John 18:10). However, after Jesus' ascension, Peter emerged as a central figure in the first-century church (see Acts 2:14–39; 3:1–8, 12–26; 10:34–48; etc.).

By the time Peter wrote his letters, perhaps decades had passed since his days with Jesus. Some

commentators have tried to date the writing of these epistles more specifically to a persecution under Emperor Nero (reigned AD 54–68). Peter might have seen the end of his life drawing near—a martyrdom in fulfillment of John 21:18–19—which would have encouraged him to write in the little time that remained for him.

C. Lesson Context: Peter and Rome

Tradition associates Peter with the first-century church in Rome, the likely location where 1 Peter was written. Peter seems to use the word *Babylon* as a code word for the city of Rome (1 Peter 5:13). Historical, literal Babylon was the great oppressor of Jews in the sixth century BC. By using the historical referent, Peter was drawing an analogy to Rome of his day (compare Revelation 14:8; etc.).

The Romans respected Judaism because of its ancient roots. Initially, they viewed Christianity as just an offshoot of Judaism, so they also showed respect for Christians. Over time, the Romans concluded that Christianity was a new religion and, therefore, forbade its followers from pledging allegiance to a crucified Lord and Savior.

After a fire in Rome in AD 64, Nero is said to have blamed Christians, putting many to death. Thus, an escalation of persecution began under Nero's predecessor Claudius (reigned AD 41–54). The letter of 1 Peter addresses external pressures on the church, such as persecution. However, it is uncertain that the letter refers specifically to the oppression under Nero, since Peter may have been killed before the persecution of AD 64 began.

I. Preface of Letter

(1 Peter 1:1–2)

A. From Peter (v. 1a)

1a. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Peter is the name Jesus gave to Simon, the fisherman-turned-disciple (Mark 1:16–17; 3:16). This name is based on an ancient Greek word meaning "rock" or "stone"; Jesus uses this fact as a play on words in Matthew 16:18.

We can discern the meaning of the word *apostle* by looking at the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament translated about 250 years before Christ. In that text, the seven hundred or so uses of the word *apostle* refer to someone sent as an envoy to deliver a divinely authorized message. And so it is here as well.

B. To the Elect (vv. 1b–2)

1b. To the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

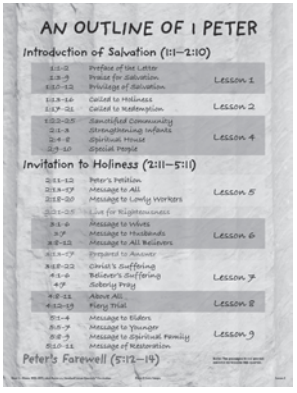
The word *strangers* refers to temporary residents of a foreign land. The Greek word behind this translation appears only three times in the New Testament, and two of those three are by Peter: here and 1 Peter 2:11 (Lesson 5). The other occurrence appears in Hebrews 11:13.

There are two major theories regarding the meaning of this word as used here. The first theory proposes that the wording refers to those of low position in Greco-Roman society—noncitizen residents who lacked the rights of citizens (compare Acts 16:37–39; 22:24–29). By contrast, the second theory proposes that the title *strangers*, as Peter uses it here, is a metaphor that reflects the spiritual outlook of believers: that of outsiders in a foreign place. Coming to the correct conclusion relies on the context in which Peter writes. For that reason, the use of the term likely reflects the second theory.

Peter's audience holds "outsider" status partially because they are *scattered* throughout the Roman Empire. The underlying Greek word used here comes across phonetically as our English word *Diaspora*. This term refers to Jews living outside of the promised land as a result of the exiles imposed by the Assyrians and Babylonians centuries before Peter writes (2 Kings 17:6, 23–24; 25:8–12; compare Deuteronomy 28:64). By the first century AD, the Diaspora continues (compare John 7:35). Peter's metaphor thus extends the concept to illustrate the

How to Say It

Bithynia	Bih-*thin*-ee-uh
Cappadocia	Kap-uh-*doe*-shuh
Diaspora	Dee-*as*-puh-ruh
Galatia	Guh-*lay*-shuh
Nero	*Nee*-row
Pontus	*Pon*-tuss
Septuagint	Sep-*too*-ih-jent



Visual for Lesson 1

Display this visual in a prominent place and refer to the outline throughout the quarter's lessons.

mindset of believers in Christ, whether they are of Jewish or Gentile heritage.

The five areas mentioned are all located in what is the modern-day country of Turkey. Jews from three of these five areas are listed as having been present on the day of Pentecost, where they heard Peter's sermon (Acts 2:5–11).

2a. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

The word *elect* describes the "strangers scattered." There are various interpretations of the doctrine of election (or predestination) regarding the process of salvation. But the word *election* can refer not only to the nature of how an individual comes to salvation but also to God's choosing of people for special roles. It is this broader sense that Peter refers to.

Three phrases identify how divine election comes about. First, it occurs *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,* fulfilling His plan and glory (Acts 2:23; Romans 9:23–24). Second, it comes through *the Spirit*. The process of *sanctification* involves a believer being made holy and set apart for God's purposes (see 1 Thessalonians 4:3–7).

Finally, the description of *sprinkling* of blood invites parallels to the Old Testament practices of purification (see Exodus 24:7–8; 29:21; Leviticus 14:6–7; etc.). The shed *blood of Jesus Christ* brings forgiveness, marking God's people as holy and chosen, heirs to His promises.

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you think of yourself as an "elect outsider" in the world?

Digging Deeper

How does the description of the work of the triune God in this encourage you despite your "outsider" status?

2b. Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

New Testament letters often open with blessings of *grace* and *peace* (Galatians 1:3; Colossians 1:2; etc.). The petition that these blessings *be multiplied* parallels 2 Peter 1:2 and Jude 2.

II. Praise for Salvation

(1 Peter 1:3–9)

A. Past Provision (vv. 3–5)

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

What a merciful God we serve! Sin brought death into the world (Romans 5:12–14). New life is possible, however, through *the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* By that reversal of death, *God* proved His ability to raise everyone. And indeed He will do so, "some to everlasting life," but others "to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2; compare 1 Corinthians 15:22). Each person therefore has a choice to make. Jesus' resurrection conquers death and makes new life available. We choose that new life by faith in Him. Faith in Jesus frees believers from the fear of death (15:26, 54–55).

Through the Son, the Father has shown His *abundant mercy* (see Ephesians 2:4–5), resulting in our being *begotten* or born again. The expression emphasizes that, through faith in Jesus, a person enters into a new family relationship. In Christ, anyone can be "reborn" into God's family (John 3:3–8; compare 1 Peter 1:23).

Christians have *a lively hope*—a confident expectation based on Christ's victory over death. Because God resurrected Jesus and believers are in Christ, we can be sure of our future (Romans 8:9–23; 1 Corinthians 15:20–23; Philippians 3:10–11, 20–21).

What Do You Think?

How does Christ's resurrection give believers a living hope instead of mere wishful thinking?

Digging Deeper

How does this hope sustain you during seasons of discouragement or suffering?

4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.

The mention of *inheritance* recalls God's promises to the Israelites regarding the land (Deuteronomy 26:1; Joshua 11:23; etc.). But the inheritance Peter refers to is far greater and more certain than that one (compare Hebrews 11:13–16; Revelation 21:6–8).

Its permanence is assured: *incorruptible* (not subject to decay) and *undefiled* (free from corruption of sin and death). It will endure eternally and *fadeth not away.* Since this inheritance is *reserved in heaven*, it is secure in the presence of the eternal God (compare Matthew 6:19–20). At Christ's return, believers will receive fully the gift of inheritance.

What Do You Think?

How have your experiences with earthly inheritance shaped your understanding of your eternal inheritance in Christ?

Digging Deeper

How does the promise of an imperishable and unfading inheritance shape your daily choices and priorities?

More than Arrowheads and Pennies

My father spent hours of his youth collecting arrowheads from fields near his rural Texas home. He mounted them with wire on picture frames. I used to marvel at the delicately knapped flint.

He stored the framed arrowheads in an outdoor shed. Over the years, mice chewed at and stained the frames' fabric backing. When it came time to move from that house, the movers threw away my father's treasured frames.

He also collected wheat pennies, exchanging his earnings at the bank for shiny pennies. I admired them as a youngster, but by the time I became an adult, those once-shiny pennies had corroded and turned green.

I loved my father's arrowheads and pennies, but they were a poor inheritance. They pale compared to the eternal inheritance found in Jesus. How will you celebrate this inheritance? —DG

5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Believers experience divine protection until our inheritance is fulfilled. Although we encounter threats in this world, we remain secure in the eternal hope that rests in *the power of God*. Such security comes through our expression of *faith,* which is demonstrated by a commitment to God and trust in Christ. He whose death, burial, and resurrection secured our inheritance has promised to return (John 14:3).

Christians experience God's *salvation* in the present (1 Peter 1:3, above). We also anticipate a future aspect of that salvation, which will *be revealed in the last time*. This era began with Christ's first coming (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:1–2; 1 Peter 1:20; etc.) and will be fulfilled at His return (Hebrews 9:28).

B. Present Trials (vv. 6–7)

6. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.

The Greek word translated as *temptations* here and in 2 Peter 2:9 is translated "trial which is to try you" (1 Peter 4:12). The idea is that of discovering the strength (or lack thereof) by exposing it to conditions of stress. Many in Peter's audience are experiencing a *season* of testing (see Lesson Context). These trials manifest in various ways, each presenting its own challenge or sorrow (*heaviness*). However, believers can face these tests confidently because God's promise of final victory is assured (John 16:33; 1 Peter 5:10 [Lesson 9]). Such hope invites believers to *greatly rejoice* in present suffering (James 1:2). Compared to eternity, these sufferings are slight, lasting only *for a season*.

7. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Peter draws on imagery from metallurgy to illustrate the testing and strengthening of *faith*. Metal ores, such as *gold*, are melted *with fire* to remove impurities. The process results in a purer, stronger metal. Our faith, which is *much more precious* than *gold,* is similarly refined (compare Job 23:10; Isaiah 48:10; Zechariah 13:9; Malachi 3:2–3; 1 Corinthians 3:13–15).

God allows suffering for various reasons. No explanation suffices. But Peter highlights one important outcome: suffering strengthens and proves genuine faith (compare James 1:3–4, 12).

C. Predicted Glory (vv. 8–9)

8. Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Peter is known to his readers as an eyewitness to Jesus' earthly ministry (2 Peter 1:16–18), but the readers themselves are not. Even so, they believe in Jesus and *love* Him due to the testimony of firsthand witnesses (compare John 20:29). Therein lies the essence of faith: a commitment to the unseen God and the confident belief in His faithfulness based on the evidence of eyewitness testimony (John 14:11; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11:1).

Faith is what enables believers to rejoice under challenging situations. Our joy is *unspeakable* because it is based on the Lord, who is beyond compare. It is *full of glory* because it anticipates the time when Christ's glory will be revealed (1 Peter 5:1 [Lesson 9]). Even as Christ's story went from suffering to glory (1:11), so ours will as well (5:10).

What Do You Think?

How is it possible to love and trust Jesus without having seen Him in person?

Digging Deeper

How would you answer someone who challenges the possibility of having faith in a Savior they cannot see?

9. Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

The phrase *end of your faith* refers not to the time when our need for faith concludes, but to its purpose: our rescue from evil.

The word *soul* can refer to the immaterial part of a person (compare Matthew 10:28). But in the New Testament as a whole, the word more often refers to the whole person (example: 1 Peter 3:20). And that appears to be the case here in the phrase *the salvation of your souls.*

III. Proclamation of Prophets

(1 Peter 1:10–12)

A. The Search (vv. 10–11)

10. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.

The *prophets* were the ones who delivered God's authoritative message to generations of Israelites. Although they announced that God would eventually accomplish His saving purpose, they did not live to see its fulfillment. They *searched diligently*, longing to experience the climax of God's plan (see Matthew 13:17; Luke 10:24). Now believers in Christ are in the position that the prophets longed to be in! The *grace that should come unto you* is the promised salvation, the favor and blessing God gives to those who do not deserve it (1 Peter 5:10).

Seeking Greater Treasure

When Mel Fisher (1922–1998) saw gold coins from a sunken sixteenth-century Spanish fleet, he sold his diving shop in California to recover the underwater treasure. Fisher and his team searched diligently for nearly a year. At last, on May 24, 1964, treasure hunters pushed aside the sand to reveal 1,033 gold coins. Following this success, Fisher set his eyes on a greater prize: the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha,* a Spanish galleon that sank in 1622 with forty tons of treasure. He searched tirelessly for years, enduring significant personal losses along the way. But Mel and his team persevered until they found the mother lode of treasure in 1985.

The prophets sought to experience firsthand the treasure of the Lord's salvation. While they never

saw the fulfillment of the search, they communicated to future generations the hope of that treasure.

Lord, help us diligently pursue the greatest treasure—salvation through Christ, in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. —DG

11. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

The prophets were certain of God's promised deliverance but were *searching* for how it would unfold (example: Daniel 12:5–13). What they had *testified beforehand*, Peter confirms through firsthand experience (see 1 Peter 5:1).

The title *Christ* comes from the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew title *Messiah* (compare John 1:41; 4:25). Both titles mean "anointed one," referring to the anointed Redeemer and King of the people of God as proclaimed by the prophets (Isaiah 9:6–7; 16:5; Micah 5:2; etc.).

The phrase *the Spirit of Christ* is rare, occurring only here and in Romans 8:9. This phrase had been interpreted in at least three ways: (1) it is another way of referring to the Holy Spirit, (2) it refers to Christ Himself in His preincarnate existence, (3) it is the dedication to tasks that Christ has and gives. The first of these three seems most likely. The Spirit who was with Christ in His suffering is the same Spirit who spoke to Israel's prophets (Joel 2:28–29) and conveyed the promise of the Messiah (Isaiah 11:1–10; 42:1–4).

What Do You Think?

How does seeing Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Christ strengthen your confidence in the truth of Scripture?

Digging Deeper

How does Peter's explanation of the prophet's inquiry reveal the unity of God's plan across testaments?

B. The Revealed (v. 12)

12. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

The promised hope of God's work had indeed been *revealed*, but it had been perceived only from "afar off" (Hebrews 11:13). Now the nature of that promise has been shown to us in "these last times" (1 Peter 1:20). This is the era wherein *the gospel* is being *preached* through the power of *the Holy Ghost* (Ephesians 3:4–6; Hebrews 4:2). These observations highlight the privilege believers have in receiving these promises.

The first readers of this letter may think of themselves as anything but privileged. But their position from God's perspective is quite different.

Conclusion

A. The Anchor of Hope

For Peter's audience, maintaining hope amid suffering was a matter of both physical and spiritual survival. That may be difficult to comprehend for those of us who live in relative comfort and safety today. But no one is exempt from the possible spiritual or physical storm clouds of tomorrow. The real question is, *How will we react when those storm clouds come?* Peter himself had at least two negative experiences in that regard, one involving a physical storm (Matthew 14:25–31), and the other involving a spiritual storm (26:69–75). May we learn not only from his mistakes but also from his counsel.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for showing Your love by fulfilling Your promises. Even as we experience sufferings, we look to You to guide us and empower us through Your Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our salvation is secure.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 124) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Winter Quarter. Order ISBN 9780784739631 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite volunteers to share about a time when they felt confused, frustrated, or challenged—yet, with time, those experiences became easier to understand or appreciate. (*Option*. Supplement these personal stories with examples from popular books or movies.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Hindsight" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated. Pairs will each need a small mirror to complete the activity.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "In today's study, Peter reminds believers of essential truths that anchor our hope and strengthen our faith, no matter how difficult the moment may seem."

Into the Word

Divide the class into five study teams, each consisting of two to five participants. (Larger classes may form additional teams to study duplicate topics; smaller classes can form fewer teams and double up some assignments.) Direct each team to read 1 Peter 1:1–12. Designate one person from each group to be the "scribe" for their group. Distribute a sheet of paper and a pen to each scribe. (*Option*: Give each team a copy of the appropriate segment of the lesson commentary to assist their study.) Give the following instructions:

Strangers Team: Using the Lesson Context section, write down main points regarding the audience to whom Peter wrote this letter and what they might have experienced from the Roman Empire. Then study 1 Peter 1:1b and explain why these believers were considered "strangers."

Hope Team: Explain the meaning of the phrase *lively hope* in today's study. Read the lesson's Introduction and the commentary on verse 3 for ideas. Write a brief definition of the phrase as used in 1 Peter 1:1–12.

Resurrection Team: Study 1 Peter 1:3–5 and explain how Peter looks to the resurrection of Christ to bring hope to believers. Explain how believers are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (v. 5).

Trials Team: Study 1 Peter 1:6–9, summarize Peter's metallurgy example and explain his teaching that hope is often refined in trials. Then create a modern-day example of his illustration in verse 7.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Suffering to Salvation" exercise from the activity page to members of the Trials Team. Direct participants to work with a partner to complete as indicated. After calling time, review answers with the class.

Salvation Team: Focusing on 1 Peter 1:10–12, summarize and clarify how the past gives hope for our salvation, our future deliverance.

After 10 minutes, invite representatives from each team to summarize their findings.

Into Life

Invite participants to work with a partner and brainstorm three ways to practice maintaining hope during times of personal suffering. Write responses on the board. Encourage everyone to choose one example from the board and make a plan to put it into practice in the upcoming weeks when trials or suffering arise.

Conclude the lesson by inviting partners to pray that they will maintain hope in Christ. Suggest that they might use 1 Peter 1:1–10 as a guide for their prayers.

Option. Write the following Scripture references on the board:

Psalm 55:16–22; Psalm 91:1–16; Psalm 139:7–18; Isaiah 40:1–31; Matthew 11:25–30; John 16:16–33; Romans 8:18–30; 2 Corinthians 1:3–7

Distribute index cards and pens to each participant. Invite them to review the references and choose one to write on their card. Encourage them to place the card in a visible location as a reminder to practice hope throughout the upcoming week.

Conforming to a Holy Family

Devotional Reading: Philippians 2:12–16
Background Scriptures: Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Peter 1:13–21

Leviticus 20:26

26 And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.



1 Peter 1:13–21

13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

17 And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

Key Text

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. **—1 Peter 1:15–16**

Image © Getty Images

Power to
the People

Unit 1: Living with God's Power

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the source of holiness.
2. Explain the relationship between redemption and holiness.
3. Make a creative response, such as a poem, song, drawing, or painting, that celebrates the precious blood of Jesus.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. The Master Sculptor
- B. Lesson Context: Holiness
- C. Lesson Context: Leviticus

I. Called to Holiness, Part 1 (Leviticus 20:26)
- A. Be Holy (v. 26a)
- B. God's Chosen (v. 26b)

II. Called to Holiness, Part 2 (1 Peter 1:13–16)
- A. Live Soberly (v. 13)
  Smartphone Sober
- B. Reject Desires (v. 14)
- C. Pursue Holiness (vv. 15–16)

III. Called to Redemption (1 Peter 1:17–21)
- A. Our Judge (v. 17)
  The Impartial Judge
- B. Our Salvation (vv. 18–20)
- C. Our Hope (v. 21)

Conclusion
- A. Pursuing the Goal of Holiness
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Master Sculptor

You likely know Michelangelo (1475–1564) as the Italian artist famous for painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Most of his creative work, however, was dedicated to carving stone sculptures. Some of his most notable famous figures include *Bacchus*, *La Pietà*, *Madonna and Child*, and, of course, *David*—a stunning seventeen-foot marble statue on display in Florence.

Regarding his sculptural work, Michelangelo is quoted as saying, "The sculpture is already complete within the marble block before I start my work. It is already there; I just have to chisel away the superfluous material."

This quote encapsulates the process of holiness. God has declared us His holy people. Through His Spirit, He works like a sculptor, chiseling away anything that hinders the final image: the holy people of God.

B. Lesson Context: Holiness

Today's lesson continues the themes introduced in 1 Peter 1:1–12 (see Lesson 1). However, a key point in today's lesson spans both the Old and New Testaments: the imperative of holiness.

Holiness implies being separate, set apart, or distinct. God is holy. One way that God expresses holiness is as Creator. He is transcendent or "beyond" His creation; this is known as His *ontological holiness*. He is also holy in the sense of being utterly perfect, free from any stain of sin; this is known as His *ethical holiness*. Hebrews 7:26 seems to capture both ideas. A key distinction between the two types of God's holiness is that human striving to attain to God's ontological holiness is an impossibility; but working toward being a mirror of His ethical holiness is mandatory.

Ethical holiness requires moral purity. God's actions are pure and righteous (Ezra 9:15; Psalm 7:11), so people, who are created in His image (Genesis 1:26–27), should reflect the same. To approach God, a person must have purity, as modeled by having "clean hands, and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3–4). This twofold cleanliness is expressed through our attitudes and actions.

C. Lesson Context: Leviticus

The book of Leviticus is one of the five books collectively known as the Pentateuch. Leviticus contains detailed instructions on the proper forms and procedures for the ancient Israelites' worship of God. These regulations and instructions were intended to direct them regarding proper conduct as a people of a holy and perfect God. Today's reading summarizes a larger section of the book (Leviticus 18:1–20:27), which outlines the steps the Israelite community should take toward holy living.

I. Called to Holiness, Part 1

(Leviticus 20:26)

A. Be Holy (v. 26a)

26a. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy.

A key word in Leviticus is *holy*. Of its 600-plus occurrences in the Bible, more than ten percent are found in Leviticus, even though that book comprises less than three percent of the Bible by verse count. To be "holy" refers to a state of being set apart in one of two senses (see Lesson Context).

To say that the *Lord* is *holy* in the communicable sense intended here is to say that He is untouched by uncleanness. The Law of Moses served to instruct the Israelites on how to live up to their collective identity as the people of God. This imperative is so essential that it is repeated (Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:26; compare 21:8).

B. God's Chosen (v. 26b)

26b. And have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.

When the Lord called Israel out of Egypt, He demanded one thing: holiness (Exodus 19:6; 22:31; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; etc.). The connection between holiness and having been chosen by God echoes throughout both the Old and New Testaments (Deuteronomy 26:19; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; etc.).

The Israelites were not to resemble *other* nations with idol worship, ruthless kings, immoral practices, and injustices toward the poor (2 Samuel 7:23; etc.). Instead, they were to live distinctively as a holy people belonging to a holy God.

What Do You Think?

How do you define holiness in daily life, and how can you pursue it in a world that often rejects God's standards?

Digging Deeper

What changes might God be calling you to make so your conduct better reflects His holy character?

II. Called to Holiness, Part 2

(1 Peter 1:13–16)

A. Live Soberly (v. 13)

13. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The word *wherefore* connects this verse with the factual summary of the preceding verse (see Lesson 1). To *gird up the loins* refers to someone gathering up their long, robe-like garment and tucking it into their belt to prevent it from hindering strenuous activity or quick movement (compare 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 4:29; etc.). The imagery in today's text as well as Luke 12:35 suggests that a person must prepare their *mind* and develop self-control to remain focused.

A *sober* mind is alert and seriously engaged with the present situation (compare 1 Peter 4:7; 5:8). The Greek word translated "sober" does not necessarily pertain to the consumption of intoxicating substances. Rather, it is used in various texts to emphasize rejecting anything that hinders self-control, clear thinking, and vigilance for proper behavior (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:6).

The apostle Paul joins Peter in connecting sober living with *hope* (see 1 Thessalonians 5:8). *Hope,* as they use the word, does not mean "wishful thinking." Instead, the concept of *hope* to the writers of the New Testament is a confident expectation that the fulfillment of salvation will occur at the return of *Jesus Christ* (compare 1 Peter 1:7 [Lesson 1]). This hope of future glory motivates our actions and gives us strength to endure present suffering (Romans 8:18–39). Peter's directives recall Jesus' warning to be ready (see Mark 13:32–37).

What Do You Think?

What specific changes can you make this week to keep your mind focused on Christ and your hope fixed on His return?

Digging Deeper

What is the relationship between having a sober mind and having hope in the future revelation of Christ?

Smartphone Sober

"Congratulations! You've won a new cell phone!"

The year was 2002. I replied over the receiver of my landline, "No thanks. I wouldn't want to get addicted to having a cell phone."

However, within a few years, I found myself with a basic cell phone. Several years later, I upgraded to the latest smartphone. Every idle moment was spent on this device—checking email, reading the news, scrolling through social media, or playing games. But I felt constantly distracted and dissatisfied. Eventually, I began to recognize the addictive nature of smartphones and their apps.

My wife and I wanted to end our addiction to these devices, leading us to decide to leave our phones in the entryway whenever we're home. With the devices out of immediate reach, we've become more attentive to each other and our kids. I wish we had "sobered up" and made this change years ago.

Most people associate the term *sober* as the opposite of being drunk on alcohol. However, Peter's call to believers to have a sober mind emphasizes the importance of eliminating distractions that can impair our self-control or clarity of thought. As we resist such impairments, we can better focus on what pleases God. In what areas of your life do you need a call to "be sober"? Might your smartphone usage be a good place to start? —DG

B. Reject Desires (v. 14)

14. As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.

Peter emphasizes obedience in this first part of his letter (1 Peter 1:2, 22). His use of the word *children* reflects usage in other New Testament texts that view fellow Christians as spiritual offspring (examples: 1 Corinthians 4:14, 17; 2 Corinthians 6:13; 3 John 4; compare Luke 3:8; Romans 8:16).

Peter's first-century readers are familiar with household codes of the era (see Lesson 5). Those codes expect children to obey their parents (compare Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20). Seeing those codes of behavior in a spiritual light, we should desire to obey God and follow His will (compare Romans 12:2). Our motivation to obey comes from the grace displayed by God through Christ Jesus—a mercy that transforms our lives and empowers us to live in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:3–5).

Peter's instructions seem particularly aimed at Gentile believers in his audience. They had engaged in drunkenness, sexual immorality, and idolatry, considering such things normal (1 Peter 4:2–3; compare Colossians 3:5–7). These behaviors are the "fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11; see Lesson 5). To return to these *former lusts* would be to revert to a state of willful *ignorance* characterized by a lack of knowledge about God and His Son (Ephesians 4:18; compare Acts 17:29–30; 1 Thessalonians 4:5).

What Do You Think?

Which disciplines or practices will you commit to this week to help guard your mind and heart against old patterns?

Digging Deeper

Who is an accountability partner who can help you in this regard?

C. Pursue Holiness (vv. 15–16)

15. But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.

Our status in being *called* by God as it relates to His foreknowledge and our will is a complicated subject. But what is readily apparent in this verse is that God's act of calling is linked to both election to salvation and expectation of holy living (1 Thessalonians 2:10–12; 4:1–8; etc.). Only the holy God can make us *holy*, and only by obeying Him can we be holy. The pursuit of His calling leads to us being holy (see 1 Peter 2:9, 21 [Lesson 5]).

As members of His holy family, we are called to reflect the family resemblance by being distinctly aligned with the character and purpose of God. Peter's audience faces persecution due to their distinct lifestyle (see Lesson 1). Peter emphasizes the importance of maintaining this distinctiveness despite the challenges, reminding readers of their vital identity as God's children. The word *conversation* refers to all forms of interaction with people, not just verbal speech.

Additionally, it's important to note that these verses address the community of believers. This is indicated by the use of the second-person plural pronoun in Greek. An equivalent phrase in English is "you all." Each individual is responsible for their specific role in fulfilling God's will. But the expectation is that the individual will live as part of the holy community. Holiness defines each person as well as our collective life together.

What Do You Think?

What can we do to help people have a better understanding of what holiness is and what it looks like in practice?

Digging Deeper

How do we do so without creating a judgmental, "holier than thou" impression that drives people away?

16. Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Peter's instructions are not new revelations for the church; rather, they are *written* precepts found in the Law of Moses. The command *be ye holy* appears notably in Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7. That book instructed the Israelites on how to live distinctively as God's people among the pagan nations (see Leviticus 20:26, above).

Although the instructions in Leviticus are set aside in the era of the new covenant, the principle of holiness for God's people continues (see Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 2:9 [Lesson 4]; 2 Peter 3:11 [Lesson 10]; etc.). Our holiness must take as its reference point the God who declares, "*I am holy*."

In times of suffering, such as those faced in the first century, health, happiness, and security may feel unattainable. But suffering should not diminish our holiness and dedication to God. When we choose holiness, we are choosing to be faithful.

III. Called to Redemption

(1 Peter 1:17–21)

A. Our Judge (v. 17)

17a. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work.

To refer to God as *Father* underscores Him as the source of life (1 Peter 1:3 [Lesson 1]). Jesus often referred to God as "my Father" (examples: Matthew 18:10; Luke 10:22; John 5:17), and He encouraged His followers to see God as their Father as well (Matthew 6:9; John 20:17). This relationship suggests that the children of the Father should relate to Him with trust, love, and obedience.

To *call on* God the Father involves appealing to Him through prayer. The Old Testament prophets foretold that God's salvation would be poured out when people called on Him (Joel 2:32; Zephaniah 3:9; Zechariah 13:9; etc.). This theme carries into the New Testament era (Acts 22:16; Romans 10:12–14; etc.). God's people pursue holiness, not through our own strength, but by calling out to God for His Spirit to transform our lives.

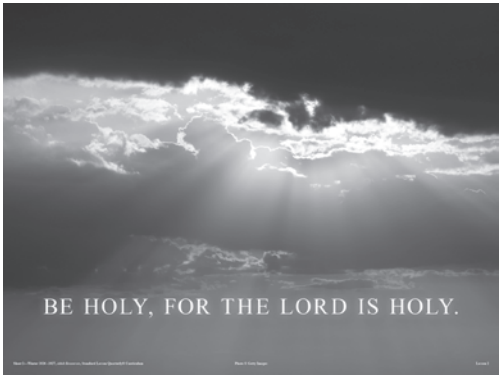
Additionally, God is judge (Isaiah 33:22; John 8:50; Hebrews 12:23). He administers justice righteously and impartially. As Peter noted years earlier, God does not show favoritism (Acts 10:34–35; compare Romans 2:11). God expects the same holy thoughts, attitudes, and actions from all His obedient children.

The Impartial Judge

"This is the due date for your final paper, and I won't accept anything late," my college professor stated while holding the syllabus. "No exceptions."

I had always been a natural procrastinator, but as the deadline approached, fear propelled me. I quickly completed my research, wrote a rough draft, and finalized the paper just in time for submission.

A few days later, a classmate asked me to proofread his paper, which was going to be submitted



Visual for Lesson 2. *Before closing with prayer, display this visual as you encourage the class to reflect on this command in the upcoming week.*

late. My jaw dropped when I saw that his paper fell short of the required number of pages. I gave it a quick scan and advised him to meet the page count requirements.

The next day, the classmate shared how the professor responded to the late submission. While the professor was kind, he was also fair. My classmate's request for special consideration fell short. As a result of his late work, he had to retake the course the following semester.

The apostle Peter reminds us that our heavenly Father is a fair judge who will reward us according to our actions—or inactions. How will God measure your deeds on earth? Is holiness your aim?

—DG

17b. Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

God's climactic display of justice will occur during the final judgment at His return. At that time, Christ will judge all people, believers and nonbelievers (Matthew 16:27; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 4:5; Revelation 20:12–13). The criteria for judgment are nuanced when we consider the relationship between faith and works (Romans 9:32; Galatians 2:16; James 2:14–26; etc.). It is with this future event in mind that Peter instructs believers *sojourning* on earth. They are a distinct minority: strangers residing in the world but belonging to God's heavenly kingdom (see 1 Peter 1:1 [Lesson 1]).

Fear does not mean pathological anxiety or paranoia. Instead, it is the feeling of honor and respect that comes from the desire to live holy lives in obedience to a holy God (compare Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:2; 2 Corinthians 7:15). Peter's message is that, since the trials his audience faces could lead them to unfaithfulness, a proper fear of God is necessary to yield faithfulness instead (Hebrews 11:7; etc.).

B. Our Salvation (vv. 18–20)

18. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers.

The reason God's people should live in fear is related to His provision for our salvation. To be *redeemed* draws on imagery of being freed or ransomed, wherein liberation from bondage comes through the payment of a price (example: Exodus 21:28–32; compare Titus 2:14).

Peter emphasizes the value of redemption for salvation by first highlighting how it wasn't purchased. *Corruptible things* wear out, and their once-positive usefulness eventually goes away. Metals such as *silver* or *gold* might not be subject to rust and corrosion as iron is, but nevertheless, their values fluctuate (compare 1 Kings 10:21).

To further paint the picture, Peter notes the background of his readers. Their entire way of life (*conversation*) has been based on the pagan *tradition* passed down from generation to generation. Their pagan beliefs are vain—entirely worthless and devoid of any eternal value (compare Acts 14:15; Ephesians 4:17–19). Having cast the backdrop as appropriately bleak, Peter turns to the good news.

19. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Earthly treasures and human traditions are insufficient for securing our eternal redemption—in fact, they result in quite the opposite! Instead, it is *the precious blood of Christ* shed on the cross that buys salvation (Mark 10:45; Ephesians 1:7). Christ's substitutionary atonement paid sin's price and satisfied God's indignation against sinful unholiness (Romans 3:25).

More than three dozen verses in the Law of Moses require that animals sacrificed as offer-

ings be without blemish or defect (Exodus 12:3–5; Leviticus 1:10; 3:1; 4:3; etc.). The description of Jesus as a *lamb* evokes imagery of the sacrificial lamb of Passover, whose blood saved the Israelites (Exodus 12:21–23). This imagery also recalls the language used by the prophet Isaiah to describe the suffering servant of God (Isaiah 53:7). In the first century, John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus, declared Him to be the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; compare 1:36). In the verse before us, Peter may be drawing on one or all of these images to describe the unique sacrifice of Christ Jesus: the lamb *without blemish* and *spot* (Hebrews 9:14; compare 1 Corinthians 5:7; Revelation 5:6–7; 7:14).

What Do You Think?

How would you explain the relationship between our redemption and our holiness?

Digging Deeper

What specific act of obedience will you commit to this week as a response to Christ's sacrifice?

20a. Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world.

The blameless sacrifice of Christ was not God's "Plan B" for salvation. In His foreknowledge, God knew all along—*before the foundation of the world*—what the plan would be (compare Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9).

20b. But was manifest in these last times for you.

However, the revelation of the chosen one of God has come *in these last times* for Peter's first-century readers (compare Acts 2:14–21; 1 John 2:18; Revelation 22:7, 10, 12, 20). We are still in these last times (see Hebrews 1:2), and we can be confident that God will carry His plan to fulfillment (Ephesians 1:10). As Peter's original readers eagerly awaited Christ's return, so do we.

C. Our Hope (v. 21)

21. Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

God's act of raising Jesus *from the dead* is the foundation for our hope. Christ is alive, ascended and glorified, ruling from heaven at the right hand of the Father (compare Hebrews 2:9). His reign assures us that we will one day share in His glory as well (1 Peter 5:1, 4, 10; see Lesson 9). The God who raised Jesus from the dead promises to raise us too (1 Corinthians 15:20–28). We hold on to the hope of Christ's return. If He does not come in our lifetime, our hopes are not lost. Our *hope* rests on the Lord *God*, the one who *raised* Jesus from the grave to *glory* and will do the same for us.

Conclusion

A. Pursuing the Goal of Holiness

For those in the family of God, we have been called to live holy lives that are transformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). God acts as the great sculptor, shaping us into a holy people (compare Isaiah 64:8). Through the Spirit's work of sanctification, our unholiness is carved away.

The journey toward holiness is not smooth or easy. We find the strength to pursue the holiness to which God calls us only when we maintain a close relationship with Christ Jesus. That relationship is made possible as we recognize that our redemption is by His precious blood. Only then can we experience daily renewal in an unholy world.

B. Prayer

Holy God, we give You thanks for our redemption that You planned in Christ Jesus. Empower us through Your Spirit to live out our calling as Your holy people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We are redeemed to be holy.

How to Say It

Ephesians	Ee-*fee*-zhunz
Leviticus	Leh-*vit*-ih-kus
ontological	*awn*-teh-***law***-jih-kul
Pentateuch	*Pen*-ta-teuk
Thessalonians	*Thess*-uh-***lo***-nee-unz (*th* as in *thin*)

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite students to work with a partner to consider the following quotations:

> Things that are holy are revealed only to men who are holy. —Hippocrates

> Anybody can observe the Sabbath, but making it holy surely takes the rest of the week. —Alice Walker

> We ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to become like him is to become holy, just, and wise. —Plato

> No man should desire to be happy who is not at the same time holy. He should spend his efforts in seeking to know and do the will of God, leaving to Christ the matter of how happy he should be. —A. W. Tozer

> Holiness is not a condition into which we drift. . . . On the contrary, we have purposefully to "put away" from us all conduct that is incompatible with our new life in Christ, and to "put on" a lifestyle compatible with it. —John Stott

> Holiness consists simply in doing God's will, and being just what God wants us to be. —Thérèse of Lisieux

Ask students to decide why they agree or disagree with each quote and whether the quotation under consideration fits their understanding of the biblical concept of holiness. Conclude by asking, "Which quote seems most valid for a Christian to heed today?"

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Crossword Challenge" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite participants to work with a partner to complete as indicated. Direct pairs to read 1 Peter 1:13–21 to check answers.

After either activity, say, "Today's Scripture texts challenge us to be holy and also tell us why and how."

Into the Word

Using the Lesson Context, explain the significance and background of the book of Leviticus. Divide participants into small groups and invite them to use online Bible concordances or word-search tools to locate every instance of the word *holy* in Leviticus. Conclude by reading Leviticus 20:26 aloud. Lead a whole-class discussion with these two questions: 1–Why were the Israelites called to be holy? 2–What was the reason for that call?

Inform participants that they will study 1 Peter 1:13–21 to complete a chart with the following column headings: *What Holiness Accomplishes* / *What Holiness Avoids* / *How Can We Be Holy?* / *Why Should We Be Holy?* Write the four headings on the board. Ask the class to listen for phrases that fit under each column as you read the Scripture aloud once or twice. Have a designated scribe record students' responses on the board.

Option. Ask participants to work in groups and complete the chart before discussing it as a whole class. Alternatively, assign each heading to a different third of the class and ask them to create a list under their headings for whole-class discussion.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Investigating Holiness" exercise from the activity page. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Begin by saying, "We can be holy only because the precious blood of Christ has redeemed us." Set up several stations around the room with a variety of art and writing supplies (*examples:* poster board, note pads, index cards, pens, markers, colored pencils, paint). Invite participants to choose a station and make a creative expression—such as a poem, song, drawing, or painting—that celebrates the precious blood of Jesus.

Adapt the activity to fit your class size, setting, and available time. Conclude by inviting volunteers to share their creations with the class.

Seeking "God with Us"

Devotional Reading: Zephaniah 3:14–18
Background Scriptures: Isaiah 9:1–7; Matthew 1:1–25; 1 Peter 1:18–21

Matthew 1:18–25

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

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

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.
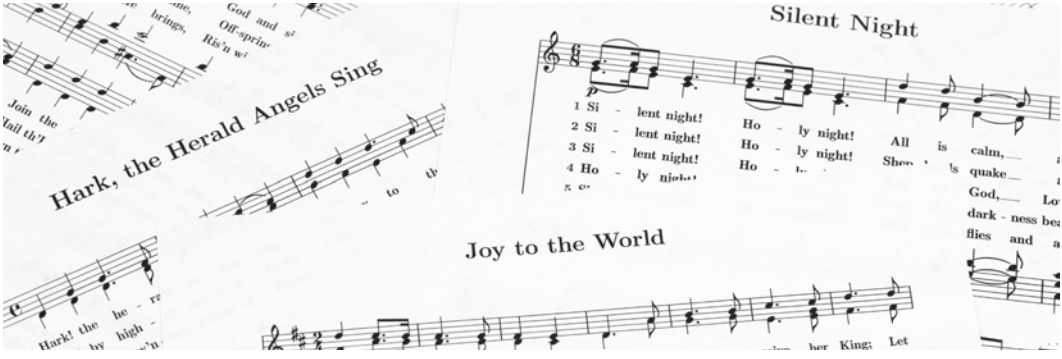
21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

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

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

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

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



Key Text

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. **—Matthew 1:23**

Image © Getty Images

Power to
the People

Unit 1: Living with God's Power

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the events surrounding Jesus' birth as described by the Gospel of Matthew.
2. List examples of Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by the birth of Jesus.
3. Plan a Christmas observance that celebrates "God with us" despite our struggles and sufferings.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Called Out of Comfort
- B. Lesson Context

I. Disgraced Couple (Matthew 1:18–19)
- A. Mary's Pregnancy (v. 18)
- B. Joseph's Dilemma (v. 19)

Still Finding Something New

II. Divine Promise (Matthew 1:20–25)
- A. Angelic Announcement (vv. 20–21)
- B. Prophetic Fulfillment (vv. 22–23)

God with Us in Our Loneliness
- C. Obedient Action (vv. 24–25)

Conclusion
- A. God with Us
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Called Out of Comfort

Fifteen years ago, my life was on a path that I had carefully planned. I had a stable career that provided financial security, and I intended to maintain the status quo until retirement. But God had a different plan for me.

Instead of continuing along the career path and comfortable life I had envisioned, I felt God's call out of my comfort zone and into full-time Christian ministry. He invited me to surrender my expectations and plans to follow Him wholeheartedly. Although I did not know the details of where His calling would lead me, I was determined not to miss out on His plan.

For the next few years, I dedicated myself to preparing for this calling by going to seminary. Returning to school and starting a new career later in life was never part of my plan, but I am forever grateful that I answered God's call.

In today's lesson, we will take a break from studying 1 Peter to study a notable example of God calling someone out of their comfort zone.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of Matthew introduces the story of Jesus' birth in an unexpected manner. It begins with a genealogy, showing that Jesus has the proper credentials to be the Messiah as a descendant of Abraham and David (Matthew 1:1–17). Matthew's purpose is to demonstrate how Jesus fulfills the prophesied expectations for the Messiah. But why must the Gospel do this?

For centuries, Israel had been waiting for the arrival of the promised Messiah, a future king from the line of David. The title "Christ" is the equivalent of the Jewish title "Messiah" (John 1:41; 4:25). Both designations mean "the anointed one." Numerous Old Testament texts point to the Messiah's characteristics, arrival, and reign (Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:12–13; Psalm 110; Isaiah 7:14; 8:14; 11:10; Daniel 7:13–14; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9; etc.). Many first-century Jews expected the Messiah to be a political and military leader appointed by God to save the nation of Israel by overthrowing the Roman occupiers,

ascending to the throne of David, and establishing an earthly empire.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites often found themselves powerless and at times subjugated. They endured centuries of slavery in Egypt, generations of warfare with their neighbors, and a lifetime of exile. They were God's chosen people, but they faced numerous hardships.

It is fitting that when the Messiah finally arrived, He entered into a humble estate; He is "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). He does not love the people of this community because of their great worth; rather, they have great worth because He loves them.

The Gospel of Matthew was written with two objectives: (1) to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (compare Matthew 1:22–23; 2:15; 21:4–5; 27:9–10) and (2) to affirm that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Christ (1:16; compare 16:16).

I. Disgraced Couple

(Matthew 1:18–19)

A. Mary's Pregnancy (v. 18)

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

Following the genealogy that begins this Gospel (see Lesson Context), Matthew describes the unusual circumstances surrounding the conception and *birth of Jesus Christ*.

Joseph is a descendant of King David, and thus, from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:27). He works as a carpenter, a skilled tradesman in his community (Matthew 13:55).

During this time, it is customary for Jewish girls to be *espoused,* or legally promised to be married, in their early teens to men in their late teens or older. Unlike modern-day engagements, which are nonlegal statements of marital intention, traditional betrothals were legally binding, solemnized by witnesses, and only to be broken by death or divorce. During this year-long season, the girl would still live with her parents and have no sexual contact with her betrothed.

Mary is committed to this first stage of marriage with Joseph, and, to this point, they have not yet come *together* in marital or sexual union (Matthew 1:25). This detail sets the stage for a miraculous mystery: *she* is *found* to be *with child*. God had been known to miraculously grant children to elderly and barren women (examples: Genesis 18:11–14; 1 Samuel 1:14–20)—but never before had He done so to a virgin.

At this point in the narrative, Joseph knows nothing of the role of *the Holy Ghost* in Mary's pregnancy. Mary knows that her child has been conceived through the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:26–38). But anyone else, including Joseph, who heard about her pregnancy would assume that it was the result of sexual activity. Joseph now faces a dilemma: whether to proceed with the marriage to a pregnant and (seemingly) adulterous woman, or to divorce her and let her face the consequences.

What Do You Think?

Is the virgin birth essential to the gospel, and what key doctrines are compromised if it is denied?

Digging Deeper

How would you respond to those who claim the virgin birth of Jesus is religious lore?

B. Joseph's Dilemma (v. 19)

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

As Mary's *husband* (still in the context of their betrothal), *Joseph* cannot legally ignore the fact that she carries a child who is not biologically his. Ending their betrothal would require a legal process recognized by the community.

But Joseph is *a just man*, meaning that he is dedicated to remaining faithful to the law. The Law of Moses has specific provisions for addressing adultery (Numbers 5:11–31; compare Deuteronomy 22:13–24). Joseph could bring Mary before the community for public shaming and punishment. At the very least, he would have been required to *put her away* through divorce

(see 24:1). This situation involves more than just breaking off an engagement. Joseph is legally obligated to wed Mary, and she is legally promised to him. He may be considering allowing Mary to remain in her father's household, have the baby, and, perhaps, never marry.

But Joseph is as caring for her as he is just toward the law. His kindness leads him to handle the situation as discreetly as possible. He plans to divorce Mary *privily* in order to minimize her shame. By doing this, Joseph can remain righteous before the law while also showing mercy to Mary.

What Do You Think?

How does Joseph's response inspire you to handle difficult situations with compassion?

Digging Deeper

In what way can you balance justice and mercy in a current relationship or personal challenge?

Still Finding Something New

When my children were young, we started a Christmas tradition that continues to this day. Each year, I bake a pan of cinnamon rolls topped with icing and place a lit birthday candle in the center of the pan. We gather around the candle and sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. When my children were younger, they would devour the rolls as we read the Gospels' account of Jesus' birth.

After each reading, we share our thoughts and observations. A different aspect of the well-known story emerges each year. One year, I noticed the social shame and stigma that surrounded the pregnant Mary and Joseph. Another year, I studied the significance of Joseph's righteousness and kindness.

Now it's only my husband and me reading the Gospels with the cinnamon rolls. And each year, I still discover something new.

This year may be the first time you've encountered the Christmas story. Or it may be the hundredth time. Regardless, allow the Spirit to open your eyes and your heart. As your understanding of the depths of God's love for you deepens, so will your love for God. —VM

II. Divine Promise

(Matthew 1:20–25)

A. Angelic Announcement (vv. 20–21)

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

Joseph continues to ponder *these things*, still trying to discern the best course of action. But one night, Joseph receives a message through *a dream*. God sometimes uses dreams to convey authoritative messages in exceptional circumstances (examples: Genesis 28:12–15; 31:24; 37:5–11; 1 Kings 3:5; contrast 1 Samuel 28:6). This circumstance certainly qualifies!

Angels are spiritual beings who serve as messengers or heralds for God (examples: Genesis 19:1–17; Zechariah 1:14–17; Matthew 28:5–7). Unlike the angel who appears to Mary (Luke 1:11–20, 26–38), this particular *angel* remains unnamed.

Scripture also portrays angels as agents of God's judgment (examples: 2 Samuel 24:16–17; Revelation 15:1). So, upon seeing the angel in his dream, Joseph may have feared divine judgment for the situation with Mary. Additionally, he may have been fearful of marrying Mary due to the social stigma that could arise from their situation. The angel commands Joseph to *fear not*, for God's plan is about to be revealed.

The title *son of David* signifies that Joseph is a descendant of King David. Joseph's place in the line of David works to cement the child's claim to the same line. If others recognize the child as

How to Say It

Ahaz	*Ay*-haz
Emmanuel	E-*man*-you-el
Isaiah	Eye-*zay*-uh
Judah	*Joo*-duh
Messiah	Meh-*sigh*-uh
Nazareth	*Naz*-uh-reth
Syria	*Sear*-ee-uh
Zechariah	*Zek*-uh-***rye***-uh

Joseph's son, a way would be paved for them to also recognize the child as the promised heir of David, a key role of the promised Messiah (see 2 Samuel 7:12–16).

The Old Testament associates God's Spirit with the process of creation (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30). The spiritual and biological mechanics of this conception by *the Holy Ghost* are mysterious and unexplainable. The conception and birth of Jesus is not only a miracle but also an act of creation by the Spirit, highlighting the beginning of a crucial new phase in God's plan of salvation.

What Do You Think?

When have you needed God's reassurance before taking a difficult step of obedience?

Digging Deeper

What celebrations, Scripture readings, or prayers can help you be attentive to God's guidance in this Christmas season?

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

Long before the invention of ultrasound, the angel announces a gender reveal: Mary *shall bring forth a son*. It is customary at this time for a father to name his son during circumcision on the eighth day (compare Luke 1:57–63). But the angel reveals this boy's God-given name.

The name *Jesus* is derived from the Greek adaptation of the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, which is also the root of the name *Joshua*. Throughout Israel's history, several notable figures have this name, the most recognized being Joshua, son of Nun and protégé of Moses (see Joshua 1:1). Many Hebrew names hold significant meanings, and parents were purposeful when naming their children. In some instances, God intervened to name children, which is always an indication of His purpose (Genesis 16:11; 17:19). The meaning of the names *Jesus* and *Joshua* makes a declaration about God: "the Lord saves."

The angel explains the significance of the name by declaring that this baby would be instrumental in how God *shall save his people*. First-century Israel anticipates a Savior known as the Messiah (see Lesson Context). But Jesus will fulfill this role in a unique way as determined by God (compare Luke 24:21; John 6:15). The angel makes it clear that the Messiah's mission is to save *God's people from their sins*. In other words, the Savior will address the fundamental issue of sin to bring about salvation.

This is the greatest of announcements for the world. But for Joseph, it is a call to serve God in an extraordinary manner. By informing Joseph that he is to name the child, the angel implies that Joseph will assume the role of earthly father to the Messiah.

What Do You Think?

What does the name *Jesus*, which means "the Lord saves," remind you about your own need for Him?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take this Christmas season to point others to Jesus as Savior?

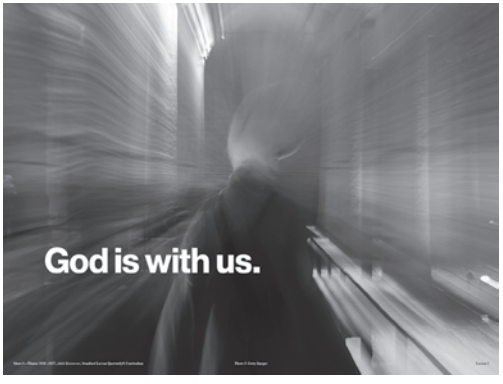
B. Prophetic Fulfillment (vv. 22–23)

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

These events are no accident. *All this was done*—the conception, the angelic announcement, the birth—so that the will of *the Lord* is accomplished and His word *fulfilled*. God has a master plan from the beginning; He shapes world history to bring about His will.

The fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and passages is a key feature in this Gospel. Matthew relates nearly a dozen instances of fulfillment to confirm God's involvement and sovereign will in the unfolding of Jesus' life (examples: Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 22:31; 24:15). Old Testament passages are "fulfilled" in the New Testament when there a correspondence, known as a "type," between God's actions in Israel's history and the events in the life of Jesus.

Writers of the New Testament sometimes refer to sections of the Old Testament to invite compar-



Visual for Lesson 3. *Display this visual as you ask the discussion questions associated with Matthew 1:23b.*

ison to that original context. Such is the case with the quotation that follows from *the prophet* Isaiah.

23a. Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son.

Matthew quotes the ancient Greek translation of Isaiah 7:14. However, that verse also belongs to its own context. The connections between the original context and Matthew's application to Jesus are essential.

Isaiah's prophecy was delivered in the context of the southern kingdom of Judah needing deliverance from the hostile alliance of Aram (Syria) and the northern kingdom of Israel. God tells King Ahaz of Judah to ask for a sign that God will defeat Judah's enemies, but Ahaz refuses to do so. Despite his refusal, God still promises a sign because the people need hope in God's sure deliverance.

In Isaiah 7:14, the prophetic sign is revealed as the birth of a *child*, a *son*. A partial fulfillment of this sign was seen in Isaiah's day, though we do not know for sure the identity of that child. One suggestion is that those living in Isaiah's day would have interpreted this sign as a prediction of the birth of Isaiah's own son (see 8:3–4). However, there were dimensions of the prophecy that this son did not live up to, pointing instead to a greater fulfillment to come (compare 9:1–7).

Isaiah's words were significant to his contemporaries in the eighth century BC, who were awaiting affirmation of God's favor. These words, however, take on new meaning when Matthew applies them to Jesus. Matthew sees in Jesus a greater son—one even born miraculously of a *virgin*—who came to fulfill every dimension of the prophecy. This miraculous birth is not a random, unexplained event but rather a definitive act of God, signifying His presence with His people.

23b. And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Jesus is not given the title *Emmanuel* as a personal name. Instead, the title affirms the significance of His birth. God enters human history and becomes human through the birth of His Son, Jesus. This event means that God is close to and is not indifferent to our human experience. Through the incarnation, *God* in Christ Jesus is *with us* because He is fully human (compare John 1:14).

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus promises to be with His followers to the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). Although He ascends to heaven after completing His earthly ministry, He remains with us, wherever we are.

What Do You Think?

How does the truth behind the title *Emmanuel*, meaning "God with us," comfort you in a present challenge?

Digging Deeper

What habits or practices help you stay mindful of God's presence during the holiday busyness?

God with Us in Our Loneliness

"The holidays are one of the toughest times for some of my clients," my counselor friend told me when she stopped by during Christmastime. She warned she might have to step away if a client called.

Surprised, I asked, "You have to work during the holidays?"

She nodded. "Loneliness can really take its toll," she explained, "The holiday season only magnifies the social and emotional isolation felt by many."

Her words stayed with me. This is supposed to be a joyous, festive season, filled with celebrations and time spent with loved ones. Yet, beneath all that excitement, many experience significant loneliness.

I've heard, said, and sung the name *Emmanuel* countless times over the years during the Christmas season. Only recently, however, have I started to reflect on what it means to proclaim, "God with us." I have begun to pray to God and worship Him as "God with us" during my own times of loneliness. I find comfort in knowing He not only understands my isolation but promises His presence.

God has called us to bear the burdens of others (Galatians 6:2). During this Christmas season, how can you represent "God with us" to those who are experiencing loneliness and heartache? —VM

C. Obedient Action (vv. 24–25)

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

When *Joseph* awakes from his *sleep,* he has complete confidence that what he has experienced is a divine communication, not just an ordinary dream. He no longer feels conflicted, and, as a "just man" (Matthew 1:19, above), he knows that *the angel of the Lord* must be obeyed, despite what remains difficult about his situation. Without hesitation, he accepts Mary as *his wife* and trusts that God is in control. This decision means that Joseph will take her from her parents' home to live with him

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

Making the point that Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus is critical to establishing Jesus' unique identity. The phrase *knew her not* means that Joseph honors Mary's pregnancy by having no sexual relationship with her until after the birth. Joseph's obedience goes beyond the requirements of the law and even beyond the norms of his culture. It is not until after she has *brought forth* the baby that they consummate their marriage. Later, God blesses them with other children (see Matthew 13:55–56).

Mary's *firstborn son* is not born in Nazareth, but in a small village called Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1–6; compare Micah 5:2). In obedience to the angel's decree, they name the baby *Jesus*. Now God has taken up residence among people: God with us!

Conclusion

A. God with Us

For many of us, no biblical account is more familiar than the Christmas story. Year after year, we revisit Bethlehem. Yet, in that familiarity, we may overlook how God can continue to teach us.

Matthew's record of Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus, is one notable example. A careful reading reveals God's call of a specific person, and more importantly, God's provision for all humanity.

The circumstances surrounding the marriage of Joseph and Mary were socially troubling for their time, likely inviting public shame from their community. Despite these challenges, God called Joseph to be the earthly father of Jesus, entrusting him with the critical role of raising the Messiah. Joseph obeyed with quiet faithfulness and extended compassion to Mary, demonstrating steadfast trust in God.

While Matthew highlights Joseph's helpful example, Matthew nevertheless puts the spotlight on Jesus as God's provision for humanity. The world is marked by trials and suffering, "heaviness through manifold temptations" (1 Peter 1:6 [Lesson 1]). God is not distant, far removed from humanity's plight. Instead, through the incarnation of Jesus, God is with us. Emmanuel is here.

The birth of Jesus was a crucial step in God's plan to live in love among us, marking the beginning of the Son's dwelling on earth and leading to the Spirit's indwelling in our hearts. By faith, we trust that Jesus, by His Spirit, remains with us today in fulfillment of God's ongoing promise of rescue, love, and grace.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, in this Christmas season, we rejoice in the love You have shown by sending Your Son, born of a virgin, to dwell among us. Through Christ Jesus, You are always with us. Empower us by Your Spirit to celebrate Your abiding presence with joy, gratitude, and obedience. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

In all of life, God is with us.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite participants to share with a partner about a time when they experienced the presence of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Through our study of 1 Peter, we have seen that because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we have a living hope. In today's study, we will turn to Matthew's Gospel to see how the promise of Christ's incarnation and birth brings living hope."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 1:18–19. Divide participants into three groups: **Joseph Group**, **Mary Group**, and **Neighbors Group**. Provide a pen and a sheet of paper to a representative from each group. Instruct each group to brainstorm a personal diary entry that reflects the potential thoughts, feelings, and experiences of their group's namesake regarding Mary's pregnancy and Joseph's response. Ask the representative to serve as "scribe" and write down the diary entry. After calling time, ask the scribes to read their diary entries aloud. For a whole-class discussion, ask, "In what ways was Mary's pregnancy a reason to celebrate, and in what ways was it a reason to feel ashamed?"

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 1:20–23 and another volunteer to read aloud Isaiah 7:1–17. Then lead a whole-class discussion using the following questions: 1–What are the key narrative points of the Isaiah passage? 2–What are the key promises in that passage? 3–What is the significance of "Emmanuel" in both texts? 4–In what ways does Matthew 1 "fulfill" Isaiah 7?

Option. Distribute copies of the "Prophecies: Foretold and Fulfilled" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 1:24–25. Invite the whole class to list the character qualities we can infer about Joseph based on his response to Mary and the angel. Write the responses on the board. Finally, pose the question: "How might Joseph and Mary have experienced 'God with us' during this season of their lives?"

Into Life

Introduce this section by saying, "Through our study this quarter, we have identified the source of hope for Christians and explored why this hope gives us a reason to rejoice in all situations. During the Christmas season, we celebrate the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus. Because of this event, we come to know Jesus as 'God with us.'"

Ask participants to shout out examples of ways that people in our community experience struggles and sufferings. Write these responses on the board. Then, divide the class into groups of three and ask each group to plan a Christmas observance that celebrates the theme "God with us" in the face of the world's struggles and suffering. Encourage groups to use the responses on the board as a starting point, considering how God's presence can bring love, grace, and hope to those members of our community who are suffering.

Remind groups that their planned observance does not need to "fix" the suffering and struggle but should thoughtfully celebrate God's presence amid these challenges. Encourage groups to decide on specific details, such as a venue, date, and time for the celebration. After the planning time is up, invite a representative from each group to share the details of their planned observance.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "God with Us" exercise from the activity page. Encourage participants to complete the activity as a take-home during the upcoming week.

Conclude class time by singing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" as a way of worshiping God, grateful for His presence with us.

Living as Royal Priests

Devotional Reading: Acts 4:8–14
Background Scriptures: Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14–15; 28:16; 40:6–8; 1 Peter 1:22–2:10

1 Peter 1:22–2:10

22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

1 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

Key Text

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. **—1 Peter 2:5**

Power to
the People

Unit 1: Living with God's Power

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the stone in Zion.
2. Identify and explain "living stones" and "the living Stone."
3. State a way to live out their calling as a member of the "royal priesthood."

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Priesthood of All Believers
- B. Lesson Context

I. Purified People (1 Peter 1:22–25)
- A. Love One Another (v. 22)
- B. Live by the Word (vv. 23–25)

II. Strengthening Infants (1 Peter 2:1–3)
- A. Setting Aside (v. 1)
- B. Growing Up (vv. 2–3)

III. Spiritual House (1 Peter 2:4–8)
- A. Living Stone (v. 4)
- B. Building Stones (v. 5)
  Significant Stones
- C. Cornerstone (vv. 6–7)
- D. Stumbling Stone (v. 8)
  Speaking in Stories

IV. Special People (1 Peter 2:9–10)
- A. Chosen by God (v. 9)
- B. Receiving Mercy (v. 10)

Conclusion
- A. Priestly Living of the Kingdom
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Priesthood of All Believers

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in 1507. But based on his interpretation of the Bible in the ensuing years, Luther began to question the church's practices. He eventually led a movement to withdraw in protest and form churches independent from the authorities in Rome. In doing so, Luther and his followers abandoned the centuries-old tradition of relying solely on priests for confession and prayer.

Rather than seeing some persons as clergy elevated above the laity, those thought to be the general membership of the church, Luther claimed that all baptized Christians were priests. There was to be no inherent spiritual division between the clergy and the laity. Any Christian could minister to another in ways that were seen before as the purview of priests alone.

This meant that any Christian could pray effectively for another Christian. This teaching eventually became known as the doctrine of the "priesthood of all believers," a central tenet of Protestant Christianity. Today's lesson takes us directly to one of Luther's guiding texts.

B. Lesson Context

The letter of 1 Peter is rich with language drawn from the Old Testament, particularly from the ancient Greek translation known as the Septuagint. To fully understand the letter, we must comprehend the types of Old Testament references that Peter employs.

A *quotation* occurs when words from a source are duplicated word-for-word or nearly so. By one estimate, there are twenty such quotations of significant length in 1 Peter. Peter often introduces these quotations with an introductory phrase, such as "for" (1 Peter 1:24, quoting Isaiah 40:6–8).

An *allusion,* on the other hand, is a flexible concept. It reflects the intent of the source passage without quoting it verbatim. It's sometimes difficult to determine what is an allusion and what isn't. One commentator proposes that there are seventeen allusions to the book of Isaiah alone in 1 Peter! Here is one example of those:

1 Peter 2:5: Ye also . . . are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood.
Isaiah 61:6: But ye shall be named the Priests of the LORD: men shall call you the Ministers of our God.

Peter employs these literary tools to enhance the rhetorical impact of the letter and lend credibility to his authority.

I. Purified People

(1 Peter 1:22–25)

A. Love One Another (v. 22)

22a. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit.

When we see the word *purified,* we can think of the word *sanctified;* the words have a lot of overlap in meaning as they both convey the idea of "separation," as in "separation from worldly values." Digging deeper in this regard reveals that there are two types of separation: initial and progressive. When a person becomes a Christian, they become a new creation, separated from the old way of sin (1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:17; etc.). This is called "initial sanctification," which is the positional state of having been redeemed. Following this is "progressive sanctification," which is lifelong spiritual growth as the person continually transforms their attitudes, actions, and character (Colossians 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Peter 3:18; etc.).

Immediately prior to this verse, Peter calls on believers to lives of holiness (separation to God, apart from worldly values) as made possible through redemption purchased by Christ's blood (1 Peter 1:13–21 [Lesson 2]). Both concepts of initial sanctification and progressive sanctification are present, but the phrase *ye have purified your souls* emphasizes the former as a basis for the latter.

The phrase *obeying the truth through the Spirit* is another contextual clue for this interpretation. The readers have not purified themselves through their own efforts; their only part in bringing about their redemption and initial sanctification was their yielding to the Holy Spirit as they acknowledged the *truth* of the message of the gospel, which directs the behavior of believers (compare 2 John 4 [Lesson 12]; 2 Peter 1:12). Further insight on the role that the recipients have taken (or are to take) comes next.

22b. Unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.

This half-verse connects a particular aspect of expected obedience with the separation (purification) discussed above. Specifically, the expected obedience is to *love one another,* stressed again—sometimes translated "charity"—in 1 Peter 2:17; 3:8; 4:8; and 2 Peter 1:7 (see Lessons 5, 6, 8, and 10, respectively). Thus, obedience is closely connected to separation from that which is unholy (1 Peter 1:2, 14–16 [Lesson 1]).

Our commitment to the gospel is to be reflected in how we treat *the brethren* in faith. Our *love* is to be *unfeigned*, free from any hypocrisy. It must come from *a pure heart* and be expressed *fervently.* We must do more than merely act as though we love one another. We must also care for each other as we care for ourselves (see Matthew 22:37–40).

B. Live by the Word (vv. 23–25)

23. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

Peter reminds readers that they have been *born again* by God into new life that brings an eternal inheritance (compare 1 Peter 1:3–4 [Lesson 1]; compare John 1:12–13; Ephesians 2:1–5; Colossians 2:13). Through this new birth granted by God, we can fulfill the command to love others.

The term *seed* evokes botanical imagery, reminding us of how plants reproduce and grow. We can also view spiritual growth using this imagery. The *seed* is *the word of God* (compare Luke 8:11). We grow in new life because we learn about Jesus and His work through the word of God. People cannot believe unless they hear or read about Jesus and His saving work (Romans 10:14, 17). Even then, the seed may not always be well-received (compare Matthew 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–20).

When seed falls on the "good soil" of hearts ready to receive, it marks the beginning of a new, *incorruptible* life (compare John 3:3–5). The word of the eternally living God is life-giving, as is His inheritance for us (1 Peter 1:4 [Lesson 1]).

What Do You Think?

How would you summarize the relationship between being purified and showing love to others?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take this week to show love to another believer?

24. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.

Peter quotes a shortened form of Isaiah 40:6–8, which uses seasonal *grass* and flowers to illustrate a point: such vegetation sprouts, grows, blooms, and eventually withers and dies. *All flesh* (people and animals) are similar; our lifespans are limited, and death overtakes us all, regardless of any earthly *glory* we may achieve (compare James 1:10–11).

25. But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

But not all things die, as affirmed by Peter's quote of Isaiah 40:8. In Isaiah's context, the *word* refers to God's promises for Israel. For both Peter and Isaiah, the word of *the Lord* brings life and salvation. Isaiah had been seeking the promises of the Lord's salvation (compare 1 Peter 1:10–12 [Lesson 1]), and now Peter recognizes those promises as fulfilled in Christ (compare Acts 10:34–38).

The eternal word is proclaimed in the preaching of the *gospel*. It endures and produces fruit far beyond present sufferings. It does not decay and cannot be hindered. For those experiencing uncertainty and fear during persecution, as Peter's initial audience is facing, the promise of the gospel's eternal nature invites them to find peace and hope.

II. Strengthening Infants

(1 Peter 2:1–3)

A. Setting Aside (v. 1)

1. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.

The conjunction *wherefore* indicates a connection between the previous statement and the action that should result from it. Peter's readers have obeyed the truth and have been set apart through the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:16–19). That initial purification needs to progress by *laying aside* vices to pursue holiness (compare Romans 13:12; James 1:21).

Malice refers to wrongdoing in general and the disposition that drives it. *Guile* is general dishonesty. *Hypocrisies* characterize a person who uses manipulation and deception for personal gain. *Envies* are bitter spirits that begrudge others. The underlying word translated as *evil speakings* is rendered as "backbitings" in 2 Corinthians 12:20. These vices undermine the purity and cohesion of the sanctified community of believers.

B. Growing Up (vv. 2–3)

2. As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.

Different levels of spiritual maturity require foods that are appropriate for each level. There is nothing wrong with the *milk of the word* (compare 1 Corinthians 3:1–4; Hebrews 5:11–6:3). But its intake should lead to growth that calls for food appropriate to that growth (compare 2 Peter 3:18).

There is a play on words here in the Greek text that is not obvious in English. The words translated as "guile" in 1 Peter 2:1 and *sincere* in the verse before us are the same word in Greek, but with the letter *a* added to the beginning of the second occurrence. This additional letter expresses negation. We often express negation in the same way in English (compare the opposites *historical* and *ahistorical*). Thus, human guile and the sincere Word of God are complete opposites.

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to increase your hunger for God's Word in Scripture?

Digging Deeper

Which distraction most dulls your appetite for God's Word, and how will you remove or replace it in the week ahead?

3. If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Peter draws on Psalm 34:8: "O taste and see that the LORD is good." Peter's audience has *tasted*

the goodness of God and experienced how *gracious* He has been. Such realization should motivate the desire for change and increased spiritual maturity (compare Hebrews 6:5).

III. Spiritual House

(1 Peter 2:4–8)

A. Living Stone (v. 4)

4. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.

To whom coming describes those who approach Jesus in obedience and worship. Through God's work in Christ, we have the privilege of approaching God's throne in worship and prayer (compare Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 10:19–22).

Peter transitions his argument by shifting the focus from his audience of believers to the Lord Himself. The allusion to Psalm 118:22 underscores this shift. As the focus changes, so does the metaphor: from infants needing milk to a *living stone.*

The *stone* is a metaphor for Christ, the one who conquered death. He was *disallowed* by some. However, His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension form the foundation of the Christian faith (compare 1 Corinthians 15:14; 1 Peter 1:3, 18–21). The resurrection confirms Jesus as God's *chosen* Messiah (Acts 2:31–33).

B. Building Stones (v. 5)

5. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Peter shifts the focus back to his readers, emphasizing that one stone alone does not make a building. God's spiritual house requires many *lively stones* joined to the foundation of Christ Jesus. The identity of these stones is clear, as Peter addresses them directly: *ye also.*

The nature of this structure is also clear: it is *a spiritual house,* constructed of believers in Christ (Ephesians 2:19–22; compare 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16). This spiritual house resembles a temple, where *spiritual sacrifices* are made, with Christians forming a *holy priesthood*. The concepts of Old Testament priesthood and temple have not been abolished; instead, they have been transformed (compare Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Christians do not require the kind of priests that the ancient Israelites did, because we now are priests ourselves, serving under the great high priest, *Jesus Christ* (Hebrews 4:14). The Holy Spirit guides us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices in worshipful obedience to God (Romans 12:1–2; Hebrews 13:15–16; compare Hosea 6:6).

What Do You Think?

What are some examples of sacrifices you are willing to offer God as part of your "priestly" responsibilities?

Digging Deeper

How can Psalm 51:17; Philippians 4:18; and James 1:27 inform your answer?

Significant Stones

In Turkey lies the ruins of an ancient complex known as Göbekli Tepe. Buried for millennia, it was discovered in 1963 and has been undergoing excavation since 1994. Archaeologists have uncovered massive T-shaped stone pillars arranged throughout the complex. Each stone is carved with images of various animals, mysterious shapes, and even human figures. These pillars and their reliefs tell the story of the mysterious complex and communicate the values of its original inhabitants.

Peter writes of a different type of stone. Believers in Christ Jesus are "lively stones," built on the cornerstone of Christ. Our lives of trust and faith in Him communicate to others the story of God's redemption. Together we form a "spiritual house," which is the church. Are you building your life in a way that encourages others to seek out Christ as the cornerstone of their faith? —VM

C. Cornerstone (vv. 6–7)

6a. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture.

Peter demonstrates the value of *scripture* as he weaves together Old Testament texts. The quote that follows comes from the Septuagint version of Isaiah 28:16 (also quoted in Romans 9:33; 10:11; and alluded to in 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20).



Visual for Lesson 4. *Display this visual as you ask what it means for believers to be "living stones" and a "spiritual house."*

6b. Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

Sion is the same place that is called *Zion* in the Old Testament, which is another name for Jerusalem (compare Isaiah 28:16, the verse being quoted here). This is where Jesus experienced rejection, humiliation, and, ultimately, glorification. Thus, it is a fitting location for God to lay the groundwork for His edifice of salvation.

The *corner stone* is the first stone set in a structure's foundation. It provides stability and serves as the starting point for the rest of the building. For a structure to endure, it is essential that the cornerstone be level and be placed in such a way that the stones above it will be plumb (compare Amos 7:7–8). In Isaiah 28:16–17, this spiritual stone is measured by a standard of justice (judgment) and set to true vertical by the plumb line of righteousness (contrast 2 Kings 21:13). *This chief corner stone* is the *elect* (chosen) servant of God (compare Isaiah 42:1).

7. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner.

Next, Peter quotes Psalm 118:22 and makes a second reference to the concept of the cornerstone, referring to the *head of the corner*. The two occurrences are entirely consistent in identifying this cornerstone as Jesus (compare Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; Ephesians 2:20).

Those who are *disobedient* are the ones who have *disallowed* Jesus as that cornerstone. Their faith is misplaced and mistaken. They are like the man who built his house on the sand rather than the rock (Matthew 7:24–27).

D. Stumbling Stone (v. 8)

8. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

The *stone of stumbling* and the *rock of offence* are parallel expressions from Isaiah 8:14. Both refer to the same idea: the facts of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ are a point of tension for many. This truth acts like a stone that blocks the path of those who are *disobedient* and have rejected Christ (compare Romans 9:32–33; 1 Corinthians 1:23).

Speaking in Stories

An episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* tells of the crew of the USS *Enterprise* encountering an alien species known as the Tamarians. A "universal translator" should allow the crew to understand the Tamarian language and speech, but it doesn't work.

The inability to communicate creates tension. But the crew eventually comes to realize that the Tamarian language operates through allusions, allegories, metaphors, and symbolic imagery drawn from Tamarian history. Without knowledge of that history, the crew of the *Enterprise* was unable to communicate with the Tamarians.

Scripture is likewise full of such literary tools. Familiarity with figurative language, however, is no guarantee of understanding (examples: John 11:11–15; 16:25, 28). When the time comes that you are baffled by a passage of Scripture, how will you respond? Will you prepare now to grow in your knowledge of Scripture? —KRH

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh-*losh*-unz
Ephesians	Ee-*fee*-zhunz
Göbekli Tepe	*Goe*-bek-lee *Teh*-peh
Septuagint	Sep-*too*-ih-jent

IV. Special People

(1 Peter 2:9–10)

A. Chosen by God (v. 9)

9a. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people.

In quick succession, Peter lists four descriptions of the church. The phrase *a chosen generation* may derive from Isaiah 43:20. To be *a royal priesthood* would be a contradiction in terms under the old covenant, where the roles of royalty (kings) and priests were separate (example: 2 Chronicles 26:16–20). That distinction changed under the new covenant. Christians are royalty because of our relationship with King Jesus. We also serve as priests by interceding for one another (see Revelation 1:6).

The phrase *a holy nation* originates in promises given to Israel that God's covenant people were to be unlike any other people in their becoming set apart from other nations in dedication and service to Him and in His favor to them—the idea of separation to maintain purity and holiness (Exodus 19:5–6; 1 Peter 1:15–16 [Lesson 2]).

The word *peculiar* is used in the sense of something valuable or a treasured possession (compare Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; Psalm 135:4). The church is the Lord's special, prized possession with a specific calling (Titus 2:14).

What Do You Think?

Which description of the church in this verse speaks most to your life of faith?

Digging Deeper

What action can your church take to reflect each of these descriptions?

9b. That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Here again is figurative language because physical light is not the intended reference. The contrast between spiritual *darkness* and spiritual *light* is evident throughout the New Testament (John 8:12; Acts 26:17–18; 2 Corinthians 4:6, etc.).

Not only are we called *into his marvellous light*, but we are also to internalize that light. We do this so others can see it in us (Matthew 5:14–16), making no mistake that we are indeed "light in the Lord" and "children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

B. Receiving Mercy (v. 10)

10. Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

In this verse, Peter alludes to Hosea 1:6, 9–10; 2:1, 23. These texts address Israel's spiritual adultery, their judgment, and their hope for restoration. Peter applies these texts to include Gentiles, that group who, by definition, had never been considered God's people but has now been welcomed to become part of the new covenant people of God (compare Romans 9:22–26; Ephesians 2:11–16). This is the only sure way to receive His *mercy*.

What Do You Think?

In what ways would you describe being part of God's people as an example of His mercy?

Digging Deeper

What difference does it make to experience mercy in the context of community instead of solely as an individual?

Conclusion

A. Priestly Living of the Kingdom

Christ calls us to be "priests." As such, we both proclaim and intercede. We proclaim and praise God for His character; we intercede in prayer and service on behalf of others as Christ would have us do.

We serve in this priesthood as we grow in our faith, relentlessly separating our thoughts and actions from worldly values. The challenge is great, but the reward is greater still.

B. Prayer

Holy God, help us to remember the roles that You have for us as priests in Your kingdom. Teach us how to be Your royal priests in the likeness of our King and High Priest, Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

We are members of the "royal priesthood."

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

As participants enter the classroom, display images of significant buildings from around the world, such as the Statue of Liberty, Westminster Abbey, and the Sydney Opera House. Lead a whole-class discussion by asking the following questions: 1–What do you know about the history of the construction of these structures? 2–What are the notable features of these buildings? 3–How do the foundation and cornerstone of each structure contribute to its longevity?

Alternative. Set up a block-stacking tower game, such as Jenga. Invite two participants to play the game. Once the game has concluded, use the now-collapsed tower as an object lesson to illustrate the importance of having a strong foundation.

After either activity, transition to Bible study by saying, "Physical structures can collapse if they don't have a strong foundation and cornerstone. Our spiritual lives, likewise, need a strong foundation and cornerstone."

Into the Word

Divide the class into four groups: **Purified People Group**, **Newborn Babies Group**, **Living Stones Group**, and **Royal Priesthood Group**. Distribute handouts (you create) of the following questions for in-group discussions.

Purified People Group. Read 1 Peter 1:22–25. 1–In what ways is spiritual purification a one-time event? 2–In what ways is spiritual purification a progressive process? 3–What is the relationship between being purified and showing love to one another? 4–How does Peter reference Isaiah 40:6–8 to convey the significance of the gospel?

Newborn Babies Group. Read 1 Peter 2:1–3. 1–As spiritual "newborns," what should new believers desire? 2–What behaviors should Christians seek to avoid? 3–What can help new Christians grow in their faith? 4–What will new believers learn about the Lord by "tasting" the Word of God?

Living Stones Group. Read 1 Peter 2:4–8. 1–In what ways is Jesus the "living stone," rejected by some but chosen by God? 2–What is our role as "living stones" in Christ's "spiritual house"? 3–What does Peter teach us about Jesus by quoting from the prophet Isaiah? 4–In what way is Jesus the "stone that causes" unbelievers to "stumble"?

Royal Priesthood Group. Read 1 Peter 2:9–10. 1–What are the four categories that describe Christians? 2–How do these categories emphasize community over individuality? 3–How do Christians serve as "priests" for other believers? 4–How does Peter use Hosea 2:23 to show the change in status that believers experience?

After allowing time for discussion, ask volunteers from each group to share their responses.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Cornerstone Connections" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite participants to work with a partner to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Distribute index cards and pens and direct each person to write a personal description of how believers live as members of the "royal priesthood" of God. After one minute of individual work, invite volunteers to write their descriptions on the board. Ask, "In light of these descriptions, what is your calling as a member of this priesthood?" Direct participants to turn over their index cards and write a way to live out their calling as a member of the "royal priesthood." After one minute, invite volunteers to share what they wrote.

Encourage participants to take home their cards and display them in an easy-to-see location to serve as a reminder to regularly praise God as part of their royal priesthood calling.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Set Apart" exercise from the activity page. Ask participants to complete the activity as indicated before sharing responses with a partner.

Power for Righteous Living

Devotional Reading: Psalm 119:65–72
Background Scriptures: Isaiah 52–53; 1 Peter 2:11–25

1 Peter 2:11–21

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme;

14 Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

15 For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

16 As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

17 Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

18 Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

19 For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.



Key Text

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. **—1 Peter 2:24**

Image © Getty Images

Power to
the People

Unit 2: Power to Endure

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the aspects of a godly lifestyle that Peter presents.
2. Explain the purpose of godly living among unbelievers.
3. Make a plan to implement a specific good work that testifies to God's goodness and grace.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Doing Good
- B. Lesson Context

I. Peter's Petition (1 Peter 2:11–12)
- A. Sin Wages War (v. 11)
- B. Good Glorifies God (v. 12)
  Respect and Reflect

II. Message to All (1 Peter 2:13–17)
- A. Submit to Authority, Part 1 (vv. 13–14)
- B. Silence Ignorant Talk (vv. 15–17)

III. Message to Lowly Workers (1 Peter 2:18–21)
- A. Submit to Authority, Part 2 (v. 18)
  Doolie Day Out?
- B. Suffer Like Christ (vv. 19–21)

Conclusion
- A. Paradoxical Living
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Doing Good

Between AD 249 and 270, disaster struck the Roman Empire. A pandemic spread wildly, ravaging young and old alike. High fevers, vomiting, a burning sensation in the gut, exploded capillaries in the eyes, sores in the throat, and widespread hemorrhaging marked the Plague of Cyprian. The few who survived were severely weakened and often left blind or deaf. By some estimates, the mortality rate was 62 percent.

During the plague, Christian leaders encouraged believers to remember Christ's call to serve others. Christians overcame fear of the sickness and set aside anger toward those who persecuted them, choosing to care for the ill bravely. As a result, the church grew. Christians powerfully impacted the Roman Empire as they followed the example of Jesus and actively modeled love.

B. Lesson Context

The Greco-Roman world of antiquity considered the household as the foundation of social order. The household included the nuclear family, relatives, and slaves. Greek and Roman philosophers, as far back as Plato and Aristotle, wrote "household codes" to guide fathers as the ultimate authority within these structures. Greco-Roman household codes addressed three specific relationships: husband–wife, father–children, and master–slave. Their instructions were not private but rather seen as fundamentally important for the well-being of the empire. If a father did not maintain order in the household, it brought dishonor on him and potentially jeopardized the empire's stability.

The Roman Empire spanned many regions and encompassed peoples who practiced many religions. The Romans were generally tolerant of the religious practices present in areas they conquered, if their choice did not threaten the empire's rule. However, Christianity demanded that believers recognize only one God. Therefore, Christians' refusal to participate in the imperial cult (worshiping the emperor as a deity) was perceived as dangerous. Political leaders sometimes used Christians as scapegoats, blaming disasters on them.

I. Peter's Petition

(1 Peter 2:11–12)

A. Sin Wages War (v. 11)

11. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

The apostle John has been called "the apostle of love." But he has a rival in Peter in that regard as Peter addresses his readers as *beloved* a total of five times in his two letters (here and 1 Peter 4:12; 2 Peter 3:1, 8, 14, 17). The word being translated is used several times in the Gospels to describe the heavenly Father's relationship to His Son (example: Mark 9:7). Early Christians used this term to demonstrate a deep affection, marking them as a new kind of family (Romans 16:8–9; Philippians 2:12; James 1:16).

As a spiritual father, Peter wants the best for his spiritual family (compare 1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; etc.). Therefore, he encourages his readers to resist sinful inclinations. The starting point for successful resistance is to realize one's status: they are *strangers and pilgrims* in the world (compare Ephesians 2:19). Christians' true citizenship is in heaven, not on earth (Philippians 3:20; contrast 2 Timothy 4:10).

Peter notes two identifying characteristics of what must be refused. First, they are *fleshly* in nature. These *lusts* refer to the readers' social status (see Lesson Context). It is tempting to strive toward moving up in status, but doing so would mean embracing the ways of the world (compare 1 John 2:16). Christians are to leave behind this type of worldly ambition when God "[begets] us again unto a lively hope" (1 Peter 1:3).

Second, these worldly desires pose a real threat. Peter refers to the internal conflict these passions may inflict as a *war*. The sure way to lose this *war against the soul* is to fail to see its danger. Fleshly appetites are not a path of life but of death.

Peter's exhortation could leave the impression that Christians should withdraw from society and retreat exclusively into private circles. However, the next verse makes it clear that this is not the case.

What Do You Think?

What does it mean for worldly appetites to "wage war" against our souls?

Digging Deeper

How do we fight this "war"? What tools or techniques are necessary?

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh-*losh*-unz
Ephesians	Ee-*fee*-zhunz
Nero	*Nee*-row
Philemon	Fih-*lee*-mun or Fye-*lee*-mun
Philippians	Fih-*lip*-ee-unz

B. Good Glorifies God (v. 12)

12. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

The word *conversation* refers not just to speech but to a way of life. Rather than indulging in wickedness, Christians are to exhibit integrity in everything they do (compare Philippians 2:15; Titus 2:8). Christians are to remain present and active in society, modeling the values of God's kingdom.

Peter is candid about the Gentiles' opinion of believers: they *speak against* them *as evildoers,* implying accusations of criminal behavior (1 Peter 2:14 [below]; 4:15; see Lesson 8). New ideas are often met with skepticism and can be perceived as threatening to social order, especially when they challenge established societal values (compare Acts 16:21) and vested interests (compare John 11:48). Nonetheless, Peter expects his audience to live lives that reflect the values of the kingdom of God. This attitude takes a purposeful, wide-lensed view, claiming the reality of the coming *day of visitation,* a way of referring to judgment day (2 Peter 3:10; see Lesson 10). This coming reality should inform Christians' interactions with unbelievers (compare 1 Peter 3:12 [Lesson 6]; 4:7 [Lesson 7]; 2 Peter 3:11–14).

In the end, *God* will be glorified. Peter's words express one of two possibilities. Either Christian modeling will turn Gentiles' hearts to the Lord, and they will willingly *glorify* Him. Or Peter is aware that despite unrepentant, grudging hearts, a day will come when every knee will bow, glorifying God, and his readers will be vindicated (Philippians 2:9–11; compare Revelation 6:15–16).

What Do You Think?

Why does Peter encourage believers to make their "good works" visible?

Digging Deeper

How do you reconcile the differences between Peter's directions in 1 Peter 2:12 and Jesus' instructions in Matthew 6:1?

Respect and Reflect

The New Zealand national rugby union team, the All Blacks (signifying the color of their uniforms), is one of the most successful sports teams in the world. Aside from their many championship awards, they are renowned for their team discipline, humility, sportsmanship, and accountability. Their success has two foundations.

First, they "sweep the shed." This adage is a way of saying that no task is too small, and no team member is too important to neglect jobs that need to be done. Everyone is responsible. Senior players, including the captain, stay behind after games to ensure that the changing room is left in better condition than they found it. Everyone stacks their plates at the end of a meal. Second, their jerseys are considered "on loan" for the season. A player never owns a jersey. Instead, they "borrow" it. The mindset here is that each player is part of a legacy, a piece of a larger whole.

Living and training under these philosophies has been important in establishing respect for the All Blacks. The apostle Peter rallies the people of God toward a similar way of living. God is looking for those who will reflect His kingdom so beautifully that even the harshest critics might glimpse His goodness through their lives. —NV

II. Message to All

(1 Peter 2:13–17)

A. Submit to Authority, Part 1 (vv. 13–14)

13. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme.

Peter uses the word that is translated *submit* a total of six times in this letter (here and 1 Peter 2:18 [below]; 3:1, 5, 22; 5:5; see Lessons 6, 7, and 9)—the highest proportional use in a single missive in the New Testament. Since the relationships vary, the nature of the submission also varies. One does not submit to human institutions the way one submits to God, etc.

A series of specifics regarding Christian behavior exemplify submission in the verse now at hand. Having acknowledged believers' status as "strangers," Peter is quick to affirm that that status does not excuse them from obeying the rules and rulers of the land.

The word translated *ordinance* usually refers to something that has been created; indeed, the word is translated that way numerous times (examples: Romans 8:22; 2 Peter 3:4). Peter and his readers don't live in a democracy where people get to elect their leaders. Theirs is an authoritarian government where obedience to *the king* or emperor is evaluated by compliance with his decrees (compare Luke 2:1; Acts 17:7). The apostle Paul stresses the same things in Romans 13:1–5 and Titus 3:1.

The letters of 1 and 2 Peter were likely written from Rome during the time of the infamous Roman Emperor Nero, who reigned AD 54–68. Even so, Peter stresses the need for compliance. His readers are to recognize and obey the emperor's authority.

Does Peter qualify Christian submission? Is his exhortation to be obeyed in an absolute sense, without exception? Peter's responses to other situations, decades before this letter was written, provide the answer. Those two episodes are recorded in Acts 4:19 and 5:29.

The phrase *for the Lord's sake* may be confusing at first. Things become clearer when we realize that the word translated as *sake* is used in the sense of "intention" or "set purpose" (compare Luke

18:29–30; 3 John 7). Christian submission is not due to the inherent qualities of the king but to further God's plans. This qualification places limits on believers' submission to earthly authorities. By recognizing God as Lord, Peter reminds believers that God is above and beyond human authority. Thus, in this context, submission does not mean bowing the head, dulling the senses, or capitulating in unquestioning obedience. Instead, Christians are to thoughtfully and consciously fulfill their role in society for the glory of God.

14. Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

Governors are mentioned alongside kings in Matthew 10:18 (parallel is Mark 13:9). After kings, governors are a second-tier "ordinance of man" to which Christians should submit. Peter explains, as does Paul in Romans 13:1–5, that submission to them is related to the responsibility they hold in ensuring societal order. Peter wants his readers to understand that governance has a rightful function and that Christians can and should live properly within the system.

What Do You Think?

Why does Peter encourage compliance to the rules of the empire?

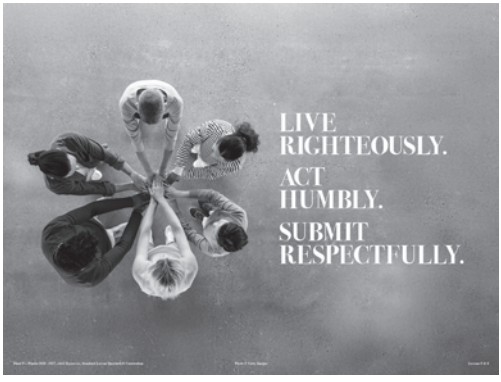
Digging Deeper

Compare 1 Peter 2:13–14 with Daniel 3:16–18; Acts 4:13–21; 5:27–32; and 1 Peter 2:17. In what circumstances might believers choose defiance over compliance?

B. Silence Ignorant Talk (vv. 15–17)

15. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Scholars offer various explanations for the *well doing* in view here. Identifying the nature of these actions is crucial, as the word being translated appears four times in this letter (here and in 1 Peter 2:20; 3:6, 17). In the latter three, it is contrasted against behavioral faults worthy of punishment (2:19), behavior grounded in fear (3:7), and



Visual for Lesson 5. *Place this visual in a prominent place. Point to it and ask learners to consider whether their lifestyles align with righteous living.*

evil actions (3:17). In the case at hand, the phrase directly follows Peter's call to submit to governmental authority. Therefore, it seems to argue that Christians should choose to live as law-abiding citizens. Their behavior is what will quiet the adversarial opinions directed at them.

Some scholars interpret Peter's words here as a call to public benefaction, such as sponsoring civic projects. The wealthy often did such things in the Roman Empire to gain social honor.

16. As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.

As Peter further qualifies the call to submit, it's helpful to sketch the possibilities visually on a continuum. At one end of the spectrum is the concept of *legalism;* at the other extreme is the concept of *license;* in the middle is the concept of *liberty.* We find legalism condemned in passages such as Matthew 23:16–26; Acts 15:1, 5, 10; and Galatians 1:6–7; 3:1–12; that's an important idea, but it's not what's in view here. What Peter is concerned about is Christians using their *liberty for a cloke of maliciousness.* This phrase conveys the attitude that "anything is okay," which is condemned not only here but also in Romans 6:1–2, 15; 2 Peter 2:18–20; and Jude 4 (Lesson 13). Another way to say this is that believers' *liberty* is not a license for sin. Christian freedom is radically expansive, and yet it does not mean that anything goes, given that Christians are *servants of God*.

What Do You Think?

How would you describe the relationship between freedom and servanthood presented in 1 Peter 2:16?

Digging Deeper

In what ways might freedom be incorrectly used as a "cloke of maliciousness"?

17. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

In a final staccato of commands, Peter encourages Christians to have the correct posture toward others. Each of the four verbs here describes one way to submit to the noun that follows.

First, *honour* extends to all people. Honor is the act of upholding someone's public reputation while showing respect and value. Surprisingly, Peter attaches the same instruction regarding *the king*: honor him. By commanding Christians to have the same attitude of respect for all people as the ruling sovereign, Peter highlights a deviation between Christian and popular thought.

Second, Peter urges Christians to *love* one another. Love is more intimate and personal than honor. He asks *believers* to have a stronger bond or deeper obligation between themselves than the previously mentioned social requirements.

Lastly, Peter reminds his audience that *fear* belongs to *God*. God is the one worthy of their true allegiance, worship, and reverent recognition. Peter is saying that God is to be the highest authority in their lives.

III. Message to Lowly Workers

(1 Peter 2:18–21)

A. Submit to Authority, Part 2 (v. 18)

18. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

Peter's succinct imperatives in the verse before this one now give way to the beginning of what is called a household code (compare Ephesians 5:22–6:9; Colossians 3:18–4:1). The address to *servants* here isn't a strict repeat of the address to "servants" in 1 Peter 2:16, above, for at least two reasons. First, the recipients of the directed service are different. We don't serve God in the same way we serve earthly bosses.

Second, the Greek words being translated are different. The language of the first century AD featured four primary families of Greek words that indicated servitude (meaning lack of liberty or being owned by another); 1 Peter 2:16 (above) uses one of those words, but 2:18 does not. Here, Peter uses a rarer word to indicate a household or personal servant. The word translated *servant* in this verse is found only here and in Luke 16:13; Acts 10:7; and Romans 14:4 in the New Testament.

Also noteworthy is the fact that Greco-Roman household codes of the era did not address the enslaved directly. Instead, they spoke to *masters* about proper slave behavior. This indirect communication is because Greco-Roman culture presumed that the enslaved were inferior to free people. As with Paul's letters, Peter's directives do not indicate that he condones the institution of slavery. Instead, they signify that he acknowledges the reality of this demographic, accepts them as fellow Christians, and respects them as equitable humans (compare Ephesians 6:5–9; Colossians 3:22–4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1–2; Philemon 15–16).

Doolie Day Out?

Would you ever voluntarily and eagerly invite a "slave" into your home? We did! (Well, in a figurative sense.) We lived in Colorado Springs, close to the Air Force Academy. Every summer, the academy permitted a "Doolie Day Out." The term *doolie* is derived from one of the Greek words for "slave." In this case, the title applied to cadets in their first year of study, commonly referred to as "freshmen." The day out was their chance to leave campus for a few hours.

Host families in the area, of which my wife and I were one, were given supervision of the cadets. Before we could pick up our "doolies," we had to agree to certain conditions (example: they weren't allowed to drive). In a metaphorical sense, we became "servants" to those in charge at the academy who wrote the expectations. At the same time, we were "masters" over the students.

A particular courtroom judge illustrated these two roles well when he noted that in his courtroom, he was the one in authority—the "master"; but when he encountered a preteen crossing guard on the drive home, she then became the one in charge, and he became the "servant" who needed to obey her *stop* sign.

How are the roles of master and servant observable in your life? —RLN

B. Suffer Like Christ (vv. 19–21)

19. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

Peter makes the safe assumption, likely from personal experience as well as from history, that unjust suffering is occurring and will continue to do so. His reaction to this fact is bound up in the Greek word translated *thankworthy.* This Greek word occurs about one hundred and sixty times in the New Testament, with a dozen of those appearing in Peter's two letters. In those dozen occurrences, ten are translated "grace" (1 Peter 1:2, 10, 13; 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12; 2 Peter 1:2; 3:18), and one is translated as "acceptable" (2:20, below).

20. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

When a person sins or disobeys and is *buffeted* as a result, there is no *glory.* However, when a person does *well* and endures the resulting suffering, then God finds that patience pleasing. The expectation of undeserved suffering while living for God is explained further in 1 Peter 3:18–4:7 (Lesson 7).

21. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.

The crucifixion of Christ is rightly labeled as "history's greatest injustice." The mindset that caused that injustice is still present today. Jesus predicted the persecution of Christians (Matthew 5:11–12; 24:9; John 15:18–21; etc.). The link between Christ's suffering and our suffering should result in a comforting solidarity. It normalizes the Christian experience. Peter exemplifies how Jesus' life and death serve as a guide for the Christian life.

What Do You Think?

How do grace, glory, and patience relate to the experience of bearing up under suffering?

Digging Deeper

What does it look like to follow Christ's example in suffering? Do you have a personal example of suffering for your faith?

Conclusion

A. Paradoxical Living

Christians are called to live vibrantly within the world's social and political structures. We are called to uphold God's kingdom values while remaining engaged with our families, friends, neighbors, governments, and authorities. The way we live is essential to Christian witness. Our interactions with the world hold the potential to give God glory. We are to participate in fulfilling our role in society with faithfulness and excellence.

Yet, at the same time, Christians are called to remember that the world is not our home; we are "strangers" here (1 Peter 1:1 [Lesson 1]). Regardless of where we were born or where we live, we are ultimately citizens of a heavenly kingdom. We may obey earthly rulers, but we claim a different Lord. Our priorities and values stem from God and not our surroundings.

The Christian life might be referred to as a "context of dialectics," where we are challenged to integrate opposites. We are both citizens and foreigners, both servants and masters, both slaves and free. It's not balanced—not 50 percent of one and 50 percent of the other. Instead, it is one hundred percent of both. The roles we play as we live in both God's kingdom and the world stand in dynamic tension with one another.

B. Prayer

Dear Father, help us to live as faithful citizens of Your kingdom. Thank You for declaring our freedom. Empower us to use that freedom to do good in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Honor God by honoring authority.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Begin today's lesson by asking your students to share a time when they felt like an outsider, a stranger, or out of place. Examples might include an experience in a new city, the transition to a new job, time with unfamiliar people, or even a situation within their family or community when values differed. Consider jump-starting the conversation by sharing an experience of your own. Then ask, "What challenges do you face in today's society while living with distinctly Christian values?"

Transition into Bible study by saying, "As we dive into 1 Peter 2:11–21, we'll see that the identification as 'strangers' to society isn't negative. Instead, it is a powerful distinction that calls us to live faithfully in the world."

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups: the **Government Group**, the **Workplace Group**, and the **General Authority Group**. Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:11–21 out loud.

Distribute a prepared printout to each group (you prepare) and ask them to discuss the relevant scenario. **Government Group:** A new law that you disagree with is passed, and many Christians are advocating for civil disobedience. Based on Peter's words in 1 Peter 2:11–17, how might you respect authority while staying faithful to Christ and your convictions? **Workplace Group:** Your employer implements a policy that is perceived as unjust and burdensome. It significantly affects your daily work. How does Peter's teaching on submitting to "masters" in 1 Peter 2:18–21 apply in this context, and what options might a Christian consider in facing the challenge? **General Authority Group:** Recall a time when obeying an authority figure felt challenging. What made it tough, and how can Peter's guidance in 1 Peter 2:13–17 help you now?

After three to five minutes, ask groups to reconvene as a whole class. Ask a volunteer from each group to share a key takeaway from their discussion.

Option. Distribute pens and copies of the "Command Decoder" and "Responding to Christ's Example" exercises from the activity page, which you can download. Ask learners to complete each exercise as indicated.

Draw a series of five blank rectangles on the board. Say, "A Christian's godly actions can initiate a ripple effect. Our actions can be a faithful witness to God's goodness and grace." Inside the rectangles, write each of the following words: 1–*Action*, 2–*Observation*, 3–*Reaction*, 4–*Recognition*, 5–*Glorify God*.

Then ask, "What's one godly action a Christian might do daily that an unbeliever might notice?" Point to the first rectangle as students talk through examples. Then point to the second rectangle and ask, "As an unbeliever observes that action, what might they think? What deeper questions or thoughts might be provoked?" Move to the third rectangle and lead a conversation regarding how their observations might push them to react. End by asking, "If those questions continue, how might this lead to recognition of God? In what ways does this progression glorify God?" Then say, "We might think of this progression like a set of dominoes. When tipped, each one triggers the next."

Into Life

Transition into this section by asking, "How does knowing that our actions can glorify God change how we approach daily life? How can we deliberately display God's goodness and grace?"

Hand out slips of paper and pens. Allow one minute for each student to write down one or two specific, actionable "good works" that they could intentionally perform this week. For each good work, ask them to briefly note: 1–*the work*, 2–*who might observe it*, and 3–*what hope might it convey*. Invite students to share as they are comfortable.

Power to Be Humble

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 13:7–13
Background Scriptures: Psalm 34; 1 Peter 3:1–12

1 Peter 3:1–12

1 Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives;

2 While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

3 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;

4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

5 For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands:

6 Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

7 Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

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

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

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

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

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

Key Text

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.
—1 Peter 3:8

Power to
the People

Unit 2: Power to Endure

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. List examples of respect, submission, and humility as outlined in today's text.
2. Explain the relationship between 1 Peter 2:13–17 (Lesson 5) and the examples given in 1 Peter 3:1–12.
3. Write a definition of biblical humility and identify one specific way to practice it.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Faithful Commitment
- B. Lesson Context

I. Message to Wives (1 Peter 3:1–6)
- A. Win Without Words (vv. 1–4)
  The Eternal Value of Inner Beauty
- B. Remember Your Heritage (vv. 5–6)

II. Message to Husbands (1 Peter 3:7)
- A. Be Considerate (v. 7a)
- B. Remember Your Inheritance (v. 7b)

III. Message to All (1 Peter 3:8–12)
- A. Seek Unity (vv. 8–9)
  Unity Amid Diversity
- B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10–12)

Conclusion
- A. The Persuasion of Peace
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Faithful Commitment

When Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928–2024), Peruvian theologian and minister, returned to his South American homeland from his studies overseas, he became distressed by the plight of the poor in his country. It was the 1950s, and most homes had no running water or electricity. Students attended overcrowded schools that lacked the necessary resources, like pencils and paper, and the money to pay teachers regularly. Most people exclusively consumed carbohydrates like rice and potatoes. Only occasionally could they afford protein, gleaning it from legumes or the unwanted parts of animals like chicken feet or fish heads. Worst of all, neither the government nor the church seemed to care.

However, Gustavo was fortunate. He had not missed a meal growing up. Because of his significant intellectual ability, he qualified for opportunities to study philosophy and theology in Europe. When he completed his studies and began looking for an academic post, Gustavo chose to return to Peru. He opted for a pastoral position in one of the poorest and most dangerous neighborhoods in his hometown. Gustavo henceforth dedicated his life to serving the poor. His work and writing gained the attention of church officials. Over time, his humble and faithful service to the poor, including his advocacy through theological writing, paved the way for social and church reform.

Effective resistance is not always loud and flashy. Sometimes the most significant change results from humble, behind-the-scenes faithfulness.

B. Lesson Context

Marriage in the first century was a structured institution. The husband ruled the household like a government official. The wife, children, and slaves were to obey and submit to the *paterfamilias*—the husband, father, and master of the household. Roman law regarded women as less valuable than men due to the assumption that women were by nature physically and intellectually inferior. Philosophers thought the ideal woman should be meek, chaste, and submissive; in public, she should be

quiet, not speaking to men other than her husband; she should even be discouraged from having friends of her own. Society expected her to worship the same gods as her husband.

At the same time, by the first century, women had gained some autonomy and rights in Roman society. In Asia Minor, women sometimes held public roles. They could own property, manage businesses, or serve as public benefactors. Still, their positions were dependent on their husband's status and wealth. *Patres familias* held significant power over them and expected hierarchical obedience.

In today's text, Peter neither condones nor condemns the hierarchical structure of marriage or domestic life in his time and culture. His concern is not to describe an ideal society; instead, his purpose is to help Christians live faithfully within their present circumstances. Today's text is a part of a household code (1 Peter 2:18–3:7), which is nested in an extensive passage about faithful living amid pagan society (2:11–3:22). The larger narrative begins with a call to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (2:13 [Lesson 5]). This concept undergirds the whole code and sets the stage for the theme of submission. Peter teases out the logic of his foundational command: as "servants of God," believers can live "as free," even within imperfect human relationships and institutions (2:16). Christian freedom willfully practices submission as integral to its witness to a watching world (2:12).

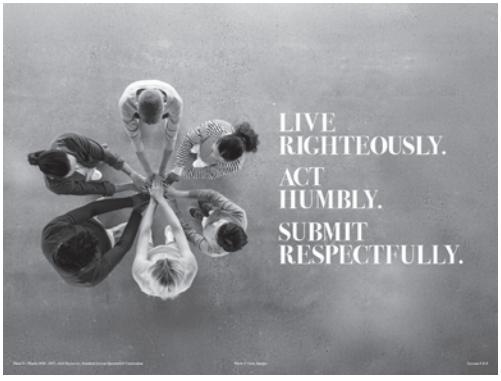
I. Message to Wives

(1 Peter 3:1–6)

A. Win Without Words (vv. 1–4)

1–2. Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.

The word *likewise* refers to the preceding instructions to servants in the larger household code (1 Peter 2:18–21; see Lesson 5). Just as enslaved Christians were told to submit to their masters, regardless of a master's kindness (or lack thereof) (2:18), so now *wives* are told to *be in subjection* to their *husbands*, whether their husbands believe in Christ or not.



Visual for Lesson 6. *Place this visual in a prominent place in your classroom. Utilize it while teaching on 1 Peter 3:8–9.*

Peter's call for wives to submit to their husbands stems not just from culture, but from their shared, God-given status as free servants (1 Peter 2:16). Peter's view contrasts with Greco-Roman moralists who based women's submission to men on the view that women were inferior by nature. Peter challenges this notion throughout his letter (example: 3:7, below). It is important to note that Peter is not calling all women into submission to all men. Instead, he is speaking to a specific dynamic present in the marriage relationship.

Peter explains the power of Christian wives: their behavior could win their husbands to God. Wives' willful submission—their determination to humbly and faithfully fulfill their role in the household—may serve an evangelistic purpose. The Greek word translated *conversation* means "way of life," which Peter says can be a sufficiently persuasive witness. The modeling of quiet submission may be more powerful than many words. Wives' choice to pair godly living with reverence toward God may point unbelievers to a healthy

How to Say It

Corinthians	Ko-*rin*-thee-unz (*th* as in thin)
Galatians	Guh-*lay*-shunz
paterfamilias	pay-*tur*-fuh-*mi*-lee-uhz

fear of the Lord (compare Proverbs 1:9; 2 Corinthians 5:11).

3. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel.

Peter then cautions wives about focusing too much on their appearance—their *hair*, *gold* jewelry, and clothing. Peter's reason for steering them away from *outward adorning* has to do with encouraging modesty in keeping with the virtues of humility and purity (compare 1 Timothy 2:9–10). Peter's examples showcase the cultural value of external beauty. As in many eras and cultures, clothing often reflects societal status and honor. The wealthy flaunt their riches through outward displays of affluence. In contrast, Christian social ethics promote dynamics of equality (compare Genesis 1:27; Proverbs 22:2; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28). However, a larger reason comes into view in the next verse.

4. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

Peter's words direct Christian wives toward the opposite of outward adornment, to one's inner self (compare 1 Samuel 16:7). The *hidden man of the heart* is a person's internal character, which cannot be seen apart from their outward behavior and way of life. The word translated as *man* refers to all human beings, not specifically males.

Peter commends inward beauty over outward adornment because it is incorruptible. Unlike physical beauty and its accoutrements—all of which fade over time—inward beauty and its virtues last forever. The Greek word translated as *not corruptible* is the same word used throughout the New Testament to describe things that will last for eternity (examples: 1 Corinthians 9:25; 1 Peter 1:4). *A meek and quiet spirit* will stand the test of time (consider Matthew 6:19–20). Neither meekness nor quietness signifies weakness. Instead, they imply an inner fortitude, patience, and wisdom in the face of difficult circumstances. Jesus described his own heart as "meek" (11:29).

Peter desires his readers to understand how much inner beauty pleases God. Though it is hidden from the world, God sees it. Peter implies that wives' choice to cultivate their inner virtues may come at a cost (for submission in any context is not always easy), but to God it is precious.

What Do You Think?

What does meekness look like in a modern believer?

Digging Deeper

What do you learn about meekness or gentleness from Numbers 12:3; Psalm 37:11; Matthew 5:5; 11:29; and Ephesians 4:2?

The Eternal Value of Inner Beauty

I remember the moment I discovered the world of makeup, skirts, and hair straighteners. I had just gotten my braces removed, and it triggered a fixation on my appearance. Before, I hadn't given a second thought to what I wore or how I looked, but now I was obsessed. Cue the vanity years! Soon, I was spending hours each morning straightening my hair, applying layers of dark eye makeup, and making alterations to my school uniform.

One day, the ever-shortening hemline of my skirt caught the attention of a teacher who then placed me on "uniform report." The administration phoned my mother and asked her to order a new uniform for me immediately.

As a responsible, high-achieving student, I was devastated. Deep down, I knew that I wasn't being my true self. I'd given in to social pressure and to a narrow cultural definition of beauty. In the wake of the skirt incident, my brother sat me down and gently said, "I know that attention to your body can feel flattering. But as you grow older, you'll realize that what really matters is beauty of the heart. And *that* really grabs people's attention!" My wise brother pointed me to the kind of beauty God values (consider 1 Samuel 16:7). What value adjustments might God be calling you to make? —NV

B. Remember Your Heritage (vv. 5–6)

5. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned

themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands.

To support his instruction, Peter points Christian women to their spiritual heritage. *After this manner* refers to clothing oneself with a modest and gentle spirit (above). *The holy women* from *the old time* represent godly women, both named and unnamed, throughout the Old Testament period. For these women, *subjection unto their own husbands* flowed from their inner beauty, which flowed from their trust *in God*. Peter wants Christian wives to aspire to nothing less than the holiness of their spiritual ancestors.

What Do You Think?

How does remembering our spiritual heritage assist believers in right living?

Digging Deeper

What biblical examples inspire you to pursue holiness?

6. Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

Peter offers a prime example of submission through trust in God by referencing *Sara*. Sara refers to *Abraham* as *lord* in Genesis 18:12 (the Hebrew word is often used as a term of respect for human authorities). Sara accepts her role in the fulfillment of the promise that God spoke to Abraham (Genesis 13:16; 15:5; 22:17). The example gets its power from knowing the outcome of Abraham and Sara's mutual obedience to God: the birth of Isaac, the covenant son of promise.

Peter encourages Christian wives to view Sara as a role model, a spiritual mother, calling them Sara's *daughters*. As such, they are to follow her example and *do well*. While this could refer to a general life of good works, it is more likely that Peter refers to the specific good done when wives submit to their husbands out of their trust in God.

The phrase *not afraid with any amazement* means not acting with fear toward things that are actually frightening. The wives to whom Peter speaks are called to a life of exceptional trust in God's provision. Like all believers, they are to fear God over humankind (compare Matthew 10:28).

What Do You Think?

How do you set aside fear when faced with things that are undeniably frightening?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture verses might believers cling to when needing to thoroughly trust God in fearful situations?

II. Message to Husbands

(1 Peter 3:7)

A. Be Considerate (v. 7a)

7a. Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel.

Once again, *likewise* signals the next section of the household code, as well as a thematic connection to the previous sections. Peter's message to *husbands* is directly linked to his general call to submission (1 Peter 2:13–17), his message to slaves (2:18–25), and his message to wives (3:1–6). Whereas Peter calls wives to holiness in their submission, husbands—given their role in the first-century household as *paterfamilias*—are called to holiness in their employment of authority. Peter encourages them, in a sense, to submit to using their powerful position for the benefit of others.

The Greek word for *wife* is slightly different than the previous uses in this passage. Peter shifts to an observation about broader womanhood to undergird his instructions for husbands. To his first-century audience, this impacts how the *paterfamilias* should regard all female members of his household. In short, Peter calls men to be both sensitive to women's station in society and aware of their worth in the kingdom of God.

To do this, heads of households are to lead with understanding, always being mindful of women as *the weaker vessel*. Notice what Peter implies: both men and women are *vessels*. Both male and female bear the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). Categorically, there is no inferiority. But Peter does call men to bear in mind women's societal and physical vulnerabilities. And Peter commands them not to exploit these vulnerabilities with their power but instead, to mitigate them with their understanding.

Beyond showing understanding, Peter calls men to go out of their way to extend *honour* to the women in their lives. The reason for this honor is explained below.

B. Remember Your Inheritance (v. 7b)

7b. And as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

The honor Peter calls men to extend toward the women in their lives is given because, in God's economy, they are *heirs together of the grace of life*. By referring to both men and women as *heirs*, Peter reminds his readers of their mutual spiritual inheritance, which makes no distinction between the sexes. Peter asks heads of households to remember that the women under their authority belong chiefly to a heavenly household, and they are to be treated as such. This reminder should jolt any chauvinism out of believing men, for no honor hierarchy exists in Christ's kingdom. To drive the point home, Peter warns them that treating women unjustly could hinder their *prayers*—a symptom of a fracture in their relationship with God.

What Do You Think?

What is it about unjust behavior or treatment of others that hinders a believer's prayers?

Digging Deeper

What do Psalm 66:16–20; Matthew 6:5–8; and James 4:3 teach about the efficacy of our prayers?

III. Message to All

(1 Peter 3:8–12)

A. Seek Unity (vv. 8–9)

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

Peter concludes with instructions for the whole community. He speaks to *all* the social stations previously mentioned (servants, wives, and husbands) as one. Peter begins by teaching how they should relate to one another. The community should be aimed at a shared purpose, operating as *one mind*. This applies to the individual household as well, which should not be a battle of wills, everyone duking it out for more power, but rather in harmony, working together toward a common goal.

Peter identifies several character traits that are beneficial for fostering unity. Believers are to be sympathetic toward each other. They are to *love* one another as though they are brothers and sisters, which emphasizes the kingdom reality that believers are bound to one another in the household of God. The Greek word translated as *pitiful* here refers to a compassionate and tender heart. In contrast to the first-century Roman values of honor and status, the New Testament lauds humility, which is translated here as *courteous* (compare Matthew 23:12; Philippians 2:3–8; James 4:6–10; 1 Peter 5:6; etc.).

By listing these traits, Peter is in effect asking the whole community to practice submission. Christians are to clothe themselves with traits that lead them to willfully subordinate themselves, one to another, seeking what is best for all.

Unity Amid Diversity

I was raised in a church full of diversity—that was one of the best parts about it. People came from all walks of life. There was an elderly couple who had spent decades as missionaries in Afghanistan. Another couple, with young children, had recently come to faith in Christ from a Muslim background. We had nuclear families and blended families, single parents and single people. Our church had highbrow academics, middle managers, and frontline workers. We were all kinds.

Attending a multiethnic, multigenerational church taught me how to be united with others by our common love for and commitment to Jesus, rather than our preferences or circumstances. I came to see us as an expression of the body of Christ when we shared meals, supported each other through difficult seasons, and served our larger community together.

In a factious and divided world, Christian unity—formed out of love, compassion, and humility—is a persuasive witness to the power of the gospel. What diversity exists in your faith community? How can you continue to foster unity? —NV

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

Following the list of self-deferential traits, Peter warns against acts of vengeance. Christians are to set aside any form of retaliation and refuse to repay *evil for evil* (compare Matthew 5:38–42). They are not to return slander or insults aimed at them (consider 5:43–48).

Instead, Christians are *called* to respond in a radically peaceful way to ill treatment. They may do so because of the *blessing* they stand to *inherit*.

B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10–12)

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

In these final three verses, Peter paraphrases Psalm 34:12–16. He grounds his optimism about the ultimate blessing that persecuted believers will receive in authoritative words from the Old Testament. The psalmist insists that having a *good* life is accomplished by living a godly life. He emphasizes the importance of godly speech: believers are to practice restraint and hold fast to their integrity.

What Do You Think?

In what ways might modern-day believers need to implement the instruction to refrain from deceitful speech?

Digging Deeper

How does humility impact the stilling of our tongues and the ability to refuse retaliation? How does it impact our Christian witness?

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

The people of God are to purposefully turn away from *evil.* They are to actively engage in a life of *good* deeds. When their opponents slander and insult them (1 Peter 2:12; 3:9), they are called to go out of their way to *seek peace*. The underlying vision is of God's people running away from evil to chase peace.

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

God's presence and attention undergird both the psalmist's and Peter's exhortations. *The Lord* sees, hears, and cares for *the righteous*. They can be assured that He listens to *their prayers*. But the opposite is true for *them that do evil*. Instead of God's *face* shining upon them with grace and peace (Numbers 6:24–26), those who oppose *the Lord* will experience resistance and judgment.

Conclusion

A. The Persuasion of Peace

Peter calls all Christians to live within their present circumstances with a humility that is winsome to a watching world. He gives different but compatible instructions to wives and husbands. These instructions illustrate what holy living looks like for people in differing positions of power. They teach how to coexist harmoniously. Peter wisely counsels wives to embrace the humility of submission as an opportunity to trust God and bear witness to the gospel. He calls husbands to carefully wield their authority, using it to extend honor beyond what is culturally normative to those under their care.

Regardless of the roles we play, followers of Jesus are called to lives of humble submission for the sake of others. A pure inner life fuels a humble outer life, which has the power to bless, make peace, and reveal God's goodness to one's neighbors. Consider the adage: "You may be the only Bible someone ever reads." Do those who know you "read" you as someone who exemplifies the inner peace and outer peacemaking of Christ?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we submit ourselves to You and to Your will for our lives. Help us learn to appropriately submit to one another. Wherever we have authority over others, guide us in using it well for their sake. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Choose humility for the sake of others.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Open today's class by asking your group to think of a time when someone showed them unexpected kindness or compassion in humility, especially when they might not have deserved it or were having a difficult moment. Then ask, "How did their kindness make you feel? How did compassion influence your day?" Be prepared to share your own example to encourage discussion. Continue the conversation by asking whether anyone has had an opportunity to be on the giving side of that scenario. Then ask, "What immediate effect does compassion have on stressful situations?"

Transition into Bible study by saying, "The godly characteristics of humility, love, kindness, and compassion can point people to Christ. In today's lesson, Peter talks about witnessing Christ to a watching world by modeling a holy lifestyle."

Into the Word

As a group, read 1 Peter 3:1–7 out loud. Ask students to describe what "a meek and quiet spirit" looks like in action. Then lead a whole-class discussion utilizing the following questions: 1–How does strengthening one's inner character assist in demonstrating humility in challenging relationships? 2–What relationships outside of marriage require the application of understanding, humility, and compassion (*examples:* parent-child, mentor-mentee, employer-employee, friends)? 3–In what practical ways might one bestow honor on another?

Option. Distribute pens and copies of the "What I Model" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask learners to complete as indicated.

Before the lesson, write each of the characteristics of biblical community that Peter presents in verse 8 at the top of separate index cards (*examples:* be of one mind; have compassion for one another; love one another; be courteous; be humble). Prepare several sets of these cards. Divide the class into pairs or small groups. Give each small group a set of cards and a pen.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 3:8–12 out loud. Then ask groups to brainstorm practical ways that believers might live out each quality written at the top of their index cards. After 2–3 minutes, call groups back together. Ask a volunteer from each group to share some of the practical actions they identified for each holy attribute.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 2:17 out loud. Remind students that they studied this Scripture in Lesson 5. On the board, write "*1 Peter 2:17*." Draw radiating lines out from the center. At the end of each line, write one of the four commands: Honor all men; love the brotherhood; fear God; honor the king. As you write each command, ask volunteers to briefly explain each one.

Then divide the class into 3 smaller groups: **Wives** (1 Peter 3:1–6), **Husbands** (3:7), and **All Believers** (3:8–12). Ask each group to read their assigned Scripture passage and consider how the commands from 1 Peter 2:17 are being specifically applied or illustrated. After three minutes, call time and ask a representative from each group to share with the larger group what they discovered.

Option. Pass out copies of the "Witnessing to a Watching World" exercise from the activity page. Give learners one minute to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Conclude today's lesson by asking the class to share their biggest "takeaway." Consider asking: 1–Which characteristic(s) of biblical humility stood out the most? 2–Did anything surprise you? 3–Did you identify any places of necessary growth?

Pass out index cards and pens. Ask learners to take 1 minute to reflect on biblical humility and write a definition. Then ask them to write a specific, actionable way they would like to practice biblical humility in the coming week.

Power in Suffering

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 41:8–13
Background Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8–4:19

1 Peter 3:18–4:7

18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

1 Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

2 That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

3 For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

4 Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:

5 Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

6 For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

Key Text

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. **—1 Peter 4:7**

Power to
the People

Unit 2: Power to Endure

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the source of the believer's power to follow the will of God.
2. Explain how Christ's physical suffering pertains to believers' actions.
3. Write a prayer of gratitude to Jesus for enduring suffering so that we may draw near to God.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Are We There Yet?!
- B. Lesson Context: Historical
- C. Lesson Context: Literary

I. Christ's Suffering (1 Peter 3:18–22)
- A. Alive in the Spirit (vv. 18–19)
- B. Saved from Disobedience (vv. 20–22)

A Different, Better Kind of Clean

II. Believer's Suffering (1 Peter 4:1–6)
- A. Be Done with Sin (vv. 1–2)

Enough of That!
- B. Refuse to Live Wildly (vv. 3–5)
- C. Live According to God (v. 6)

III. Soberly Pray (1 Peter 4:7)
- A. Warning (v. 7a)
- B. Command (v. 7b)

Conclusion
- A. Victory Through Defeat
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Are We There Yet?!

"Are we there yet?!" my children asked for the seventeenth time. We were driving through the woods of Michigan. With a spark of inspiration, I said, "Let's take turns finding as many different colors as we can!" I pointed out the window, "Bright red, on that tall, thin tree with little leaves." The kids perked up, looked out the window, and began seeing with new eyes. Instead of a never-ending roll of highway, they beheld a colorful game. In a similar vein, today's text encourages believers to see suffering in a new way.

B. Lesson Context: Historical

Genesis says that the "sons of God" desired and married "the daughters of men" (Genesis 6:2). These marriages produced "giants . . . mighty men which were of old, men of renown" (6:4). In ancient Jewish tradition, interpreters understood this as the union of fallen angels, whom they called "Watchers," with human women (1 and 2 Enoch, noncanonical books containing stories familiar to Peter's first-century audience). In choosing to act in this way, these angels trespassed boundaries established by God. According to this tradition, the fallen angels guided humans into further wickedness, which led to God's judgment on the whole earth in the form of the flood (Genesis 6:5–8). In the story of Enoch, God judged the Watchers and imprisoned them until the final judgment (compare 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 14–15).

Historical context includes social context. For both Peter and his first-century readers, there were sharp differences between their values in Christ and the values of the surrounding pagan culture. Those differences resulted in challenges of both an offensive and defensive nature. Proper "offense" included making the gospel and the church as

How to Say It

ascension	uh-*sen(t)*-shun
Gentiles	*Jen*-tiles
lasciviousness	luh-*sih*-vee-us-nuss
Messias	Mes-*sigh*-us

appealing as possible by tolerating certain cultural trends. Proper "defense" involved preserving the ethical, spiritual, and doctrinal boundaries that make the church distinctively of Christ.

C. Lesson Context: Literary

The letter we call "1 Peter" reflects the literary format of the letters of Paul. It identifies both the author and his audience in the first two verses. Following those verses, Peter uses a specific "marker" to indicate major transitions. These two markers are identical uses of a word translated into English as "beloved" in 1 Peter 2:11 and 4:12. The contents of the three resulting segments can be summarized this way:

- 1:1–2:10: *a focus on identity as the people of God*
- 2:11–4:11: *a focus on everyone's responsibility in general*
- 4:12–5:11: *a continuing focus on responsibilities, zooming in on specific instructions for elders*

Today's study takes us to the heart of the second of these three sections.

I. Christ's Suffering

(1 Peter 3:18–22)

A. Alive in the Spirit (vv. 18–19)

18. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.

This verse's opening *for* indicates that what follows is a reason for what was stated prior to that word. The verses before this one sum up reasons why it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (1 Peter 3:13–17). The verse at hand takes us deeper into that reasoning.

The title *Christ* comes from the ancient Greek translation of the ancient Hebrew title *Messias* or Messiah (compare John 1:41; 4:25). Both titles mean "anointed one," referring to the anointed Redeemer and King promised by God to His people through the Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 9:6–7; 16:5; Daniel 9:25–26; Micah 5:2; etc.).

For Jesus to have suffered *once* refers to His death on the cross. This singular event accomplished the goal of reconciling believers *to God* as His suffering paid sin's price in a substitutionary (*just for the unjust*) atonement (compare Romans 3:19–26; 5:6–8). This is how Christ won the victory on our behalf, allowing us to be with God (compare John 3:16; 17:3; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19; Colossians 1:19–23).

Scholars debate the precise meaning of *in the flesh* and *by the Spirit*. At least four interpretive possibilities exist. First, Peter could mean that Jesus' body died, but His spirit came back to life. However, this view creates a distinction—body versus spirit—that critics think does not coincide with the broader biblical narrative.

The second theory sees Peter identifying humans as *the flesh.* This implies that even though people killed Jesus, the Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead. A third common reading is that Peter is referring to Jesus' own *flesh*. Therefore, it would mean that Jesus died as a human and the Holy Spirit raised Him. The fourth proposal is that "the flesh" in this context refers to human limitations; this implies that Jesus died to (cast off) the various aspects that are characteristic of human experience.

What Do You Think?

Which possible interpretation of "in the flesh" and "by the Spirit" makes the most sense to you? Why?

Digging Deeper

What do Genesis 2:7; Romans 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; and James 2:26 reveal about the relationship between body and spirit?

19. By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.

Significant debate surrounds this verse as well. Where did Jesus go while His body was in the grave? What does Peter mean by the word *preached*? Who are *the spirits*? What and where is this *prison*? So many intertwined questions! The table of interpretive proposals on page 172 may help. (If you're wondering why Noah is mentioned in the table, see the next verse.)

B. Saved from Disobedience (vv. 20–22)

20. Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

Peter elaborates on the identity of the spirits in question: they *were disobedient*; they rebelled against God. Then Peter mentions *the days of Noah,* which strengthens the thought that Peter is referring to the angels who were believed to have influenced human transgression against God (see Lesson Context). During this time, *God waited* with patience for the earth's wickedness—including both human sin and the depravity of spiritual beings—to reach a tipping point (compare Genesis 15:16). Peter's focus on Noah's time suggests that Jesus' proclamation (mentioned above) is one of victory against rebellious spirits, authorities, and powers of darkness.

The *eight souls* to whom Peter refers are Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their spouses (Genesis 6:10, 18). The *water* that brought death to the rest of humanity saved Noah's family, as *the ark* floated upon it.

Peter urges the Christians in his day to find comfort in remembering God's *longsuffering* nature (Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18). Since God chose to save a *few* from His overarching judgment, the original readers of this letter also have the hope of salvation.

21. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This verse takes us even deeper into a lack of consensus on the exact meaning. The writers of the New Testament sometimes make "similar to, but greater than" comparisons of people and events of the old covenant to their counterparts under the new covenant. This is sometimes known as a comparison between "type" and "antitype." The Greek word translated *type* occurs sixteen times in the New Testament, but invariably, some English word other than the word *type* is used to translate it. In Romans 5:14, for example, it is translated as "figure," comparing Adam to Christ.

In contrast, the Greek word *antitype* occurs only twice in the New Testament: once in Hebrews 9:23–24 and once in the verse now before us. Here in 1 Peter, the translation *like figure* compares *baptism* and Noah's ark. Each is, in some sense, connected with being saved. Yet, Peter recognizes that baptism in and of itself does not save; there are no magical properties in the waters of baptism. Rather, salvation comes through Jesus' *resurrection*.

But that's not the last of our challenges for correct interpretation here! The next challenge involves *the answer of a good conscience.* The wording in the oldest manuscripts does not decisively reveal whether this means "the answer produced by a good conscience" or "the answer that produces a good conscience." How do we decide which is right in capturing what Peter intends?

The solution lies in the word translated as *answer*. The Greek noun here is exceedingly rare, occurring only half a dozen times in all of Greek literature. One of those occurrences is found in a particular Greek version of Daniel 4:17. In that context, the word is obviously intended to mean "verdict." Using this definition, Peter says that submitting to baptism is "a verdict produced by

Theories of 1 Peter 3:19	"he went"	"spirits"	"prison"	"preached"
#1: Jesus' descent into hell before the resurrection	Jesus' disembodied spirit before rising	the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1–4 or spirits of those who died before the flood	the underworld	to offer salvation
#2: The preexistent Christ	the preexistent Christ in the person of Noah	the contemporaries of Noah	a metaphor for sin or a literal place of the spirits' location	to offer salvation
#3. Jesus' triumphal proclamation after the resurrection	Jesus' spiritual existence after rising	the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1–4	hell (2 Peter 2:4)	to proclaim victory

a good conscience." This means that a believer undergoes baptism after having reached a determination that the gospel is true.

A Different, Better Kind of Clean

I grew up in a very humid climate, in a house that lacked air conditioning. Summer temperatures could be brutal; sometimes, the soaring temperatures barely decreased overnight. During those months, I constantly felt dirty because of excessive sweating. I found a little relief by taking cool baths, but the bathroom was on the roasting second floor, so the relief was always short-lived.

Those summer days were in sharp contrast to the winter day on which I was baptized. When I was about nine, I knew I wanted to follow Jesus. I was aware that aligning with Him would involve a baptism. To my surprise, the heater in the baptistry was broken on that winter day! But I wasn't there to take a comfortable bath to cleanse my physical body. I underwent baptism because the verdict of my conscience regarding my decision to follow Christ needed to be expressed. What's the verdict of your conscience? —KS

22. Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

Here Peter states the definitive place where Jesus resides—His specified location after His death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus sits at *the right hand of God*, which is a place of authority and power. His placement indicates vindication! Peter's specification regarding all who are *subject* to Jesus reflects Paul's conclusion in Romans 8:39.

II. Believer's Suffering

(1 Peter 4:1–6)

A. Be Done with Sin (vv. 1–2)

1. Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.

Peter returns to the theme of Christ's suffering that he began in 1 Peter 3:18 (see above). He reminds his readers that Jesus *suffered* as a human (*in the flesh*), which connects that suffering to their lived experience. Peter's use of the military term *arm* offers Jesus' example to believers as a tool or weapon they may use to fight against their circumstances. By putting on a *mind* like Christ's, believers may claim victory.

Peter is circling back to the larger context present in his letter, the concept of how to live godly lives within a pagan culture (1 Peter 2:11–12 [Lesson 5]). His words reflect his previous statements to servants regarding enduring grief while "suffering wrongfully" (2:19). Believers who persevere in obedience, misunderstood by the surrounding culture, demonstrate that they have made a break with *sin* (compare 1:6–7 [Lesson 1]; 2:15 [Lesson 5], 20–25; 3:14–17; 4:12–19 [Lesson 8]).

What Do You Think?

In what practical ways might believers put on the mind of Christ?

Digging Deeper

How might an attitude like Christ's "arm" believers against the challenges we face?

Enough of That!

When I was young, I received a small allowance every week. Due to our family's humble circumstances, it didn't increase as I grew. Therefore, as a teenager, there were times when my friends wanted to do things that I couldn't afford. In those times, I resorted to raiding my dad's spare change jar.

One day, my conscience got the better of me and I realized that what I was doing was dishonest. I was convinced that my sins, like this one, were the reason why Jesus suffered. So I went to my dad, sobbing, and confessed my actions to him. Graciously, he forgave me. It was Christ's suffering that broke my heart and brought me to repentance. Is there something for which you need to repent? —KS

2. That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

Peter further explains what it means to separate from sin. Believers who hold tight to Christ's example *no longer* strive toward the things that secular culture values. Instead, we can *live* in a better way, seeking God's *will*.

The lusts of men represent a life devoid of self-control, unwilling to regulate human passions. Armed with the mind of Christ, believers may step out of the emptiness that comes from following their own desires, set aside sin, and focus upon *the will of God* (compare 1 Peter 1:18 [Lesson 1]).

B. Refuse to Live Wildly (vv. 3–5)

3. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.

Peter contrasts believers' *past* lives with the new way of life they are called to live in Christ. Before committing to follow Jesus, they all pursued a worldly *will*. This "will" refers to the "lusts of men" mentioned above.

Peter refers to the general Greco-Roman populace, those outside the family of God, as *Gentiles*. These non-Christians exhibit habits that align with a godless way of life. Peter presents a list of vices specific to the type of religious feasts common in the Roman Empire rather than a broad overview of disapproving behaviors (compare Galatians 5:19–21; Colossians 3:5–8; 2 Timothy 3:2–4).

Lasciviousness is unrestricted bodily pleasure. It primarily implies sexual activity but also includes drug and alcohol use. *Lusts* suggest sexual immorality but can also include overtones of cravings, longings, or desires for things that God prohibits. Drunkenness and overabundant eating (*banquetings*) are also connected to excess. *Revellings* are nighttime activities connected to the worship of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and fertility.

The list reaches its high point (or low point!) with *abominable idolatries*. This is the worship of false gods, a practice that lies at the heart of all the others.

4. Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.

Peter refers once again to a general Greco-Roman suspicion of Christians, given the latter's restrained behavior. Believers' choice to abstain from wild living (*riot*) results in hostility from the larger society. The Greek word translated as *speaking evil of you* here is a form of the word *blaspheme.* Certain Gentiles thus revile Christians with abusive language to the extreme. Peter also discusses this particular slander in 2 Peter 2:2, 10, 12 (Lessons 4 and 5).

What Do You Think?

What things might modern Christians abstain from that non-Christians think are "strange"?

Digging Deeper

What steps might modern Christians take to resist the sting of slander or abusive language thrown at us?

5. Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

Peter reminds his readers that in the end, all people will stand before God, who judges creation (compare Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1). By this reminder Peter seeks to comfort faithful believers who have lost relationships, honor, status, and health because of their commitment to Jesus. The comfort is this: everyone will be held accountable before God.

What Do You Think?

What comfort is gleaned from remembering that it is God who will judge all creation?

Digging Deeper

How does Revelation 20:11–15 impact your understanding of what it will be like to "give account" to God?

C. Live According to God (v. 6)

6. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

The phrase *them that are dead* seems to refer to

Christian martyrs. The gospel had been preached to them, and they believed it before succumbing to death. Therefore, even though they have been *judged* harshly by worldly standards, those deceased believers enjoy life everlasting with God.

III. Soberly Pray

(1 Peter 4:7)

A. Warning (v. 7a)

7a. But the end of all things is at hand.

Peter notes that an extraordinary event is nearer than his readers think: *the end of all things*. Other passages reflect this fact from different angles (compare Romans 13:11–12; 1 John 2:18; 2 Peter 3:3–10; etc.). Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension witnessed to a new period in history—the era of God's unfolding kingdom (Matthew 10:7). Some were ready for it (Luke 2:25–38) and some were not (20:1–2). Will people heed that example before it's too late?

B. Command (v. 7b)

7b. Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

This is the second of three times that Peter states the imperative to be *sober* and/or *alert* (1 Peter 1:13; 5:8). The two commands in this verse work together as one, being nearly synonymous. They refer to a mind that is fully aware, under control, and thinking rightly (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8; 2 Timothy 4:5).

We are to be like sentries on the watch, always attentive. But our watchfulness is directed to *prayer*, calling on God for assistance and relying on Him to guide us in these last days. Recognizing that our time on earth is short, we prayerfully grasp the urgency of the moment: to do God's will now.

What Do You Think?

How does Jesus' teaching in Luke 21:34–36 compare to Peter's teaching in 1 Peter 4:1–7?

Digging Deeper

How does 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 compare to both texts?



Visual for Lesson 7. *Place this visual in a prominent place. Point to it while teaching about Peter's warning and command (1 Peter 4:7).*

Conclusion

A. Victory Through Defeat

Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection change everything. A situation that looked like defeat brought about ultimate victory. Jesus accepted suffering so that all may be reconciled to God. He defeated sin, death, and every spiritual force that opposes God and torments the church. He sits in the seat of power, at the right hand of God, and reigns over every authority in heaven and on earth. This reality, although unseen, is true and trustworthy. Christ will uphold the righteous.

When we choose a new life in Christ, we are to make a decisive break from our former ways of life. Just like believers in the first century, we are called to control our passions and follow God in sober watchfulness. We will likely suffer for these changes, for those who do not see the world through God's eyes find the Christian life strange, intolerant, and offensive. Yet, Jesus' victory is good news, "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Peter 4:7), and God saves the righteous.

B. Prayer

Father, help us to hold tightly to You, turning from sin and trusting in Your love and victory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus is victorious.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

To introduce today's lesson, draw a line down the middle of the board, creating two columns. Label the left column *The World's Way* and the right column *Christ's Way*. Ask your class to list common desires, pursuits, or ways of thinking that often guide people's lives. Write their answers in the left column. Then ask, "If someone is truly committed to living for God's will and following Christ's example, how might their desires, pursuits, and ways of thinking differ from those we just listed?" Write their answers in the right column.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today's Scripture encourages believers to live differently from the world."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 3:18–22 out loud. Then discuss the following questions as a large group: 1–What does it mean that Jesus "once suffered for sins"? 2–What is the significance of "the just for the unjust"? 3–What was the ultimate purpose of Christ's suffering? 4–What does Christ's position at the right hand of God tell us about His ultimate victory?

Then briefly discuss what you understand about Christ's proclamation to the "spirits in prison" by utilizing the chart on page 172.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 4:1–3 out loud. Divide the class into four smaller groups: **Gossip Group**, **Overspending Group**, **Revenge Group**, and **Compromise Group**. Provide each group with their applicable scenario. Ask them to discuss how to "arm" themselves with Christ's mind and how to demonstrate living for the "will of God" instead of for human desires when facing their scenario.

Gossip Group: You are at a social gathering where the conversation is becoming increasingly crude and gossipy. You feel pressure to participate.

Overspending Group: You are consistently tempted to overspend on nonessential items to impress others or feel good.

Revenge Group: You are wronged by someone, and your immediate reaction is to seek revenge or speak negatively about them.

Compromise Group: You have a demanding workload at your job and are tempted to compromise your integrity to get ahead.

Reconvene and ask for volunteers to share highlights of their group's conversation.

Option. Hand out pens and copies of the "My New Direction" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask participants to complete it as indicated.

Invite a volunteer to read 1 Peter 4:4–6 aloud. Ask the following questions as a whole class: 1–What worldly behaviors are mentioned in this passage? 2–Why do people in the world find it strange when believers don't participate in these things? 3–What causes people to slander those who live differently from them? 4–How does Peter comfort those who suffer?

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 4:7 out loud. Say, "Peter gives three final directives on how to live with urgency—soberly, with watchfulness, and in prayer." Ask students to choose one of these three directives. Lead 2–3 minutes of quiet prayer, instructing students to consider how they might practically live out the directive they chose.

Alternative. Pass out copies of the "My Priority Thermometer" exercise from the activity page. Ask students to complete it as indicated.

Into Life

Pass out pens and paper. Ask students to write a prayer of gratitude to Jesus for enduring suffering so that we may draw near to God. If there is time, ask students to share their prayers with a partner. Encourage learners to place their prayer in a visible place so they might pray it throughout the week.

Power to Serve

Devotional Reading: James 5:13–20
Background Scriptures: Romans 12:3–21; 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Peter 4:1–19

1 Peter 4:8–19

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

9 Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

Key Text

Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.
—1 Peter 4:8

Power to
the People

Unit 2: Power to Endure

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Peter's directives regarding Christian love and service.
2. Explain why suffering and service are integral parts of the Christian life.
3. Identify a personal gift that God has given and how it is useful in serving others.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Struggle for Survival
- B. Lesson Context

I. Above All (1 Peter 4:8–11)
- A. Love Deeply (vv. 8–9)
  Unique and Unforgettable Hospitality
- B. Use Your Gifts (vv. 10–11)

II. Fiery Trial (1 Peter 4:12–19)
- A. Don't Be Surprised (v. 12)
- B. Rejoice in Suffering (vv. 13–16)
  Guilty and Miserable
- C. Commit to Good (vv. 17–19)

Conclusion
- A. Courage and Conviction
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Struggle for Survival

The television series *Survivor* pits twenty strangers against one another in a competition for $1 million. The producers place the contestants in "tribes" far from civilization. These tribes must work together to build shelter, cook food, and compete in games that demand physical and mental stamina. Every few days, one tribe must vote a member out of the contest.

Survivor entertains by showcasing the complex web of relationships and strategy that is woven by the contestants. They form alliances, identify weak links, pinpoint rivals and threats, and go to great lengths to deceive one another. Inevitably, as a tribe struggles, social relationships fray. Contestants become annoyed with each other, friendships and alliances falter, and unholy "situation ethics" follow as deceit takes center stage. On the night of the vote, friends quite often betray one another to survive.

When communities struggle and self-interest reigns, critical bonds disintegrate. But which is the cause and which is the effect? Peter addresses this question in today's text.

B. Lesson Context

In the first century AD, following Jesus resulted in believers being at odds with their surrounding culture. Christians were accused of atheism because they refused to worship the Roman emperor. Christian practices such as participating in the Lord's Supper and greeting one another with a holy kiss were misunderstood. These practices were incorrectly associated with cannibalism and incest.

Additionally, Greco-Roman culture believed that Christian values held the potential to corrupt dominant social structures. Christians had the habit of associating with people of divergent social statuses, which was interpreted to mean that they did not care for honor. In a highly stratified, honor-shame society, this was unsettling. Roman concern was that if the poor began to think that they could share social space with the rich, then the Roman Empire would have a problem.

Christians served the poor and cared for the

sick. They shared money and were generous with their possessions. They eschewed sexual promiscuity and withdrew from social activities that involved excessive indulgence and/or idolatry. The gulf that formed between Christians and Greco-Roman culture eventually resulted in overt persecution and even martyrdom.

I. Above All

(1 Peter 4:8–11)

A. Love Deeply (vv. 8–9)

8. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

Just before this verse, Peter urges believers to remember that "the end of all things" is closer than they may realize (1 Peter 4:7). In light of this coming end, he launches into an explanation of what communal life in the household of Christ should look like in the meantime. With strong language (*above all*), Peter calls the Christian community to *charity*; it is to be a priority among them (compare 1 Corinthians 13:13). The word being translated here occurs over one hundred times in the New Testament, usually translated as "love" in the King James Version. This points to a broader application of the word *charity* than our twenty-first-century use might indicate. It implies the need to have a "whatever it takes" mentality that includes all manner of benevolence and provision, especially toward those who are most in need or suffering (compare 1 John 4:16–18). Given the first-century believers' precarious situation as a suffering minority in the Greco-Roman world, Peter is pointing out the need for unity and solidarity in this regard (1 Peter 1:22 [Lesson 4]; 2:17 [Lesson 5]; 3:8 [Lesson 6]). His command plays an essential role in preserving the vitality of the church.

How to Say It

Antioch	*An*-tee-ock
doxology	dock-*sah*-luh-jee
metallurgy	*meh*-tah-lur-gee
paterfamilias	pay-*tur*-fuh-*mi*-lee-uhz
Raskolnikov	Rah-*skowl*-nuh-kuhv

Peter recognizes the challenge presented by the demands of love and emphasizes the believers' call by requiring it to be *fervent*. The people of Christ should love with consistency, dedication, and persistence.

Peter communicates the reason for communal care by paraphrasing Proverbs 10:12 (compare 1 Corinthians 13:4–7; James 5:20). Peter's use of the proverb indicates several things about the nature of charitable love and its superiority over other attitudes that tear communities apart. Such a love helps defeat sin by promoting a culture of forgiveness and grace.

What Do You Think?

How does love cover a "multitude of sins"?

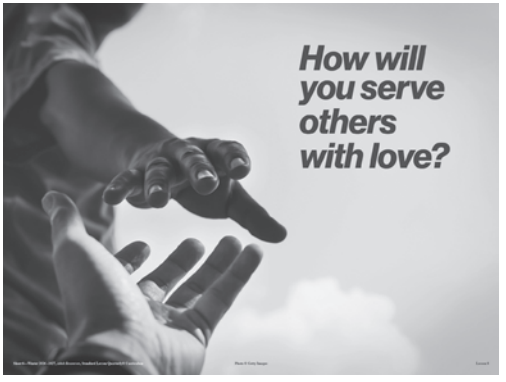
Digging Deeper

How do Proverbs 10:12; 1 Corinthians 13:4–7; and James 5:20 affect your answer?

9. Use hospitality one to another without grudging.

Peter gets more specific. In the continued vein of provision, he calls believers to put their faith into action by being generous in offering shelter, food, and protection *to one another*. Greek and Jewish culture both valued *hospitality* as a virtue; the apostle Paul considers it so important that he includes it in two listings of qualities (or qualifications) for elders (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8; compare 3 John 5–8 [Lesson 12]). Therefore, Peter's instruction is not surprising. But the motivations for offering hospitality differed between Jews and Greeks. Jewish emphasis was on pleasing God by extending hospitality to strangers and foreigners because they had a genuine need (compare Leviticus 19:33–34; Deuteronomy 10:18–19; Judges 19:16–21; etc.), while Greco-Roman culture practiced hospitality because it provided value in terms of networking and forming strong social alliances. Lavish hospitality was used to display one's wealth and status.

It is not particularly surprising that Peter enjoins his readers against *grudging*, given the fact that the ancient Israelites have a history of doing just that (Exodus 16:1–12; Numbers 17:10;



Visual for Lesson 8. *Point to the visual and ask learners to contemplate the question. Then ask volunteers to share their answers.*

Psalms 59:15; 106:25; etc.). Many Christians of the first century are of low social status (1 Corinthians 1:26–29); they are likely giving what they can (compare Mark 12:41–44). Therefore, those of wealthier households are the primary targets of Peter's call to actionable and patient love. They should practice hospitality with satisfaction that they are honoring Christ (Matthew 25:34–40), removing any mindset of resentment (contrast Proverbs 23:6–8). Hospitality was a key factor in Jesus' earthly ministry (Matthew 10:11–15), and so it must be for Christians as well.

Unique and Unforgettable Hospitality

I once knew a church leader who practiced hospitality in a uniquely thoughtful way. When the Thanksgiving holiday approached, he and his wife would prepare a feast that was much larger than their family needed. Then he would go to the local hospital's emergency department to seek out people who had their Thanksgiving plans interrupted or cancelled by a medical emergency. He would invite them to be his family's guests for the meal!

Could there be a greater application of 1 Peter 4:9? Notice the reason that the leader didn't fall into grumbling or complaining—he reached out to those in need from personal conviction and initiative.

Sadly, my association with this man was all too brief. We met each other while we were both stationed at the same base in the US Air Force. When it came time for military moves, we lost contact. But his example lives on in my memory, more than forty years later. What manner of unique hospitality could you initiate as an example of today's text? How might your example shine for others like this man's has done for me (Matthew 5:16)? —RLN

B. Use Your Gifts (vv. 10–11)

10. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Charitable love also expresses itself in using our spiritual gifts as we *minister the same one to another.* Peter reminds his readers that God has blessed *every* person with at least one such *gift* for serving the community (compare 1 Corinthians 12:7). He makes no distinction between members of greater or lesser importance, social status, or wealth. Every Christian has something to give for the sake of everyone else.

As he calls believers to be *good stewards,* Peter continues with the language of first-century "household codes" (compare 1 Peter 2:18–25; 3:1–7 [Lessons 5 and 6]). Stewards were the overseers of all domestic duties. The *paterfamilias* (Latin for "head of household") trusted his steward to manage his goods and people, to attend to appropriate expenses, and to ensure the proper functioning of the estate (compare Luke 12:42–46). In contrast to a Roman household, however, Peter wants every person in the household of Christ to personally manage the gift(s) they have *received* appropriately. He acknowledges that these gifts are varied in form, but they all express *grace* (compare Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; Ephesians 4:11–13).

What Do You Think?

How might the modern church support every believer in utilizing their God-given gift(s)?

Digging Deeper

What things keep you from stewarding your gift(s) well?

11a. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.

In contrast to the words of slander that Christ's

followers have received from those outside the church (1 Peter 4:4), Peter calls his readers to *speak* to one another as though *God* were speaking through them. Peter's words here harmonize with his earlier call to get rid of "evil speakings" (2:1), as well as insults (3:9). To speak as God speaks is both humbling and powerful. The idea promotes caution, care, and intention. All this is tied together by Jesus' warning that we will be held accountable for "every idle word" we speak (Matthew 12:36; compare Ephesians 4:29).

Peter is not necessarily focusing on day-to-day speech, but rather on those who speak publicly, teach, or provide counsel. It is a heavy responsibility to speak on God's behalf. As James says, the one who teaches the word of God faces stricter judgment (James 3:1).

11b. If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth.

Peter has more to say about service (see 1 Peter 4:10, above). As with speech, the *ability* to *minister* to fellow Christians comes from *God*. It is God's power working through believers that enables us to function in ways that benefit others (compare Ephesians 3:20). All are called to serve according to what they receive from the Lord.

11c. That God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

This lengthy verse of thirty-eight words (in the Greek) ends with a doxology that defines the purpose of exercising spiritual gifts. It is not to show off the skills, talents, or abilities of humans. Instead, believers' gifts are designed to glorify *God*. Thus, Peter brings his readers to a point of *praise* for the empowerment that God supplies. The glory that Peter wants believers to express comes *through Jesus Christ*, the one who draws all people to God (John 12:32; 1 Peter 3:18).

In addition to praiseworthiness, Peter acknowledges the *dominion* of Jesus. This word, that is often translated "power," reiterates that Jesus rules above and beyond every other power—whether spiritual or human (compare 1 Peter 3:22; 5:11; Jude 25). Jesus' reign eclipses that of the Roman empire, the opinions of naysayers, persecutions, and believers' sufferings.

What Do You Think?

How does the utilization of spiritual gifts bring glory and praise to God?

Digging Deeper

What is a doxology, and what other examples can you identify in Scripture? (Consider Romans 16:27; Philippians 4:20; Hebrews 13:21; etc.)

II. Fiery Trial

(1 Peter 4:12–19)

A. Don't Be Surprised (v. 12)

12. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.

Peter's use of the term *beloved* here marks the beginning of the third major section in his epistle (see the Lesson Context of Lesson 7 for a breakdown of these sections). Peter returns to a topic that recurs throughout the letter: suffering (1 Peter 1:6–7 [Lesson 1]; 2:15, 20–25 [Lesson 5]; 3:14–17 [not covered this quarter]; 4:12–19 [the text at hand]). He makes a personal appeal to first-century believers in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), asking them to maintain an attitude of expectancy as they face persecution.

In that light, he returns to the imagery of metallurgy, where the refiner's fire purges impurities from precious metals. The persecution his readers face is fierce and *fiery,* but it is to *try* them. The illustrative language that Peter uses connects with his opening message: believers' present trials serve to demonstrate their faithfulness to God, like fire purifies gold (1 Peter 1:6–7 [Lesson 1]).

Peter stresses the pointlessness of dwelling on thoughts that persecution is *strange*. Although God created the world in such a way that humans should flourish, suffering is nothing new, given the lengthy presence of sin (compare Matthew 5:11–12; 10:22).

B. Rejoice in Suffering (vv. 13–16)

13. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Perhaps Peter is recalling the time when he

failed to stand tall in faith because of fear and danger (Matthew 14:28–31). If that's the case, then he speaks from the personal experience of letting something other than Jesus control his outlook. Instead of focusing on the negative, Peter gives believers an alternative: *rejoice*! Joy is not a natural human response to suffering. Even so, believers are to hold a special perspective because of *Christ's sufferings*. Their identification with Jesus is to reinterpret their experience. As Peter has already pointed out, Christ left believers an example, and when they follow in His footsteps, they become *partakers* with Him (1 Peter 2:21 [Lesson 5]). To know that they suffer for a purpose will assist in an attitude adjustment.

Peter continues to look toward the end, when Christ's *glory* will be *revealed*. On that day, God will vindicate believers.

What Do You Think?

How might believers rejoice amid suffering?

Digging Deeper

How does joy help you reinterpret your experience of suffering or trial?

14a. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.

A beatitude is a saying that declares why a seemingly accursed person is actually blessed (Matthew 5:3–12). Peter uses such a form here, as he acknowledges the reproach that believers experience because of their association with *the name of Christ.* That loyalty is accompanied by a blessing that is not to be minimized! We should note that the word translated "happy" here is translated "blessed" almost 90 percent of the time that it is used elsewhere.

Jesus warned those who desired to follow Him that affliction would come. He used severe language (Matthew 10:16; John 15:18). He wanted them to be prepared for these situations (16:4). Peter was present when Jesus taught about persecution. Therefore, as Peter remembers Jesus' words, he passes them along.

Peter's language bears resemblance to Isaiah 11:2, with its five "the spirit of" entries. These speak of the spirit of the Lord resting upon the Messiah for various benefits. Now that Christ has come, these believers are empowered with God's Spirit themselves! The importance of this empowerment is reflected in the uniqueness of the phrase *the spirit of glory*—this phrase occurs only here in the Bible.

14b. On their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

This last portion of the verse acknowledges opposite reactions to Christ. During His earthly ministry, Jesus was a polarizing figure (Luke 11:23; 16:13; John 7:12; etc.). As Peter writes this letter some three decades after that ministry, the hostility has grown even worse.

15. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

Peter clarifies the kind of suffering to which he refers. He has not been talking about deserved suffering resulting from criminal and interpersonal wrongdoing (compare 1 Peter 2:19–20 [Lesson 5]). The apostle Paul makes similar distinctions (Acts 28:18; Romans 13:1–5; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Colossians 1:24; etc.).

Guilty and Miserable

The famous novel *Crime and Punishment* tells the story of a man who murders two people, flees the scene before anyone notices, wrestles with a guilty conscience, and eventually confesses. He is sentenced to many years in a Siberian prison for his crime. Although Raskolnikov deserved the consequences he received, the worst of his punishment comes from inner turmoil. His guilt haunts him. Redemption eventually comes as he owns up to his actions and accepts the consequences.

A supporting character in the story knows shame and suffering herself. This fuels her compassion and empathy toward Raskolnikov. Devout in faith, Sonia serves as a moral and spiritual guide. She helps him find meaning in his suffering by sharing in his burden rather than judging him as a lost cause. It is Sonia's support that allows Raskolnikov to confess, repent, and face the consequences of his crime with dignity.

How are you keeping yourself steady in Christ and avoiding the vices that Peter mentions?—KS

16. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

Peter fervently desires for his readers to view their identity in Christ as a badge of honor rather than a point of shame. So he reminds them again that their suffering indicates a powerful alignment with Jesus and that bearing up under it brings *God* glory.

The term *Christian* is rarely used in Scripture (only in Acts 11:26; 26:28; and here). Acts 11:26 indicates that the designation was first used in relation to the church at Antioch decades earlier. Historical evidence suggests that the name was created by the Romans and applied to Jesus-followers as a disgraceful moniker.

C. Commit to Good (vv. 17–19)

17. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

Peter cuts to the heart of why believers must continue to claim their identification with Christ: *judgment* is coming, and it will *begin* with God's *house* (compare Ezekiel 9:6)! The New Testament affirms that those who are in Christ do not face condemnation (Romans 8:1), even though we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). Make no mistake: God is indeed poised to judge the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5 [Lesson 7]).

The "fiery trial" of persecution mentioned in 1 Peter 4:12 is the start of God's discipline (see above). God wants His household refined and purified through it. Peter's point is that although this trial is difficult, it is strengthening God's church. On the flip side, those outside the house of God, those who *obey not the gospel*, will face a difficult *end*. Peter exhorts his audience to consider their adversaries' fate.

18. And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

Peter recognizes that maintaining faith through inevitable trials is challenging. He draws on Proverbs 11:31 to challenge his readers to identify if they are *righteous* or *ungodly*. There is no in-between, no middle ground.

19. Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

Peter concludes with a final encouragement and exhortation. Christians may trust in God's goodness and love. As the psalmist praises God for being a refuge and savior, so first-century believers may trust God to faithfully deliver them (compare Psalm 31:1–5). After all, we are made in the image of the God who is the *Creator* (Genesis 1:26).

What Do You Think?

Why do you think that suffering has a role in God's will?

Digging Deeper

How do believers actively commit "the keeping of their souls" to God?

Conclusion

A. Courage and Conviction

Christians will inevitably face trials on account of their beliefs. Learning to stand up under them with courage and conviction is essential. Throughout his letter, Peter encourages believers to remember that we have the opportunity to patiently and consistently do good, even in (or perhaps especially in) the face of suffering. There is power in humble service and faithful alignment with the church, the household of God. Despite the challenges, following Jesus may bring about deep joy.

As believers, our ethics and values diverge from mainstream cultural trends. This friction causes pressure to mount. Therefore, purposeful dedication to the Christian community is essential. We must encourage one another with the gifts we receive from God. How are you called to serve?

B. Prayer

Father, help us rejoice when we share in Christ's suffering. Empower us to use the gifts You give. May our service bring You glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The Christian life involves suffering and service.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Assign partners. Ask learners to think of a time when they had to trust God and do the right thing even though it wasn't easy. After one minute, ask partners to share personal examples with each other. (If students struggle to think of personal examples, encourage them to consider hypothetical examples for the sake of discussion.)

Alternative. On the board, write a list of difficult life circumstances in which people have suffered for doing good (example: *losing a job for refusing to do a task that went against Christian ethics*). Lead a discussion regarding which situations your class thinks would be the most difficult for them and why.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Suffering for identification with Christ and serving others with our God-given gifts are two hallmarks of the Christian life. Today we'll consider how God calls believers to serve and suffer well."

Into the Word

Read 1 Peter 4:8–19 out loud as a class. Consider asking volunteers to take turns reading a few verses each. Then check for learners' comprehension by leading a Question & Answer Volley. With each verse, or set of verses (listed below), ask the class a question. Encourage a different learner to answer each question; after they've responded, ask them to ask *you* a question from the same verse(s). Repeat the pattern until you have covered the entire text.

Verses 8–9: What are two things every Christian is called to do? Verse 10: What is the main point of believers using their gifts? Verse 11: Which two specific spiritual gifts are mentioned here? Verses 12–14: What attitude are believers called to hold in the face of suffering/insults? Verses 15–18: How does Christian suffering set an example for other believers? Non-believers? Verse 19: Why might it be the will of God that believers suffer?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "What Did You Read?" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Give learners five minutes to answer the questions in small groups. Then go over the answers as a class.

Option. Ask learners to return to their previous partners. Instruct pairs to brainstorm responses for each of these questions: 1–In what specific ways might believers use their spiritual gifts to serve others? 2–In what specific ways might believers suffer for the name of Christ? Allow learners to share their lists with the class. Then work together to identify patterns of similarity and uniqueness between the compiled answers.

Then, divide the class into three groups: **Gifts Group** (verses 8–11), **Praising Group** (verses 12–15), and **Sufferings Group** (verses 16–19). Ask groups to review their assigned verses and then work together to write a paraphrase of those verses, capturing Peter's meaning in their own words. When groups are finished, ask a representative from each group to share their paraphrase with the class.

Into Life

Review the Christian virtues present in today's passage (vv. 8–11): charity, hospitality, speaking, and ministering. Then, list other spiritual gifts from passages such as Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 (you compile). (Examples: *leadership, administration, teaching, exhortation, shepherding, faith, evangelism,* etc.) Pass out pens and index cards. Ask learners to write out the following prompt: *I believe God has given me the gift of _____, and I can use it to serve others by _____*. Give one minute for learners to fill in the blanks. Then collect the index cards, shuffle them, and read the written statements aloud (without sharing names). End the class by praying for opportunities for these unique gifts to be used.

Option. Distribute copies of the "So Many Gifts" exercise from the activity page. Ask learners to complete it as indicated.

Power to Resist

Devotional Reading: Psalm 55:1–4, 16–22
Background Scripture: 1 Peter 5

1 Peter 5:1–11

1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

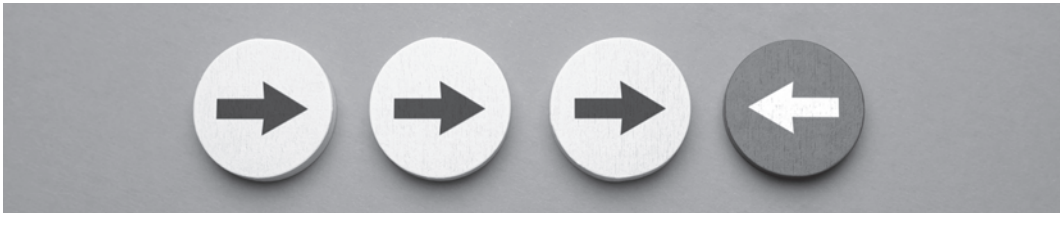
7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

11 To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.



Key Text

When the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

—1 Peter 5:4

Image © Getty Images

Power to
the People

Unit 2: Power to Endure

Lessons 5–9

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize the directives given to elders, those who are younger, and all believers.
2. Describe how a believer might actively resist the devil.
3. Write a letter to encourage a younger believer to stand firm in their faith and resist the devil.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Quiet Life
- B. Lesson Context: Historical
- C. Lesson Context: Literary

I. Message to Elders (1 Peter 5:1–4)
- A. Be Examples (vv. 1–3)
  Honoring Experience
- B. The Chief Shepherd (v. 4)

II. Message to the Younger (1 Peter 5:5–7)
- A. Practice Humility (vv. 5–6)
- B. Receive Care (v. 7)

III. Message to Spiritual Family (1 Peter 5:8–9)
- A. Stay Alert (v. 8)
- B. Resist in Solidarity (v. 9)

IV. Message of Restoration (1 Peter 5:10–11)
- A. Temporary Suffering (v. 10)
  Secondhand Clothes
- B. Eternal Power (v. 11)

Conclusion
- A. Countercultural
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Quiet Life

In 458 BC, the Roman Republic faced a major threat: a hostile people-group known as the Aequi threatened Roman control of the Italian Peninsula. The Aequi attacked Tusculum, a wealthy town only fifteen miles southeast of Rome.

The Roman Senate decided to appoint a *dictator*, a citizen granted absolute authority to address the crisis. The Romans recognized the value of a single decision-maker in an emergency, but they also feared that an appointee might refuse to relinquish that power when the crisis ended.

The Senate chose a man named Cincinnatus, a retired statesman and military veteran, to be the dictator. They found him working in a field on his farm. Immediately, Cincinnatus donned his toga, accepted the role, and led the Roman army to victory at the Battle of Algidus.

Just fifteen days later, Cincinnatus gave up his authority and returned to his farm. Rather than pursuing personal power, Cincinnatus sought a modest and quiet life, working with his hands (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:11). He is acclaimed for his humility and public service. Five hundred years later, the apostle Peter encouraged the readers of his first letter to pursue the same virtues.

B. Lesson Context: Historical

From a bird's-eye view, first-century church meetings would have looked familiar to modern Christians. The earliest Christ-followers sang songs and delivered messages to instruct and encourage one another (1 Corinthians 14:26). The rich and poor alike shared the Lord's Supper (11:17–34). Yet, there were differences too. One of the most surprising variations was the age range of participants. These days, one expects stable communities comprised of a cross-section of children, adults, and the elderly. However, such stability was uncommon in the ancient world.

Life expectancy in the first century was between twenty-five and thirty-five years. In many ways, this figure reflects high child mortality rates. Some research indicates that 25 percent of infants died within their first year of life.

Many more perished before the age of ten, as society struggled with malnutrition, disease, and environmental accidents.

However, Psalm 90:10, which is attributed to Moses, reflects a life expectancy of between seventy and eighty years, although Moses himself lived to be one hundred and twenty (Deuteronomy 34:7). Adding to this historical complexity is the fact that forty years was considered a "generation" (Numbers 32:13). Many factors in the ancient world (as today) play into the difficulty of life expectancy calculations: infectious diseases, social class, gender, famine, war, etc. In certain areas, those who lived beyond their sixties were so rare that cities inscribed their names on public monuments as a witness to the region's greatness. Therefore, the "elders" of first-century churches were most likely in their thirties or forties (1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14).

C. Lesson Context: Literary

Throughout 1 Peter, the apostle teaches that living to honor God includes submitting to authorities. That involves not only how believers relate to the government (1 Peter 2:13–17 [Lesson 5]; compare Romans 13:1–6) but also how slaves and masters (1 Peter 2:18–25 [Lesson 5]), married couples (3:1–7 [Lesson 6]), and fellow believers treat one another (3:8–22 [Lessons 6 and 7]; compare Romans 13:7–8). Mutual care and service, rather than the desire for prestige, should mark these relationships (1 Peter 3:8; compare 1 Corinthians 2–4, 8–10).

I. Message to Elders

(1 Peter 5:1–4)

A. Be Examples (vv. 1–3)

1. The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

Peter turns from exhorting the whole Christian community to specifically addressing church leaders. He uses the term *elders* to identify these leaders, a word that might make us imagine a person of advanced age. But the word being translated, which occurs dozens of times in the New Testament, can simply refer to someone who is comparatively older than others.

Peter begins his address to these elders with a decree formula, which is a formal and tactful way of introducing a command to a subordinate. Following this formula, Peter states his credentials and then uses a Greek verb that is often translated as "beseech" (examples: Romans 15:30; 16:17; 1 Peter 2:11 [Lesson 5]).

Accompanying the appeal, Peter identifies himself with three designations: as an *elder*, a *witness of the sufferings of Christ*, and a *partaker* in future *glory.* Peter's choice of titles reflects a countercultural understanding of leadership. First, he places himself on equal footing with the other church leaders. Second, he reminds his audience that he was an eyewitness to Christ's arrest and suffering (Matthew 26:37, 58–75; John 18:1–14). He was also one of the first to see the resurrected Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:5). Third, he aligns himself with all believers by referring to the ultimate hope that they will participate in God's glory (2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:17; Colossians 1:27). This last designation asserts Peter's position in the family of God. Each of these three titles anticipate the key points of Peter's instruction to the elders that follow (see below).

Taken as a whole, Peter's instruction is not mere take-it-or-leave-it advice from a wise sage. Instead, it is a strong directive from a senior leader.

What Do You Think?

What three titles best categorize your past, present, and future?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do these titles showcase your relationship to Christ?

Honoring Experience

When I was younger, I had a supervisor who advanced to high-level administration after first holding many lower-level positions. He had many years of experience working in a job like mine. When he moved on, our company replaced him with a new supervisor who had not held my position. Frankly, I struggled with the new boss. He

asked me and my coworkers to do things that seemed ridiculous. Looking back, I realize how much I respected the first supervisor for his attitude and empathy toward us. He understood our needs.

It is easy to respect requests that come from a place of experience and expertise. Conversely, we feel less confident about following the directives of someone who hasn't "been there, done that." In today's Scripture, Peter could speak elder-to-elder about how to lead because he had firsthand knowledge of Jesus and a personal call to feed God's sheep (John 21:15–17). What firsthand experience do you have that effectively serves mentoring relationships? —KS

2. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.

Shepherding metaphors are used throughout Scripture to describe the relationship between God and His people; He loves them and leads them (Psalms 78:52; 80:1; Zechariah 10:2–3; 1 Peter 2:25; etc.). God also uses people to "shepherd" His flock. However, throughout Israel's history, these shepherds repeatedly failed (examples: Jeremiah 23:2; Ezekiel 34:1–6). God brought judgment upon these Old Testament shepherds (Zechariah 11:3, 8) and promised to take care of His people by setting faithful shepherds over them (Jeremiah 23:3–4; Ezekiel 34:23–24).



Visual for Lesson 9. *Place this visual in a prominent place. Use it to lead a discussion regarding pursuits that hold eternal value.*

As Peter urges the elders with the imperative *feed the flock of God,* he is calling first-century church leaders to serve dutifully in the capacity of *oversight.* A key to effective oversight is remembering the former failed shepherds of Israel and avoiding their sin.

In contrast, the kind of shepherd that Peter envisions is characterized in two distinct ways, expressed by four rarely used Greek adverbs set in pairs. The first set of adverbs is present in the phrase *not by constraint, but willingly.* The intent of this thought is self-evident. But it is worth pointing out that the Greek adverb translated as *willingly* here occurs in the New Testament only two times: here and in Hebrews 10:26, where it refers to sinning deliberately. It means something along the lines of acting purposefully, without reluctance.

The second phrase is *not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind*. This contrast features a pair of Greek adverbs found nowhere else in the New Testament. A form of the adverb translated here as *filthy lucre* is found in 2 Maccabees 11:12. That passage is from a book in the non-biblical collection of texts known as the *Apocrypha.* This collection was written during the centuries between the Old and New Testaments. As such, it sheds light on Jewish history during that time. The apocryphal passage records an action that is shameful and disgraceful. We may wonder how that is the opposite of "a ready mind"! Here again, we are assisted by how the second underlying Greek adverb is used in the non-biblical *Apocrypha.* Second Maccabees 6:28 and 11:7 use this underlying Greek word to mean "willing" or "willingness." The meaning is different than the previous use of "willingly," above. This "willingness" is connected to the idea of voluntary action or prompt response. Peter uses it to emphasize the desire he wants elders to feel regarding their position as shepherds of God's flock (compare 1 Corinthians 9:17; Philemon 14).

3. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.

To be an elder is to be in a position of service. Just as Peter chose to identify himself as a fellow elder and witness of Christ, church leaders are to serve the flock without hierarchical pressure. Their humility will model the example of Christ, who

came to serve and suffer for His people (Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:5–11).

Peter illustrates this model with one more comparison, but this time he uses participles rather than adverbs. For elders to be *ensamples* means the same thing as being "examples" (John 13:15; James 5:10).

The word *heritage* in this verse refers to what may be called a "rightful possession," or one's inheritance. In the context of ministry, however, it can also be a share in responsibility or duties (Acts 1:17). Given the context in which he writes, Peter uses the term in the latter sense. God has placed His flock in the care of the elders, and their role is to model God's ways to the people under their care instead of leading with authoritative heavy-handedness.

What Do You Think?

How are leading by example and the concept of servant-leadership connected?

Digging Deeper

How does integrity-filled modeling combat condescension, patronizing interactions, or attitudes of superiority?

B. The Chief Shepherd (v. 4)

4. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

The third part of Peter's earlier identification, that he will share in God's glory, comes back around here. He brings his listeners into an awareness of a future time *when* Jesus will return. In the end, faithful leaders may look forward to receiving an eternal *crown*. The crown is a common image in the New Testament, used to refer to the future reward that believers will obtain. Peter calls it the crown *of glory*; Paul calls it an "incorruptible" crown (1 Corinthians 9:25) and a "crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:8). James calls it "the crown of life," referring to the eternal life that God will give His people (James 1:12).

By calling Jesus the *chief Shepherd*, Peter emphasizes that the elders serve under Christ. It is from Him that they will receive their reward.

II. Message to the Younger

(1 Peter 5:5–7)

A. Practice Humility (vv. 5–6)

5a. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.

Peter now turns from speaking to church leaders to address those who are to follow those leaders in faith. As with the term *elder*, some scholars propose that the designation *younger* here refers primarily to their status in the community rather than their physical age. They do not hold the duties of church leadership. In that light, Peter encourages submission, which most likely means recognizing the authority of the church elders (compare Hebrews 13:17).

Peter next offers general instructions for the whole church. The call to *be subject one to another* doesn't appear in the earliest manuscripts of this book. Still, the idea is biblical (Ephesians 5:21). To be *clothed with humility* is to subject oneself to service, valuing the welfare of others as more significant than one's own (compare Philippians 2:3–4). The apostle Paul repeatedly uses the image of putting on clothing to represent alignment with Christ and His character; it depicts a transformed spiritual identity (Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; 6:11; Colossians 3:12).

5b. For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

The reason for Peter's directives is found in Proverbs 3:34, which he quotes. If you flip your Bible to that passage and notice that the quote is somewhat different than what Peter says here, it is because Peter is not quoting from the Hebrew, which is the basis of your Old Testament. Instead, he is quoting from the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament that was translated in the second and third centuries BC for the benefit of Greek-speaking Jews (compare James 4:6).

6. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

Peter's grammatical style involves using a lot of verbs structured in what's called "the imperative mood." Such verbs introduce things that simply

must be done—no *ifs, ands,* or *buts*! We've already encountered two such imperatives in this lesson ("feed" in 1 Peter 5:2 and "submit" in 5:5a). With the word *humble* we encounter yet another one (compare James 4:10). Humbling oneself should be the natural result of applying the wisdom of the proverb just noted. The equation seems simple enough: "no humility, no grace."

The idea of God using His *hand* to save His people is repeated throughout the book of Exodus (Exodus 3:19; 13:3, 9, 14, 16). By using this anthropomorphism, Peter reminds his audience of God's ability and intent to rectify the world's wrongs; readers need not rely on their own power.

What Do You Think?

Does God's grace result *from* our humility, or does God's grace result *in* our humility?

Digging Deeper

Which reading aligns with your personal experience of humility and grace?

B. Receive Care (v. 7)

7. Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

While this verse is often treated as a separate idea, the form of Greek expression that is translated as *casting* implies that this verse is an expansion of Peter's previous point. In other words, one way to humble ourselves is to trust God completely with our cares (anxieties). First-century believers certainly worried about things like food and shelter, but the emphasis in verse 6 (above) is on rejecting the competition for status present in Greco-Roman society. By *care*, then, Peter most likely refers to status and wealth. Because the almighty God of Israel cares for them, believers can trust that He will fulfill the needs that the Gentiles compete and backstab to obtain.

What Do You Think?

How does casting one's cares upon God connect to humility?

Digging Deeper

How do you actively trust God with your cares?

III. Message to Spiritual Family

(1 Peter 5:8–9)

A. Stay Alert (v. 8)

8a. Be sober, be vigilant.

There are thirty-five imperative verbs in 1 Peter, and the two we see here are numbers thirty-one and thirty-two. Interestingly, the apostle Paul uses the same two verbs in 1 Thessalonians 5:6, but he reverses their order and uses the "subjunctive mood" rather than the imperative. The subjunctive is the mood of "unreality"—something that *should* happen, but so far it hasn't. Neither Peter nor Paul is giving take-it-or-leave-it advice!

The Greek verb translated as *be sober* means exercising self-control (also 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; compare 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8; 2 Timothy 4:5). It refers to a general state of self-discipline. Being *vigilant* stresses anew Jesus' command for watchfulness (Matthew 25:42–43; Mark 13:34–35).

8b. Because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.

This spiritual reality is what makes Peter's imperatives so vital to implement (compare Job 1:7). The plan of *the devil* is diametrically opposed to the plan of God (1 John 3:8–10).

What Do You Think?

How does remembering our adversary impact your application of Peter's imperative "be sober, be vigilant"?

Digging Deeper

What other commands are you nudged to apply when you take our adversary seriously?

B. Resist in Solidarity (v. 9)

9a. Whom resist stedfast in the faith.

The word *resist* brings us to imperative number thirty-three (compare James 4:7). As we ponder what is involved in resisting the devil, we should first remember that in the New Testament era the devil is a defeated enemy (Luke 10:18; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8). But a *defeated* foe is not necessarily a *powerless* foe (compare Ephesians 4:27;

2 Timothy 2:26). Thus, we are wise to explore what it means to remain *stedfast in the faith,* and there are at least two possibilities.

It could refer to one's strength or firmness in *the* faith, that is, the whole Christian belief system. In that sense, Peter would be talking about one's commitment to the body of Christian doctrine (compare Acts 6:7; 14:22; 1 Timothy 1:10; 4:6, 16; Jude 3). On the other hand, Peter may be referring to the strength of a *believer's* faith or trust in God. The latter seems most likely in this context, as Peter has been emphasizing the importance of trusting God rather than relying on oneself.

9b. Knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

To encourage his readers, Peter reminds them that they are not alone in their suffering. Others around *the world* are experiencing the same things.

IV. Message of Restoration

(1 Peter 5:10–11)

A. Temporary Suffering (v. 10)

10. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

Peter concludes his instruction with a final encouragement. Believers' suffering will not go on forever—they have the aid of *the God of all grace*. The God who *called* them to *his eternal glory* will come to their rescue. Peter uses multiple synonyms to emphasize the certainty of God's promise (*stablish*, *strengthen*, *settle*). He will protect His people, deliver them through their sufferings, and bring them into glory (compare Romans 8:14–25).

Secondhand Clothes

Because of their limited financial resources, my mother and her three sisters grew up wearing "hand-me-downs." Personal frugality led her to dress me in the same manner. Unfortunately, there were times when my secondhand clothing caused me embarrassment.

As an adult, however, I understand why my parents economized in the ways they did. I even agree with their values (and often buy used clothes)! My parents guided me beyond earthly expectations and values to the virtues of character, such as honesty, integrity, humility, and living within our means.

Do you have an example of suffering at the hands of worldly expectations or values? —KS

B. Eternal Power (v. 11)

11. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

The body of Peter's letter ends with a doxology, a formal expression of praise to God. By one count, there are about twenty doxologies in the New Testament (Romans 9:5; Ephesians 3:20–21; etc.).

Conclusion

A. Countercultural

Peter's call to live in a countercultural manner remains essential for us today. One need only spend a few minutes on social media to find the same infatuation with power and prestige that was present in the first-century Greco-Roman world. And, as recent scandals have shown, churches have not entirely escaped this danger. Peter's first epistle still calls us to humility, self-control, and resistance of the devil. It still calls us to push back against worldly fixations on wealth, fame, and power. Peter calls us to live in the present as citizens of God's coming kingdom, ones who know that God's kingdom is quickly approaching.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, strengthen us to endure life's challenges and to resist the devil as You prepare us for Christ's return. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Resist evil by standing firm in faith.

How to Say It

Aequi	*Ee*-kwai
Cincinnatus	Sin-suh-*na*-tuhs (*Na* as in *nah*)
Septuagint	Sep-*too*-ih-jent
Tusculum	*Tuh*-skuh-luhm

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Create two columns on the board. Label the left column *Our Weaknesses* and the right column *Ways to Avoid Excess.* Ask learners to brainstorm examples for each column. Begin by asking individuals to call out types of food or drink that tempt them to consume larger-than-healthy amounts. Second, ask learners to call out things people might do, or methods they might use, to avoid acting on the temptation to indulge. (Example: *ice cream // don't buy this food from the supermarket*) Then ask students to identify any patterns or themes they see in their overall list of answers.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "In today's lesson we'll see how the apostle Peter urges believers to resist temptations, worldly preoccupations, and the devil's schemes."

Into the Word

Read 1 Peter 5:1–7 aloud. Then divide learners into three groups: **Older Believers**, **Younger Believers**, and **All Believers**. Give each group a half sheet of paper and a pen. Ask each group to record the directives given to the audience they represent. Then ask them to answer the following questions: 1–What imperative(s) did Peter give the group you represent? 2–What reward or promise might believers look forward to by following Peter's command(s)? 3–What evil or temptation(s) will believers avoid by following Peter's instructions?

When groups have finished discussing, bring the class back together and ask a representative from each group to share their answers. Lead a whole-class discussion regarding how these commands might be applied in the life and relationships of a local church.

Distribute index cards and pens to every student. Invite a volunteer to read 1 Peter 5:5b–11 out loud. Then pose the question, "How might a believer actively resist the devil?" Ask individuals to spend one minute considering a real-life example of resistance. Then give them one additional minute to write down their answer. Invite volunteers to share their examples with the whole class. Make a third column on the whiteboard labeled *Resist!* Compile students' answers in this column. As appropriate, encourage participants to answer: 1–What active things might you do to resist the devil? 2–What things should you actively avoid doing in order to resist the devil? 3–How or where might you find strength for resistance? 4–How do God's provision and power play into your answer(s)?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "What He Has Promised" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask pairs or small groups to complete the exercise as indicated.

Into Life

Distribute index cards and pens. Say, "Today's text mentions elders, the younger, and all believers in a way that allows us to find ourselves somewhere on the list." Invite learners to consider which group they most closely identify with today. Ask them to write their answer on their card. Then ask them to pray for one minute, asking God to help them determine which of Peter's directives they need to put into practice. Instruct them to write their goal application on the card as well.

Pass out small note cards with envelopes. Say, "God wants us to encourage one another in faith. He's purposefully placed us in a family comprised of various ages, maturity levels, and experiences." Invite learners to write a short, encouraging note to a younger believer whom God brings to mind. Remind them to include the concepts of sober watchfulness, standing firm in faith, and resisting the devil. Encourage students to give or mail their note sometime in the coming week.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Keep Them in Mind" exercise from the activity page. Encourage learners to complete this activity at home to pray for the young believer God brought to mind.

Confirm Your Calling

Devotional Reading: Matthew 7:21–29
Background Scripture: 2 Peter 1–3

2 Peter 1:3–11

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:10–13

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Key Text

Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. **—2 Peter 1:10**

Power to
the People

Unit 3: Living in Perilous Times

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify characteristics of holy living that help strengthen our knowledge of Christ.
2. Explain the pressing need for godliness, considering a new heaven, a new earth, and the coming "day of the Lord."
3. Plan to pursue a characteristic of holy living in the week ahead.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Careful Cultivation
- B. Lesson Context: Historical
- C. Lesson Context: Literary

I. Present Situation (2 Peter 1:3–11)
- A. Precious Promises (vv. 3–4)
  Knowledge That Equips
- B. Furthering Faith (vv. 5–7)
- C. Diverging Directions (vv. 8–9)
  Shortsighted Ducks
- D. Certain Calling (vv. 10–11)

II. Future Hope (2 Peter 3:10–13)
- A. The Day (v. 10)
- B. The Devotion (vv. 11–12)
- C. The Dwelling (v. 13)

Conclusion
- A. Lasting Character
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Careful Cultivation

My mother always kept a garden. She believed that anything worth eating ought to be grown slowly, tended daily, and harvested with care. As a boy, I remember watching her stoop down beside the rows, pulling weeds and gently cultivating the soil. One day I asked her why she didn't just leave it alone and let the plants grow on their own. She simply said, "Weeds grow fast and will kill the fruit and vegetables."

Her words stuck with me. Many things in life need tending—like our habits, character, and faith—because growth does not happen by accident. If left untended, our hearts will quickly fill with things that do not belong. We must rise each day with patience and intention, remembering that fruitfulness takes time and purposeful cultivation. Today's text encourages believers to pursue active growth and long-term vision.

What Do You Think?

How do you know which is best practice—to pull the weeds or let unwanted plants grow among the healthy ones?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 13:3–23, 27–30; and Colossians 3:5–9 affect your answer?

B. Lesson Context: Historical

The apostle Peter sent his two letters from the city of Rome, to which he gave the code name "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13). He penned this second one near the end of his life, and it reflects his concern for preserving apostolic teaching in the face of rising threats. Emperor Nero reigned at this time (AD 54–68) and fostered an environment that was actively hostile toward Christians.

Peter doesn't name the recipients of his second letter as specifically as those of the first (compare 1 Peter 1:1–2 with 2 Peter 1:1–2). Under the pressure of external persecution, the churches also faced internal doctrinal deviations. Peter warns against false teachers who were dismissing Christ's return,

denying the coming judgment, and thereby living immoral lives. The denial of the second coming of Christ forms the backdrop for Peter's exhortation to moral steadfastness and eschatological hope in the second of today's texts (2 Peter 3:4).

C. Lesson Context: Literary

The letter we call 2 Peter shares a significant overlap with the book of Jude. Both are concerned with apostasy and divine judgment. As such, their tone is largely negative as they push back against false teachers and their doctrines. Most of us would rather talk about "the good things" of the Christian faith and avoid spending much time on problematic issues. But since doctrinal error and sinful behavior exist, the subject must not be ignored.

The letter opens with an affirmation that anchors Christian ethics to God's promises rather than human works (2 Peter 1:3). In contrast, the closing chapter lifts the reader's gaze beyond the "here-and-nowness" of persecutions and false teachings to the certainty of divine judgment and the coming of a "new heavens and a new earth" (3:13).

Literarily, the letter functions as a farewell address (2 Peter 1:12–15). Framed in this way, Peter reminds his readers that the apostolic witness is trustworthy because it is grounded in eyewitness testimony and the prophetic word (1:16–21). The inclusion of this letter in the New Testament points to the enduring reliability of Scripture and the certainty of God's promises.

I. Present Situation

(2 Peter 1:3–11)

A. Precious Promises (vv. 3–4)

3. According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.

Peter begins with a reminder that God provides for His people. *His divine power* imparts to believers everything needed to maintain a healthy relationship with God and to live a sound *life*. The ability to do so flows from believers' *knowledge* of God, our faith in Him, and our relationship with Him. The type of knowledge that Peter refers to here is a precise and correct awareness of God—who He is, what constitutes His will, and the gifts we receive from Him through Christ.

God calls believers to exhibit *glory and virtue*. This glory was displayed by Jesus in the incarnation (John 1:14). It is descriptive of God's magnificent presence and is noted throughout the Scriptures as light or radiance (compare Exodus 34:29–35; Matthew 17:2; Revelation 21:23).

Greco-Roman culture valued virtue. Romans believed that pursuing virtue would bring excellence and wholeness to one's life. Greek philosophers believed the top virtues to be piety, perseverance, wisdom, and discipline. Here, Peter uses the term *virtue* to mean "moral goodness." Believers are called to reflect God's goodness and light.

What Do You Think?

How do believers exhibit God's glory and virtue?

Digging Deeper

If you were making a list of godly characteristics that lead toward Christian maturity, which would you include?

Knowledge That Equips

I had a hard day this week. Amidst the frustration, I remained inwardly focused and neglected to talk to God about the situation. I decided to go for a walk, hoping fresh air would help.

As I headed for the door, I noticed that our smallest cat was looking up at me hopefully. Quickly, I dropped to the carpet and began petting her. As I comforted her, a Scripture came to mind. The Holy Spirit used it to console my scattered heart and remind me that God is always poised to provide, "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

The knowledge of God's love for me rushed into my heart, and it shocked me out of the strange mental corner into which I'd backed myself. After a few more affectionate scratches under the chin, I left. As I strolled through my neighborhood, I poured my heart out before

God. He listened and continued to whisper to my heart just what I needed to lay my anxieties down and trust Him with the situation. How has your intimate awareness of God equipped you with something you needed? —DS-G

4a. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

The *great and precious promises* mentioned here come directly to believers out of God's *divine* power, mentioned above. However, Peter leaves the specific promises that he has in mind unspecified. Most likely, he is referring to the promises of the new covenant: a renewed relationship with God that is enabled by the forgiveness of sins and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Matthew 26:27–28; 1 Corinthians 11:25). When believers become part of God's people through the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, God's *divine nature* is restored within them. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us is indeed an *exceedingly precious* gift!

4b. Having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The goal of the Christian life is to *escape* worldly desires and values. Christians can successfully fight *corruption* because of our participation with the Holy Spirit in living godly lives. But not everyone succeeds in doing so (example: 2 Timothy 4:10).

What Do You Think?

What are the "exceeding great and precious promises" that God gives?

Digging Deeper

Which reading aligns with your personal experience of humility and grace?

B. Furthering Faith (vv. 5–7)

5a. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue.

Although God gives all that is needed to live a life worthy of the Christian calling, effort is required from believers. We are responsible for our conduct and spiritual maturation, while remembering that growth is impossible without God's provision. The qualities of a faithful life must be built through cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

Peter asks believers to diligently pursue a list of godly characteristics. We are to take the *faith* we have in God, through which He supplies grace and power, and *add* to it moral excellence.

5b. And to virtue knowledge.

Peter continues his character chain, building additional traits upon the previous. Believers are to add *knowledge* to their moral goodness. Knowledge in this context refers to a practical, lived discernment that shapes one's conduct. It reflects the kind of knowledge that leads to right action. This type of knowledge is practical and rooted in the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7).

6a. And to knowledge temperance.

Temperance refers to more than abstaining from intoxicating beverages—it relates to complete self-control. Believers are to build up their *knowledge* by supplementing it with restraint in action or the practice of self-control. Knowledge helps one know what to do, and temperance enhances the ability to follow through with right action. Mastery over oneself in the context of Christian discipleship means that one does not give in to the lusts of the world.

Temperance is also included in Paul's listing of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). One who is committed to Christ and has received the gift of the Holy Spirit is granted the ability to walk in the Spirit (Acts 2:38; 2 Corinthians 12:18; Galatians 5:16). This is vital!

6b. And to temperance patience.

One cannot successfully practice *temperance* in a consistent manner without *patience*—the ability to hold to enduring peace. Patient people bear their challenges, frustrations, and difficulties with grace. They are not hasty or impulsive. When patience is added to temperance, one's character grows in foundational steadiness and the ability to withstand adversity.

6c. And to patience godliness.

The next link in Peter's chain connects long-term endurance with piety toward God. *Godliness* is the act of choosing God's way—holding tightly to holy character—in every situation. Godly people direct their feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and actions toward God out of reverence for Him.

They exhibit devotion toward God and choose to live in a manner that respects God's will and ways.

7a. And to godliness brotherly kindness.

Peter now turns from character traits that relate the believer to God and right personal action to characteristics that support healthy interactions with others.

The term for *brotherly kindness* in Greek is a compound term (literally the word *philadelphia,* like the city of that name) that refers to sibling love. We become part of God's people, adopted into His family, through our acceptance of Christ (Galatians 4:4–7). As in any family, there are expectations of love and care for one another. Biblical kindness is not merely a feeling. Rather, it is the call to devout honor among believers (Romans 12:10).

7b. And to brotherly kindness charity.

The final element in Peter's chain is *charity*, which is often translated as "love" (examples: John 15:10; Romans 5:8; Galatians 5:13). Here is the climactic virtue! Peter does not mean charity in the sense of benevolent giving, but rather as true, undefiled, wholistic love put into action.

Christ is the perfect model of this kind of love (John 15:13). He claims it as the second most important commandment (Matthew 22:39). This type of love is often presented in Scripture as the defining mark of a faithful Christian (John 13:34–35; 1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Colossians 3:14; 1 Peter 4:8). In a way, charity encompasses all the previous virtues. It is undoubtedly the aim of the Christian life.

What Do You Think?

Which characteristic from Peter's list is the hardest for you to claim?

Digging Deeper

How will you work to pursue that characteristic further?

C. Diverging Directions (vv. 8–9)

8. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The hopeful result of implementing the characteristics from Peter's list is bountiful spiritual fruit. God has desired fruitful lives for His children from the beginning (examples: Genesis 1:28; 17:6; Deuteronomy 30:9–10). Conversely, God warns that disobedience results in *barren* disaster (30:17–18). God wants us to be both productive and effective.

Peter specifically connects believers' effectiveness to their *knowledge* of *Christ*. This knowledge is a fullness of wisdom and intelligence that flows out of spiritual truth. The abundant presence of the virtues that Peter encourages believers to pursue results in an intimate comprehension and experience of Christ.

9. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

Peter continues to speak to believers—his statement here is not to those outside the family of God. A believer who lacks the characteristics that Peter encourages will experience spiritual blindness. They will suffer a deficit in long-range vision as they struggle with holding onto the truth of being a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The truth is that the blood of Jesus has removed believers' former *sins*. If we do not "walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 John 1:7), however, we will remain in the darkness of our own blinded eyes (2:11).

Shortsighted Ducks

We raised ducks this spring; when they were old enough to leave the brooder, we created a spacious pen for them in our garden. The garden sports two kiddie pools and paths full of bugs and weeds, both of which we were eager for the ducklings to consume. To our surprise, the ducks scarcely travelled five feet from where we set them down!

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh-*losh*-unz
eschaton	*eh*-skuh-tawn
Galatians	Guh-*lay*-shunz
Thessalonians	*Thess*-uh-***lo***-nee-unz (*th* as in *thin*)

Their behavior stayed constant for days. We'd given them at least a thousand square feet to live within safely, and yet they remained rooted to their spot. Their little patch of ground grew muddy and unpleasant.

We had to encourage the little creatures to explore, poking and prodding them to expand their "vision." They didn't like it much at first. After weeks of growth, however, they've happily claimed the garden and all its delights.

Peter urges followers of Jesus to grow in various ways. When we neglect to embrace all the tools that God provides for the pursuit of Christian maturity, we risk displeasing Him as we live like those shortsighted baby ducks. How are you purposefully utilizing all the tools God provides to live a whole, full, fruitful life in Christ? —DS-G

D. Certain Calling (vv. 10–11)

10. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.

To be called is to be invited; to be elected is to be chosen. These are two parts of the same concept. God wants us to be part of His family—He chooses us for this and calls us to accept His invitation (John 12:32).

The underlying Greek word, translated here as *diligence*, carries a sense of zealous action—it emphasizes a sustained effort (compare Romans 12:8). This word is typically used in contexts requesting obedience or careful attention from readers (examples: 2 Corinthians 8:7–8, 16). Christian maturity is neither passive nor accidental.

The promise attached to diligent effort—*ye shall never fall*—does not imply absolute immunity. Instead, it suggests spiritual stability and endurance. Peter is striking a balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Believers must pursue the assurance of salvation in obedience, with the confidence that God's grace enables the very persistence that He commands.

What Do You Think?

How can modern Christians apply diligence to their faith?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do divine sovereignty and human responsibility work together toward fullness in Christ?



Visual for Lesson 10. *Use this visual to lead a time of quiet reflection, asking learners to identify which character traits they feel called to pursue.*

11. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Peter's view of the eschaton (the end times or day of the Lord) looks to the things that are still to come. That may sound obvious, but on the flip side, the New Testament also places God's *kingdom* events in the here and now (Luke 17:21; etc.). Theologians refer to this phenomenon as the "already not yet." In other words, Christ's kingdom is already here in the church (Colossians 1:13), and yet, His kingdom will come in its fullness at the end of the age (Revelation 12:10). Entrance into this final, ultimate kingdom is the goal toward which believers confidently place their expectations. *The everlasting kingdom* is the promised eternal life with God (Daniel 2:44; 7:14; Luke 1:33; Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 11:15).

II. Future Hope

(2 Peter 3:10–13)

A. The Day (v. 10)

10. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth

also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

The day of the Lord is frequently mentioned in the writings of the Old Testament prophets as the time when God will judge the world and restore order (Isaiah 2:12; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18–20). Peter builds on these prophecies by reminding his audience that this day will come like *a thief in the night*, which is a simile that depicts the unexpectedness of its timing. Jesus used this same simile while teaching His disciples (Matthew 24:42–44). The apostle Paul also used it in his first letter to the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

Peter goes on to paint the general picture of what will happen on this day. He uses intense apocalyptic language (compare Matthew 24:29–31; Mark 13:24–27; Luke 21:25–28), speaking of *great noise*, melting, burning, and *fervent heat*. The message is that God will test every created thing with fire; all creation is subject to God's judgment. The apostle Paul sounds a similar warning in 1 Corinthians 3:12–15.

B. The Devotion (vv. 11–12)

11. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.

Because the readers know that the world will eventually *be dissolved*, they must seek to be people of spiritual integrity. This requires an acute awareness of, and behavior consistent with, being a holy priesthood and a holy nation (1 Peter 2:5, 9 [Lesson 4]). They must be *holy* because God is holy (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15–16 [Lesson 2]). They are to pursue upright lives that are identified by godly character (2 Peter 1:3–8, above). Peter is contrasting *the things* that will pass away with the virtues that will remain eternally.

12. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Two verses prior, Peter used the phrase "the day of the Lord," an expression that occurs about two dozen times in the Bible. Now he switches to writing about *the day of God*. This exact phrase is quite rare in the Bible, occurring only here and in Revelation 16:14. He also uses the phrase "the day of visitation" in 1 Peter 2:12 (Lesson 5) and "the day of judgment" in 2 Peter 2:9. This kind of repetition is a valuable teaching tool, and Peter wants to make sure his readers get the message! So he stresses the divine destruction by *fire* that is to come, driving home its seriousness. Believers are to expect it. In fact, they are to speed its coming; Christians may hasten *the day of God* with prayer, evangelism, and holy living (Matthew 6:10; 24:14).

C. The Dwelling (v. 13)

13. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

The prophecy of *new heavens and a new earth* comes from Isaiah 65:17; 66:22 and is repeated in Revelation 21:1. This future reality helps Peter's readers look beyond their current circumstances. After the destruction of the current heavens and earth, there will be a renewal of the cosmos. The significant feature that separates the new creation from the old is that it will be the realm in which *righteousness* dwells (compare Revelation 22:14–15). The holiness and righteousness of God will permeate the new order.

Conclusion

A. Lasting Character

The book of 2 Peter pairs concerns regarding allegiance to biblical doctrine with a strong emphasis on the moral transformation of believers. It all ties in with the promise of a new creation. The nature of God's eternal kingdom is the standard Christians are to strive for in the here and now. What should you put into practice?

B. Prayer

Father, convict us of the need to conform to Christ's image as we strive for spiritual maturity and godly character. Assist us in looking ahead, toward Your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Let righteousness dwell in you.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Write these roles as headings on the board: *Boss, Friend, Government Leader*. Divide the class into groups and assign a different role to each group. (Assign the same role to more than one group if you have more than three groups.) Ask class members to decide the characteristics they look for in the role they were assigned. After five minutes, ask groups to share their responses. Make a list under each heading, then compare the lists. Lead a whole-class discussion on the following questions: 1–Which traits are similar between roles? 2–What traits seem specific to a single role? 3–What are the differences we notice? Lead into Bible study by saying, "Let's see how our list of characteristics compares with the characteristics that Peter says should describe every believer."

Into the Word

Before class, write each of the characteristics from 2 Peter 1:5–7 on a separate piece of construction paper. Display these signs around the room.

Ask a volunteer to read 2 Peter 1:3–11 out loud. Then divide the class into groups: the **Faith and Virtue Group**, the **Knowledge and Self-Control Group**, the **Patience and Godliness Group**, and the **Love Group**. Ask each group to use study Bibles, commentaries, Bible dictionaries, or online resources to define the term(s) they were assigned. Give groups ten minutes to work and then call time. Reconvene the class and ask a volunteer from each group to share their definitions and discoveries.

Ask a volunteer to read 2 Peter 3:10–13 out loud. Distribute a handout (you make) and a pen to every student. Create your handout with the following statements, omitting the Scripture references (which are present to help if groups need a hint):

1. The world is so evil that even Christians have little chance of overcoming the evil in it. (2 Peter 1:3–4)
2. Believers must demonstrate the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5–7 if they want to get to heaven. (2 Peter 1:8–11)
3. There's no connection between our past sins and the possibility for current error. (2 Peter 1:9)
4. Once Christians have been saved, they need not worry about falling short of God's standards. (2 Peter 1:10)
5. It will be easy to pinpoint when Christ is returning. (2 Peter 3:10)
6. The end of the world will be a beautiful, peaceful event. (2 Peter 3:10)
7. The end of the world is far off, and believers need not concern themselves with it today. (2 Peter 3:11–12)
8. Jesus will come to save His followers, but the world that is left will be as bad as the world we have today. (2 Peter 3:13)

Ask students to work with a partner to explain why each statement is false. Ask for citations of specific verses. After ten minutes, walk the class through the list, explaining why each item is false. Ask class members to restate the sentences to make them true.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "A Fiery End" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask students to find a partner with whom to complete the activity as indicated.

Into Life

Distribute index cards. Ask students to take a minute to consider which characteristic of godly living God would like them to pursue this week. After one minute, invite learners to write it on their card. Then ask students to flip over the card and make a plan as to how they will put that characteristic into practice in the coming week.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "A New Beginning" exercise from the activity page. Ask learners to complete it as indicated.

Walk in Light

Devotional Reading: Psalm 103:1–14
Background Scriptures: 1 John 1–3; 4:7–8; 5:3–4

1 John 1:5–10

5 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 3:6–8

6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

1 John 4:7–8

7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

1 John 5:3–4

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Key Text

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. **—1 John 1:7**

Power to
the People

Unit 3: Living in Perilous Times

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the pairs of terms used in the lesson's Scripture text.
2. Explain how fellowship with God leads to greater fellowship with other believers.
3. Write a personal reflection about a time they chose "light" over "darkness."

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Where Are You From?
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Message (1 John 1:5–10)
- A. Walk in Light . . . (vv. 5–7)
- B. . . . And Confess Sin (vv. 8–10)
  The Spiritual "Personality Test"

II. The Warning (1 John 3:6–8)
- A. Sin Deceives . . . (vv. 6–7a)
- B. . . . But God Is Righteous (vv. 7b–8)

III. The Imperative (1 John 4:7–8)
- A. Love One Another . . . (v. 7)
- B. . . . Because God Is Love (v. 8)
  An Exceptional Call

IV. The Promise (1 John 5:3–4)
- A. Keep His Commands . . . (v. 3)
- B. . . . And Overcome the World (v. 4)

Conclusion
- A. How Do You Live?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Where Are You From?

"Where are you from?" is a common question exchanged between people. It might be asked by Americans when their paths cross while on a European vacation. Similarly, the question could be posed by Europeans who encounter other tourists in one of the many national parks in the United States. But one does not have to be on foreign soil; the same question might arise in conversation between residents of the same town. The question of where we live is important; it forms part of our identity. Sharing this information can provide others with some insights about who we are.

For people living in the same vicinity as each other, a related question is, "Where do you live? Have you ever heard someone answer that question with "I live in Christ"? Whether we respond that way or not, the letter of 1 John encourages us to think about the implications of that statement. How might your life change if you were to ask yourself each day, "Where will I live today?"

B. Lesson Context

Today's lesson comes from parts of 1 John, which is one of the General Epistles. This section consists of eight writings: Hebrews; James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Jude.

Although 1 John is not attributed to the apostle John by name as the writer, it shares close connections with the language and themes of the Gospel of John. For example, both emphasize Christ as the "Word," and both use "light" and "darkness" as metaphors. Additionally, both emphasize the command to love.

First John takes the form of a letter, but it reads like a sermon, offering us insight into the challenges that early Christians faced. Church history associates the letter with the church in Ephesus, located in modern-day Turkey. While we are uncertain about the specific issues confronting the original audience, it appears that the letter's recipients had encountered false teachers whom John referred to as having a "spirit of antichrist" (1 John 4:3). These individuals seem to have broken away from the local church and promoted alternative

ways of being Christian (2:19). Their teachings included denying that Jesus had come in the flesh, claiming that it only seemed like He did. This heresy is known as Docetism (compare 1:1–4; 2:22; 4:3; 5:6–7). Additionally, its advocates promoted a return to idol worship (compare 5:21) and a general lack of love for one another (compare 4:7).

Further threats included the allure of an early form of a heresy known as Gnosticism. Among other things, followers of this belief system taught that morality and love were unimportant, so long as a person had "secret knowledge" of the world. The imperatives in today's text reveal the apostle John's remedy for spiritual infections such as these.

I. The Message

(1 John 1:5–10)

A. Walk in Light . . . (vv. 5–7)

5a. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you.

The *message* consists of the facts of the gospel: the good news that Jesus Christ has come to earth, announcing eternal life and fellowship with God (compare John 1:1–5). John can write with authority about this message because he has first-hand experience (see 1 John 1:1). Now, he will *declare* details of that message.

5b. That God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

The New Testament uses the terms *light* and *darkness* as metaphors to contrast the ways of righteousness and unrighteousness, respectively (examples: Matthew 4:16; 6:23; Ephesians 5:8–14). John expands on that usage by declaring that *God is light*, meaning God is pure and holy in every possible way.

The Old Testament describes God's perfect glory as being like a light that shines on His people (Psalm 4:6; Isaiah 60:1–2; etc.). In contrast, ancient philosophers believed that pagan gods were mixtures of good and evil—light and darkness. However, the one true God, revealed through Christ Jesus, is free from any *darkness* or taint of sin. We come to know God and obey Him when we recognize His holiness.

6. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.



Visual for Lesson 11. *Display this visual and ask, "How can we experience fellowship with one another as we walk in the light of God?"*

This verse contains the first of five conditional if-then statements. To attain *fellowship with* God means establishing a close and abiding relationship with God the Father through Christ Jesus (1 John 1:3). By this intimate relationship of living in God, we learn to love Him and demonstrate our love through obedience and a commitment to walk in His light of truth (3:24; compare John 3:21; 14:21, 23).

Some people claim to be in fellowship with God, but their lives do not reflect being in the light of God. They claim to be God's children, yet they engage in behaviors of *darkness* that God condemns. Their lives are a *lie* and *do not* tell the *truth* (compare 1 John 4:20). Downplaying the seriousness of sin, they have left the fellowship of believers. Their relationship with God is a sham, as their lives are focused solely on themselves (compare Romans 16:17–18).

7. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

The second conditional statement offers a message of hope. We nurture a strong relationship with God by walking *in the light* (compare 1 John 1:5b, above). John does not specify precisely how we should walk in this manner. However, the writers of the New Testament connect living in

Christ with obeying His commands (John 3:19–21; Romans 13:12–14; Ephesians 5:8–20; etc.). By walking in the light, we strengthen our *fellowship* with other believers.

As we remain in the light, we never lose sight of the fact that our sins have been paid for by *the blood of Jesus,* which has been shed for our redemption (1 Peter 1:19–20 [Lesson 3]; Revelation 1:5). The blood of Jesus pays the penalty for our sins, purifying us from the guilt that prevents us from being in the presence of the holy God.

What Do You Think?

What steps can you take this week to walk more consistently in God's light?

Digging Deeper

What attitudes or habits help you remain in step with God's light? How do Psalm 119:105 and Galatians 5:16–18 offer encouragement in this pursuit?

B. . . . And Confess Sin (vv. 8–10)

8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

It is unlikely that John is discussing a hypothetical situation. There apparently are false teachers trying to convince the church that they have *no sin* at all (see Lesson Context). We know this is not true, both from our experience and from God's Word (see Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23). Even those who are the most spiritually mature can stumble (example: Galatians 2:11–14). We live in *truth* by acknowledging our sin (see next verse).

9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

To *confess* means to acknowledge and name *our sins* before God. It means we are not comfortable with our sin, nor do we ignore it (examples: Acts 19:18; Romans 7:24; James 5:16; compare Luke 15:21).

God shows His holiness by being *faithful* to us through His *just* forgiveness, as He promises to remember our sins no more (see Jeremiah 31:34). We who are *unrighteous* are counted as being righteous by the God who is both just and the one who justifies (Romans 3:26). He is just because that is His inherent nature; He justifies us because the penalty for our sins has been paid (Titus 2:14).

What Do You Think?

How can you build acts of confession into the rhythm of your weekly life of prayer and worship?

Digging Deeper

Who is a trusted believer with whom you can share confession and prayer (compare James 5:16)?

10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

John presents the foremost implication of claiming to deny our sinfulness: doing so implies that we are calling God *a liar.* By claiming that we do not need a Savior, we are implying that God did not need to send Jesus to die for our sins. The scaffold of falsehood that results is in constant opposition to God's Word (compare Daniel 8:12).

The Spiritual "Personality Test"

Upon hearing the word *personality* spoken in a conversation, a would-be comedian responded, "Personality? I always wanted to have one of those!" But in all seriousness, many people complete various "tests," such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or Big Five Personality Test, to identify strengths, weaknesses, and the traits that make up their personalities. After receiving results, the natural tendency is to boast about strengths and downplay any weaknesses.

But Scripture confronts us with one "test result" that applies to all humanity: we are sinners. This failure is an issue of our hearts, which are corrupted by sin (compare Psalm 73:7). Hopefully, none of us are naïve enough to claim to be without sin. John reminds all believers that we are simply deceiving ourselves if we make such a claim.

However, there's another "test result" that all believers in Christ Jesus can claim: we are forgiven. Jesus' precious blood has paid the price for our sin, and He offers forgiveness when we come to Him in repentance. Personality tests may reveal how we tend to act, but the gospel reveals who

we are in Christ. What sins do you need to bring before the forgiving God today? —DS-G

II. The Warning

(1 John 3:6–8)

John warns his audience of "antichrists" who aim to deny the work of God the Father and the promise of the coming Son (1 John 2:18, 22–23). These individuals seek to divide the church and lead believers astray. After addressing this deception, John encourages his audience to live as children of God who look forward to the promised hope that, "when [Jesus] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (2:28–3:2).

A. Sin Deceives . . . (vv. 6–7a)

6a. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.

The word *whosoever* speaks to the broad application of the statements that follow. What follows the generalizing term is a set of two groupings of people. The first group consists of those who *abideth in* Christ. Jesus taught His disciples to "remain in" Him so that their lives could bear fruit (John 15:4–9). To achieve this fruitfulness, we orient our lives to obedience to Him and follow His example (see John 8:31; 15:10; 1 John 2:6).

The phrase *sinneth not* has raised many questions among commentators, particularly regarding whether John is describing a form of "sinless perfectionism." That does not seem to be the case. Even though believers have been justified and redeemed from sin, we still face the reality of sin (compare 1 John 1:8, 10). When we sin, we are called to come before God in repentance, seeking His forgiveness (1:9; 2:1–2).

6b. Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

The second group includes those who have chosen to live in a state of sin. They claim to know God, yet their actions demonstrate no evidence that they have *known* Christ. Their lives are devoid of truth (1 John 2:4).

7a. Little children, let no man deceive you.

The term *little children* suggests a close connection between the writer and the original audience (compare 1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21).

B. . . . But God Is Righteous (vv. 7b–8)

7b. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

One deception threatening John's audience seems to be false claims of *righteousness*. Some people have asserted their righteousness, yet their outward conduct fails to match that claim.

Being declared *righteous* is not a self-proclaimed status, but rather it is related to obedience to God (see Romans 2:13). A primary way to demonstrate righteousness is through loving one another with mutual care (see 1 John 3:14, 17). The model for righteous living is *he* who *is* entirely and totally *righteous*: Jesus Christ (2:1).

What Do You Think?

What is the relationship between God's declaration of our righteousness in Christ and our own righteous actions?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 5:13–16; Ephesians 2:8–10; and James 2:14–26 help inform your response?

8a. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.

The children of God will seek to imitate their heavenly Father in righteousness. In contrast, those who persist in willful and unrepentant *sin* reveal that they have *the devil* as their father (John 8:44; 1 John 3:10).

The phrase *from the beginning* points back to the earliest acts of sin and rebellion. At that time, Satan opposed God and deceived the humans in Eden (Genesis 3:1–20). From that time onward, the spirit of sin and deception has been in the world (Ephesians 2:2).

8b. For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

John presents a powerful contrast to the devil's deception. The eternal *Son of God* has entered the world through the incarnation for a particular mission (compare John 1:14; 1 John 3:5). The *works of the devil* encompass sin, deception, and the powers that lead to death (Hebrews 2:14). However, through the incarnation, Christ has

directly confronted and overturned the enemy's dominion.

Christ accomplished His triumph on the cross (Colossians 2:15). Yet, while Satan's defeat is certain, he persists in continuing to deceive and destroy. The final fulfillment of Christ's work will occur as His return to earth, when He will *destroy* Satan (Revelation 20:7–10).

III. The Imperative

(1 John 4:7–8)

A. Love One Another . . . (v. 7)

7a. Beloved, let us love one another.

The term *beloved* is a favorite term of affection (see also 1 John 3:2, 21; 4:1, 11). The message that follows affirms that the church is the fellowship of the beloved—people who recognize and accept God's love for them as they act in love for *one another* (see 3:11, 23).

7b. For love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

When we try to comprehend God, we discover that He has two kinds of attributes. These are referred to as "communicable" and "incommunicable." The communicable attributes are those that we are expected to imitate. Just one example of those is the mandate to *love* (1 John 4:8, 16).

Christians demonstrate that we are *born of God* by our love for God and others. We are God's children, reflecting the character of our heavenly Father. This family identity is established by virtue of birth, but not a physical birth (see John 1:13). The new birth is spiritual, an act of new creation (compare 2 Corinthians 5:17–18; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23 [Lesson 2]). Those who have been *born of God* are called to demonstrate God's love in their lives and relationships. Furthermore, a lack of love among those who claim to be Christian indicates that their relationship with the Lord is not what it should be.

How to Say It

Docetism	Doe-*set*-iz-um
Ephesus	*Ef*-uh-sus
Gnosticism	*Nahss*-tih-*sizz*-um

B. . . . Because God Is Love (v. 8)

8. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

Because *God is love,* anyone unacquainted with love is also unacquainted with God. Further, even if a person shows remarkable works of faith, those works amount to nothing without love (1 Corinthians 13:1–3).

What Do You Think?

Why is our love for others evidence that we are born of God?

Digging Deeper

How does 1 Corinthians 13 help you assess whether your love for others reflects God's own love?

An Exceptional Call

One day, a particular church sign caught my attention. It said, "Be careful whom you hate." At first, the message struck me as odd, almost as if it were suggesting that people should be careful to hate the "right" person.

I began to reflect on all the ways I have been conditioned to feel justified in harboring hatred and contempt for others. Popular rhetoric often normalizes these feelings, teaching us that it's acceptable to hate those who in some way may be a threat to us or our way of life. Hatred becomes justified, and any willingness to show love is stifled.

But John does not allow any wiggle room. There's no exception clause, only an exceptional call for believers to love others. After seeing that sign, I had to ask myself: What would it look like to show love to the people I feel justified in disliking? Whom might God be calling you to love?—DS-G

IV. The Promise

(1 John 5:3–4)

A. Keep His Commands . . . (v. 3)

3. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

John sees nothing surprising in linking our *love* for *God* with our obedience to Him. A sin-

cere relationship with God naturally includes our commitment to keep His commandments (John 14:15; see also 14:21–24; 15:10).

God's commandments have never been burdensome (*grievous*) (compare Deuteronomy 30:11, 14). We gain the strength to obey by finding our life in Christ, the one whose "yoke is easy" and "burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). When we embrace God's commands as an expression of our love, we discover that following Jesus does not steal our joy—it fills it (compare John 17:13).

This verse does not mean that John is referring to salvation by works or salvation through law-keeping. It comes down to motive. We do not obey to earn salvation. We obey God as a loving response to the salvation that is already ours.

B. . . . And Overcome the World (v. 4)

4. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

The phrase *the world* means different things in various contexts. In this verse, it refers to the powers of evil that oppose God. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Our goal is not to seek military or political victory over other nations or groups of people; rather, it is to overcome the flawed principles by which the world lives (see Colossians 2:8, 20–23). These principles can manifest in various ways (examples: Mark 7:20–23; Romans 1:29–31; Galatians 5:19–21; 1 Peter 2:1 [Lesson 4]). However, we can summarize them by saying that the world's values are contrary to God's command to love one another.

By being *born of God,* we share in His *victory* over the world. The promise of victory is rooted in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Son of God. As members of God's family, we possess an overcoming *faith*—one that separates us from the sinful world and gives us victory over its temptations. Although we live in this world in a physical sense, we do not adhere to its values and ethics (see John 15:19; 17:6, 14–19). While we strive to live godly lives, we can take comfort in the fact that God has already won the victory. The outcome is already decided, and we are on the winning side.

What Do You Think?

How does the assurance of Christ's victory give you strength to persevere in faith?

Digging Deeper

How do the examples of faith in Hebrews 11 inspire you to trust God in ways that overcome the world?

Conclusion

A. How Do You Live?

For Christians, the answer to the question "Where do you live?" is "In Christ." The letter of 1 John elaborates on this by addressing the related question, "How do you live?" The answer is straightforward: we live in Christ by walking in the light, confessing our sins, resisting deception, and showing love for one another. By doing these things, we discover that fellowship with God will lead to fellowship with other believers.

At the same time, John does not minimize the trials associated with our identity in Christ. The church may face issues such as sin, deception, and division. Nevertheless, the church lives in God's light by practicing confession, forgiveness, and experiencing reconciliation with God and with one another.

We look to the example of Christ as the ultimate display of God's love. Our understanding of love must be transformed by the divine love revealed through the self-giving sacrifice of Christ. To love as God loves is not an option; it is the "family trait" of His children.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are light, and in You is life. Forgive our sins and help us be attentive to the leading of Your Spirit so that we can walk in Your light. Show us how to obey Your Word and foster in us a spirit of love for others. Keep us from walking in the darkness and remind us daily to walk "in Christ." In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Live in Christ. Walk in light. Love in truth.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Begin class by writing this prompt on the board:

The darkest situation I ever experienced was . . .

Invite participants to share their responses with a partner. After calling time, ask for volunteers to share their responses with the whole class. Then ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–Based on these responses, what types of darkness exist? 2–What makes each type frightening? 3–Why might someone fear being in the light? 4–For each type of darkness, how does a person come into the light?

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today's study will reveal the danger of darkness and the significance of light. We'll see how these ideas are central to our relationship with God and with others."

Into the Word

Divide the class into four groups: **Children of Light, Overcoming Sin, Loving God,** and **Faithful Victors**. Distribute handouts (you create) of the questions below for in-group discussion. After calling time, ask a volunteer from each group to read their group's assigned Scripture text and summarize their group's responses.

Children of Light Group. Read 1 John 1:1–7. 1–What does it mean that "God is light"? 2–What is the relationship between being in spiritual light and having fellowship with other believers? 3–How does being in fellowship with God help us to be in fellowship with one another? 4–How do we demonstrate that fellowship?

Overcoming Sin Group. Read 1 John 3:6–8. 1–What is the meaning and significance of the statement, "Whosoever abideth in [God] sinneth not"? 2–How can we pursue righteousness in our daily choices? 3–How does Christ's victory over sin strengthen our resolve for righteous living? 4–In what ways can we support one another in resisting sin and living in alignment with God's will?

Loving God Group. Read 1 John 4:7–8. 1–How can we show God's love to others through our daily habits and routines? 2–What does it mean to "know God"? 3–What does it mean that "God is love," and how does that shape our understanding of His character? 4–How does the example of Christ Jesus influence the way we respond to people who are difficult to love?

Faithful Victors Group. Read 1 John 5:3–4. 1–Describe the relationship between love for God and our obedience to His commands. 2–What challenges do believers face when trying to obey His commands, and how do we overcome those challenges? 3–In what ways do believers overcome the world? 4–What is the relationship between our faith and our victory?

Option. Distribute copies of the "God's Word in Focus" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite participants to work in pairs to complete as indicated before sharing results with the whole class.

Into Life

Distribute an index card and a pen to each participant. Allow them one minute to write a reflection on a time when they intentionally chose spiritual light over spiritual darkness. Remind participants that this reflection should be completely anonymous and encourage them not to include any identifying details or names.

Collect and shuffle the cards. Read several reflections back to the class, carefully omitting any statements that might reveal the identity of the writer. Afterwards, invite participants to consider common themes that emerge from the responses. Then ask, "How does today's study encourage us to continue seeking the light over darkness in our daily choices?"

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Walking in the Light" exercise from the activity page. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Love One Another

Devotional Reading: Romans 16:17–20, 25–27
Background Scriptures: 2 & 3 John

2 John 4–9

4 I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

5 And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

6 And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

7 For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

3 John 2–6

2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

3 For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

5 Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers;

6 Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well.



Key Text

This is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. **—2 John 6**

Image © Getty Images

Power to
the People

Unit 3: Living in Perilous Times

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the command that exists "from the beginning."
2. Describe the significance of walking in love.
3. Write a letter encouraging another believer to obediently walk in love.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. The Shared Journey
- B. Lesson Context

I. Father's Command (2 John 4–9)
- A. From the Beginning (vv. 4–5)
- B. This Is Love (v. 6)
- C. Many Deceivers (v. 7)
  An Orchid by Any Other Name
- D. Keep Watch (vv. 8–9)

II. Friend's Wish (3 John 2–6)
- A. Great Joy (vv. 2–4)
  Don't Tinker with Truth
- B. Witnessed Love (vv. 5–6)

Conclusion
- A. The Path Forward
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Shared Journey

During a recent hiking trip with my five-year-old son, I realized the example I was setting as an experienced outdoorsman and as a father. The hiking trail was clearly marked, allowing me to navigate it without tripping over jutting tree roots, running into overhead branches, or moving out of the way of oncoming hikers. Years of hiking with my own dad taught me how to proceed safely along the journey without losing my footing.

My own son closely followed my footsteps—literally! He carefully watched where I stepped and placed his tiny boots in the imprints of mine. He was learning how to walk, how to hike, and how to follow the footsteps of a leader. At times, he may stumble, but he is learning to walk the path and avoid (most) obstacles.

Avoiding obstacles in the Christian life is essential. But before we can do so, we have to be able to recognize such barriers—an important theme of today's lesson.

B. Lesson Context

The letters of 2 and 3 John weigh in as the two shortest writings of the New Testament, each containing fewer than 300 words. Their writer or writers are identified as "the elder" (2 John 1; 3 John 1). Some Christian traditions associate these letters with the apostle John from the first century AD. Similarities in the writing styles and themes of the Gospel of John and the three epistles suggest that the author is the same for all four. However, we cannot definitively say whether these are one and the same person or if "the elder" is correctly identified as the same person who wrote the Gospel of John or 1 John.

Reconstructing the situations behind 2 and 3 John is difficult. Second John is addressed to "the elect lady and her children" (2 John 1). One interpretation suggests that the elect lady may be a prominent woman in the community, while another possibility is that the author used this term figuratively to refer to the local church.

A feature of 3 John that is lacking in 2 John is that 3 John lists specific individuals by

name—three in total (the addressee Gaius, the opponent Diotrephes, and the fellow believer Demetrius; 3 John 1, 9, 12). The name *Gaius* was the second-most common name in the Roman Empire; the New Testament mentions several men by that name (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 1:14).

On the other hand, both letters address the issue of hospitality within the first-century church. And both seem to be written to react to the heresies known as Docetism and Gnosticism (see Lesson Context for Lesson 11). We will see further similarities in the commentary that follows.

I. Father's Command

(2 John 4–9)

A. From the Beginning (vv. 4–5)

4a. I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth.

The elder begins this letter by referring to the *children* of the "lady" to whom the book is addressed (compare 2 John 1). It is unclear whether these children are her biological offspring or if the phrasing figuratively describes the members of the local church. Either way, they are all Christians. The term *walking,* in the sense used here, refers not to physical movement, but to an overall manner of living (compare John 8:12; 1 John 1:6–7; 2 John 4, 6; 3 John 3–4).

To walk *in truth* helps ensure that there is no mismatch between behavior and profession of faith. This behavioral "walk" immunizes Christians against charges of hypocrisy.

4b. As we have received a commandment from the Father.

The spiritual walk of a believer is measured, at least in part, by adherence to *a commandment* that originates from God *the Father* (compare 1 John 3:23). The nature of that commandment is explained next.

5. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.

The command to *love one another* is second only to the command to love God (Matthew 22:35–40). The source of the *commandment* is not in doubt: it is Jesus (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17). His commandment is timeless and bears repeating (1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7–11). This is not a *new* teaching; believers have had this command *from the beginning* of their walk with Christ; it is an old but ever-new commandment (compare 1 John 2:7–8).

What Do You Think?

Why is mutual love among believers essential to our identity and witness?

Digging Deeper

What attitudes or actions in your own life most reflect obedience to the command to "love one another"?

B. This Is Love (v. 6)

6. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

The elder summarizes what this love requires. We express our love as we live (*walk*) by God's requirements as found in His *commandments*. Love for God, obedience to Him, and love for one another are inseparable (see Luke 10:27; John 14:15; 15:10, 12, 14; Romans 13:9–10; 1 John 5:3). This is not an advanced teaching, but the most fundamental teaching of all that underpins the Christian life.

C. Many Deceivers (v. 7)

7a. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

Attention is now turned to the *many deceivers* who are troubling the people (compare Matthew 7:15; 1 John 4:1). The elder wants his readers to be loving, but at the same time they should not become easy, gullible targets for these deceivers (compare Matthew 10:16). Walking in the command to love will be a vital method to protect oneself from all deceivers.

The letter of 1 John is on high alert for unholy deceptions. There, John characterizes opponents as liars (1 John 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10), murderers (4:15), false prophets (4:1), and antichrists (2:18–23; 4:3).

The particular deceptive, false teaching being addressed here denies the fact that Jesus had *come in the flesh*—a denial of His humanity. This heresy is known as Docetism. The central idea of this heresy is that Jesus only appeared to be human and was not truly human.

The implications of this belief are significant. It means Jesus only seemed to be human. If He were not fully human as well as fully divine, then He could not have died the death of a human on the cross. And if He had not died such a death, then there would be no atoning sacrifice for sins (see Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 2:2).

Denying this central teaching of the faith—the death, burial, and resurrection of the incarnate Jesus—means the deceivers must be promoting a different kind of salvation because they cannot have the doctrine of the atoning death of Jesus. The elder will not stand for this.

7b. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

The term *antichrist* is often associated with an evil person thought to appear at the end of time, but that is not its primary meaning in this letter. The word *antichrist* in English seems to mean "one who is against Christ," but there is more to it in the original language. The prefix *anti-* in Greek has the sense of "substitute" or "alternate." So the idea is closer to "false Christ."

For the elder, then, *antichrist* is not simply a singular figure but a spirit of falsehood that infiltrates the church (compare 1 John 2:18; 4:1–3; note both singular and plural uses). Jesus warned against such counterfeits (Mark 13:22). False teaching does not arise spontaneously; it comes from false teachers who have something to gain by their deception.



Visual for Lesson 12. *Display this visual as you review the commentary and discussion questions associated with 2 John 5–6.*

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to teachings that deny the true humanity of Jesus?

Digging Deeper

How can we discern which doctrines must be defended as essential to the faith and which allow room for differing convictions?

An Orchid by Any Other Name

While I'm not particularly fond of insects, one species has recently captured my interest: the orchid mantis. This fascinating insect, found in Southeast Asia, gets its name from its striking resemblance to an orchid flower. Although the mantis is typically a shade of white, it can change its color to blend in with the shades of pink and brown of the nearby orchids.

As carnivorous insects, their complex mimicry of their background serves to deceive. The unsuspecting prey will often approach the mantis, mistaking it for an orchid. The deceiver then quickly captures its unsuspecting victim and lies in wait for more.

We seem to live in an era when scams predominate. Many people have lost money to these "artists." But how much worse is it when Christians are deceived regarding matters of doctrine and faith! Such deceivers lie in wait, seeking to mislead unsuspecting followers and divert them from God, ultimately leading them away from the truth.

Take a fresh look at the four outcomes of the sown seed in Matthew 13:1–9. In which of the four situations are deceivers most likely to make an appearance? What spiritual guardrails should you erect to head them off? —PM

D. Keep Watch (vv. 8–9)

8. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

The command *look to yourselves* is the elder's way of saying, "Pay attention, this is important!" It conveys the need for personal self-evaluation. While the command serves as a warning, it is not a dire prediction. Instead, it is an encouragement for believers to stay the course and finish well (compare 2 Timothy 4:7).

Those who follow deception risk losing *those things which we have wrought.* The elder does not specify what this potential loss might involve. Some think it refers to loss of salvation or a forfeiture of eternal life, particularly in light of verse 9 (next). Others suggest a less severe interpretation, arguing that it refers to a diminished reward in the afterlife (compare Matthew 5:12; Revelation 11:18; 22:12).

The concept of *reward* is addressed in Matthew 10:42; 1 Corinthians 3:8; and Hebrews 10:35, but not in the sense of earning salvation through works. The idea is more in line with Luke 12:47–48; 19:16–19; and 1 Corinthians 3:10–15. The elder views his readers as partners in ministry, coworkers who are building the church through diligent effort. They should be careful lest they end up with less than what they or God expect.

We can at least say that, in the verse before us, the elder is acknowledging the loss of spiritual rewards in the present: the blessings of grace, mercy, and peace (compare 2 John 3). Following false teaching has consequences.

9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

How to Say It

Demetrius	De-*mee*-tree-us
Diotrephes	Die-*ot*-rih-feez
Docetism	Doe-*set*-iz-um
eisegesis	ahy-si-*jee*-sis
epistles	ee-*pis*-ulz
exegesis	ex-si-*jee*-sis
Gaius	*Gay*-us
Galatians	Guh-*lay*-shunz
Gnosticism	***Nahss***-tih-*sizz*-um

The elder outlines the problem of following false teachings: violating (*trangresseth*) the boundaries of sound *doctrine* results in abandoning God. The elder urges his readers to abide in the doctrine of Christ, to which they have been faithful in the past. Specifically, this refers to the teachings about the nature of *Christ*—His full humanity and full divinity, as well as His work to atone for our sins. To go beyond this doctrine is to abandon the central promise of Christianity: forgiveness and reconciliation with God through the work of Christ.

There is no middle ground—it's impossible to have *God* while rejecting Jesus (compare 1 John 4:15). The apostle Paul is no less strident on this issue (see Galatians 1:6–9; etc.). New Christians, those who are spiritual infants, are at particular risk of being deceived because they are drawn to doctrines presented as new and improved.

What Do You Think?

How can believers remain alert to deceptive teachings?

Digging Deeper

How do safeguards such as faithful study, accountability, and the guidance of mature believers help protect us from deception?

II. Friend's Wish

(3 John 2–6)

A. Great Joy (vv. 2–4)

2. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

Both *prosper* and *prospereth* carry the meaning of physical safety and flourishing health. The elder's wish for Gaius is not to separate his physical *health* from the health of his *soul*. Instead, the elder prays that Gaius might experience health and flourishing in both categories.

This verse has served as a proof text for promoters of the so-called prosperity gospel. This viewpoint suggests that there is a correlation between physical, material, and spiritual well-being. Those who follow this doctrine claim that God wants believers to be financially wealthy and physically

healthy. Achieving prosperity in these ways requires strong faith; thus, the lack of these things is interpreted as a sign of spiritual failure.

Christians who have no intent to deceive are still subject to interpretive errors. One way to avoid mistakes in interpreting Scripture is through careful reading and study. When we encounter a text and seek to develop a doctrine or teaching from it, a helpful first question to ask ourselves is, "Am I reading my personal assumptions *into* the text (a problem known as *eisegesis*), or am I drawing conclusions *from* the original intent of the text itself?" The latter is the aim of Biblical *exegesis*.

Regarding the verse at hand, it's difficult to see anything more than John's prayerful desires for a friend. The intention of this verse is for his well-being in all regards.

3. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.

As in 1 and 2 John, the theme of *truth* is significant in this letter (3 John 1, 3, 8; compare 1 John 3:18; 4:6; 2 John 1–2, 4). The elder praises Gaius in two significant ways regarding truth. First, the reputation of Gaius in this regard has preceded him in light of the testimony of other believers (*brethren*). The acknowledgment suggests that Gaius is embodying the principles of the Christian faith through his teaching and behavior. He does not need to recommend himself; others praise his character (compare Proverbs 27:2).

Second, the elder's commendation of Gaius as being one who *walkest in the truth* means that his life is an acted-out demonstration of what he teaches. This is a walk in the way of integrity and righteousness. Authentic Christian teaching must have an effect that way.

What Do You Think?

Who is another believer—a modern-day Gaius—whose life consistently models walking in truth?

Digging Deeper

What qualities or habits in that person's life reveal their commitment to truth and faithfulness to God?

Don't Tinker with Truth

"I know a guy!" was my response when someone asked where they should take their vehicle for repairs. There are a few things in life that are difficult to find but are treasured and valued once you do. One such thing is a good mechanic, and we found ours quite by accident. From the first time we brought our car to him, we knew he was a keeper. His shop was a family-run operation. His wife, the receptionist, treated us as if our families had been friends for generations. His prices were fair, and his advice was honest and straightforward. He often suggested solutions that meant we wouldn't have to bring our vehicle to him with every minor issue. We recognized his wisdom and commitment to truth, which led us to refer others to him.

In the letter of 3 John, the writer acknowledges Gaius's trustworthiness, hospitality, and commitment to walk in truth. Even in the modern day, it's rare to find people dedicated to truth. But when such people are found, they are invaluable in numerous ways, but especially as ambassadors of the gospel. When others observe your work, do they notice the authenticity of your actions and your obedience to Christ? —PM

4. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Students of notable sages, rabbis, or elders are often referred to as the "children" of their teachers (compare 1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4). To be designated as one of the *children* in this context acknowledges that Gaius has taken to heart lessons on the gospel *truth* and thereby has chosen to *walk* in obedience.

A nagging doubt that many teachers have is whether anyone is paying attention to their teaching. John was not alone in experiencing both the heights of joy and the depths of disappointment in this regard (see 1 John 2:19). The apostle Paul experienced both extremes as well (see Galatians 1:6–7; Philippians 1:4). There is nothing more satisfying for elderly teachers than to witness the lasting impact their teachings have had on their students. Such an experience brings *joy* to any teacher of the gospel (compare Proverbs 23:24).

B. Witnessed Love (vv. 5–6)

5. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers.

The elder addresses Gaius as *beloved* three times in this letter, here and in verses 2 and 11. This repeated expression of affection highlights the close relationship they share.

Most commentators agree that the *strangers* are other believers who had been unknown to Gaius. They likely carried a letter of introduction from known believers so Gaius could identify them as fellow Christians. One way we walk in the truth is by extending hospitality (see Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:10; Hebrews 13:2; and 1 Peter 4:9).

What Do You Think?

What can your church do to help visitors feel like welcomed guests?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 25:40 and Hebrews 13:1–3 challenge you to view hospitality as an act of worship?

6. Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well.

The fact that the elder encourages Gaius to send these visitors *on their journey* adequately provisioned seems to speak to Gaius's regular practice of care (compare Titus 3:13). Hospitality of this sort means ensuring that the visitors are well rested, have food in their packs, etc., as they depart to resume their travels.

This demonstrates *charity*, or love, in the best sense: it is an act of hospitality and generosity toward God's people, regardless of their backgrounds. Such expressions of hospitality are grounded in God's love, one demonstrated by His giving of His one and only Son, Jesus (see 1 John 4:10).

In the first-century culture, strangers in town are seen as threats unless someone welcomes them into their home (compare Acts 16:15, 34, 40). Such a welcome changes the strangers' status from outsider to guest. For Gaius to welcome traveling Christian teachers into his home involves more than just providing for their immediate needs of food and lodging. It also allows them to operate as temporary residents of the city. Such hospitality, then, is the reception of strangers who become members of the household as long as they are in town.

In contrast to the gracious Gaius is the inhospitable Diotrephes, a man who fancies himself a leader in the church but is more of a controlling bully. The fact that Diotrephes "receiveth us not" is at least an indication of inhospitality and probably more (3 John 9). Such behavior is the opposite of the kind of leader that Jesus describes in Mark 9:33–37; 10:35–44.

Conclusion

A. The Path Forward

As members of the body of Christ that is the church, we support one another in our journey of following Christ in love. We do this because we share the same goal, the same journey, and the same way of life: obedience to Him.

God has not promised that this journey will be easy. False teachings, deceivers, and divisions will continue to hinder our walk with Christ. The path of obedience to God urges us to love one another by extending love to our co-laborers in Christ.

One tangible way to show love is through hospitality, a way to meet the needs of others (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9). When we welcome one another in hospitable love, we are welcoming Christ. We walk in truth by following God's commandments so that we can support the community of faith on our journey of discipleship.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your love for us. Please guide us through Your Spirit to transform our desires so that we love only the things You would have us love. As we strive to walk in obedience, may we be attentive to others who are on the same journey. Help us show them love and hospitality. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Walk in love, obedience, and hospitality.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before class begins, write the following quotes on the board for participants to see as they enter.

1. *Love is friendship set to music.*
2. *True love stories never have endings.*
3. *Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind.*
4. *Love is an irresistible desire to be irresistibly desired.*
5. *Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.*
6. *Love does not dominate; it cultivates.*

Invite participants to share with a partner which quote they like best and why. After three minutes, conduct a poll of raised hands to determine which quote is the most popular.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Singing About Love" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated before discussing responses with the whole class.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Some say that love makes the world go around. Today's study will show how Scripture offers a more mature look at this topic."

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups: **Commands Group, Warnings Group,** and **Commendations Group**. Assign one person from each group to serve as a scribe and provide each scribe with a sheet of paper and a pen. Instruct each group to read 2 John 4–9 and 3 John 2–6, identifying the commands, warnings, or commendations relevant to their designated group.

After the study, direct each group to write summaries of their findings. Afterward, ask each scribe to share their group's findings with the whole class. (Be prepared to contribute additional information from your own study that participants may not have identified.)

Then ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–In what ways does the elder use the image of "walking," and what does each use mean? 2–What does the image of walking suggest about the nature of the Christian life? 3–What does the picture of walking teach us about the unique nature of Christian love? 4–Why is it important to accept that Jesus truly came in the flesh? 5–Why does the elder commend Gaius?

Conclude this segment of the lesson by challenging participants to summarize what these Scripture texts teach about the nature and significance of Christian love. Write responses on the board and work together to combine responses into one sentence that expresses the entire class's conclusion about Christian love.

Into Life

Ask, "On a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most determined and one being the least, how determined is the average Christian to walk obediently in love?" Invite participants to defend their answers and work together to come up with a consensus response. Invite participants to work together to brainstorm ways that Christians can improve their love. Then ask, "What is one piece of advice you would give to encourage another believer to walk obediently in love?" Write answers on the board.

Distribute blank sheets of paper and pens to each participant. Invite participants to compose a letter to another believer explaining the necessity of obediently walking in love. Hand out blank envelopes and postage stamps so that participants can mail their letters after class time.

Option. Encourage participants to work with a partner to brainstorm the main points that the letters should include. Invite pairs to share the results.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Writing in Love" exercise from the activity page as a take-home activity as participants depart.

Contend for the Faith

Devotional Reading: Exodus 15:1–13
Background Scripture: Jude

Jude 3–8, 12–13, 20–21, 24–25

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

5 I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

12 These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

13 Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

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

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

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

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

Key Text

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

Power to
the People

Unit 3: Living in Perilous Times

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the metaphors that Jude uses to characterize believers' opponents.
2. Describe the concerns that the writer of Jude has for the church.
3. Identify a modern threat to holy living and make a plan to address it.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Start with the Ending
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Situation (Jude 3–7)
- A. Ungodly Influences (vv. 3–4)
- B. Historical Examples (vv. 5–7)

II. The Opponents (Jude 8, 12–13)
- A. Evil Actions (v. 8)
  Grand Theft Defense
- B. Figurative Description (vv. 12–13)

III. The Hope (Jude 20–21, 24–25)
- A. Promise of Life (vv. 20–21)
  Keep Your Eye on the Ball
- B. Presented for Glory (vv. 24–25)

Conclusion
- A. Fight for the Faith
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Start with the Ending

In a song titled "Start with the Ending," singer-songwriter David Wilcox tells the story of a conversation following the termination of a relationship. While the relationship was characterized by anxiety and pretending, the dissolution of it allowed the couple uninhibited communication in a refreshing way. Through the song, Wilcox offers ironic advice to those seeking love—start at the end!

Indeed, endings often bring clarity. Like the old saying goes, "Hindsight is twenty-twenty." There is something about being at the end that helps us see what is truly important. Today's text looks to the mercy of Christ on the last day. By keeping the end in sight, we may gain the necessary motivation to persevere in the face of adversity.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Jude is part of what are called the General Epistles, as are all the other Scripture texts we have studied this quarter. In the opening verse, the author identifies himself and affirms an alignment with Christ, as well as a familial connection to James. Traditionally, this James is understood to be the half-brother of Jesus (compare Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Therefore, Jude would be a half-brother of Jesus as well. The name *Jude* is a shortened form of *Judas* or *Judah*, a common Israelite name of the time. It is widely acknowledged that the epistle of Jude and 2 Peter share many structural and linguistic similarities.

Jude draws upon a range of sources in crafting his letter. He never quotes the Old Testament directly, but in this brief letter of only twenty-five verses, he alludes to it numerous times. He also draws on a couple of noncanonical sources in verses that are not part of this study. This practice should not surprise us—the apostle Paul does it too (example: Titus 1:12).

I. The Situation

(Jude 3–7)

A. Ungodly Influences (vv. 3–4)

3. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write

unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Jude plainly states his purpose for writing: to encourage his readers in the face of danger. By *common salvation,* Jude may be referring to the general salvific benefits that Christ-followers share (compare Titus 1:4). But it's also possible that he is referring to "common deliverance" from a specific problem in his audience's immediate social context, such as a revolt or persecution. In either case, Jude pivots to address a more pressing concern: *faith*. In either case, the word *common* is to be understood in the sense of "mutual."

Jude's exhortation to *contend for the faith* reflects the combative context in which Jude's readers find themselves. Although faith often entails obedience and, thus, means something like "faithfulness" or "allegiance" (Matthew 23:23; Romans 3:3; Galatians 5:22), here Jude refers to the content or message that was *delivered* to his readers. Specifically, he means the body of doctrine that is to be believed and obeyed (compare Acts 6:7; Titus 1:13; 1 Timothy 6:21). Christ-followers are to fight for the central truths of Christian doctrine as though they strive for victory in an athletic contest, with determination and assertion.

What Do You Think?

How does one "contend" for the central truths of Christian doctrine?

Digging Deeper

What are the "rules of engagement," so to speak, in the way a Christian might strive to "win" the contest of faith?

4. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The expression *certain men* voices disparagement (compare Galatians 2:12), as is illustrated by Jude's statement that these people covertly inserted themselves into the fellowship. Four descriptions follow. First, Jude states that these men are condemned. In fact, their *condemnation* extends to a previous era. It is difficult to pinpoint whether Jude has a specific text in mind or if he is referring to rebellion in general (examples: Numbers 14:26–45; Judges 2:11–19).

Second, Jude characterizes these people as *ungodly*, a term that describes those who do not fear God (compare 2 Peter 3:7). It implies that they are irreverent, impious, and wicked. More than mere name-calling, this description suggests that these opponents violate the acceptable norms for relating to *God*.

Third, these people twist God's *grace* into something it is not. The logic of Jude's description is akin to the distorted rationale that Paul anticipates in Romans 6:1 when he asks, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" If an increase in sin makes God's grace bigger, then one might (mistakenly) claim that they are making God more gracious by sinning. Both Paul and Jude reject this logic. One might imagine a spectrum of behavior with ***Legalism*** at one extreme, ***License*** at the other extreme, and ***Liberty*** situated halfway between the two.

Fourth, and most egregious, these people deny *Jesus* as *Lord*. Denying *Christ* results in serious consequences (compare Matthew 10:33; Luke 12:9). Jesus' lordship is the foundation of the church (compare 1 Peter 2:6–7)!

B. Historical Examples (vv. 5–7)

5. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

Jude utilizes three examples of divine judgment to warn his readers. He begins with an example connected to the generation of the Exodus. On the verge of entering Canaan, twelve Israelite spies were sent out to explore the promised land (Numbers 13:1–25). Upon their return, only two of the twelve believed they could subdue Canaan and called the people to trust in God's provision (13:26–30; 14:6–9). The majority led the people to question their leaders (Moses and Aaron), rebel against God, and even consider returning to Egypt (13:31–14:4).

In response, God brought punishment upon all

those over the age of twenty, except for Caleb and Joshua (Numbers 14:29–30). This doubtful generation was forced to remain in the wilderness until they had died off (14:32–34). They personally had experienced God's provision as He brought them out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:51), and yet they did not muster enough faith to enter the promised land. Jude uses this example to remind his readers that it is possible to turn from the faith and into the arms of doubt when powerful voices speak disbelief.

What Do You Think?

Why did the Israelites struggle to remember God's provision(s) when faced with a new challenge (Numbers 13:1–14:4)?

Digging Deeper

In what ways are we like them, and what can you do to hold fast to faith in the face of doubt?

6. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

The second example of *judgment* that Jude expresses refers to fallen *angels* who rebelled against their Creator. Jude is drawing upon an ancient Jewish tradition that interprets Genesis 6:1–4 to mean that angelic beings married human women (1 and 2 Enoch, noncanonical books that would have been familiar to Jude's first-century audience; see Lesson Context in Lesson 7). In this tradition, the angels stirred humanity toward further wickedness, which precipitated God's decision to send the flood (Genesis 6:5–7, 11–13, 17).

The tales told in 1 Enoch describe chaos and violence. These rebellious angels experience the consequence of *darkness* and *chains* in the present, as well as future punishment (compare Isaiah 14:12; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:7–9). *The great day* draws upon a tradition of divine *judgment* that is expressed through the prophets (examples: Joel 2:31; Malachi 4:5). This day is referred to elsewhere as "the day of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10 [Lesson 10]). After their current detainment, these rebellious angels will face the final judgment with everyone else (Revelation 20:11–15).

7. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Jude uses yet another example of God's past judgment. The sin in *Sodom and Gomorrha* was so rampant that God found fewer than ten righteous people in those cities (Genesis 18:32). God's ruling against the cities overthrew the whole region (19:23–28). Jude's mention of the *cities about them* serves to demonstrate how the corruption of a few infects many.

The people in these cities gave in to great wickedness and sin, particularly in the form of sexual immorality and perversion. *Strange flesh* stands as the polar opposite to God's plan for a male and a female to be husband and wife as "one flesh" (Genesis 2:23–24; Ephesians 5:31). Therefore, Jude's example refers broadly to sexual promiscuity, including the whole gamut of sexual indiscretions outside of God's intention for marital union. The cities rebelled against God's standards, and as a result, they were destroyed.

In this historical example, the punishment took the form of "brimstone and fire" that rained down from heaven (Genesis 19:24–25). Jude uses this *example* as a prototype, connecting the destruction of these wicked cities to a much larger concept: the *eternal* nature of the judgment to come.

II. The Opponents

(Jude 8, 12–13)

A. Evil Actions (v. 8)

8. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

Jude now shifts focus as he begins to describe the wickedness of his readers' opponents. It seems that they live in a mental fantasy world where it's permissible to do all the evil practices mentioned here. Their engaging in sexual immorality as they *defile the flesh* aligns with the vivid imagery in the verse just before this one.

To *despise dominion* is to deny the lordship of Jesus, refusing to relinquish personal control (Jude 4). This refusal to yield to authority mirrors the Israelites' rejection of Moses and Aaron as their leaders, which Jude alludes to in Jude 5, above.

The fact that they *speak evil* against those in positions of power, rank, authority, or honor adds to their condemnation. *Dignities* may denote human dignitaries, however, the underlying Greek term that Jude uses is regularly used to refer to heavenly glory (examples: Acts 7:55; 2 Peter 2:10; Revelation 21:11). Therefore, it is likely that Jude refers to beings that inhabit heaven.

Grand Theft Defense

Devastation hit my daughter like a hurricane when thieves stole her car. She communicated feelings of violation and even defilement, and then the insurance company had to call it a total loss. Their decision came not because the thieves wrecked the car, but because they used the inside of the car for illegal activity. The toxic compounds they brought into the vehicle proved to be too much to remove.

The dreamers of Jude 8 have no regard for the law, show no respect for lawmakers, and do immoral things. They are deceivers. Jude asks believers to be on guard against such people, to prepare and protect themselves.

The trouble with my daughter's car was not her negligence but a problem inherent in the security of its make and model. It was vulnerable to this kind of offence. If she had known more, she could have taken further preventive measures.

When spiritual challenges and temptations come your way, are you more *proactive* or more *reactive* in defending against them? How can you improve?

—PM

How to Say It

Canaan	*Kay*-nun
doxology	doc-*sah*-luh-jee
Enoch	*Ee*-nock
Gomorrha	Guh-*more*-uh
Jude	*Jood*
Sodom	*Sahd*-um



Visual for Lesson 13. *Use this visual to lead a discussion regarding specific ways modern Christians might fight for holy living and right doctrine.*

B. Figurative Description (vv. 12–13)

12. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.

The pronoun *these* refers to the opponents. In a series of metaphors, Jude likens them to a series of natural phenomena that result in harm to people.

The first such metaphor is their position as that of *spots* in believers' fellowship meals. Ancient Greek poets used the underlying word translated here as "spots" to describe rocks just below the surface of the sea—a hidden danger to ships (example: Homer's *Odyssey,* etc.). Figuratively, the word represents those who can damage someone else's moral well-being if not recognized and avoided.

Jude continues with a second metaphor, relating the opponents to *clouds* that carry no rain. Jude draws on Proverbs 25:14 (compare 2 Peter 2:17) for this imagery. A person who sees a cloud expects that rain will soon be forthcoming. Thus, *clouds . . . without water* are deceptive.

A third analogy is similar to the second. It likens the infiltrators to barren fruit *trees* (compare Mark 11:12–14). Jesus pointedly taught how to identify false prophets: by their fruit (Matthew 7:15–20)!

13. Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Jude's illustrative language becomes sharper still. God holds power over the waters as Creator (Genesis 1:2). Therefore, Jude's description of the adversaries as *raging waves of the sea* suggests opposition to God (compare Isaiah 57:20). But as they oppose God, the tossing and turning of their waves result only in frothy *shame*.

With one final illustration, Jude describes the antagonists as those who wander. As the ancient person looks up into the night sky, hundreds of unmoving stars can be seen night after night. But a handful of those stars can be seen shifting positions on a regular basis. Today, we know these *wandering stars* as planets of the solar system. Indeed, the underlying Greek word for "wandering" is the same as our English word "planet."

The comparison between these people and celestial bodies that move depicts a sense of fickleness or instability. Never-ending *blackness of darkness* is reserved for such people. This description of final judgment mirrors pictures found throughout the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

What Do You Think?

How do metaphors assist in conceptualizing theological truth?

Digging Deeper

What other metaphors might communicate deception, impotence, or impermanence?

III. The Hope

(Jude 20–21, 24–25)

A. Promise of Life (vv. 20–21)

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

Jude shifts gears and addresses believers directly, offering specific ways for them to contend for their *most holy faith*. First, they are to combat divisiveness with unity and encouragement. They are to build upon faith as though it is a foundation (compare 1 Peter 2:4–5 [Lesson 4]).

In the verse before this one (not in today's text), Jude describes the antagonists as "having not the Spirit" (Jude 19). Therefore, believers are to do the opposite of their opponents and specifically pray in the *Holy Ghost*. Doing anything with the help of the Holy Ghost is an advantage that believers have because this power is inaccessible to their adversaries.

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

Jude uses the imperative clause to send a message of urgency. Believers have a responsibility to *keep* themselves within the bounds of God's *love*, to stay rooted and grounded in it (compare Ephesians 3:16–19). Jude also prompts believers to look toward judgment day, where we may anticipate *mercy* from *Christ*. The outcome for those who trust in Jesus' lordship is *eternal life*.

What Do You Think?

What advantage does the Holy Spirit give believers?

Digging Deeper

Compare Paul's teaching in Ephesians 6:10–18 to Jude 20–21. How might putting on God's armor be an effective way to build up faith?

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

Sports did not come naturally for our middle child. We signed him up for basketball, but try as he might, he didn't have a knack for it. He was tall enough, and his teammates were encouraging and accepting—even though they were better than him. The problem was that he didn't have the necessary stamina, strategy, or quick reflexes. His teammates were better because they had put in years of practice. They did drills outside of team practice. They hung out together. They immersed themselves in basketball and one another.

In Jude 20–21, the author urges his readers to build themselves up in faith, pray in the Spirit, and to "keep" themselves in the love of God. These verses speak to the practice of fellowship as a picture of unity and commitment.

My son could have increased his basketball skills and stamina had he committed himself to

daily practice. What about you? Where's your primary commitment? When opposition comes your way, will you know how to respond both offensively and defensively? —PM

B. Presented for Glory (vv. 24–25)

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

Jude closes his letter with a doxology that celebrates God's ability to preserve and protect believers from the various snares and traps mentioned throughout his letter. Several other New Testament texts also describe the ultimate standing of believers as blameless or *faultless* before God's throne (examples: Colossians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 3:13). The idea is that there is a quality of moral cleanliness to believers when they allow the holiness of Christ to strengthen them. They may stand confidently before God on judgment day (compare 1 John 2:28; 3:21). While believers' opponents will receive judgment and destruction in the coming age, Jude characterizes true believers as having *exceeding joy* in God's presence (compare Psalm 16:11; Philippians 4:4–7).

What Do You Think?

What attributes does Jude list for God that praise Him for His ability to "keep" believers from falling?

Digging Deeper

What attributes would you emphasize if you were to write a doxology for God's faithful provision?

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

The final words of Jude's doxology praise God for His ability to rescue His people from anything their adversaries might throw at them. Jude closes with a list of four divine attributes: *glory and majesty, dominion and power.* Taken together, these attributes convey the foundational truth that all honor and authority belong to God, and that He is in control (compare Psalms 22:28; 103:19).

Conclusion

A. Fight for the Faith

Jude uses historical examples and metaphors to both warn of destruction and encourage faith. Both are necessary as Christ-followers contend for truth. Like wrestlers in a ring, or runners in a race, we must guard against complacency, watch for obstructions, and compete with strength. We must not back down, be turned aside, or be led off track by false doctrine. For those who finish valiantly, a reward awaits: God's mercy unto eternal life! God will keep us safe and secure in His love.

Like any good story, conflict and antagonism can be the crucible for great courage. Although Christians are not the heroes of our stories (Christ is), we are given the responsibility to remain alert and aware—watching for foes, choosing to sidestep temptation, and holding tightly to the faith we confess. It takes valor and determination to stand up to false teachers and expose distortions of truth. There is a difference between the open invitation of God for all to come and feast at His banqueting table and the infiltration of His sheepfold with those who intend to exploit.

Jesus warned His disciples that they were sent out "as sheep in the midst of wolves," and because of this, they were to be as "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16). Similarly, the apostle Paul urges believers to stand guard (1 Corinthians 16:13), and the apostle Peter warns that there is a need to stay alert, aware, and vigilant (1 Peter 5:8–9). Jesus taught that we have an enemy who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). The threat is real, and Jude's warning is unnerving: the enemy is sometimes in our midst! Are you standing firm on the Lord Jesus Christ?

B. Prayer

God of all power and dominion, mercifully preserve our faith. Grant us wisdom and holy discernment as we pray in Your Spirit. Keep our eyes fixed on the truth and our lives in alignment with Your ways. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Contend for the faith entrusted to you.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Display this question as your class gathers:

What is a metaphor?

To begin, ask a few volunteers to answer the question. Then, ask the class to do an internet search for a formal definition. Lastly, brainstorm several example metaphors.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Figure of Speech" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask students to complete the activity as indicated in small groups. After five minutes, call groups together to share the results of their work.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Metaphors are a form of figurative speech used to draw connections. The book of Jude uses many throughout today's text. Let's consider their significance."

Into the Word

Ask class members to pretend to be news reporters seeking answers. Use the common prompts *Who*, *When*, *Where*, and *Why* to compile contextual information about the book of Jude. Consider dividing your class into groups of four to six and assigning one of the four prompts to each group. Encourage learners to use Bible study resources to research their questions. Reconvene as a whole class to discuss their answers.

Alternative. Prepare (or ask a class member to prepare) a brief presentation answering the four contextual questions regarding the book of Jude.

Invite a volunteer to read Jude 3–8, 12–13, 20–21, 24–25 out loud. Divide your class into three groups: **Challenges Group**, **Metaphors Group**, and **Commands Group**. Ask the **Challenges Group** to identify the *challenges* faced by the first-century believers to whom Jude writes. Ask the **Metaphors Group** to list all the *metaphors* in the text that describe the enemies of God's will. Ask the **Commands Group** to identify the *commands* or encouragements that Jude expresses to the letter's recipients. Allow at least 10 minutes for the groups to study, and then ask a volunteer from each group to report their findings to the class.

Alternative. Continue the reporter theme by asking one or more groups to research the text and identify: 1–Who presented a threat to the faith of these believers? 2–Why were these people dangerous? 3–What effect did these enemies have on the first-century church? 4–What should believers do to counteract these threats? Ask volunteers to report their discoveries to the class.

Then ask, 1–Why do you think Jude wrote so expressively about the threat of these false teachers? 2–How does Jude's attitude contrast with the "live and let live" approach taken by today's culture?"

Into Life

Give the following questions to each of the groups named above. **Challenges Group:** What challenges do modern believers face that are similar to those faced by the recipients of Jude's letter? **Metaphor Group:** Which of the metaphors in today's text seems most striking? How might modern Christians avoid qualifying for such a description? **Commands Group:** In what practical ways can modern Christians obey today's text?

After groups discuss, lead a whole-class discussion identifying modern threats to holy living. Brainstorm ways to address those threats.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Modern Threats" exercise from the activity page. Give students several minutes to work individually and then ask them to share their ideas with a partner.

Recruit three volunteers to each offer a brief closing prayer, utilizing the following prompts: 1–"God, thank You for Jesus; we acknowledge Him as Lord . . ." 2–God, forgive us for the ways we have tolerated false teaching. Grant us discernment in our fellowship. . ." 3–God, help us to pray in the Spirit and be built up in faith . . ."

Written That You Might Believe

Special Features

		Page
Quarterly Quiz		226
Quarter at a Glance	Editorial Staff	227
Get the Setting	Amber M. Dillon	228
This Quarter in the Word (Daily Bible Readings)		229
Sites from the Ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John (Map Feature)		231
The Best Lesson I Ever Learned (Teacher Tips)	Ronald L. Nickelson	232
Activity Pages (annual Deluxe Edition only)		481
Activity Pages (free download)	www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages	
In the World (weekly online feature)	www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world	

Lessons

Unit 1: Jesus, the Christ

March 7	Light of Life	*John 1:1–14*	233
March 14	Lamb of God	*John 1:24–34*	241
March 21	King of Israel	*John 12:12–19*	249
March 28	Proof of Resurrection	*John 20:11–18*	257

Unit 2: Signs and Miracles

April 4	Healing on the Sabbath	*John 5:2–16*	265
April 11	Feeding the Multitude	*John 6:5–13, 30–35*	273
April 18	Walking on Water	*John 6:15–27*	281
April 25	Restoring Blind Eyes	*John 9:1–9*	289

Unit 3: Jesus Proclaims

May 2	I Am the Good Shepherd	*John 10:1–11*	297
May 9	I Am the Resurrection	*John 11:17–27*	305
May 16	Peace Be with You	*John 16:13–15; 20:19–23*	313
May 23	I Am the Way	*John 14:1–7*	321
May 30	I Am the Vine	*John 15:1–11*	329

Quarterly Quiz

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

Lesson 1

1. Which of the following was "in the beginning"? (universe, Word, tree of life?) *John 1:1*

2. Jesus came unto His own, and His own received Him. T/F. *John 1:11*

Lesson 2

1. John the Baptist saw Jesus and said, "Behold the _____ of God." *John 1:29*

2. John's mission was to baptize people with the Holy Ghost. T/F. *John 1:33*

Lesson 3

1. Jesus was entering which city when the crowds approached Him with palm branches? (Bethany, Jerusalem, Nazareth) *John 12:12*

2. The disciples understood the meaning of these events after Jesus "was _____." *John 12:16*

Lesson 4

1. When Mary first saw the resurrected Christ, she thought He was a carpenter. T/F. *John 20:15*

2. Which title did Mary use when she recognized Jesus? (Rabboni, Son of Man, Emmanuel) *John 20:16*

Lesson 5

1. Jesus told the man that healing would follow a confession of sin. T/F. *John 5:6–8*

2. Jesus faced persecution because He healed on the _____. *John 5:16*

Lesson 6

1. How many baskets of leftovers remained from the barley loaves? (5; 7; 12) *John 6:13*

2. Jesus taught that bread of God "giveth _____ unto the world." *John 6:33*

Lesson 7

1. The disciples set across the lake toward which town? (Jerusalem, Tiberias, Capernaum) *John 6:17*

2. Jesus taught the disciples regarding the spiritual food that is given by the "Son of _____." *John 6:27*

Lesson 8

1. The man healed by Jesus had become blind in an accident. T/F. *John 9:1*

2. Jesus told the man to go and "wash in the pool of _____." *John 9:7*

Lesson 9

1. The one who does not enter the sheepfold by the door is a thief and a _____. *John 10:1*

2. John the Baptist is the door of the sheep. T/F. *John 10:7*

Lesson 10

1. Bethany, the town of Lazarus, was located close to which city? (Nazareth, Heliopolis, Jerusalem) *John 11:18*

2. Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the _____." *John 11:25*

Lesson 11

1. Which is another name for the Holy Ghost? (Spirit of man, Spirit of truth, Spirit of heaven) *John 16:13*

2. Jesus _____ on the disciples to give them the Holy Ghost. *John 20:22*

Lesson 12

1. Jesus said, "Let not your _____ be troubled." T/F. *John 14:1*

2. Which of these things did Jesus reveal Himself to be? (the way, the key, the answer) *John 14:6*

Lesson 13

1. Christ is the vine, and we are what? (root, branches, soil) *John 15:5*

2. We abide in Christ's love if we keep His commands. T/F. *John 15:10*

Quarter at a Glance

by Editorial Staff

This quarter surveys the Gospel of John. Its writer, John the Evangelist, uses rich, figurative language to testify to Jesus' identity as the Son of God, the Messiah. John's Gospel differs significantly from the four Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) due to its unique focus. Instead of presenting a chronological account of Jesus' life and ministry, John emphasizes Jesus' teaching and specific miracles that identify Him as the Messiah.

Testimony and Tomb

John's primary goal in writing his Gospel is to encourage people to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). To achieve this, John uses figurative language, such as "the Word" and "the true Light" (1:1, 9 [Lesson 1]), to characterize the person and work of Jesus.

In its early chapters, this Gospel introduces John the Baptizer, who enters as a "witness of that Light" (John 1:8). He identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God, God's chosen one who will take away sins and baptize with the Holy Ghost (1:29, 33–34; Lesson 2). The role of John the Baptizer is to serve as a herald who points the way to Jesus as Savior of the world.

Near the middle of the Gospel, crowds come to Jerusalem for the Passover. They gather in the streets, carrying palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna" (John 12:13 [Lesson 3]). The people honor Jesus as king, declaring their hope that He will bring them salvation and deliverance. But the Jewish religious leaders respond with frustration and hate. Although the disciples face understandable devastation, Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Christ, and their grief turns to joy (20:18 [Lesson 4]). Mary's proclamation of Jesus' resurrection continues the witness: Jesus is the risen Savior!

Miraculous Signs

The Gospel of John identifies seven specific miracles which prove that Jesus is the Messiah. These signs pair with the witness mentioned above, demonstrating Jesus' identity as God's only Son. They reveal Jesus' glory, establish His authority, and call observers to believe in Him. This unit focuses on four of the seven miracles: Jesus' healing of a paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:2–16 [Lesson 5]), the feeding of the 5,000 on a hillside in Galilee (6:1–13 [Lesson 6]), Jesus, walking on water (6:16–21 [Lesson 7]), and the healing of the man who was blind from birth (9:1–9 [Lesson 8]).

"I Am . . ."

The final unit of this quarter investigates seven sayings that reveal Jesus' divinity, mission, and role in salvation. It focuses on five of the seven (although a sixth is mentioned in Unit 2, Lesson 6). The unit begins with Jesus' declarations, "I am the door of the sheep" and "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:7, 9, 11, 14 [Lesson 9]). These sayings convey His intention to keep His followers safe and lead them into abundant life. Like a gate, access to God is granted through Jesus. Like a good shepherd, He is willing to give up His life for His sheep.

The unit continues by studying the following saying: "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25 [Lesson 10]). It then addresses the person and work of the Holy Ghost, given by God's own breath as a sign of the new creation in Christ (20:19–23 [Lesson 11]). The role of the Holy Ghost is to provide comfort, peace, and guidance to followers of Christ.

The quarter concludes with studies on Jesus as "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:1–7 [Lesson 12]) and as "the true vine" (15:1–11 [Lesson 13]). By knowing Jesus as "the way," we come to know God the Father. And, as Jesus is the true vine, His followers are compared to branches that find life in Him by remaining in His love. The external sign that life is found in Jesus is the good fruit we bear. We are invited to join the mission of Father, Son, and Spirit by declaring truth, resurrection hope, freedom, forgiveness, and peace to the world.

Get the Setting

by Amber M. Dillon

When embarking on a road trip, drivers must pay close attention to road signs to ensure they reach their intended destination. Heeding them is especially crucial when traveling to a new or unfamiliar place. These signs offer directions, warnings, and important information for the trip. Ignoring these signs can derail the journey!

In this quarter, we are taking a "road trip" through the Gospel of John. The writer, John the Evangelist, uses vibrant imagery and rich metaphors to guide us toward a better understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. As we "journey," we need to be attentive to the "signs" outlined in the text—signs that reveal Jesus as the Son of God and the promised Messiah.

Miraculous Acts

When we compare John's Gospel with the Synoptic Gospels, we notice that John does not include the same miracle accounts. Instead, he focuses on seven miraculous events (John 2:1–11; 4:46–54; 5:1–15; 6:1–15; 6:16–24; 9:1–12; 11:1–44). The word translated as "miracles" in these accounts is most accurately translated into English as "signs." The King James Version uses this translation in John 2:18; 4:48; 6:30; and 20:30. A *sign* is not merely a display of supernatural power; it is a miracle with implications—one that points to or signifies something.

Furthermore, these signs are often accompanied by discourses or teachings that explain the miracle's meaning. Through these discussions, John reveals a particular aspect of Jesus' identity and mission.

What we may call the "purpose statement" of the Gospel of John stresses the importance of these signs:

> And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. —John 20:30–31

Seeing and Belief

Where do John's signs direct us? What does John want his readers to recognize? They are to help us "see" Jesus and His work. They reveal Jesus' authority and glory and allow us to understand His divine nature as the Son of God (John 6:2; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; compare Acts 2:22). When these significant claims are supported with supernatural evidence, a second purpose is achieved: belief. That's the effect we witness among Jesus' disciples (see John 2:11).

To "see" something means to perceive it, become aware of it, or recognize it. This entails imagining possibilities and reaching conclusions. Seeing is, in part, understanding; it is examining an idea and discovering its meaning. Discovery through "seeing" is how John's purpose aligns with belief. Observing Jesus—even through the words of the Gospel—and believing in His work is of utmost importance. It is through these things that we receive life and become children of God.

Seeing and Glory

The goal of this Gospel is to prove Jesus' divinity. Thus, one brilliant feature of the seven "signs" is the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. These signs reveal truths about God. He rules over the natural world, unincumbered by its limitations (John 2:1–11). His word brings life and healing (4:46–54). He is Lord of the Sabbath and cares about both physical and spiritual health (5:1–15). He offers spiritual sustenance but never forgets physical needs (6:1–15). Our God is a helper and guide, one who rescues and offers presence in times of need (6:16–24). He is light and love and provision (9:1–12); the one who holds resurrection power (11:1–44).

Thus, we may liken our study of John's Gospel to a road trip: we are following the promised way through the wilderness (John 1:23; compare Isaiah 40:3), surrounded by beautiful scenery, and watching for the special "signs" that keep us on track and offer us salvation.

Mon, May 17	**Seek the Lord**	Isaiah 55
Tue, May 18	**Come and Find Rest**	Matthew 11:25–30
Wed, May 19	**The Lord, Our Dwelling Place**	Psalm 90:1–6, 10–17
Thu, May 20	**All Authority Is His**	Matthew 28:16–20
Fri, May 21	**My God, I Seek You**	Psalm 63
Sat, May 22	**The Father Sent Jesus**	John 5:31–47
Sun, May 23	**He Prepares a Place for You**	John 14:1–7
Mon, May 24	**Fruit Worthy of God**	Isaiah 5:1–7
Tue, May 25	**Live in Christ**	1 John 2:20–29
Wed, May 26	**Fruit of Righteousness**	Proverbs 11:23–31
Thu, May 27	**Christ in Us**	Galatians 2:15–21
Fri, May 28	**What Is Their Fruit?**	Matthew 7:13–19
Sat, May 29	**Planted by Streams of Water**	Psalm 1:1–6
Sun, May 30	**Abide in Christ**	John 15:1–11

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 226

Lesson 1—1. Word. 2. False. **Lesson 2**—1. Lamb. 2. False. **Lesson 3**—1. Jerusalem. 2. glorified. **Lesson 4**—1. False. 2. Rabboni. **Lesson 5**—1. False. 2. Sabbath. **Lesson 6**—1. 12. 2. life. **Lesson 7**—1. Capernaum. 2. man. **Lesson 8**—1. False. 2. Siloam. **Lesson 9**—1. robber. 2. False. **Lesson 10**—1. Jerusalem. 2. life. **Lesson 11**—1. Spirit of truth. 2. breathed. **Lesson 12**—1. heart. 2. the way. **Lesson 13**—1. branches. 2. True.

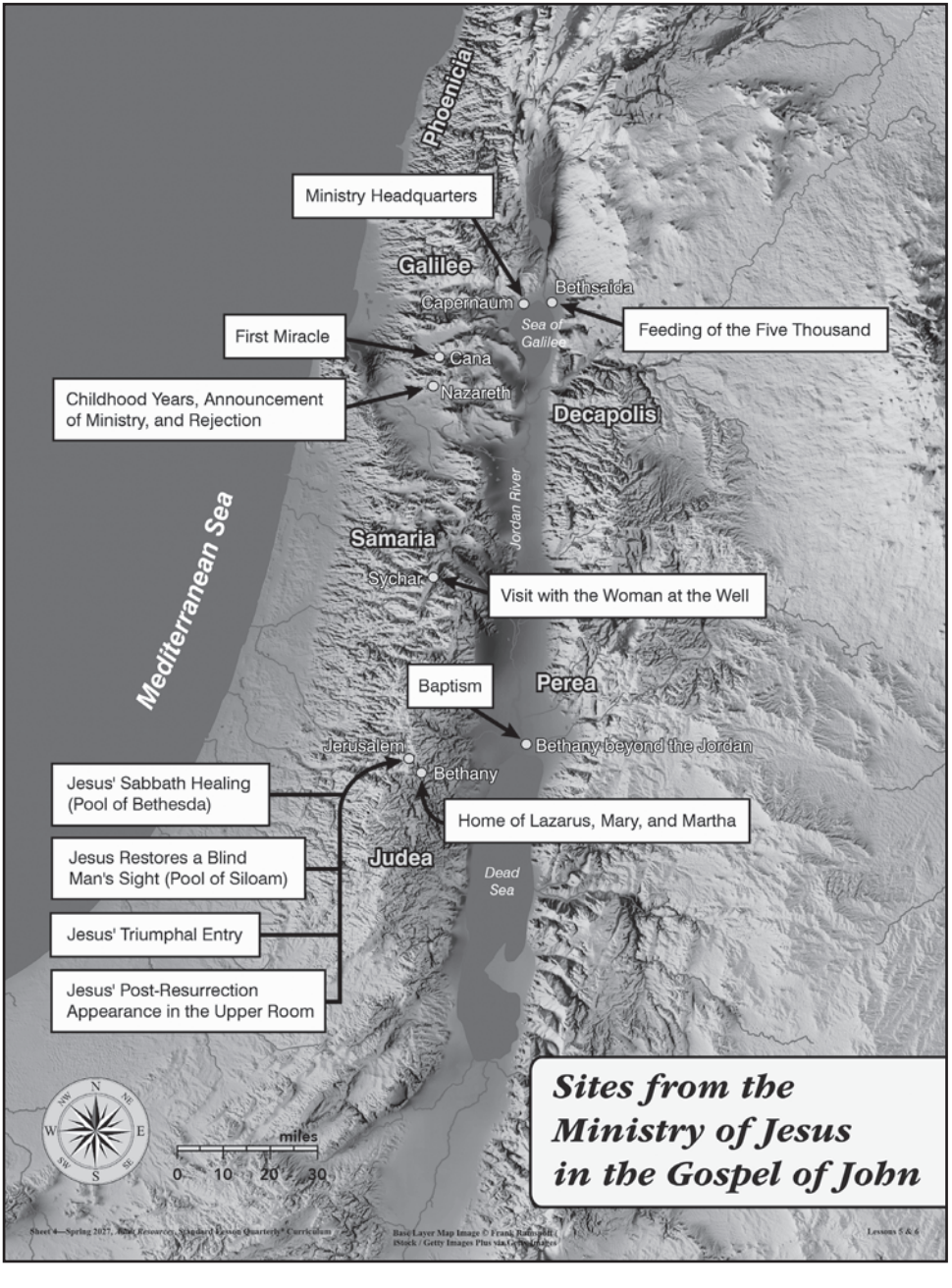
This Quarter in the Word

Mon, Mar. 1	**Christ Reflects God's Glory**	Hebrews 1:1–9
Tue, Mar. 2	**Remember the God Who Leads**	Deuteronomy 32:7–18
Wed, Mar. 3	**Confess That Jesus Is Lord**	Romans 10:1–11
Thu, Mar. 4	**Announce the Good News to All**	Romans 10:12–21
Fri, Mar. 5	**By Wisdom, God Created All Things**	Proverbs 8:1–3, 22–33
Sat, Mar. 6	**God Shall End Injustice**	Isaiah 58:6–12
Sun, Mar. 7	**The Word Became Flesh**	John 1:1–18
Mon, Mar. 8	**God Will Give the Spirit**	Acts 1:1–8
Tue, Mar. 9	**Testify of God's Great Works**	Psalm 66:8–20
Wed, Mar. 10	**God's Suffering Servant**	Isaiah 52:13–53:12
Thu, Mar. 11	**Christ, the Passover Lamb**	1 Corinthians 5:7–8, 10:15–18
Fri, Mar. 12	**Worthy Is the Lamb!**	Revelation 5:1–14
Sat, Mar. 13	**Branch of Jesse, Judge and King**	Isaiah 11:1–5
Sun, Mar. 14	**John Testifies About Christ**	John 1:19–34
Mon, Mar. 15	**Pilgrims Coming to Worship**	Psalm 122
Tue, Mar. 16	**Christ Came at the Right Time**	Romans 5:1–11
Wed, Mar. 17	**One Man Dies for the People**	John 11:47–57
Thu, Mar. 18	**Share That Jesus Has Power**	Mark 5:9–20
Fri, Mar. 19	**Our King Comes to Us**	Zechariah 9:9–12
Sat, Mar. 20	**The King of Glory Comes**	Psalm 24
Sun, Mar. 21	**Blessed Is the One Who Comes**	John 12:12–19

Mon, Mar. 22	**Waiting for God**	Psalm 130
Tue, Mar. 23	**Graciously Speaking About God**	Colossians 4:2–6
Wed, Mar. 24	**Jesus Shall Be Lifted Up**	John 12:27–36
Thu, Mar. 25	**Remember the Passover**	Exodus 12:1–3, 11–14
Fri, Mar. 26	**It Is Finished**	John 19:19–30
Sat, Mar. 27	**See, Lord, How Distressed I Am**	Lamentations 1:12–22
Sun, Mar. 28	**I Have Seen the Lord!**	John 20:11–18
Mon, Mar. 29	**The Lord Sustains**	Psalm 41
Tue, Mar. 30	**Keep God's Statutes**	Ezekiel 20:5, 10–20
Wed, Mar. 31	**Forgiveness and Healing**	Mark 2:1–12
Thu, Apr. 1	**Heal Me, O Lord**	Jeremiah 17:12–18
Fri, Apr. 2	**Healing as Kingdom Power**	Luke 10:1–9
Sat, Apr. 3	**Lord of the Sabbath**	Mark 2:21–28
Sun, Apr. 4	**Healing on the Sabbath**	John 5:2–16
Mon, Apr. 5	**The Meek Are Satisfied**	Psalm 22:22–31
Tue, Apr. 6	**Faith Without Action?**	James 2:14–26
Wed, Apr. 7	**Wisdom Offers a Feast**	Proverbs 9:1–12
Thu, Apr. 8	**Love Prompts Action**	1 John 3:14–22
Fri, Apr. 9	**An Endless Supply**	1 Kings 17:8–16
Sat, Apr. 10	**Blessings for the Giver**	Malachi 3:7–12
Sun, Apr. 11	**Jesus Satisfies Our Hunger**	John 6:1–14
Mon, Apr. 12	**Food from Heaven**	Exodus 16:1–12
Tue, Apr. 13	**Abundant Food for All**	Exodus 16:13–21
Wed, Apr. 14	**Eyes Opened at Supper**	Luke 24:28–35
Thu, Apr. 15	**Christ Is Bread from Heaven**	John 6:36–47
Fri, Apr. 16	**Christ's Sacrifice Gives Life**	John 6:48–59
Sat, Apr. 17	**Remember God's Works**	Psalm 105:1–5
Sun, Apr. 18	**Jesus, Bread of Life**	John 6:24–35

Mon, Apr. 19	**Taught by the Spirit**	1 Corinthians 2:10–16
Tue, Apr. 20	**Jesus, Light of the World**	John 8:12–20
Wed, Apr. 21	**Light Shines in the Darkness**	Isaiah 9:1–9
Thu, Apr. 22	**Children of the Light**	1 Thessalonians 5:1–10
Fri, Apr. 23	**Declaring God's Righteous Acts**	Psalm 71:15–24
Sat, Apr. 24	**Everlasting Light from God**	Isaiah 60:15–20
Sun, Apr. 25	**Jesus Opens Blinded Eyes**	John 9:1–9
Mon, Apr. 26	**Heed the Shepherd's Voice**	John 10:12–18
Tue, Apr. 27	**God Gently Leads Us**	Isaiah 40:6–11
Wed, Apr. 28	**Sheep of God's Pasture**	Psalm 100
Thu, Apr. 29	**Sheep Without a Shepherd**	Mark 6:30–34
Fri, Apr. 30	**A Better Shepherd**	Ezekiel 34:1–16
Sat, May 1	**David Will Shepherd God's Flock**	Ezekiel 34:17–31
Sun, May 2	**The Good Shepherd Gives Life**	John 10:1–11
Mon, May 3	**Can Mortals Live Again?**	Job 14:7–15
Tue, May 4	**Death Is Swallowed Up in Victory**	1 Corinthians 15:51–57
Wed, May 5	**The Dead Will Rise**	John 5:17–30
Thu, May 6	**Lazarus, Come Out!**	John 11:33–44
Fri, May 7	**Awake and Sing for Joy**	Isaiah 26:12–19
Sat, May 8	**Resurrection of the Righteous**	Daniel 12:1–10
Sun, May 9	**I Am the Resurrection**	John 11:17–27
Mon, May 10	**Created and Renewed by the Spirit**	Psalm 104:24–33
Tue, May 11	**By My Spirit, Says the Lord**	Zechariah 4:1–9
Wed, May 12	**Spirit of Truth**	John 14:14–27
Thu, May 13	**A New Heart and Spirit**	Ezekiel 36:25–36
Fri, May 14	**Children of God by the Spirit**	Romans 8:10–16
Sat, May 15	**The Gift of the Spirit**	Acts 2:36–47
Sun, May 16	**Receive the Spirit**	John 16:13–15; 20:19–23

Map Feature


Phoenicia
Ministry Headquarters
Galilee
Capernaum
Bethsaida
Sea of Galilee
Feeding of the Five Thousand
First Miracle
Cana
Nazareth
Childhood Years, Announcement of Ministry, and Rejection
Decapolis
Jordan River
Mediterranean Sea
Samaria
Sychar
Visit with the Woman at the Well
Baptism
Perea
Jerusalem
Bethany beyond the Jordan
Bethany
Jesus' Sabbath Healing (Pool of Bethesda)
Home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha
Jesus Restores a Blind Man's Sight (Pool of Siloam)
Judea
Dead Sea
Jesus' Triumphal Entry
Jesus' Post-Resurrection Appearance in the Upper Room
N
NE
E
SE
S
SW
W
NW
miles
0
10
20
30
Sites from the Ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John

The Best Lesson I Ever Learned

Teacher Tips by Ronald L. Nickelson

The coming cap-and-gown season, with its bestowed diplomas and degrees, takes me back to two of my own graduations. In high school, I walked across the stage, convinced that I was just about the smartest guy in the world. In contrast, when I walked across the stage for my college graduation just four years later, I felt small and knew I had a lot to learn.

You can probably guess the reasons behind the change in my mindset, but here are two worth highlighting.

Practical Realizations

First, college exposed me to a much wider world. It expanded my comprehension of knowledge bases, disciplines, and expertise. For every new thing I learned, I realized that there were dozens more I did not know. Another way to say this is that in college, **I knew that I didn't know**, whereas in high school, **I didn't know that I didn't know**.

The second reason for my change in mindset wasn't apparent to me at first; it snuck in, remaining subconscious for several years. But when I began teaching Bible classes, it quickly emerged.

Dawning Awareness

After a few classes, my wife mentioned that my teaching style (note the singular) was suboptimal. She was bold enough to tell me a truth that no one else would: my teaching was too much like preaching, and my preaching was too much like teaching. I always presented material in the same in-between way.

Later, I was privileged to attend the Air Force's "Academic Instructor School" at Maxwell AFB, AL, as a reservist. The class relentlessly stressed that good teaching begins with proper lesson objectives. They taught that different objectives require different approaches. For example, students often catch knowledge easily through a lecture format. Comprehension, on the other hand, requires students to grapple with the material personally. That usually leads to the need for activities that help students summarize, question, or predict outcomes. Those types of activities require time to reflect, write, converse, or ask questions—not just listen. Further, if an aim points toward application, students need space to problem solve or relate the lesson to their lives.

I came to terms with the fact that my one-style approach needed an overhaul.

Lesson Aims

Every week of *Standard Lesson* begins with three lesson aims (objectives). In short, the editors of the volume have determined the direction of each lesson for you. But as a teacher, you must still work through those aims with wisdom and discernment, asking yourself, *Which teaching method is most suited to achieving this objective?* Each aim has a slightly different goal. The first aim focuses on knowledge, the second on comprehension, and the last leads learners into application.

The Right Method

Start with the end goal in mind: the achievement of each lesson's aims must determine the teaching method(s) you employ. A few methods to consider include lectures, case studies, problem-solving exercises, and discussions. *Standard Lesson* offers varied ideas for classroom facilitation. Consider utilizing the discussion questions, lesson visuals, activities found on the Involvement Learning Pages, and exercises available as Activity Pages, which you can download.

What methods do you employ regularly in your teaching? What new methods may God be nudging you to try? May God faithfully guide your preparation. May you find great joy and contentment in your learning, planning, teaching, assessments, and adjustments.

Light of Life

Devotional Reading: Psalm 113
Background Scripture: Genesis 1:1–3; John 1:1–18

John 1:1–14

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
2 The same was in the beginning with God.
3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men.
5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.



6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.
8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.
10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Key Text

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **—John 1:1**

Image © Getty Images

Written That
You Might Believe

Unit 1: Jesus, the Christ

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the metaphors used in the lesson text to describe Jesus.
2. Compare John 1:1–5 with Genesis 1:1–3.
3. Make a plan to testify to the transforming effects of the light of Jesus.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Light That Lasts
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Word (John 1:1–5)
- A. In the Beginning (vv. 1–3)
- B. The Source of Life (vv. 4–5)

II. The Witness (John 1:6–8)
- A. Sent from God (v. 6)
- B. Testifying to the Light (vv. 7–8)

Carrying the Message

III. The World (John 1:9–14)
- A. Light and Darkness (vv. 9–11)
- B. Belief and Birth (vv. 12–13)
- C. Flesh and Glory (v. 14)

More than Words

Conclusion
- A. Witnesses to the Ever-Present God
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Light That Lasts

When I was in elementary school, my class went on a field trip to a cave system. We were there to experience what it was like to mine for gold. Flashlights in hand, we ventured deep inside a vast cave. Immersed in cavernous earth, our guide asked us to turn off our flashlights. The result was a complete and overwhelming darkness; I could not even see my hand in front of my face! After what felt like an eternity, the guide lit a small candle, and it instantly illuminated the space. We could see each other and the cave walls again.

But that candle's glow was temporary; once it burned out, darkness returned. In contrast, the opening of John's Gospel describes a light that will never burn out—the true light that has always been and always will be.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of John is the Fourth Gospel in both canonical order and, likely, in the order of composition. Commentators suggest that it was written toward the end of the first century AD, after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Although the author of this Gospel is unnamed, it is traditionally attributed to the apostle John, son of Zebedee. To avoid confusion with other individuals named *John* (see commentary on John 1:10, below), we will refer to the author of this Gospel as "John the Evangelist."

Because the Gospel of John was likely written last, the author would have been familiar with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These three are known as the "Synoptic Gospels" because they share similar perspectives in recounting the person and work of Jesus. However, John's Gospel stands out as unique; John the Evangelist chooses to give new information from his wealth of eyewitness recollections (see John 21:24–25). About 90 percent of the content in John's Gospel is not found in the other three. This statistic does not suggest that John sought to avoid the accounts in the other Gospels. Instead, he likely recognized his original audience's familiarity with those accounts and aimed to offer a different perspective on the life and ministry of Jesus.

John writes with a unique and creative perspective on Jesus' life and ministry. For example, John emphasizes the metaphorical and symbolic language present in Jesus' teaching (John 4:13–14; 6:35–65; 8:12; 10:1–16; 15:1–10; etc.).

The beginning of John's Gospel is unlike that of the Synoptic Gospels. Matthew begins with a genealogy and the birth narrative of Jesus (Matthew 1:1–24), Luke begins with two birth narratives (Luke 1:1–2:21), and Mark skips straight to Jesus' adult ministry (Mark 1:1–20). But the introduction to John's Gospel, its opening passage (or prologue), sets the stage for the Gospel's depiction of Jesus as the Word of God who invites us to know God and God's work better.

I. The Word

(John 1:1–5)

A. In the Beginning (vv. 1–3)

1a. In the beginning was the Word.

John the Evangelist begins by signaling to readers that the Old Testament will play a prominent role in his Gospel. The phrase *in the beginning* recalls Genesis 1:1. Although the Gospel writer does not say he is quoting that verse, there is little doubt he is pointing us in that direction.

John the Evangelist reflects the philosophical and rhetorical concepts common to his time by referencing *the Word*. Specifically, his use of the underlying Greek term—*logos*, from which we get the English word *logic*—reflects the ways ancient people tried to understand the world. Pagan philosophers use the term to explain how their gods communicate with the cosmos and the created order. The concept is an attempt to make sense of the animating forces at work in the world. Ancient Jewish writers employ the term to describe divine reason, often linking it to notions of God's wisdom.

However, John challenges these expectations by applying the concept of "the Word" to the one, true, eternal God of Israel. This God is the one through whom all creation came into being. The Word was already in existence at the beginning and possesses an eternal nature. Elsewhere, the New Testament confirms the concept of the everlasting God who existed before creation (Hebrews 1:10).

1b. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

In the underlying Greek text, the word translated as *God* does not have a definite article attached to it (example: "the"). This fact has led some non-Christians to suggest that *the Word* is merely *a* god. However, in Greek, definite nouns do not always require a definite article. The sentence structure and the location of the verb *was* in the original language help us understand that the Word is not a random pagan god. Instead, the Word is divine and of the same essence as the true God; the Word is *God* (John 10:30; compare Matthew 3:17).

2. The same was in the beginning with God.

John again describes the eternal nature of the Word (compare John 1:1a, above). The nature that characterizes *God* the Father has also characterized the Word since *the beginning.*

3. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

The Word is uncreated and eternal in His being, yet He is both creative and personal in His work. God created by speaking His word (Genesis 1:1–31; compare Psalm 33:6). Therefore, the Word has a distinct role in creation. The Word is eternally coexistent with God the Father, and through the Word, *all things* come into existence (1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15–20; Hebrews 1:2–3). John's purposeful use of creation imagery identifies the Word as being not only present at the inception of the world, but also integral to its process.

What Do You Think?

What significance is it to you that Christ is "the Word"?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take this week to worship Christ Jesus as Creator?

B. The Source of Life (vv. 4–5)

4. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

Because the Word is the source of *life*, nothing is sustained apart from Him. All life is *in him* through the power of God the Father (John 5:21, 26).

Metaphorical language appears throughout this Gospel (see Lesson Context). Here, John introduces

a second metaphor: *light*. In the Genesis account, light was brought into existence through the word of God on the first day (Genesis 1:3–5). Just as physical light is essential for physical life, so is spiritual light necessary for spiritual life. The Word of God brings spiritual light and life into the world (compare Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23; 1 John 5:11–12).

5. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

Darkness not only signifies the absence of physical light, but it also refers to a state characterized by a lack of wisdom (Ecclesiastes 2:13–14), the rejection of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:18), or the pursuit of sin (Matthew 6:23; John 3:19–20). These various forms of darkness can occur simultaneously.

Nevertheless, the brilliance of this *light* cannot be permanently overcome. No matter how great the darkness may be, the light of the Word triumphs over it so that the darkness can comprehend *it not* (compare Isaiah 9:2). As the light dispels darkness, the darkness is incapable of understanding the extent and power of the light.

What Do You Think?

What areas of a believer's life often need the light of Christ to shine most clearly?

Digging Deeper

How does spiritual darkness harm relationships among believers (see 1 John 2:7–11; 5:10)?

II. The Witness

(John 1:6–8)

A. Sent from God (v. 6)

6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

At this point, readers might expect John to identify the Word. Instead, the Evangelist introduces a significant figure—another *man* named *John*. The name *John* is common in the first century (compare Matthew 4:21; John 1:42; Acts 4:5–6; 12:12). This particular *John* is not the apostle and evangelist who wrote this Gospel, but rather the man commonly referred to as "John the Baptist" (Matthew 3:1; Luke 7:20).

The Old Testament describes how important prophets were commissioned and *sent from God* for specific purposes (Exodus 3:15; Isaiah 6:8; Malachi 3:1; 4:5; etc.). John the Baptist is the latest in this long line. He came prior to the incarnate Word of God to prepare people's hearts to receive the message (Luke 1:13–17; compare Matthew 11:7–10).

B. Testifying to the Light (vv. 7–8)

7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

John the Baptist is not *the Light,* the ultimate manifestation of God that is Jesus (see John 1:15–18). Instead, John has been commissioned by God to *bear witness* to the true light (see 1:19–34). John's witness draws many people from the regions around the Jordan River. They come, confess their sins, and embrace the baptism of repentance (Matthew 3:5–6). Several of Jesus' disciples were originally disciples of this John (John 1:35–42).

The Synoptic Gospels introduce this man as "John the Baptist" (Matthew 3:1; Luke 1:13; Mark 1:4). However, the Gospel of John chooses a different descriptor. As we consider this man's ministry, it may be more appropriate to refer to him as "John the Witness." His call was to bear witness to Jesus, the light, so that *all* people *might believe* (compare John 1:19–34).

Carrying the Message

The 2019 film *1917* takes place during World War I and follows the dangerous journey of two young British soldiers, William Schofield and Tom Blake. The two are tasked with an urgent mission to deliver a warning to the front lines before an entire British regiment walks into a deadly ambush.

The film highlights the extraordinary measures the two soldiers take to deliver their message. Their journey exposes them to every condition

How to Say It

Gentiles	*Jen*-tiles
logos (Greek)	*law*-goss
Synoptic	Sih-*nawp*-tihk
transfiguration	trans-fig-*yuh*-***rey***-shuhn

imaginable, including graveyards, rivers, and enemy trenches filled with dead bodies. The pair carries a weighty responsibility—lives are at stake.

Nearly two thousand years earlier, another messenger was sent on an even greater mission. God sent John the Baptist to proclaim the coming Messiah. What an extraordinary responsibility! John delivered this message with boldness and faithfulness, even at high personal cost (see Mark 6:14–29).

You may not be asked to cross battlefields or face beheading, but you are entrusted with a message of hope, a message that carries the responsibility of life or death. How will you carry the good news of Jesus to those who need to hear it? —NV

8. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

Some in the first century considered John the Baptist to be the promised Messiah (Luke 3:15; compare John 3:28; Acts 13:25). However, John is *not* the promised *Light* of the world. Instead, he is "a burning and shining light" who illuminates the identity and ministry of the true *Light* (John 5:35).

What Do You Think?

How have family, friends, mentors, or church leaders borne witness to the light that is Christ?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take to bear witness to this light among your neighbors, coworkers, or friends?

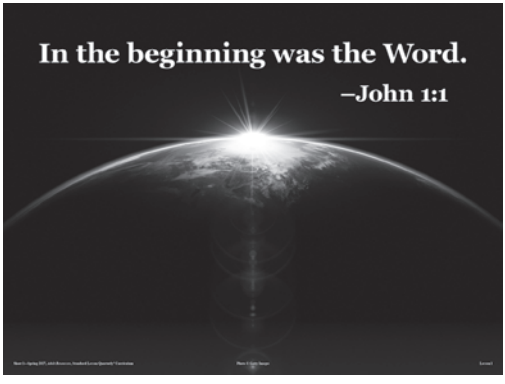
III. The World

(John 1:9–14)

A. Light and Darkness (vv. 9–11)

9. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

The ministry of John the Baptist is preparatory, readying people to receive *the true Light*. In this verse, John the Evangelist weaves together two significant themes from his Gospel: truth and light. Truth is a fundamental characteristic of God, and all truth comes from Him (see John 3:33). A central aspect of John's portrayal of Jesus is that His life and message are a revelation



Visual for Lesson 1. *Display this visual as you lead the class through a discussion on the significance of the title "the Word."*

of truth and that this truth has the power to give freedom (8:32).

The true light has entered *the world* and shines upon *every* person. Every individual has or will experience the light's illumination, but this does not mean that everyone will acknowledge or believe in that light. Only those who receive God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus will live in the light of His salvation (John 12:46; compare 8:12).

10. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

In John's Gospel, the term *world* can refer broadly to the entire physical Earth (John 21:25) and, more specifically, to human hostility and rebellion against God and His Son (7:7; 15:18–19; 17:14). Either possibility could be in view here.

John presents a tragic reality. Jesus Christ, as the true light and Word, is deeply and personally involved *in the world;* all creation is *made* and sustained *by him* (Hebrews 1:2–3; compare Colossians 1:16). Despite His involvement, many people *knew him not* and continue to reject Him.

11. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

The true light, the Word of God, *came* into the world, first appearing to *his own* people. This phrase can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is broad: since the Word created the world, all humanity is considered "His own."

The second interpretation is more specific. The Word of God became incarnate in Jesus, a

Jewish baby born in Bethlehem (see Luke 2:1–21). Therefore, He came to the children of Israel as "His own" people—the Messiah promised in Hebrew Scripture and tradition (see Micah 5:2; etc.).

Regardless of interpretation, these people have mixed reactions and struggle to believe (John 3:32; 6:64–65; 9:30–34, 39–41). Therefore, we should be careful, avoiding the implication that Gentiles are better at accepting Jesus than those of Jewish heritage. John's mention of "the world" (1:10, above) indicates that rejection of Jesus is a universal problem (compare Romans 1:18–21).

B. Belief and Birth (vv. 12–13)

12. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

In contrast to those who do not know or receive the Word are the *many* who do receive Jesus Christ. The phrase *believe on his name* may sound unusual for modern-day readers, as we typically do not speak of faith as being placed in someone's name. However, in John's time, putting faith in a person's name meant wholeheartedly trusting that person.

Power indicates the ability to do something (compare John 19:10–11). But the underlying Greek text can be translated as "right" (Hebrews 13:10; Revelation 22:14), and that is the sense in the verse before us. God grants believers the power to claim the right to a new identity.

We come to know God the Father more clearly by receiving His Son (see Matthew 10:40). As a result, we experience adoption and *become* His children. This does not mean that we become gods ourselves. Instead, John the Evangelist employs familial imagery to illustrate the new relationship we can have with our Creator. Through faith, we gain a new family identity and become joint heirs with Jesus (Romans 8:17).

What Do You Think?

How would you summarize what it means to "receive" Jesus as the light?

Digging Deeper

In what areas of life is it most challenging to welcome Christ's light, and what steps will you take to receive Him there?

13. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

This new family identity occurs by virtue of birth, but not a physical birth. How do we become children of God? We must be spiritually born again (John 3:3, 5–8). No physical reality—the *blood* of a person's ancestry, the desire *of the flesh*, or human *will*—can result in this new birth. Entrance into this family is solely the work *of God*. Only through faith in "the word of truth" can a person be born into the family (James 1:18; compare 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 1:23).

C. Flesh and Glory (v. 14)

14a. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

John concludes the prologue by revisiting the metaphor of Jesus as *the Word* (see John 1:1, above). In the New Testament, the term *flesh* can refer to a physical human body (examples: John 3:6; 1 Corinthians 15:39). However, the term can also signify fallen human nature (examples: John 6:63; Galatians 5:17; 1 John 2:16). John's usage of the term here refers to the former sense.

In ways mysterious yet glorious, the eternal Word of God *was made* human and entered His creation (see 1 John 4:2). This fact is the central component of the incarnation, a doctrine stating that in Jesus of Nazareth, the eternal, preexistent Word of God took on human flesh, becoming both fully God and fully human. The details of the incarnation are a mystery: the Word of God humbled Himself to live among His creation (Philippians 2:6–8). It is only by becoming human that the Son of God could die for the sins of the world (Hebrews 2:14).

In the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God lived as a resident in the created world. The underlying Greek word translated *dwelt* is derived from a term meaning "tent" or "tabernacle." John's use of this word recalls God's presence—His dwelling place—in the tent of the tabernacle in the camp of ancient Israel (Exodus 40:34–38; compare Ezekiel 37:27). Through the incarnation of Jesus, God has "tabernacled" *among us*. Jesus is Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

More than Words

When I was in elementary school, our class participated in a pen pal program that connected students of similar ages from different countries. At six years old, I was paired with a girl who lived across the Atlantic. Writing to her became one of the highlights of my monthly routine. Each letter carried updates about school, hobbies, family, and friends.

Nearly ten years later, our parents decided to have us meet in person. As my parents and I landed in her hometown, I felt a mix of excitement and nervous energy. It felt surreal to meet someone I had only known through words on paper. Yet, the initial awkwardness faded quickly, and we were soon sharing stories and interacting as if we had always known each other face-to-face. It was a delight to know her in the flesh!

For much of history, people came to know God through the revelation of the Law and Prophets, or through encounters with His self-disclosure (example: Exodus 3:2–6). But in the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth, God revealed Himself clearly through a human. He took on flesh and "dwelt among us" (John 1:14). As a result, people experienced Him face-to-face. Do you know that God's revelation in Jesus is far more than words on a page? —NV

14b. (And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

The author John includes himself among the *we* who *beheld* the *glory* of the incarnate Word of God. John, the apostle and evangelist, had been among the closest of Jesus' disciples who saw His glory firsthand in the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–13; Luke 9:28–36).

The *glory* observed by John is unlike the glory that humans ascribe to each other. Instead, this glory can only be ascribed to God the Father. The incarnate Son can receive (and show) this because He is the unique and *only begotten* Son of God (see John 1:18; 1 John 4:9).

Through the incarnation, God's *grace* was made available to the world (Romans 3:21–24; Ephesians 2:7–8). Furthermore, Jesus embodied God's *truth* (John 14:6), and therefore, that truth is revealed to all who believe (8:31–32).

What Do You Think?

How can believers live in ways that reflect Christ's glory, grace, and truth to others?

Digging Deeper

How do Ephesians 4:15 and 1 Peter 3:15–16 inform your answer?

Conclusion

A. Witnesses to the Ever-Present God

The darkness of our world is apparent. We know and experience that ever-present darkness through broken relationships, spiritual warfare, and physical suffering—to name a few. Sometimes, it can feel like the darkness has won. When that darkness descends, God may seem far away, disinterested in our experiences, questions, and struggles.

However, God is not far! As John's Gospel announces, the true light that is Jesus Christ has been revealed. This light is unlike the flame of a candle—it cannot be extinguished and cannot be overcome. As we walk in that light, by following Christ and obeying Him, we are filled with true spiritual, eternal life (John 8:12). When we believe in Jesus' name, we become daughters and sons of God. As part of this new family, we become like John the Baptist: witnesses to the light.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, into the world as the Word and the light. Give us courage and wisdom to testify to Your truth, grace, and glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Walk in the light.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 235) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Spring Quarter. Order ISBN 978-0-784-74013-2 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite the class to brainstorm sources of light. (Possible answers include: the sun, a light bulb, a candle.) Record their responses on the board.

Next, have participants pair up and choose one of the listed light sources. Distribute an index card and a pen to each pair and ask them to list attributes that describe their chosen source. After three minutes, conclude and explain that their lists will be used in the *Into Life* section of the lesson.

Transition into Bible study by saying, "There are many kinds of light, each with its own attributes. In today's study, we'll look at the one true light and consider how that light illuminates darkness."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read John 1:1–5 aloud. Divide the class into two groups: **Word Group** and **Light Group**. Instruct the **Word Group** to compare John 1:1–3 with Genesis 1:1–2, and the **Light Group** to compare John 1:4–5 with Genesis 1:3–4. Invite both groups to answer the following questions through in-group discussion: 1–What do these passages have in common? 2–In what ways are they different? 3–How does reading them side by side deepen your understanding of the person and work of Jesus? After allowing time for discussion, ask a volunteer from each group to share their group's insights with the class.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Word Maps" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Ask a volunteer to read John 1:6–13 aloud. Rename the two groups as the **John Group** and the **Jesus Group**. Instruct the **John Group** to compare John 1:6–8 with John 1:19–23 to determine the true role of John the Baptist. Instruct the **Jesus Group** to compare John 1:9–13 with John 8:12–19 to determine the obvious and unrecognizable components of Jesus' identity and mission. After bringing the groups together to share their responses, ask, "Why might some people in the first century have thought that John the Baptist was the promised Messiah?"

Ask a volunteer to read John 1:12–14 aloud. Say, "In these verses, we see two ways Jesus provides us with a new family status." Rename the two groups as **Family Group** and **Building Group**. Instruct the **Family Group** to compare John 1:12–14 with Romans 8:14–17, noting all words or phrases that indicate the family relationship that believers have with God. Instruct the **Building Group** to compare John 1:12–14 with Ephesians 2:19–22, noting all words or phrases that indicate the construction of the people of God. After bringing the groups together to share responses, ask, "How do we receive the power to become God's children, and what does this power entail?"

Into Life

Ask participants to regroup with their partners from the *Into the Lesson* activity. Ask each pair to share their responses from that activity with the whole class. After pairs have shared, ask each participant to choose one light source that represents, for them, the transformative effects of the light of Jesus.

To guide discussion, ask the following questions: 1–In what ways did the light of Jesus illuminate darkness? 2–How did you respond to this light? 3–How do you live differently because of this light? Have partners take turns sharing their responses and retelling how the light of Christ brought about transformation. Conclude by challenging participants to think of one person with whom they can share their story this week. To encourage engagement, tell participants that you will begin the next period by asking volunteers to share their experiences of the transformative effects of Jesus' light.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Transformative Light" exercise from the activity page. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Lamb of God

Devotional Reading: Matthew 10:26–39
Background Scripture: John 1:19–34

John 1:24–34

24 And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.

25 And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

26 John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;

27 He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

28 These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.



33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

Key Text

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. **—John 1:29**

Image © Getty Images

Written That

You Might Believe

Unit 1: Jesus, the Christ

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. State John the Baptist's role in preparing the way for the ministry of Jesus.
2. Explain the significance of the titles that John the Baptist gives Jesus.
3. Write a personal statement declaring who Jesus is to them.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Too Good Not to Tell
- B. Lesson Context

I. Baptizing the People (John 1:24–28)
- A Pharisees Inquire (vv. 24–25)
- B. John Answers (vv. 26–28)

II. Proclaiming the Lamb (John 1:29–31)
- A. John Sees Jesus (vv. 29–30)
  Royal Announcement
- B. Made Manifest (v. 31)

III. Seeing the Spirit (John 1:32–34)
- A. The Dove Descends (v. 32)
- B. The Son Confirmed (vv. 33–34)
  The Supporting Act

Conclusion
- A. Pivotal Figure
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Too Good Not to Tell

"We have good tidings of great joy!" my elementary-aged children shouted as they ran to me. The summer sun was blazing, so I was puzzled by their Christmastime announcement.

My confusion did not last long. A quick trip to the grocery store had yielded a pint of their favorite ice cream. They were thrilled to enjoy their favorite dessert and eager to be the first to share the news of this summertime treat.

If I'm honest, I'm much the same as my children. Whether I enjoyed a fantastic meal at a new restaurant or saw an engaging new film, I can't wait to tell others about it!

Truly great news compels us to share it. Today's study continues the account of a key figure introduced in last week's lesson.

B. Lesson Context

During the reign of Caesar Augustus (27 BC–AD 14), the Romans imposed a high tax to fund the emperor's numerous building projects. Those who resisted Roman authority faced severe consequences, including fines, flogging, exile, or execution. This was a contributing factor for a large majority of Jews living in poverty.

Roman domination was more than a political and economic burden for the Jewish people. It was also a spiritual problem: as long as Rome ruled, God did not (or so it seemed). The reality of Roman occupation was a constant reminder that God had consigned Israel to a state of exile—even "exile" within its own borders—for generations.

In this context, the Jews desperately desired liberation. The faithful looked to the promises of Scripture for hope. God had promised a great son of David to rule over His people and to bring restoration (see 2 Samuel 7:12–16; Isaiah 51:11). One day, the invading powers would be destroyed, and God would rule supreme over all nations (see Daniel 7:1–14). This ruler would be the promised Messiah. The Hebrew title *Messiah* and its ancient Greek equivalent *Christ* both mean "anointed one" (compare John 1:41; 4:25). The designations refer to an anointed redeemer and king of

the people of God, as proclaimed by the prophets (Isaiah 9:6–7; 16:5; Micah 5:2; etc.).

By the first century, several centuries had passed since God first gave His promises. The faithful looked beyond their ancestors' failures and kept their trust in God's promises. For more than 400 years, no prophet had risen in Israel to speak God's word to the people. The last of the great Hebrew prophets, Malachi, ended his book by predicting that the prophet Elijah would one day reappear to call people to remember the Law of Moses (Malachi 4:4–6).

In this historical and cultural context, the ministry of John the Baptist marks an important chapter in the history of God's salvation. The New Testament refers to him by that title so that we don't confuse him with other men by the name of *John*.

Although John the Baptist was the son of a priest (Luke 1:5–25, 59–63), he did not serve in a priestly role. Instead, his ministry took place outside the traditional framework of the temple in Jerusalem. He ministered in the wilderness near the Jordan River. John's simple clothing and sparse diet of locusts and honey complemented his message of repentance and call to justice (Matthew 3:4–10).

I. Baptizing the People

(John 1:24–28)

A. Pharisees Inquire (vv. 24–25)

24. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees.

The teachings and actions of John the Baptist attract the attention of the Jewish officials. So, they send a delegation of priests and Levites from Jerusalem to inquire about his identity and mission (John 1:19).

The delegation includes members of *the Pharisees*, a sect of first-century Judaism. The Pharisees are lay leaders, not part of the priesthood; however, they do consult with the chief priests and other religious leaders (John 7:32, 45; 11:47; etc.). Members of this sect teach in synagogues, earning widespread respect among Jews for their strict adherence to the Law of Moses.

To ensure compliance with the law, the Pharisees establish traditions that serve to create a "fence" around it (compare Matthew 15:1–2; Mark 7:1–4). The intention is that, if followed, individuals will avoid breaking any part of the law.

25. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

The delegation has already pressed John about his identity (John 1:19–22). John has denied being the *Christ* (the long-awaited Messiah), who is to be the anointed deliverer to free the people (see Lesson Context). He also rejects being the prophet *Elias* (Elijah), whose return would precede the "great and dreadful day of the LORD" (Malachi 4:5). Although there are similarities in their tasks, John simply comes in the "spirit and power" of Elijah (Luke 1:17; compare Matthew 17:11–13; Mark 9:12–13).

John's denials do not satisfy his inquisitors; they want to hear an affirmation of who he is (or thinks he is). And so the delegation demands to know who authorized him to conduct baptisms. Ritual or ceremonial washings—also known as "lustrations"—are common in first-century Judaism (Mark 7:1–4; Luke 2:22; John 2:6; 3:25; compare Leviticus 14:8–9; 15:4–12, 16–22, 25–27; Ezekiel 36:25). Faithful Jews, desiring to avoid anything that might make themselves "unclean," would wash regularly in accordance with the Law of Moses. Additionally, Gentile converts to Judaism (proselytes) also underwent ceremonial washing to symbolize cleansing and conversion.

Yet John's baptism is distinct. He calls people to water baptism that represents the cleansing of the soul through genuine repentance (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 19:4). To the religious leaders, John's practice appears as a rogue act lacking proper authority.

B. John Answers (vv. 26–28)

26. John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not.

John the Baptist does not deny that he has been baptizing. Instead, he answers in a manner that directs attention away from himself and toward someone far greater. In one sense, this individual is familiar: He *standeth . . . among* the Pharisees. Yet,

He also remains unknown as one whom the Pharisees *know not*. With the advantage of two thousand years of hindsight, we recognize that John is speaking of Jesus. The incarnate Word of God came to the world and to His own people, but neither group recognized Him (John 1:10–11 [Lesson 1]).

27. He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

Specific details clarify the greatness of the *coming* one. In terms of timing, John's public ministry begins earlier than that of Jesus' ministry, but the latter is more significant than the former.

The importance of the phrase *whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose* is seen when we consider life in the first century. People wore open-toed sandals and traveled on foot. Limited infrastructure, such as a lack of paved roads, water drainage, and sewage systems, meant that feet quickly became covered with dirt, mud, and waste. Cleaning one's own feet was an unpleasant chore. Further, washing the feet of another was considered a degrading task reserved for the lowliest servant (compare John 13:5). Disciples of rabbis often performed humble duties, but evidence suggests they were not expected to remove or carry their teacher's sandals. By saying he is unworthy to unloose the clasp of this one's sandal, John expresses both his own humility and the immeasurable greatness of Jesus.

What Do You Think?

In what practical ways can you model humility in your ministry roles, following the example of John the Baptist?

Digging Deeper

What does a contemporary expression of humility look like in your contexts of ministry?

28. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The Gospel provides readers with a geographic marker indicating where *John* the Baptist established his base for *baptizing* others (compare John 10:40). Although the exact location of *Bethabara* is unknown, most commentators estimate that it is situated on the eastern bank of the *Jordan* River.

II. Proclaiming the Lamb

(John 1:29–31)

A. John Sees Jesus (vv. 29–30)

29. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

The phrase *the next day* signals events that immediately follow *John* the Baptist's interaction with the priests, Levites, and Pharisees, as recorded in John 1:19–28.

The title *Lamb of God* that John bestows on *Jesus* is rare, appearing only here and in John 1:36. However, it is essential for understanding Christ's identity and mission. At first glance, that designation may seem to associate Jesus with the sacrificial lambs used in the Passover celebration (compare 1 Corinthians 5:7). However, the Passover lamb was not viewed as a sacrifice for sin. Instead, it was eaten as the main course of the Passover dinner, where it functions as a reminder of God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt—a rescue marked by lamb's blood (Exodus 12:21–27).

As an alternative, some commentators suggest that John is referring not to the Passover lamb of Exodus 12 but to the suffering servant figure of Isaiah 53. That passage describes the coming Messiah as God's servant who is "brought as a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7).

Regardless of which image John intends, the point remains clear: Christ is the one, final "lamb" whose death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation bring about the complete removal of the *sin of the world* and its consequences (compare Revelation 5:6–14; 22:1–5).

What Do You Think?

What have you found to be effective ways to introduce others to Jesus?

Digging Deeper

What title or description of Jesus' person and work would most clearly communicate to others who He is?

Royal Announcement

Have you ever attended a royal banquet? I

certainly haven't. But I know someone who has! The British monarchy recognized my friend's work, and, as a result, King Charles III invited him to a formal banquet at Buckingham Palace in London. The room was filled with a "who's who" of dignitaries, guests, and members of the royal family.

The evening followed strict protocol. When the king and the guest of honor arrived, royal trumpeters sounded a fanfare to announce their arrival. Senior staff members formally introduced foreign heads of state, declaring each's full title. Only after those announcements could attendees take their seats around the banquet table.

I imagine John the Baptist's announcement of Jesus being made with similar gusto and enthusiasm, though with far less grandeur. When John declared "the Lamb of God," he made a bold proclamation regarding the person and work of Jesus. John knew the role(s) that Jesus would fulfill. With that title, John presented the King and Messiah to anyone willing to listen. What title for Jesus resonates most with you? How many can you list from the Gospel of John? —NV

30. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

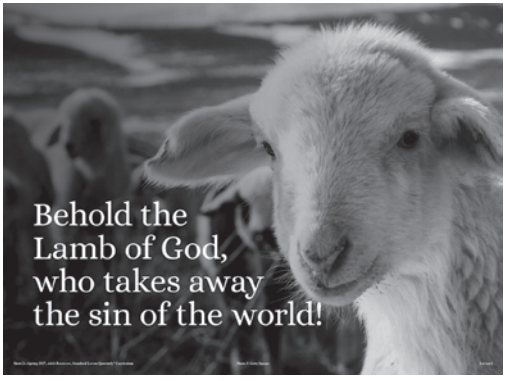
The past tense verb *said* indicates that John the Baptist has previously spoken about his status in relation to the coming Christ (see John 1:15). John's role is that of a forerunner, so in terms of public ministry, Jesus comes *after* John. However, Jesus *is preferred before* John because of Christ's preexistence as the Word of God (1:1–2).

Although John the Baptist has already gained a notable following, he readily acknowledges Jesus' superiority. While Jesus *the man* comes after John the Baptist in time, Jesus *the Word* existed before time itself. There can be no doubt, then, about Jesus' authority; the Word made flesh is truly God.

B. Made Manifest (v. 31)

31a. And I knew him not.

The statement John *knew him not* does not suggest that John had never met Jesus or knew of Him as a person. Other accounts indicate that they are cousins, and their mothers had known each other (Luke 1:39–45). John's lack of knowledge refers to Jesus' eternal identity and His mission as the chosen Messiah.



Visual for Lesson 2. *Display this visual as you ask, "What does it mean that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away sin?"*

31b. But that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.

John frames his ministry as being one of preparation. By *baptizing with water*, he readies people to receive the true Light (John 1:7 [Lesson 1]. His baptisms help to make the Messiah *manifest to Israel* by preparing hearts to recognize and receive Jesus as Lord and Messiah (see Luke 1:17; 3:3–4). In this way, John's life and ministry fulfill the prophecies of his father, Zechariah (1:76–79).

III. Seeing the Spirit

(John 1:32–34)

A. The Dove Descends (v. 32)

32. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.

John the Baptist looks back and recounts the events surrounding his baptism of Jesus. The reference to a *dove* aligns with other accounts of this baptism (see Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22).

Jesus came to the Jordan River from the region of Galilee and asked John to baptize Him (Matthew 3:13; Mark 1:9). Although John initially resisted, Jesus insisted that it was necessary to "fulfil all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). After Jesus emerged

from the water, John *saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove*. The fact that the Spirit *abode upon* Jesus indicated that God's Spirit remained on Him (compare 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22).

The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit fulfills Old Testament prophecy regarding the Spirit-empowered ministry of the Lord's servant. Isaiah foretold of a descendant of Jesse upon whom "the spirit of the LORD shall rest" (Isaiah 11:2). The presence of the Spirit on Jesus signals the inauguration of the Messiah's rule, characterized by justice, wisdom, and goodness (compare 42:1; 61:1).

What Do You Think?

Why is it significant that God confirmed Jesus' identity through the visible descent of the Spirit?

Digging Deeper

How do John 14:16–31; 15:26–16:15 describe the Spirit's role?

B. The Son Confirmed (vv. 33–34)

33. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

God has commissioned John's mission of baptizing and bearing witness. Through this same divine authority, John is told how to identify the Messiah. Although John will later seek clarification (Matthew 11:2–3), Jesus is indeed the one John has been waiting for. The descent of *the Spirit* like a dove reveals to John that the promised "preferred one" is fulfilled in Jesus (compare John 1:27).

This verse reiterates the content of the previous one with one key addition: the mention that Jesus will baptize *with the Holy Ghost* (compare Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). Many commentators connect this promised baptism to the day of Pentecost, an event that occurred several weeks after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:5). On that day, the disciples' empowerment by the Holy Spirit is accompanied by "cloven tongues like as of fire" (2:3). Peter urges those present to "repent, and be baptized," promising that those who did so would "receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (2:38). This suggests that baptism with the Holy Spirit refers to the gift of the indwelling Spirit that Jesus promised in John 7:37–39; 14:16–18 (compare Acts 10:44–48; 11:15–17; Titus 3:5).

Another interpretation understands baptism with the Spirit in a broader sense. Old Testament prophets promised that God would pour out His Spirit on His people in the last days, the time of the Messiah (Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Ezekiel 36:24–27; Joel 2:28–32). The presence of God's Spirit will enable people to recognize their sin, turn to God, and obey His decrees, thus marking them as His own. If John has this promise in view, then baptism with the Spirit refers to the totality of Jesus' ministry as the Lord's chosen Messiah, inaugurating God's kingdom, declaring the message: "When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8).

What Do You Think?

When did you first recognize the person of Jesus, and how have you experienced His work since then?

Digging Deeper

What distractions keep people from clearly recognizing Jesus' identity and mission? How will you address these?

34. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

John's affirmation *I saw* points again to his own eyewitness testimony of the Spirit's descent upon Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel, John the Baptist serves as the chief witness to Jesus, announcing the good news of the Spirit-empowered reign of the Messiah.

This good news centers on the declaration of Jesus' identity. Throughout the Fourth Gospel, Jesus often refers to Himself as the "Son of man" (John 1:51; 12:23; etc.), while others use the designation *the Son of God* (compare 1:49; 11:27; 19:7; 20:31; contrast 5:25). The title highlights Jesus' unique relationship with His heavenly Father, who sent Him (3:16, 18; 5:19; 14:10–11; 17:1). It also affirms the Son's deity even during His earthly

ministry (5:20–25). As the Son of God, Jesus is the source of eternal life (5:26). He is God's long-expected chosen Messiah, who establishes God's reign of righteousness and justice (compare Isaiah 42:1).

What Do You Think?

How does the title "Son of God" deepen your understanding of Jesus' identity and mission?

Digging Deeper

How do the titles "Son of God" and "Lamb of God" together provide a fuller picture of who Jesus is and what He came to accomplish?

The Supporting Act

For my ninth birthday, my older brother took me to see my favorite band. Leading up to the concert, my excitement overflowed; I memorized every lyric and carefully planned my outfit.

When we arrived at the stadium, I felt overwhelmed and excited. The house lights dimmed, and the screams of 80,000 fans erupted. I eagerly awaited what I thought would be the opening song, only to realize that the band on stage was not the one I had come to see.

Turning to my brother, I asked, "Are we at the right concert?" He explained that a supporting act would open the show. For the next hour, we watched this opening band perform—their energetic set preparing us for the main act. Finally, they went offstage, the lights dimmed again, and the long-awaited headlining band appeared.

I often think of John the Baptist as the ultimate supporting act, preparing the "stage" of the world for Jesus' arrival, preparing hearts to receive Christ's work. Who prepared your heart to encounter Christ? And how can you better serve as a "supporting act," preparing others to receive Him?

—NV

Conclusion

A. Pivotal Figure

A *pivotal figure* is someone who stands at the cusp of two periods of history and is instrumental in bringing about a transition. An Old Testament example is Samuel. As the last of the judges (Acts 13:20) and the first of the prophets (Acts 3:24), he played a key role in Israel's transition to monarchy (1 Samuel 8–10).

John the Baptist is no less a pivotal figure, his ministry signaling that a transition was underway. In a sense, this "voice crying in the wilderness" was both the last of the Old Testament prophets and the first of the New Testament prophets. He prepared people to receive Jesus by calling them to repentance and baptism. John served with humility, directing people away from himself and toward the one greater than him—the one through whom we have the forgiveness of sins.

John's testimony still rings forth today: Jesus is "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This proclamation should invite us to worship Jesus with gratitude for His sacrifice. May we proclaim this until Jesus, the final and ultimate pivotal figure, presents Himself at His glorious second coming.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son to be the Lamb who takes away our sin. We also thank You for sending forerunners, such as John, to bear witness to Your work in Christ Jesus. Lead us through Your Spirit to be attentive to the ways that You point us to the person and work of Your Son. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Behold! The Lamb of God, who takes away sin.

How to Say It

Caesar Augustus	*See*-zer Aw-*gus*-tus
Elijah	Ee-*lye*-juh
Galilee	*Gal*-uh-lee
Judaism	*Joo*-duh-izz-um or *Joo*-day-izz-um
Messiah	Meh-*sigh*-uh
Pentecost	*Pent*-ih-kost
proselytes	*prahss*-uh-lights
Zechariah	*Zek*-uh-*rye*-uh

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite participants to work with a partner to brainstorm idioms or descriptive phrases that describe a person's character. Write the following examples on the board: *He is busy as a bee; She is tough as nails.* After three minutes of brainstorming, ask participants to share their responses. Prompt further discussion by asking, "How do these idioms and comparative phrases help understand a person?"

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Matching Idioms" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing answers in small groups.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Word pictures, such as idioms and descriptive phrases, help us describe people or concepts that feel too big or abstract. In today's study, consider how the titles used by John the Baptist reveal significant details regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read John 1:24–28 aloud. Through whole-class brainstorming and discussion, create a job description for the ministry of John the Baptist.

Option 1. Divide the class into four groups: **Matthew Group** (Matthew 3:1–12), **Mark Group** (Mark 1:4–8), **Luke Group** (Luke 3:2–18), **Acts Group** (Acts 13:23–25). Invite each group to compare their assigned passage with John 1:24–28, noting both similarities and differences between the two accounts. After five minutes of group work, invite a volunteer from each group to share their conclusions by asking, "What do these accounts teach us about the significance of John's ministry?"

Ask another volunteer to read John 1:29–31 aloud, and write on the board any titles that John the Baptist gives Jesus. Using lesson commentary, introduce each title and discuss its significance.

Option 2. Assign each of the four groups one of the following Scripture texts: Leviticus 5:5–6; Isaiah 40:3–5; Isaiah 53:4–7; and John 5:31–35. Invite each group to answer the following questions in a small-group discussion: 1–What are the main points of this text? 2–How does this passage relate to John 1:29–31? (Possible answers: Leviticus 5–sacrificial lamb for sin offering; Isaiah 40–prophecy of John; Isaiah 53–prophecy of Jesus as a sacrificial lamb; John 5–confirmation of John's fulfillment of his role) Conclude the activity by asking volunteers to share their findings with the whole class.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 1:32–34. Write the following headers on the board:

See / Know / Hear / Speak

Invite participants to complete the chart by responding to the following prompts under the appropriate header: 1–What John saw during Jesus' baptism; 2–What John knew about his role in Jesus' baptism; 3–What John heard regarding Jesus' baptism; 4–What John spoke in response to Jesus' baptism. Then ask, "How effective is John's witness to the Lamb of God?"

Into Life

Invite participants to list the titles of Jesus that are found in the New Testament. Write these responses on the board. Then, divide the class into small groups and ask them to discuss the meaning and significance of these titles.

Next, distribute index cards and pens to each participant. Ask them to write a personal statement summarizing who Jesus is to them. Afterward, invite them to share their statements with their group and discuss how they have experienced the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Who Is Jesus?" activity from the activity page. Have participants complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in small groups.

King of Israel

Devotional Reading: Psalm 124
Background Scripture: Psalm 118:25–26; Zechariah 9:9; John 12



John 12:12–19

12 On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

13 Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

14 And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written,

15 Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.

16 These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.

17 The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.

18 For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.

19 The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.

Key Text

They took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. **—John 12:13**

Image © Getty Images

Written That
You Might Believe

Unit 1: Jesus, the Christ

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the Old Testament Scriptures quoted by the crowd in their praise of Jesus.
2. Explain the meaning of Jesus as "Messiah" within its biblical and historical context.
3. Worship Jesus by waving palm branches, shouting praise, and celebrating Him as King.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Return of the King
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Crowds Bless (John 12:12–13)
- A. Jesus and Jerusalem (v. 12)
- B. Palms and Praise (v. 13)
  Parades

II. The King Arrives (John 12:14–16)
- A. Unassuming Animal (v. 14)
- B. Fulfilled Prophecy (vv. 15–16)
  Understanding in Hindsight

III. The Message Spreads (John 12:17–19)
- A. Witness to Miracles (vv. 17–18)
- B. Witness to Popularity (v. 19)

Conclusion
- A. Return of the Kingdom
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Return of the King

One of the main plot points in J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, centers on a protagonist named Aragorn. As the narrative advances, readers learn that he is the rightful heir to the throne of the kingdom of Gondor. His long-anticipated return signifies a victory over evil, particularly the primary antagonist in Tolkien's mythology, the Dark Lord Sauron.

What distinguishes Aragorn from his predecessors is his commitment to justice. While his ancestors were flawed and allowed evil to take root in the kingdom, Aragorn ascends the throne with justice. As he ascends the throne, he is attentive to the needs of the kingdom.

In crafting this story, Tolkien draws heavily on a classic literary trope: the return of a long-lost heir to the throne. This narrative device has roots in the account of Scripture. We see this device on display when we read Scriptures that detail the arrival of a long-awaited heavenly king who restores His people and establishes a kingdom of righteousness. However, unlike many earthly kings, the King of Kings arrives on earth as a humble servant. Today's study explores how and why this is significant.

B. Lesson Context

Today's text covers the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. All four Gospels recount this event (Matthew 21:4–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–44; John 12:12–19). The Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke frequently overlap in their presentations, so we are not surprised by the shared information. But having an event shared in both John's Gospel and the Synoptics is less expected. Inclusion in all four Gospels underscores the event's significance.

Since last week's lesson on John 1:29–34, we have progressed through the three-and-one-half-year timeline of Jesus' ministry, arriving at the final week of His life. As Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread approached, Jesus and His disciples traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the observances. This was not the first time that Jesus made this journey for this reason (Luke 2:41; John 2:13).

Passover is a one-day celebration that commemorates God's deliverance of the Israelites from enslavement in Egypt. This observance was always both joyous and solemn, with each element serving as a reminder of God's triumph over Egypt. The annual celebration of Passover reaffirmed God's liberation of the Israelites and their identity as His unique people (Exodus 12:42). This single-day observance was followed by the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread (see Leviticus 23:5–6; Numbers 28:16–17; Deuteronomy 16:1–4).

Pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem six days before the celebration to undergo ritual purification (John 11:55; compare Numbers 9:10; 19:11–12). Jesus, however, traveled to Bethany in the days leading up to Passover (John 12:1). Bethany is a village located on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, just under two miles from Jerusalem.

Several weeks earlier, Jesus had visited Bethany after hearing that His friend Lazarus had fallen ill and died. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. However, after Jesus declared Himself to be "the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25), He raised his deceased friend from the dead. After this, "many . . . believed on him" (11:45). Further details of this account will be examined in Lesson 10.

In the days leading to Passover, Jesus returned to visit Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. They held a dinner in Jesus' honor, which concluded with a significant prophecy concerning Jesus' future (John 12:2–7). When word spread of Jesus' presence in Bethany, a crowd gathered to see Him and the recently resurrected Lazarus (12:9). However, not everyone who was interested in seeing Jesus had good intentions. The religious leaders, particularly the chief priests, made plans to kill both Jesus and Lazarus (12:10–11).

I. The Crowds Bless

(John 12:12–13)

A. Jesus and Jerusalem (v. 12)

12. On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.

After spending the evening in Bethany, Jesus travels to Jerusalem *the next day*. The phrase *much people* indicates a large crowd, similar to the one He encountered the day before in Bethany (John 12:9; see Lesson Context).

This crowd is not just an eager group of admirers seeking a chance encounter with *Jesus*. Instead, they are pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover *feast*. Among them are "the whole multitude of the disciples" (Luke 19:37). Having heard that Jesus was in Bethany, the multitude correctly assumes that He will journey *to Jerusalem* to prepare for Passover. Consequently, they set out to meet Him and welcome Him as He enters the city.

What Do You Think?

How does it encourage you to be with a crowd of people who are praising Jesus?

Digging Deeper

What potential pitfalls arise if the *only* time you worship is with others?

B. Palms and Praise (v. 13)

13a. Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried.

The Law of Moses directed that *branches*, including those from *palm trees*, be used during the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:40). Although none of the accounts explicitly mention that the crowd waves these branches, it is likely they do. Palm fronds are used in this way to signify praise (see Revelation 7:9). Such fronds were also used in the triumphal procession of Simon the Maccabee when he entered Jerusalem in about 141 BC (see the extracanonical 1 Maccabees 13:51; compare 2 Maccabees 10:7).

13b. Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

The word *Hosanna* originates from a Hebrew expression meaning, "O save us, please." The crowd's plea comes from Psalm 118, which describes the triumphant return of a warrior to Jerusalem. The climactic point of the psalm occurs when the psalmist turns to God in praise and supplication. The psalmist cries, "Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name



Visual for Lesson 3. *Display this visual as the class waves palm branches, shouts praise, and celebrates Jesus as King.*

of the Lord" (Psalm 118:25–26). Additionally, this psalm also contains several significant statements, including the "cornerstone" prophecy (118:22–23). Jesus later applied these to Himself (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10–11; Luke 20:17).

The crowd applies the words of Psalm 118 as they identify Jesus as a king. In doing so, they reveal expectations and hopes regarding the prophesied Messiah. The title *Messiah* means "anointed one," referring to the anointed king of the people of God as proclaimed by the prophets (Isaiah 9:6–7; 16:5; Micah 5:2; etc.). The promised Messiah would be a king who would save His people and establish a reign of peace (see Zechariah 9:9–10).

The people clearly anticipate great things from a *king* who *cometh in the name of the Lord*. But they do not yet realize or appreciate how Jesus' kingship will differ from that of every monarch they have ever known. Nor do they know of Jesus' absolute worthiness to receive such praise and worship. The Pharisees understood the threat of the people's adoration, however, and regarded their behavior as worthy of rebuke (Luke 19:37–44).

It is important to note that the crowd does not refer to Jesus as the "king of the Jews" (compare Matthew 2:2; John 1:49; 18:33, 39). Instead, by referring to Him as the *King of Israel*, they anticipate a broad renewal among the people. The term *Israel* refers to the twelve tribes of the covenant people of God. By the first century, however, most of Israel—especially the tribes associated with the northern kingdom—had been exiled and dispersed among the nations. The term *Jew,* as used in the New Testament era, refers to someone descended from or associated with the southern kingdom of Judah. While a "king of the Jews" ruled only over the southern kingdom, a "king of Israel" would have authority over the whole restored people (see Jeremiah 31:31–34; etc.).

The title *King of Israel* treats Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem as a coronation procession for the heir to the throne of David. Up to this point in the Gospel of John, Jesus has avoided accepting direct proclamations of His kingship (John 6:15). However, before the crowds, He publicly embraces the title. Thus, His participation serves to approve the crowd's declaration of Him as the rightful king.

What Do You Think?

What items, such as palm branches, do believers incorporate in acts of worship?

Digging Deeper

What is the significance of these items, and how do they help direct our hearts and attention toward God in worship?

Parades

We had a parade every Memorial Day—the only parade we had all year—in the community where I grew up. It began at the grade school and ended at the community center, about a mile away. There was always a color guard in the lead, followed by the high school marching band, fire trucks (we had two), and other entrants. At the community center, the color guard fired three volleys from their rifles, an area minister offered a prayer, and a local official gave a short speech. The Memorial Day parade had a starting point and an ending point, where there was always a brief official function.

In the intervening years, every parade I have witnessed has followed this pattern. It probably would seem a bit silly and pointless to have a parade where each element disbands as soon as it reaches the end point, with no official function tying it all together.

The triumphal entry of Jesus looked like a parade. It had a beginning point, it had joyous

people along the route who affirmed the central figure in the procession, but where was the official function at the end, the climax of the parade?

There was indeed a climax, but it occurred later. That climax began at Jesus' crucifixion and continued through His resurrection and ascension. That was an official function of divine nature, the event where the one in charge (Jesus) made it clear that what had happened and was happening was not an end but a beginning. (See Acts 1:8.) —JBN

II. The King Arrives

(John 12:14–16)

A. Unassuming Animal (v. 14)

14. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written.

The Synoptic Gospels provide further details about the procurement of the animal (Matthew 21:1–3; Mark 11:1–7; Luke 19:29–35). In contrast, the Gospel of John offers minimal information, simply stating that *Jesus . . . found* the animal.

During the time of the Roman Empire, powerful military leaders or reigning kings would typically enter a city on a magnificent warhorse or in a chariot. However, Jesus' decision to ride *a young ass* underscores the humble nature of His reign. The choice fulfills what the Old Testament prophets wrote (see next).

B. Fulfilled Prophecy (vv. 15–16)

15. Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.

John records a modified, abbreviated prophecy from the prophet Zechariah. This prophet foretold of the *King* who enters Jerusalem (Zechariah 9:9). The title *Sion* (Zion) is a poetic expression referring to Jerusalem, which is often personified as a young woman or *daughter* (compare Isaiah 37:22; 62:11).

When Zechariah prophesied, no king ruled over a united Israel. The united monarchy of Israel had ended following Solomon's death in 931 BC. What followed was a two-hundred-year period of a divided monarchy: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. The prophet Zechariah was active in the southern kingdom of Judah in about 520–480 BC. He wrote of a day when God will appoint a king from the line of David to restore the kingdom of Israel (Zechariah 9:9; 14:9, 17; compare Ezekiel 37:24–28).

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is not to fight physical battles and overthrow the Roman occupiers. Despite the praise surrounding Him, His humility is evident. Rather than riding a majestic stallion with flaring nostrils, He chose a lowly *ass's colt*. This animal was primarily used for plowing or carrying burdens, not for signaling the presence of royalty. We can easily picture Jesus' legs extending from the donkey's round belly, with His feet barely grazing the ground. He is the humble King—a contradiction of terms in the ancient world, but perfect in God's plan.

What Do You Think?

In what areas of your life do you most often struggle with fear or anxiety?

Digging Deeper

How do the reign of King Jesus and your citizenship in His kingdom bring peace in the face of fear?

16. These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.

This verse and the three that follow can be seen as transitional. John is closing one scene to open another. The scene being closed out is one of adulation based on misunderstanding—by both the

How to Say It

ascension	uh-*sen(t)*-shun
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-*ahn*-uh-me
Hosanna	Ho-*za*-nuh
Lazarus	*Laz*-uh-rus
Maccabees	*Mack*-uh-bees
Messiah	Meh-*sigh*-uh
Messianic	Mess-ee-*an*-ick
Pharisees	*Fair*-ih-seez
Sadducees	*Sad*-you-seez
Synoptic	Sih-*nawp*-tihk
Zechariah	*Zek*-uh-***rye***-uh

crowd and *his disciples.* The scene that John transitions into deals with God's glorification, a process that begins with His crucifixion (see John 12:23; compare 13:31).

Understanding in Hindsight

For the longest time, my friend thought "love songs" were silly and unrealistic. After a difficult childhood and a painful first marriage, she stopped believing that true, unselfish love could ever be real—that is, until she married the love of her life!

Not long after her wedding, a love song came on the radio. As she listened, her eyes began to sting with tears. The lyrics painted a picture of deep, unselfish love—something she had only recently started to experience. Suddenly, the same old lyrics took on an entirely new meaning. Her new relationship allowed her to hear the song with new ears.

As Jesus' disciples accompanied Him into Jerusalem, they did not understand why He entered the city in the manner He did. Only after His glorification did they understand how that event fulfilled Scripture. Their experience with the crucified and risen Lord reframed everything they knew.

In what ways has time—and your own experience with Jesus—reshaped your expectations or deepened your understanding? If that hasn't happened yet, how are you positioning your heart to pay attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit?
—PM

What Do You Think?

When has God reshaped your expectations or deepened your understanding of His work?

Digging Deeper

How can you strengthen your trust so that you will continue to follow Him even when His work is not clear to you?

III. The Message Spreads

(John 12:17–19)

A. Witness to Miracles (vv. 17–18)

17. The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.

This crowd of *people* includes those who witnessed Jesus' miraculous work of raising *Lazarus* from the *dead* (John 11:43–45; see Lesson Context). Not only did they see Lazarus *walk out of his grave*, but they also continued to testify and give a *record* of that event, even reporting it to the Pharisees (11:46).

18. For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.

The location and timing of the miracle in Bethany set the stage for its news to spread rapidly. Since it was a public miracle, it attracted the attention of many (see John 12:17, above). As a result, the crowd's testimony spread rapidly.

Those who *met* Jesus on the way to Jerusalem include both those who had witnessed His miraculous work and those who had only *heard* its details. This highlights a significant theme in the Gospel of John: the power of belief in Jesus apart from the prerequisite of also seeing His work (compare John 20:29).

B. Witness to Popularity (v. 19)

19. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.

The *Pharisees* are a sect of first-century Judaism. They are known for their careful observance of the Law of Moses and their traditions that promoted repentance among the people. They teach in the synagogues and are generally respected by the people, who view them as authoritative teachers of the Scripture.

Members of this group anticipate the future restoration of Israel. They believe it will come through obedience and repentance in accordance with the promises outlined in the law (see Deuteronomy 30:2–3; Leviticus 26:40). Compared to the Sadducees, the Pharisees are less supportive of the Roman occupation. The Pharisees seek political liberation and freedom from foreign oppression. However, they are also pragmatic. They recognize that temporarily aligning with the political powers could help them achieve their goals of an obedient and repentant Israel.

Consequently, the Pharisees are alarmed by the popularity Jesus garners. If a critical mass of

people acclaims Him as "King of Israel" (John 12:13, above), it could provoke a disastrous war with Rome. Fearing consequences like those of 586 BC (see 2 Kings 25), the Pharisees seek to protect themselves from the empire's response to any figure who might be seen as rebellious or a rival to the emperor (see John 11:47–48). A generation later, in AD 70, Rome will indeed destroy Jerusalem and its temple as part of a bloody campaign against Jewish rebels.

In the Gospel of John, *the world* can refer to humanity's overall rebellion and hostility toward God and His Son (John 7:7; 15:18–19; 16:20; 17:14). However, the term can also refer to the entire planet in a neutral sense (21:25). The verse before us reflects the latter usage. Alarmed by this situation, the Pharisees realize that their efforts to oppose Jesus and undermine His popularity are failing to *prevail*. Instead, the people continue to pursue Him and listen to His teachings.

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem marks a point of no return for Him. He has labored to keep a low profile due to His sense of divine timing (John 2:4; 7:6–8; compare Matthew 12:16, 20). But He is now past the proverbial "point of no return." The wheels are in motion, and the authorities will ensure He is executed before He can incite a major revolt.

Conclusion

A. Return of the Kingdom

Readers of the Gospel of John understand that Jesus did not come as a military conqueror to lead a revolt against the foreign occupation. He did not come to establish a new political order based on earthly measures.

Instead, His mission is to achieve a final victory over the spiritual ruler that even Rome is subject to, conquering death itself by passing through it and being resurrected afterward. His kingship is not of this world (John 18:36); He came to accomplish something much more significant than any human ruler could achieve. In doing so, He fulfilled the messianic promises of God to the people. He did so by fulfilling the promises of the law and the prophets by overcoming death and bringing redemption.

The crowds recognized that Lazarus' resurrection was only a preview of this promised restoration. Their celebration on the road to Jerusalem was, in essence, an appeal to Jesus, imploring Him to renew their political expectations by establishing a kingdom of their own expectations.

In response, Jesus demonstrated His royal status, but not in the way one might expect. Instead of entering Jerusalem on a warhorse, He came into the city in a humble fashion, in accordance with the vision described by the prophet Zechariah. Through this act, Jesus showed that His authority derives not from human measures of strength and power. Instead, His authority comes from the divine power of His heavenly Father.

Those whose status and authority were threatened by this implicit declaration were alarmed by this humble display. Similarly, those who are powerful by human standards today may find it challenging to recognize and submit to Jesus' kingdom and rule. Will you celebrate His rule and His kingdom, or are you making your own "kingdom" of your choosing?

What Do You Think?

What are some examples of kingdoms people still try to build today—personally, politically, or socially? How do these compare with God's kingdom?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to more fully submit to Jesus as King and to live according to the ethics of His kingdom?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son as the anointed Savior of the world. Help us better understand the nature of Jesus' kingdom and our own status within that kingdom. Empower us through Your Spirit to live in obedience to our heavenly King, in accordance to His kingdom ethics. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Hosanna! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite each participant to share with a partner about a joyful time that involved a significant celebration. Examples might include a wedding, the birth of a child, or an important academic or professional achievement. Invite partners to describe their experiences to one another, including both physical and emotional reactions. As participants share, record volunteered responses on the board.

Next, ask pairs to think of a loved one, such as a friend, sibling, or child, who experienced a similar joyful event. Have participants describe their feelings and reactions to celebrating secondhand. Again, record their responses.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Our joy—and our other emotions—often change based on how closely we are connected to a situation. In today's lesson, pay attention to the different reactions people have to the same news about the work of Jesus."

Into the Word

Ask one volunteer to read John 12:12–13 aloud and another to read Psalm 118:25–27 aloud. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–What similarities and differences do you notice between these two passages? 2–How do these passages express praise through words? Objects? Movement? 3–Why do you think the crowd chose this psalm to announce Jesus' arrival? 4–What does this combination of Scripture and celebration suggest about how the people understood Jesus at this point?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Comparing Accounts" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite participants to work with a partner to complete Part 1 as indicated.

Ask one volunteer to read aloud John 12:14–16 and another to read aloud Zechariah 9:9–10. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–What is the significance of the animal on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem? 2–What message did this deliberate action convey to the people? 3–How does this image of a king differ from typical expectations of power? 4–Why do you think the disciples did not fully understand this moment until later?

Alternative. Invite participants to work with a partner to complete Part 2 of the "Comparing Accounts" exercise.

Ask a volunteer to read John 12:17–19. Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–How does John 11:38–57 help shape your understanding of this account? 2–Why do the crowds and the Pharisees respond differently? 3–What fears or threats do the Pharisees seem to recognize in this moment? 4–How does this passage help us understand what is important in Jesus' kingdom?

Alternative. Invite participants to work with a partner to complete Part 3 of the "Comparing Accounts" exercise. Then, conclude the activity by asking volunteers to share their findings from all three parts.

Into Life

Distribute one or two palm fronds to each participant. Say, "The people heard that Jesus had raised the dead, and they responded by celebrating Him as king. What miracles has Jesus done in your life or in the lives of your loved ones?" Invite volunteers to share with the whole group.

After reminding participants that praise to Jesus can be expressed through words, objects, and movement, encourage the whole group to take part by waving their palm fronds and reciting the crowd's praise from John 12:13. You may choose to lead this brief act of praise after each shared testimony.

Conclude the activity with a prayer of praise, honoring Jesus as king.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Palms of Praise" exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute before sharing praises with a partner.

Proof of Resurrection

Devotional Reading: Acts 2:22–28
Background Scripture: John 20:1–10

John 20:11–18

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

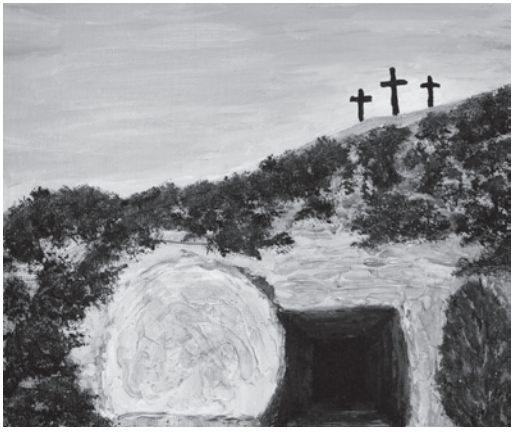
12 And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

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

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

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

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



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

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

Key Text

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her. **—John 20:18**

Image © Getty Images

Written That

You Might Believe

Unit 1: Jesus, the Christ

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Christ at the empty tomb.
2. Identify how Jesus' resurrection overturns the expectations of His followers.
3. Write a personal testimony of a time they had "seen the Lord" through His work.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. The Dawn of Easter
- B. Lesson Context: Timeline
- C. Lesson Context: Burial

I. Mourning and Weeping (John 20:11–15)
- A. Angels in White (vv. 11–12)
- B. Questions and Answers (vv. 13–15)
  Not Lost, but Found

II. Surprise and Joy (John 20:16–18)
- A. Personal Recognition (v. 16)
  The Shepherd's Call
- B. Personal Commission (vv. 17–18)

Conclusion
- A. From Grief to Mission
- B. From Lost to Found
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Dawn of Easter

In the fifteenth sonnet of "Easter Dawn," the poet Malcolm Guite escorts readers into the empty tomb of Easter morning alongside Mary Magdalene. He begins the sonnet by describing Mary's expression of grief upon seeing the empty tomb.

Grief is an unavoidable part of the human experience. At some point, we all face grief—whether through the loss of a loved one, the destruction of a cherished dream, or the collective mourning of a community tragedy. During these moments, we can feel like a "dark night of the soul" has descended. We are left confused and saddened, searching for God's presence amid the darkness.

Guite concludes the sonnet by describing the feeling of darkness that Mary finds herself in during the early hours of Easter morning. This feeling is one that many of us who have experienced grief can relate to. And yet, the final line of Guite's sonnet beautifully identifies how that darkness of grief transforms into the daylight of joy through the resurrection of Christ.

B. Lesson Context: Timeline

The structure of the Gospel of John can be divided into three sections. The first focuses on the miraculous works of Jesus' ministry (John 1–12). The second records His last words to His disciples (John 13–17). The third recounts His death, burial, and resurrection (John 18–21). Today's lesson is situated at the conclusion of the second section.

The final week of Jesus' life began with His anointing in Bethany (John 12:1–11), following His resurrection of Lazarus (11:38–43). From Bethany, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem, where crowds adored Him and religious leaders questioned Him (12:12–50 [Lesson 3]).

Chapters 13–17 describe the events surrounding Jesus' betrayal and arrest. The night began with a final meal with His disciples, during which He washed their feet, predicted His death, and comforted them in their sadness (John 13:5–14:14 [Lesson 12]). He then focused on teaching, explaining the arrival of the Holy Spirit (14:15–31; 15:26–16:15 [Lesson 11]) and emphasizing the

need for further discipleship (15:1–16:33 [Lesson 13]). He concluded the evening with a lengthy prayer (17:1–26).

From there, Jesus was arrested (John 18:1–14), denied by Simon Peter (18:15–18, 25–27), questioned by the religious and political authorities (18:19–24, 28–40), and sentenced and crucified (19:1–37). He was buried in the grave owned by a wealthy man (19:38–41), although some burial practices were skipped to account for preparation for the Sabbath (see Luke 23:56; John 19:31, 42).

C. Lesson Context: Burial

The respectful disposition of dead bodies has been a concern in many cultures since ancient times. One common worry was that the corpse of a loved one would become carrion for wild animals (2 Samuel 21:10; Psalm 79:2; Jeremiah 16:4; 34:20). To address this, some cultures chose to cremate the bodies, while others opted to bury the bodies in the ground or place them in specially constructed rooms that could be sealed.

During Jesus' time, wealthier families in Jerusalem had tombs carved into the limestone hills and rock faces of the region. These tombs typically featured several bed-like shelves where bodies could be laid to rest. The entrances to these stone chambers could be sealed, often with a large stone shaped like a disk that could be rolled across the entrance along tracks carved into the stone (see Matthew 27:60).

After sufficient time had passed, someone would return to the tomb, have it opened, and collect the bones. These would be placed in an ossuary (bone box), also carved out of limestone and left in the tomb. Several sets of bones could be placed in an ossuary, and space would be available for the next body to be laid to rest in the tomb.

Jesus' body was given a hasty but respectful burial in a nearby tomb that His family did not own. It was temporary lodging anyway! If they had had a family tomb, it would have been in Nazareth. The tomb was the possession of Joseph of Arimathaea, a prominent and wealthy Jewish leader in Jerusalem. Matthew portrays Joseph as a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 27:57), and Mark adds that he was "an honourable counsellor," meaning a member of the Sanhedrin (Mark 15:43).

I. Mourning and Weeping

(John 20:11–15)

A. Angels in White (vv. 11–12)

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

The *Mary* mentioned here refers to Mary Magdalene (John 20:1). The designation *Magdalene* is not her family surname; rather, commentators suggest that it indicates the location of her hometown. Mary is one of the devoted women who remained with Jesus during His crucifixion (John 19:25). The touchstone for her devotion is the dramatic freedom from oppression she experienced (Luke 8:1–2).

The previous verses of this chapter tell of how Mary visited Jesus' tomb before dawn (John 20:1), found it empty, returned to tell Peter (20:2–3), and then returned to the tomb herself. Now, Mary is *weeping* because the shock of Jesus' missing body has rekindled all the emotions she experienced at His death. It seems she has been denied the chance to perform a final act of service for her Lord: the preparation of His body in the *sepulchre* (see Lesson Context: Burial).

What Do You Think?

What are some common ways people respond to grief, and how can we offer support to those who are mourning?

Digging Deeper

What helps or hinders you when bringing your own grief before the Lord in prayer?

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

Looking inside the tomb, Mary sees something unexpected: *two angels.* Although the nature of their *white* clothes could have clued Mary to their identity (compare Matthew 28:2–3; Luke 24:4), the strong emotions of the moment likely hinder this. Their position, *sitting* at *the head* and the *feet,* highlights the absence of the expected occupant and begins to suggest a miraculous occurrence (compare Mark 16:5–6).



Visual for Lesson 4. *Display this visual as you discuss the Conclusion and ask the associated discussion questions.*

B. Questions and Answers (vv. 13–15)

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

Mary does not seem to recognize the two angels as supernatural beings. Their question, *why weepest thou?* is not a rebuke or a request for information, but instead it is an act of kindness, inquiring about the source of her pain. Although addressing her as *Woman* may seem abrupt or rude to modern ears, this term should be interpreted as an address of respect (compare John 2:4).

The angels know something Mary does not: this is a time for rejoicing, not mourning. Mary weeps because the tragic events of the past few days seem irreversible. Her teacher has been disgraced and executed. Yet, His death has not deterred Mary from showing devotion to her *Lord;* she is at the tomb to care for the body and, if necessary, confront any grave robbers who may disturb the site. Now, the final insult has occurred: His body seems to have been *taken away.*

Jewish rituals from this time outline a period of seven days of mourning for the deceased. Any interruption during this period is considered disrespectful to the mourners and a dishonor to the deceased.

Having seen the empty tomb, Mary is overcome with sorrow upon sorrow. Her only thought is to find the missing body of Jesus and rescue it from those who might desecrate it. She believes the mystery of His absence could be solved if someone would tell her where they have laid Him, presumably in another tomb for reasons unknown. At this point, she does not consider the possibility that Jesus may not be dead (compare Luke 24:5–8).

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

Receiving no answer from the white-clad visitors (or perhaps not caring even to wait for a reply), Mary turns away from the entrance of the tomb. She is determined to find Jesus' body. However, in the dim light of dawn, she encounters someone else. She sees Jesus' body but not in the way she expects.

Commentators have suggested various explanations for why Mary *saw Jesus standing* but failed to recognize Him. One possibility is that Jesus may have intentionally prevented her from recognizing Him, similar to what happened on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:15–16; compare Mark 16:12). There is also a physical reality: Mary's tears of mourning might have temporarily affected her vision, leaving her unaware that the person standing in front of her was *Jesus*.

This instance is not the only time after the resurrection that people fail to recognize Jesus (see John 21:4; etc.). His post-resurrection body is different in some way (Luke 24:30–32; John 20:19, 26; compare 1 Corinthians 15:35–43). But that body also bears the marks of the crucifixion (John 20:20, 27). The changes in His appearance, combined with the unthinkable of His being alive likely contribute to Mary's lack of recognition.

How to Say It

Aramaic	*Air*-uh-***may***-ik
Arimathaea	*Air*-uh-muh-***thee***-uh (*th* as in *thin*)
Magdalene	*Mag*-duh-leen or Mag-duh-*lee*-nee
ossuary	*aw*-sheh-***wear***-ee
rabbi	*rab*-eye
Rabboni	Rab-*o*-nye
Sanhedrin	*San*-huh-drun or San-*heed*-run

Regardless of the explanation, John the Evangelist invites us to notice the irony: Mary does not recognize the very person she is seeking, the one she knows so well.

15a. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?

Jesus repeats the angels' question (see John 20:13, above), thus pushing to the heart of Mary's grief. He is not seeking information; He knows why she is weeping. His question, rather, serves to open a conversation.

What Do You Think?

What does Jesus' approach to asking questions teach us about comforting those who are grieving?

Digging Deeper

What do the attitudes and actions of the individuals in this account teach us about how we can process our grief and support others in theirs?

15b. She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

Mary, still not recognizing Jesus, reflects her earlier response (see John 20:13, above). She assumes that the man she sees is *the gardener* and believes he might know what had happened in the garden surrounding the tomb (compare 19:38–42).

She asks the only question that seems reasonable at the time. Perhaps Jesus' body has been stolen. Or maybe the gardener has moved it for a good reason. But neither idea is correct.

Not Lost, but Found

When our children were young, we reached a milestone they had been anticipating for years: a family trip to Disneyland. Our youngest child, who was seven years old at the time, was almost uncontrollable with excitement.

But as soon as we stepped through the gates of the park, the excitement got the better of him. In an instant, he darted ahead and disappeared into the crowd. My husband and I split up immediately to search for him, calling his name repeatedly. With every passing minute, my worries grew.

Spotting a security guard, I rushed over and explained everything—what my son looked like, where we last saw him, and how long he had been missing. But the guard didn't respond. He kept listening to his radio, murmuring short replies. In my panic, I failed to notice that his radio reports were about my son. Finally, the guard turned toward me, looked me right in the eye, and, with kindness and compassion, said, "We have your son, ma'am."

I imagine Mary Magdalene feeling the same mix of fear and desperation. She was searching for Jesus' body, begging for answers, and unaware that the answer was in front of her. The resurrected Jesus was there, alive, present, and ready to give her peace. When you feel lost, overwhelmed, or frantic from searching for answers, remember: the risen Jesus is already closer than you think, waiting for you to turn and see Him.

—PM

II. Surprise and Joy

(John 20:16–18)

A. Personal Recognition (v. 16)

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

Knowing that *Mary* has not recognized Him, *Jesus* speaks her name in a personal, revealing way. It all comes to her in a rush: Jesus is not dead! This is her Lord speaking to her. This split-second realization changes her life forever. She has heard Jesus say her name many times before, and in that moment, all her plans unravel—there is no corpse to care for. Whatever appears different about His body does not apply to His voice; she recognizes His voice, as a sheep recognizes the voice of its shepherd (compare John 10:3–4, 27 [Lesson 9]).

The title *Rabboni* is an Aramaic term of respect meaning "my teacher." As a variation of the title *rabbi,* both can mean *Master* (compare John 1:38). By addressing Jesus in this way, Mary acknowledges that He is as much her teacher and rabbi as any of the other twelve disciples.

What Do You Think?

When have you recognized Christ at work in an unexpected situation? How did you come to realize that it was Him?

Digging Deeper

What practices or habits help you stay alert to the presence of Christ?

The Shepherd's Call

A video circulating online shows three people standing beside a pasture of grazing sheep. One by one, each person approaches the fence and calls out the same phrase to the sheep. But every time, the sheep remain unmoved. Their heads remain down, focused on their grazing, not even glancing toward the unfamiliar voices.

Then the shepherd steps forward. He repeats the same words the others used, but this time the response is entirely different. A few sheep lift their heads almost immediately. The shepherd calls again, and more look up. Their ears turned toward the voice they knew. Within moments, the entire flock is running toward him, bleating with excitement. They recognize the voice that has led, protected, and cared for them. They know their shepherd.

Blinded by grief and confusion of the previous few days, Mary does not initially recognize Jesus. But when He speaks her name, her doubts dissolve. She knows the sound of her rabbi's voice; she knows the sound of her shepherd.

If we want to recognize the voice of our shepherd, we must become familiar with it. Through the study of Scripture, we learn the tone and character of His voice. Our shepherd is calling us still. Are we listening? —PM

B. Personal Commission (vv. 17–18)

17a. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.

Jesus' command, *Touch me not,* carries a meaning that extends beyond simply rejecting a hug. Even so, the reasons for this request from Jesus are not entirely clear. At other times, the resurrected Jesus invites people to touch Him (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:27). It appears that Mary wishes to detain Jesus, perhaps hoping to keep Him with her and the other disciples. With this command, Jesus is teaching Mary regarding the next step of His work: His ascension to His *Father* in heaven. There would be no negotiating or delaying of His planned departure.

Before His crucifixion, Jesus taught His disciples regarding this point of His ministry: "Whither I go, ye cannot come" (John 13:33; compare 13:36). His command to Mary serves as a reminder that she—and, eventually, the other disciples—must allow Jesus' physical presence to ascend to heaven to let God's work to continue in accordance with Jesus' prayers (John 17).

The significance of Jesus' ascension is often misunderstood or downplayed compared to the other key events in His ministry, such as His birth, death, or resurrection. Even though Jesus has ascended to heaven, He is not absent from us. He promises to return (John 14:3 [Lesson 12]). In the meantime, He ensures His presence with us through the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:20; etc.).

17b. But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Jesus gives Mary an important task—one akin to a spokesperson proclaiming a message on behalf of another. She is commissioned and authorized by Jesus to go to the other disciples and deliver a significant message.

This verse highlights the new family status of those who are in Jesus. Although first-century Jews have many ways to describe God, the term *Father* is used less frequently than other terms such as Creator, Lord, or King. However, the idea of addressing God as *Father* is woven throughout the recorded teachings of Jesus (Matthew 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1; 7:11; etc.). In declaring God to be heavenly Father, Jesus reinforces Old Testament teaching about God (compare Deuteronomy 1:29–31; 32:6; 2 Samuel 7:12–14; Jeremiah 31:9; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8).

Jesus often refers to God as *my Father* (examples: Matthew 18:10; Luke 10:22; John 5:17), and He encourages His followers to view God as their Father as well (Matthew 6:9; John 20:17). This relationship suggests that the children of the

Father should relate to Him with trust, love, and obedience.

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

Mary Magdalene does not create an elaborate presentation for *the disciples*; instead, her testimony, while simple, is profound. Her witness is significant because women are not regarded as trustworthy witnesses in a court of law, as reflected in the writings of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (compare Luke 24:11). Rather than asking one of the male disciples to bear witness, Jesus invites an emotional, teary-eyed woman to be the first earthly witness to His resurrection. For this reason, some have designated Mary as the "evangelist to the evangelists."

Sometimes the most effective form of witness comes from sharing our personal experiences with Jesus and the changes He brings to our lives. Mary had plenty to say that day—explaining how a heartbroken, sobbing woman became a joyous, confident eyewitness for the disciples.

What Do You Think?

In what ways does Jesus' resurrection encourage you most today? Why?

Digging Deeper

How will you testify through your words or habits to the transforming power of the risen Christ?

Conclusion

A. From Grief to Mission

We do not have to ignore or suppress feelings of grief. Jesus Himself welcomes our sadness and receives our tears with compassion. Mary's experience in the garden reminds us that grief is not a barrier to faith in God or discipleship to Jesus. Instead, God can work through our grief, shaping it into a deeper expression of love and devotion to Christ. Mary's tears are neither dismissed nor rebuked; she is seen, comforted, and then commissioned.

In the same way, God can transform our grief into a unique purpose for His mission. Through the risen Christ, sorrow is not the final word. Instead, sorrow is replaced with joy. As a people of the resurrected Master, we share in the same calling Mary received: to share with others what we have seen and experienced of the presence of the resurrected Jesus. We only need to trust that His presence will guide us throughout.

B. From Lost to Found

Notice that Mary does not find the living Christ because of her seeking. Instead, the living Christ finds her! This fact has significance for us today. The risen Christ is alive and continues to seek out disciples. Jesus said He came to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). If we make ourselves available and call on His name, Jesus will find us and transform us.

This transformation changes us permanently. We can be moved from death to life (John 5:24). Our great fear of death no longer holds us captive, for "now is Christ risen from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20) and "in Christ shall all be made alive" (15:22). Even if we die, we will be raised to eternal life and "so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

What Do You Think?

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

Digging Deeper

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

C. Prayer

Heavenly Father, You know each of us, and You call us each by name. Help us be attentive to that call, in all life's situations—the joyous moments and the times of grief. Teach us through Your Spirit that You are with us in every moment, in every circumstance, and with every feeling. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

Jesus turns tears into joy.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before class begins, write the word *EASTER* vertically on the board to create an acrostic. As class begins, invite participants to call out words or short phrases they associate with Easter. Write responses on the board beside the appropriate letter. If time allows, create a second acrostic using the word *RESURRECTION*, this time inviting participants to list words or phrases that express the significance of Jesus' resurrection.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Each of us comes to Easter with different expectations, emotions, and experiences. In today's study, we'll see how Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus completely overturns her expectations."

Into the Word

Announce a Bible-marking activity. Provide copies of John 20:11–18 for anyone who prefers not to write in their own Bible. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following instructions:

1. Underline any words or phrases that depict grief or sadness.
2. Place a question mark (?) beside any questions asked in the passage.
3. Place an exclamation point (!) beside any imperative (commands) in the passage.
4. Draw a box around any words or phrases that refer to Jesus' mission.
5. Draw a circle around any words or phrases that refer to Mary's mission.

Read the Scripture aloud (or ask volunteers to do so), slowly, at least twice (and up to four times if helpful). Encourage participants to mark their text as they listen, noting new details with each reading.

After the final reading, divide the class into four groups. Give each group a handout with the following questions:

1. How does the text portray grief or sadness? What insight does this give us into our own experiences of sorrow?
2. What is the significance of the questions asked in this passage? What do they reveal about the nature of faith, misunderstanding, and searching?
3. What imperatives are given? What do they reveal about discipleship and obedience?
4. What does this passage reveal about Jesus' mission after the resurrection?
5. What is Mary called to do in this account? How does her mission inform our own calling as followers of Jesus?

Allow groups ten minutes to answer based on their observations from the activity and the commentary. After calling time, invite a representative from each group to share one of their answers, continuing until all the questions have been addressed.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Sensing Easter" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated. (This exercise may be more time-consuming than it appears at first glance.) After ten minutes, invite pairs to present their findings for whole-class discussion.

Into Life

Begin by asking a volunteer to reread John 20:18 aloud. Then invite participants to identify the four actions (verbs) in the verse. (Hint: Mary takes three actions [went, told, and seen], and Jesus takes one action [said].) Explain that Mary's testimony resulted from her encounter with the risen Christ. She experienced His presence, heard His voice, and then shared what she had seen.

Distribute index cards and pens to participants. Invite them to write their own version of verse 18, describing a time they have "seen the Lord" or "heard Him speak" through His presence and work. After one minute of individual work, invite participants to share with a partner what they wrote.

Option. Distribute copies of the "My Resurrection Testimony" exercise from the activity page. Direct participants to work with a partner to complete as indicated.

Healing on the Sabbath

Devotional Reading: Psalm 6
Background Scripture: Exodus 20:8–11; 31:15–16; John 5

John 5:2–16

2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

7 The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

8 Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

9 And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

10 The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

11 He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.

12 Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?

13 And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.

14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

15 The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.

16 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

Key Text

Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day. **—John 5:16**

Written That

You Might Believe

Unit 2: Signs and Miracles

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the commands Jesus gave to the man healed at the pool of Bethesda.
2. Explain why Jesus' act of healing on the Sabbath led to opposition and persecution.
3. Write a prayer that expresses gratitude for the wholeness that Jesus offers.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Unexpected Assistance
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Setting (John 5:2–5)
- A. Place and Purpose (v. 2)
- B. Time and Tradition (vv. 3–4)
- C. Person and Problem (v. 5)

II. The Miracle (John 5:6–9a)
- A. The Question Asked (v. 6)
  My Condition as My Identity
- B. The Response Given (v. 7)
- C. The Command Issued (vv. 8–9a)
  Instant Gratification

III. The Fallout (John 5:9b–16)
- A. Calculated Interrogation (vv. 9b–13)
- B. Strict Warning (v. 14)
- C. Increased Persecution (vv. 15–16)

Conclusion
- A. Seeing the New Thing
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Unexpected Assistance

The night was dark and deep, and we were tired but longed to sleep in our own bed. It was January 2010, and we had just returned from a trip to the Holy Land. We served as missionaries in Jamaica and were anxious to get home to see our kids. So, we made the late-night decision to drive the four hours from Kingston to Savanna-la-Mar in the dark.

We'd driven the route many times, and I had a good understanding of where to go, but I still missed a key turn. With no GPS, no streetlights, and no clear sense of direction, our only option was to keep driving. We had no idea how long we'd been going in the wrong direction. Salvation arrived in the form of a modest shop situated close to the road. It felt like a miracle. Its existence was unexpected and brought us relief and delight. The sympathetic proprietors informed us that we had overshot our turn by forty-five minutes. The shop and its people reoriented us and set us back on track.

But course correcting sometimes brings problems of its own, as today's text reveals.

B. Lesson Context

The writer of the Gospel of John is very clear about his purpose for writing: that readers will believe Jesus is the Messiah (John 20:30–31). John presents seven miracles to demonstrate Jesus' identity as the Son of God, the longed-for King and deliverer of the Jews:

- Turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1–11)
- Healing the official's son from a distance; Jesus was in Cana, the boy lay sick in Capernaum (4:46–54)
- Healing the paralyzed man at the Pool of Bethesda (5:1–15; part of today's text)
- Feeding five thousand men on a hillside near Bethsaida (6:1–15 [Lesson 6])
- Walking on the Sea of Galilee to reach His disciples' boat (6:16–21 [Lesson 7])
- Healing a man born blind (9:1–41 [Lesson 8])
- Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:38–44)

Each miracle is a sign that reveals a critical

aspect of Jesus' identity. Jesus rules over creation, heals, forgives, multiplies, provides, enlightens, and holds dominion over death.

Today's text focuses on the third sign recorded in the Gospel of John. Jesus has returned to Jerusalem to attend an annual feast; the text of John 5:1 does not specify which one. Jesus and His disciples occasionally traveled between the regions of Galilee and Judea. During these treks, Jesus interacted with Jews and Gentiles, men and women, and people of all social statuses. He had crucial conversations, healed the sick, and began drawing crowds.

As Jesus' ministry gained momentum and attention, opposition to it also grew. Jewish elite from Jerusalem—the Pharisees and Sadducees—saw themselves as gatekeepers of Jewish religious tradition. Many of Jesus' teachings challenged their understanding of the Law of Moses. Therefore, they often reacted negatively to His words and actions. Jesus and His disciples faced persecution from these leaders.

I. The Setting

(John 5:2–5)

A. Place and Purpose (v. 2)

2. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep *market* a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

John begins his narrative by setting the scene. First-century Jerusalem had several pools of water. The two most well-known ones are Siloam in the north (John 9:1–12 [Lesson 8]) and *Bethesda* in the southeast. The pool of Bethesda was located on the outskirts of the temple in *Jerusalem*. While there is debate about the precise location of the pool, it is likely adjacent to the temple wall. Recent discovery and excavations place it near the Church of Saint Anne in modern-day Jerusalem and indicate it was comprised of two adjoining trapezoidal-shaped pools. The name "Bethesda" means "house of mercy" in *Hebrew*.

Regarding the phrase *sheep market,* the word *market* is italicized in your King James Version for a specific reason: no word in the original language is being translated; the translators have inserted a "best guess" word for smoother reading. The gate was near the northern entrance of the temple courtyard in ancient Jerusalem. Nehemiah mentions a dozen gates by name, and the sheep gate is one of them (Nehemiah 3:1, 32; 12:39). It may have provided visitors with the opportunity to buy animals that had been preapproved for sacrifice.

Herod the Great (reigned 37–4 BC), the Roman-Jewish client king of Judea and father of Herod Antipas, is known for his massive construction projects. He invested heavily in key areas around the temple. Therefore, the *porches* mentioned here were probably Roman-style colonnades that formed a grandly covered stone portico. There are *five* such terraces, indicating John's attention to detail.

B. Time and Tradition (vv. 3–4)

3. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

These refers to the structural features described above. Disabled people gather around the pool, under the porticos, but we don't yet know why. Since it is a Jewish feast (John 5:1), the size of the crowd is large.

The proximity of this portico to both the market and the temple courtyard makes it a prime area for invalids to request and receive alms. They are not waiting idly, but rather, they anticipate a miraculous *moving of the water*.

4. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water:

How to Say It

Bethesda	Buh-*thez*-duh
Capernaum	Kuh-*per*-nay-um
Gentiles	*Jen*-tiles
Hagar	*Hay*-gar
Herod	*Hair*-ud
Jerusalem	Juh-roo-suh-lem
Pharisees	*Fair*-ih-seez
Sadducees	*Sad*-you-seez
Samaritan	Suh-*mare*-uh-tun
Zacharias	Zack-uh-*rye*-us

whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

The claim of an angel at the pool would not have surprised first-century Jews. Their common faith narrative included angelic messengers from God. People who heard from angels include Hagar (Genesis 16:7–13), Lot (19:1), Gideon (Judges 6:11–12), Zacharias (Luke 1:11–17), and Mary the mother of Jesus (1:26–38).

The healing process depicted here is reminiscent of the story of Naaman, who was miraculously healed of his leprosy after bathing in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:1–14). In this case, the *first* person to enter the pool after the *water* moved would be healed.

C. Person and Problem (v. 5)

5. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

John now presents a specific character. The *man* is identified by his ailment. It is unclear how he got to the pool or how long he lay there. The impact of what will happen is increased by knowing the length of the man's suffering—this is not a recent condition; he struggles with a long-term problem.

What Do You Think?

What makes long-term suffering especially difficult?

Digging Deeper

What strategies do you use to feed your faith during extended seasons of suffering?

II. The Miracle

(John 5:6–9a)

A. The Question Asked (v. 6)

6. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

Jesus' attention—the way He notices people and their needs—is a special kind of seeing. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus engages people purposefully, often beginning with a question, stating something definitive about them, or both (compare John 1:36–39; 1:42; 1:47–51; 4:7, 16–18). Here, Jesus not only sees the disabled man but also knows the extent of his disability. Under normal circumstances, one might imagine Jesus inquiring about the man. However, examples of His supernatural knowledge precede Him—Nathanael, Nicodemus, and the Samaritan woman are all cases in point.

Questions in the Gospel narratives often signal to listeners that something miraculous or extraordinary is about to happen. Jesus' question invites immediate engagement from the man. This question may have both practical and doctrinal implications, as healing extends beyond the physical and relates to our spiritual wholeness. The question about being *made whole* is an invitation toward physical health, but it also opens a door toward reclaiming one's integral place in the world. Jesus does not force healing on this man, nor does He make assumptions about the man's presence at the pool. Jesus asks before He acts.

What Do You Think?

Why do some people hesitate to ask God for healing?

Digging Deeper

Is there any part of your life that you are holding back from the healing power of Jesus?

My Condition as My Identity

I rubbed the side of my face, grimacing at the familiar ache. For most of my life, TMJ / TMD has plagued me. Doctors tell me the disc pad inside my jaw has shifted backward, out of its proper position. Therefore, I struggle with an asymmetrical jaw alignment, which causes headaches, jaw and tooth pain, and periodic lockjaw. Despite early efforts, general medical treatments have not brought relief.

Recently, I found a team of healthcare professionals who offer a different treatment approach. Unfortunately, however, this new approach comes at a tremendous financial expense—with no

guarantee that it will work. In contemplating this new intervention, I sensed the Holy Spirit asking, "How badly do you want to get well? Do you believe I can heal you? Do you believe physical relief is possible?"

Through this line of questioning, I realized that my condition had become such a part of my identity that it was hard to imagine getting better. It was hard to trust God in a place of hopeful possibility. I wasn't even sure how to function without this impairment. I realized that more than any limitation or condition, I wanted my hope and identity anchored in the Lord. What about you? Consider the needs you struggle against. Do you want to get well? —KS

B. The Response Given (v. 7)

7. The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

The man's reply suggests at least two things. One is that he has no prior knowledge of Jesus or His miracles. Instead of answering directly, with a simple "Yes" or "No," the man voices his inability to reach the water quickly. The other implication is that healing at this pool is only for one person per angelic appearance.

The man's use of the term *Sir* shows Jesus respect. Perhaps his explanation about the healing waters of *the pool* is meant to elicit Jesus' empathy and ask for assistance. Regardless, his response focuses on his limitations. From the man's perspective, it's easy to think that Jesus has asked the wrong question. The invalid's situation has nothing to do with whether he wants to be healed—he lacks the help and the stamina necessary to benefit from the healing powers of the pool.

C. The Command Issued (vv. 8–9a)

8. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

Jesus replies with what must seem like a *non sequitur*. He does not offer to help the man into the water the next time it is stirred. Instead, He commands the man to do the impossible—something he has not been able to do in thirty-eight years!

9a. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked.

It's interesting to compare elements of this healing with others elsewhere. We notice that this healing is immediate; other healings are not (example: Mark 8:22–26). We also note that this *man* did not go looking for Jesus or have friends and relatives do so (compare Matthew 9:18–19, 23–25; Mark 2:1–12). Lastly, there is no discernible faith in Jesus to perform a miracle (contrast Matthew 8:5–13; Mark 5:24–29).

Jesus' healing power takes effect in such a way that the man is miraculously able to follow Jesus' instructions. John narrates the story using parallelism. The man's actions correspond to each portion of Jesus' command. Imagine the shock of such instantaneous healing and strength!

What Do You Think?

Have you ever experienced or witnessed an immediate answer to prayer?

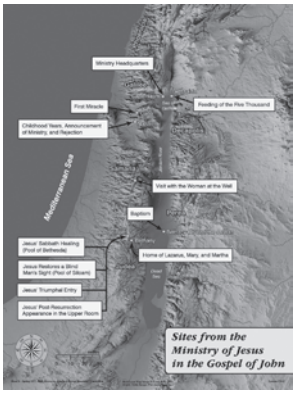
Digging Deeper

How did it encourage your faith?

Instant Gratification

The television flashed with color, light, and sound. We watched the screen in awe and wonder as the biblical account came to life: The man they carried in on a stretcher stood and walked out on his own two feet. My husband turned to me, eyes wide with amazement, as he gasped, "Do you realize what is involved in a healing like that? It's not just the legs, but a complete connection between the person's brain and body. Muscles, tendons, and neurons must work together. And, he must have received instant physical strength in atrophied muscles. Can you imagine? The instant ability to do things you've never done before?"

My eyebrows rose in surprise at the thought. It *was* phenomenal to consider. I thought of other instances of healing and miraculous circumstances in Scripture. Jesus often made things happen "immediately." He puts a whole new spin on the idea of instant gratification! What brings you to a place of awe and wonder over what God's power can do? —KS



Visual for Lesson 5

Display this visual in a prominent place and use it as you give your class contextual information.

III. The Fallout

(John 5:9b–16)

A. Calculated Interrogation (vv. 9b–13)

9b. And on the same day was the sabbath.

The author unveils a critical new detail: Jesus has performed this miracle on *the sabbath*. In Jewish culture, the Sabbath is a day of rest, the ceasing of all work from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. God implemented Sabbath practice as a time for rejuvenation, worship, and purposeful reliance on His provision (compare Genesis 2:1–3; Exodus 16:23–30; 20:8–11).

The regulations associated with Sabbath adherence in the first century were strict and numerous. Jewish religious leaders and scholars had outlined thirty-nine types of work forbidden on this day of the week, thereby adding their traditions to what God established (Deuteronomy 5:12–15).

10. The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

The Jews mentioned here represent Jewish religious leaders. Their reaction to the man sets the tone for a new dynamic in the story. They approach the healed man with the reality of their *sabbath* regulations: Carrying his bedroll breaks the guidelines against bearing loads (Jeremiah 17:21–22). The text is silent regarding the location of this encounter. Regardless, the leaders indict the man. Jewish law forbids work on the Sabbath according to the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8–11), and the additional tradition apparently saw carrying a bedroll as "work."

What Do You Think?

Why did the Jewish leaders mention the Sabbath and the man's carrying of his bedroll?

Digging Deeper

How do Jesus' observations in Matthew 23:23 affect your answer?

11. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.

The man pushes back against the Jews' accusation; his response underscores a broader reality that his critics seemed to have missed: He's been healed! He acknowledges that fact and then informs the leaders that he acted on Jesus' command. It is unclear whether he is deliberately shifting responsibility or merely recounting the joyous truth of these events.

12. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?

The religious leaders follow up with another question. But their inquiry focuses on identifying exactly who commanded the man to break their Sabbath regulations rather than on his incredible healing. With their focus so grievously misplaced, they miss the implication of the miracle.

13. And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.

Incredibly, the man doesn't know who healed him. As readers, we may recognize this as an early data point in Jesus' emerging pattern of hiding Himself (compare John 8:59; 12:36). It seems that Jesus purposefully kept His identity a secret, disappearing into the crowd.

B. Strict Warning (v. 14)

14. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

The story takes another turn, and the scene shifts again. This time, the healed man is inside *the temple* courts. What a change! After a lifetime of waiting just outside the walls, the man's restoration includes full access to Jewish religious life and community (compare Leviticus 21:17–23).

Jesus seeks the man out, finding him among the hundreds (if not thousands) of people gathered for the feast. Then, Jesus issues a warning: There is something *worse* than the inability to walk. The consequences of *sin* override physical disability and infirmity (compare Mark 2:1–12).

It is unclear whether Jesus is confronting the man about a particular sin or about sin in general. Bible experts propose different answers. Some detect an implication that the man was actively engaged in something sinful (as in "stop your current sinning"). Other scholars believe Jesus was warning the man that although he carried his mat on this Sabbath, he should obediently follow Sabbath rules in the future. In that way, Jesus' words may encourage the man to realign his lifestyle with faithfulness to God's ways through the Jewish community—he should not blithely shrug off the Jewish leaders' concerns (compare Matthew 23:2–3). Other scholars point to the heart of spiritual health: Jesus wants this man to embrace the hope of eternal life in God. If he is unable to set aside sin, and therefore misses out on salvation, then he will undoubtedly be *worse* off than when he started!

What Do You Think?

What is implied in the connection Jesus makes between wholeness and a call to "sin no more"?

Digging Deeper

How has sin impacted your wholeness?

C. Increased Persecution (vv. 15–16)

15. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.

We do not know the impetus for this second conversation with *the Jews*. The man's choice to return to them may be evangelistic in nature. People who joyfully encounter Jesus do not often keep that knowledge to themselves. Instead, they go to their community and share the good news (compare Matthew 9:27–31; Luke 17:15; John 4:39–42).

However, it is possible that the man wanted those who accused him of breaking the Sabbath to know who had commanded him to do so, and in telling them, to shift the blame from himself to Jesus. But that's hard to imagine, considering the gift Jesus has given him!

16. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

Here we see the unfortunate repercussions of the man's identification: *the Jews* begin to *persecute* Jesus actively. The saddest realization of the Gospel of John is also key to the heart of its message: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11 [Lesson 1]). Blinded by their adherence to religious tradition and practice, the Jewish leaders reject the evidence laid before them that the Messiah has come (Matthew 23:13–39; John 9:40–41).

Conclusion

A. Seeing the New Thing

Tragically, the Jewish leaders of the time focused on the wrong details and missed the new thing that God was doing. They were so tied to the legalistic application of rules, regulations, and traditions that they failed to see the wonder of the miracle! This invalid's miraculous healing wasn't the first (compare Isaiah 43:19), and it wouldn't be the last (compare John 11:43–53).

Where is your focus? Do you approach today's text with the purpose of John 20:30–31 in mind? Are there any places you sense the Holy Spirit asking you to pivot, step back, or reassess?

B. Prayer

Father God, make us whole in You. Help us to see where and how You are working in our lives and in the lives of others. Heal our hurts, protect us from sin, and lead us in righteousness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus offers wholeness and mercy.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

In preparation for class, write the following prompts on the board: 1–*Circumstances we wish would go away*; 2–*Conditions we need healed*. Divide your participants into pairs. Encourage learners to come up with at least two ideas for each prompt.

Reconvene the group and invite learners to share their brainstorming. Write their answers under the applicable prompt. Then ask students to consider both lists and discuss: 1–Which items are physical problems? 2–Which concerns are spiritually rooted? 3–Is there any overlap between the physical and spiritual needs mentioned?

Lead into Bible study by saying, "In today's lesson, we will consider one of seven signs recorded in the Gospel of John that point to Jesus as the Messiah: the healing of the man beside the pool of Bethesda. We will consider Jesus' role in the man's physical healing and spiritual wholeness."

Into the Word

Ask for a volunteer to read John 5:2–16 aloud (or break the passage up into sections and ask for several volunteers to take turns reading). Divide participants into pairs and distribute pens and handouts (you create) of the following questions. Ask partners to spend 3–5 minutes answering the questions together.

1. What was the name of the pool? (v. 2)
2. What did the area around the pool look like? (v. 2)
3. Under what conditions did the people near the pool suffer? (v. 3)
4. How long had the man been infirm? (v. 5)
5. What question did Jesus ask the man? (v. 6)
6. How did the man answer? (v. 7)
7. What was Jesus' command to the man? (v. 8)
8. How was this man's healing different from those who experienced healing at this pool in the past? (vv. 4, 7, 9)
9. What concerned the Jewish leaders? (v. 10)
10. Did the man know who healed him? Why or why not? (v. 13)
11. What did Jesus say to the man when He found him in the temple? (v. 14)
12. How did healing on the Sabbath impact Jesus' ministry? (v. 16)

Invite your class to reconvene as a whole group and discuss their answers. Include a conversation about Jesus' pairing of physical healing and spiritual wholeness.

Option. Invite partners to compare today's text with Luke 5:17–26, noting similarities and differences. Then lead a whole-class discussion about their observations. Note both the physical and spiritual aspects of Jesus' healing power.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Healing: Line by Line" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask learners to work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Into Life

Remind learners that Jesus did more than physically heal the man at the pool—He also encouraged the man to turn away from sin. Write the following headings on a whiteboard or piece of butcher paper: *Relational* / *Emotional* / *Physical* / *Spiritual* / *Moral*. Lead a brainstorming session with participants, asking them to name ways people experience wholeness and healing through Jesus. Write their examples under the appropriate category. Then discuss how the various categories intersect.

Ask learners to find a new partner. Encourage pairs to discuss how they've personally experienced healing through Jesus. Then, ask pairs to work together to craft a written prayer of gratitude for the wholeness Jesus offers. Encourage learners to read these prayers throughout the week.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "My Prayer of Thanksgiving" exercise from the activity page. Give learners one minute to complete it, then ask volunteers to share their prayers with the class.

Feeding the Multitude

Devotional Reading: Mark 6:34–44
Background Scripture: Exodus 16; 2 Kings 4:42–44; John 6:1–14, 25–59

John 6:5–13, 30–35

5 When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,

9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

13 Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

30 They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?

31 Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

32 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

33 For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

34 Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

Key Text

Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. **—John 6:35**

Written That
You Might Believe

Unit 2: Signs and Miracles

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Jesus' teaching about the bread of life in its context: the miracle of loaves and fish.
2. Compare Jesus as "bread of life" with the provision of manna during the time of Moses.
3. Make a plan to host a meal and "break bread" as a way to remember Jesus as the bread of life.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Fast Food Memory
- B. Lesson Context: Historical
- C. Lesson Context: Literary

I. Seeking Provision (John 6:5–9)
- A. Assessing the Need (vv. 5–7)
- B. Presenting the Boy (vv. 8–9)
  Surprising Care

II. Providing Abundantly (John 6:10–13)
- A. Feeding the Multitude (vv. 10–11)
- B. Gathering the Leftovers (vv. 12–13)

III. Requesting Signs (John 6:30–35)
- A. Recalling the Manna (vv. 30–31)
- B. Recognizing the True Bread (vv. 32–33)
- C. Revealing the Bread of Life (vv. 34–35)
  Satiety in God

Conclusion
- A. Eternal Provision
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Fast Food Memory

I was too young to remember much more than the smell of greasy fast food, the sad look of the woman a few tables away, and the empty table in front of my mother. But the story is critical to my formation. When prompted, my mom still tells it with a faraway look in her eyes and the kind of steely determination that comes from obedience to God's still, small voice.

When I was young, we had very little money. My dad was a pastor in a rural town. We wore hand-me-downs and delighted in the bags of groceries that sometimes miraculously appeared by the front door. They tell me that we had a monthly tradition of enjoying $0.25 hamburgers while spending time at the play area—a chance for us all to get out and enjoy a treat.

On one of these occasions, my mom looked up from her meager meal to see a woman huddled over a cup of hot water. The way she tells it, she felt the unmistakable urge to wrap her burger back into its white-and-brown paper and offer it to the woman. She knew she was called to compassion, care, and provision in the face of someone else's need. My mother's sacrificial generosity marked me as I watched the woman's face break into a smile and her eyes widen with surprise. Her words were filled with gratitude. I can still hear my mom say with a shrug, "I was looking forward to that lunch, but someone else needed it more."

We all need physical sustenance, and it is often a joy to share food with others, whether by means of mercy, hospitality, or fellowship. Today's text showcases a true miracle meal.

B. Lesson Context: Historical

Under Roman occupation, the Jewish people were looking for a messianic deliverer. They longed for someone who would bring about political liberation and economic prosperity. Just as Moses had delivered the Israelites from captivity in Egypt and Joshua had led them into the promised land, the descendants of Israel hoped for a new revolutionary leader who would liberate them from the Romans. With Passover quickly approaching (John 6:4),

Moses' legacy would have been forefront in their minds (Exodus 15:1–4; 16:4).

Those who observed the miracle on the mountainside, where Jesus fed five thousand men, believed He was a prophet and sought to establish Him as king (John 6:14–15). The idea of a prophet-king like Moses reflects their political interests and evokes memories of the Maccabean revolt two centuries earlier. In this revolt, Judas "the Hammer" pushed back the Seleucid forces of Antiochus Epiphanes (167–160 BC), so that Jews could once more worship in the temple and practice their ancestral religion.

C. Lesson Context: Literary

The feeding of the five thousand is the one miracle of Jesus that is included in all four Gospels (Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15). Its fullest treatment is found in the Gospel of John.

Jesus and His disciples returned from Jerusalem and crossed "over the sea" (John 6:1). They were somewhere along the northeastern coast of the Sea of Galilee, which Luke identifies more specifically as Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). He took the disciples out to a remote mountainside and sat down with them, which was a typical posture for Jesus as He taught (Matthew 13:1; 15:29; 24:3).

Visual for Lesson 6



Use this visual to help students conceptualize the location of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000.

I. Seeking Provision

(John 6:5–9)

A. Assessing the Need (vv. 5–7)

5. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?

Despite the remote location, a crowd appears, drawn by the miracles Jesus has performed (compare Matthew 8:1–4; 9:1–8; Luke 7:1–10). This crowd is *great* in size. The parallel passage in the Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus is "moved with compassion toward" the crowd, and therefore, heals their sick (Matthew 14:14). In Mark's perspective, Jesus' compassion stems from seeing them as sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34; compare Numbers 27:15–17). By the time Jesus has finished with the people, it is late in the day (Matthew 14:15; Mark 6:35; Luke 9:12). Therefore, the question of dinner arises.

Jesus turns to *Philip* and asks for assistance. He may have directed the question toward Philip because Philip was from Bethsaida (John 1:44; 12:21). Logically, he would know of suitable food and lodging in the area.

6. And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

The pronouns in the translation of this verse are confusing! Jesus speaks, asking His question to test Philip. However, Jesus already has a predetermined plan. John's Gospel often emphasizes Jesus' divine knowledge and command of every situation (John 1:48; 2:24–25; 6:15, 64; 13:1–3, 11; 18:4; 19:28).

What Do You Think?

In what ways has God tested your faith?

Digging Deeper

Knowing that character, trust, and faith are grown through such testing, in what ways will you prepare yourself for God's next test?

7. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.

Feeding such a large crowd, though, is a daunting task. Philip's response is understandable—*two hundred pennyworth* translates as 200 denarii, each

of which was a standard day's wage. Most people in the first century are day laborers. To pay their bills, they rely on receiving their payment at the end of the day. The Old Testament forbids withholding the laborer's wages until the next day (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15). Philip estimates that even six months of wages would not be enough to feed everyone an appetizer.

It is possible that Philip's retort may reflect the assumption that Jesus was asking him to pay for it all himself. His outburst certainly indicates the impressive scale of the crowd's need.

B. Presenting the Boy (vv. 8–9)

8–9. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

Andrew overhears the conversation and offers his two cents. Also a local, he comes up with a resource: a *lad* who has a small meal. The Gospel of John is the only gospel to include this detail.

Barley loaves reflect common, local food. They represent honest, humble generosity in the face of an impossible need. They also echo the Old Testament story of Elisha, who fed one hundred men with twenty loaves of barley bread (2 Kings 4:42–44). Elisha's servant balks at the inadequacy of twenty loaves to one hundred men. Jesus' odds here are exponentially higher!

The Gospel writer wants readers to make the connection between Jesus' situation and Elisha's. In doing so, he presents Jesus as the promised eschatological prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15–19), whom some embrace and others reject (John 6:66–69).

Even as Andrew offers the boy's contribution, he questions it, wondering aloud about the meal's smallness in the face of the crowd's size.

Surprising Care

Mom often mentioned her neighbor, a sweet, older lady who was still supporting a struggling adult child. It was an offhand comment, but it stuck with me: "Angie's having surgery next week." I decided to set up a meal train: a system for family and friends to deliver food. Friends from my church graciously prepared a week's worth of meals and delivered them daily during her recovery. One of the gentlemen who visited noticed that a recent hurricane had damaged her patio. He showed up the next day with tools to fix it.

A few months later, I felt an inner prompting to invite Angie and her daughter to a discipleship course at our church. I expected a refusal, perhaps even a fierce one, but to my surprise, they both said yes! They were curious to find out why the church was so concerned about them.

We thought these things were small—similar to the size of the little boy's lunch in proportion to the size of the crowd—but for Angie, they made all the difference. Where have you seen God faithfully multiply your generosity? —DS-G

How to Say It

Antiochus	An-*tie*-oh-kus
Augustine	*Aw*-gus-*teen* or Aw-*gus*-tin
Elisha	Ee-*lye*-shuh
Epiphanes	Ih-*piff*-a-neez
eschatological	ess-kuh-tah-*lah*-juh-kul
Maccabean	Mack-uh-*be*-un
Messianic	Mess-ee-*an*-ick
Samaritan	Suh-*mare*-uh-tun
Seleucid	Suh-*loo*-kid

II. Providing Abundantly

(John 6:10–13)

A. Feeding the Multitude (vv. 10–11)

10. And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

The first reference to *men* here is a general one. The underlying Greek word refers to all people, both men and women. Jesus instructs the disciples with the next step: have this massive crowd *sit*.

The narrator's next detail is a sensory one. Imagine the lush hillside—comfortable turf, a vibrant green from new spring growth. It's a lovely place for a picnic, if only there were food! Jesus' actions bring to mind the psalmist's famous line, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2).

The people follow the disciples' instructions, and *thousands* take a seat. The specific *number* of *about five thousand* denotes only males (the text uses a different Greek word than above). Scholars estimate that with women and children included, the complete number would be at least twice that (Matthew 14:21). Mark's gospel offers an extra detail: The people assemble into groups of fifties and hundreds (Mark 6:39–40).

What Do You Think?

What is the role of order and preparation in God's mighty works?

Digging Deeper

Do you sense God asking for increased order in a particular part of your life?

11. And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

With the crowd organized, Jesus takes the boy's supper into His hands. Jesus' *thanks* was a formal prayer of gratitude. It was most likely a traditional Jewish prayer that blesses the name of the Lord, acknowledges Him as God over everything, and recognizes Him as the one who provides our bread. Jesus publicly acknowledges that God's bounty is the source of all provision.

Then comes the miracle. Jesus passes the bread to His twelve disciples, and in turn, the disciples *distribute* the bread to the crowd (compare Matthew 14:19; Mark 6:41; Luke 9:16). What started as five loaves becomes an abundance. The same happens with the two fish. The crowd receives and eats *as much* as they desire; this was no meager meal or scant few bites each. A few moments before, the need appeared impossible to meet. Now Jesus provides more than anyone could eat.

What Do You Think?

What does Jesus' gratitude before the miracle meal imply?

Digging Deeper

How are you being called to practice gratitude in times of need?

B. Gathering the Leftovers (vv. 12–13)

12. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

We may imagine time passing, a change in the position of the sun on that hillside. For a crowd of thousands, the distribution and eating would have taken quite a while. When the crowd is finished and full, however, Jesus gives His disciples another job. He asks them to clean up!

The description of fragments suggests tearing, sharing, and bites taken. These are no longer whole loaves. We may imagine jagged edges and exposed middles. Did Jesus do the tearing, every rip creating more? Did the people do the same, offering to each other? Or do the pieces indicate a "I just can't take even one more bite" kind of filling? Regardless, Jesus' instruction is clear: *Don't waste the leftovers*.

13. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

The disciples move at Jesus' command and gather *twelve baskets* of leftover bread—one each. The number twelve is significant in Jewish history and tradition. First, twelve is associated with the sons of Jacob and the tribes of Israel that descended from them. Moses sent out twelve men to spy on Canaan as representatives of the tribes (Numbers 13:2). After the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel (722 BC), ten of the tribes had been lost. Jesus' choice of twelve disciples represents God's restoration of His people.

III. Requesting Signs

(John 6:30–35)

In the intervening verses, readers learn that the crowd sees Jesus as a prophet like Moses and hopes He will lead them in a liberating revolution against the Romans. They want to make him king by force (John 6:15). However, Jesus perceives their political intentions and escapes to a solitary place.

The crowds pursue Jesus the next day but find that He and His disciples have crossed to the opposite side of the lake (John 6:16–24). They climb into their boats and follow. The next portion of

today's text depicts a conversation between Jesus and the crowd, which takes place the day after He fed them on the hillside, after they have caught up with Him in Capernaum.

A. Recalling the Manna (vv. 30–31)

30. They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?

Jesus has just asked the people to believe He is the one God sent (John 6:29). But instead of leaning into faith, the crowd continues to question Him. Jesus had fed some of them the day before, but others had come because they heard reports of the miracle. They demand another *sign* even though Jesus has performed sign after sign, healing the sick and feeding the multitude. The crowd threatens unbelief if Jesus doesn't show something else that will bring them to awe and prove that He is who they want Him to be. Jesus' listeners frequently ask Him to perform signs beyond those He has given already (Matthew 12:38–42).

Their demand to *see* in order to *believe* also conflicts with the ideal of discipleship in this Gospel. Jesus will blatantly ask Martha, in the process of raising Lazarus, "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). After His resurrection, Jesus will tell Thomas, "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (20:29). And for all of us who live on the far side of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the apostle Paul reminds us that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). In God's kingdom, sight, understanding, and comprehension follow belief rather than preceding it.

What Do You Think?
Is it ever appropriate to ask God for a sign?

Digging Deeper
How does Judges 6:36–40 affect your answer?

31. Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

Jesus' questioners formally compare His feeding on the hillside to Moses' procurement of *manna in the desert* (see Exodus 16:1–16). Because they refused to enter the promised land (Numbers 14:1–36), God forced the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for forty years (Deuteronomy 29:5). God fed them on their journey with *manna*, a seed-like food that they baked into cakes (Numbers 11:8). A psalmist calls it "angels' food" (Psalm 78:25), which many Jews at this time understood literally. The crowd cites Scripture as a basis for their request for a similarly supernatural sustenance (Exodus 16:4). They want a prophet like Moses who does miracles like Moses.

B. Recognizing the True Bread (vv. 32–33)

32. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.

While the Gospel emphasizes how Jesus fits the patterns of Moses and Elijah, Jesus also proves Himself greater than those prophets. First, Jesus denies that the manna in the wilderness was a greater miracle, because God is *now* offering the *true bread from heaven*. Second, Jesus identifies God as His own *Father*, thus claiming to be divine (John 5:18). By focusing on what God has done in the past, the people are missing what God is doing in the present. By focusing on the physical, they are missing a deeper truth.

What Do You Think?
Have you ever misunderstood a passage of Scripture before Jesus gave you wisdom for understanding?

Digging Deeper
How will you seek Jesus' wisdom and understanding in your daily Bible study?

33. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

Jesus then offers a glimpse of what the *true bread* is. Jesus tells the crowd that the *bread of God* is not bread like either the Israelites' manna or the barley loaves served the day before. The bread that

comes *from heaven* is a person. Astonishingly, the people are to understand that the person sent by God will give *life*—and not only to the Jews, but to the whole *world*. There is room for everyone to accept this life-giving bread, even Gentiles.

C. Revealing the Bread of Life (vv. 34–35)

34. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus' listeners interpret His metaphors in physical terms. For example, when Jesus promises "living water" that will satisfy one's thirst forever, the Samaritan woman thinks He is talking about literal water (John 4:13–15). Similarly, the crowd interprets the *true bread from heaven* as a means of satisfying their hunger forever. Their wish to receive this bread *evermore* is not greed. Most people lived "paycheck to paycheck," relying on their daily wage to eat (Matthew 6:11). They longed for the same kind of care that God provided their ancestors in the wilderness (Psalm 78:23–29; Deuteronomy 29:5–6). They want it not just once, but forever. At first, it seems like the crowd has gotten it right. But they still think Jesus is talking about physical bread. They still have a meal on their minds—one they do not have to toil to consume.

35. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

With the first of seven "*I am*" statements (compare John 8:12; 10:7–9, 11–14 [Lesson 9]; 11:25–26 [Lesson 10]; 14:6 [Lesson 12]; 15:1–5 [Lesson 13]), Jesus now clearly declares that the *true bread* from heaven is not manna, but Himself. There is something more substantial than the bread the crowd ate the day before; long-term sustenance is found in a relationship with Him.

Jesus explains a movement toward Himself, an action necessary for those who accept that He is who He claims to be. One must come to Jesus and believe that He is God's Son. If both belief and action occur, then the result is a release from *hunger* and *thirst*. Jesus is not talking about physical appetites, but a spiritual reality where the deepest human needs are met. Jesus provides eternal sustenance and provision.

Satiety in God

Our hearts are restless until they rest in Jesus, claims Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) in his famous *Confessions.* The book is an autobiography that chronicles Augustine's life before his complete commitment to Jesus. Before Christ, he recalls stealing forbidden fruit (literally), boasting of sexual exploits (some he hadn't even committed!), and pursuing fame and notoriety. Nothing fulfilled him.

In John 6:34–35, Jesus says that those who partake of what He offers will never go hungry. Jesus is not referring to physical hunger, but to the deep restlessness of the soul that drives us to distraction. Only He will satisfy. Are you satisfied or restless?

—DS-G

Conclusion

A. Eternal Provision

In a lesson taught with more than words, Jesus shows His disciples that in Him, they have all they need. The value of the signs and miracles that Jesus performs is not in their temporal sustenance, whether they involve merriment at a wedding (John 2:1–11), healing of afflictions (4:46–54; 5:1–15; etc.), alleviation of hunger or thirst (6:1–13), or rescue on the sea (6:16–21). Rather, their importance lies in what they show us about God's saving and revealing work. Jesus heals our hurts, redeems our situations, and nourishes our souls. The disciples began with grieving hearts, watched the gathering of a massive and needy crowd, came up virtually empty when asked to feed that crowd themselves, and then witnessed a miracle. They watched as Jesus fed every person and then collected entire baskets full for themselves. The crowd remembered God's provision in the past; they experienced His provision in the present; and the disciples held evidence of His provision for their future.

B. Prayer

Father God, thank You for the ways You provide for us. We recognize that our lives depend on it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus alone truly satisfies.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before the session, do an online search for food scarcity statistics. You may choose to consider the problem either locally or globally.

Begin by announcing that you've brought a snack for participants to share. (A charcuterie board works well for this, as it provides an abundance of food and offers choices for those with dietary restrictions. However, feel free to bring any snack, while keeping in mind the known dietary restrictions of your participants.) While students are eating, share the food scarcity statistics you researched. Then lead a whole-class discussion using the following questions:

1. How does our snack showcase abundance?
2. How does our snack showcase scarcity?
3. What are some of the obstacles to solving food scarcity?
4. How might we be a part of the solution?

Lead into Bible study by saying, "In today's lesson from John 6, the disciples were facing a hunger crisis. When they gave Jesus their little, He multiplied it beyond their expectations. Let's discover how He still feeds us today."

Into the Word

Divide the class in half, designating one half the **John Group** and the other half the **Exodus Group**. Instruct the **John Group** to read John 6:5–13 and the **Exodus Group** to read Exodus 16:1–4, 13–15. Ask each group to discuss the main events of their passage. After calling time, invite a volunteer from each group to write highlights from their passage on the board. Discuss the following:

1. In each instance, what was the reaction of the crowd to the miracle?
2. How does Jesus use past stories, people, and texts from the Old Testament to teach?
3. Why might bread be the standard provision in both stories?

Option. Distribute copies of the "Bread to Bread Comparison" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask students to find a partner. Allow pairs time to complete the exercise as indicated before sharing their ideas with the entire group.

Ask a volunteer to read John 6:30–35 out loud. Then give a short introduction to the seven "I am" statements of Jesus found in the Gospel of John (you research and prepare). Discuss the following questions while making a list of participants' answers on the board:

1. What is the "true bread from heaven"?
2. What does Jesus mean when He calls Himself the "bread of life"?
3. Do you think there is significance to the title "bread of life" being first?

Remind students that Jesus still fulfills our needs. Distribute pens and paper. Ask participants to fold their paper into thirds. Then ask them to label the sections as *Physical*, *Emotional*, and *Spiritual*. Allow five minutes for participants to brainstorm ways that God meets their needs in each category. After calling time, invite volunteers to share their responses.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Jesus Meets My Needs" exercise from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in one minute or less. Encourage students to share their answers with a partner.

Into Life

As class wraps up, announce that you will host a meal for participants to "break bread" together and remember Jesus as the bread of life. Plan the date, time, and location as a class. *Note:* You may choose to gather at a restaurant, but a potluck-style meal is preferable. Pass around a sign-up sheet (you create) for food, paper goods, and utensils.

End class with a prayer focused on gratitude for Jesus as the bread of life.

Walking on Water

Devotional Reading: Psalm 81
Background Scripture: John 6:1–14

John 6:15–27

15 When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

16 And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea,

17 And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

18 And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

19 So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

20 But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

21 Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

22 The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone;

23 (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:)

24 When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

25 And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

Key Text

[Jesus] saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. **—John 6:20**

Written That

You Might Believe

Unit 2: Signs and Miracles

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Recount the key events in John 6 that lead to Jesus' teaching in verses 26–27.
2. Explain how the miracles recorded in the Gospel of John reveal Jesus as the Messiah.
3. Compose a journal entry reflecting on a time when they experienced fear and how God's presence brought peace.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Peace, Be Still
- B. Lesson Context: Literary
- C. Lesson Context: Signs
- D. Lesson Context: Historical

I. Retreat (John 6:15)
- A. Sensing the Crowd (v. 15a)
- B. Ascending the Mountain (v. 15b)

Single-Minded Pursuit

II. Rescue (John 6:16–21)
- A. Facing the Storm (vv. 16–18)
- B. Seeing the Savior (vv. 19–20)
- C. Reaching the Shore (v. 21)

III. Rebuke (John 6:22–27)
- A. Crowds Search (vv. 22–24)
- B. People Question (v. 25)
- C. Jesus Corrects (vv. 26–27)

Hungry for Jesus

Conclusion
- A. Distinguishing Priorities
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Peace, Be Still

She showed up on my doorstep unannounced. With tears in her eyes, she asked, "Can I come in? Do you have a minute?" I opened the door wider, took a deep breath, and whispered internally, *Lord, help*. For the next hour, my friend sat on my couch and recounted the events of her last few months. When she finished, I made a few phone calls—canceling my afternoon appointments—and then asked, "What do you need?"

We ended up at a local painting and pottery studio, poised for some artistic expression and purposeful messiness. I watched as my friend stained the tile in front of her with blue, gray, and purple swirls. A raging sea emerged. On top of it all, she wrote, "Peace, be still. Though the storm rages—peace, be still." When she looked up, I caught a spark of hope in her eyes. "It'll be okay. Jesus is with me," she said. I smiled in response and affirmed, "Yes, He is."

B. Lesson Context: Literary

Today's text picks up just after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1–11 [Lesson 6]). Jesus' disciples are cleaning up after the meal, and the crowd is talking amongst themselves, beginning to grasp that Jesus may be the promised prophet for whom the Jewish people are waiting (6:12–14). Moses had foretold that God would send another prophet like him to guide God's people (Deuteronomy 18:15). They had watched and waited for generation after generation.

The miracle of Jesus walking on water is recorded in three of the four Gospels: Matthew 14:22–34; Mark 6:45–53; and John 6:15–21. Each offers different details, but all are linked to the feeding of the five thousand. John's account has multiple purposes. First, it recounts the disciples' memories of Jesus' ministry for the first audiences and preserves them for future generations. The writers shaped their narratives to connect the past with the needs of emerging congregations. The immediate audience for the Gospel of John included Jewish and Gentile believers in post-AD 70 Asia Minor. Second, John's

Gospel "dialogues" with the synoptic accounts, as the author had familiarity with the other Gospels.

C. Lesson Context: Signs

John writes specifically to promote belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). He does this by focusing on seven miracles or "signs" that Jesus performs. Today's text focuses on the fifth of these signs.

There is tension within the Gospel of John regarding the value of miracles. People do believe in Jesus based on signs (John 2:11, 23; 4:53; 7:31), but Jesus also rebukes people for seeking signs (4:48; 6:26). There are even some who beheld the signs and still did not believe (6:36, 64; 12:37). The Gospel writer clearly states that Jesus performed far more signs than those chosen to be recorded (20:30). Those included in the Gospel are present for the benefit of all who were unable to witness the physical signs, so that they too might believe and receive eternal life "through his name" (20:31).

D. Lesson Context: Historical

Even though the Gospel portrays Jesus as the promised prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15–19, He did not align neatly with the expectations that His contemporaries had for that figure. The Samaritans expected that a messianic prophet like Moses (*Taheb*) would teach God's people the law and deliver them from the Romans. Some Jews anticipated that the prophet would reverse the throes of Roman oppression, especially monetary taxation. Leading a revolt a few decades earlier, Judas the Galilean (died AD 6) likened monetary taxation to slavery. The move from taxed resources to taxed coin forced the selling of animals or produce, followed by money exchanges, thus creating financial hardship for the populace.

A decade before Judas, the Syrian forces under Varus (the Roman regent in the area) responded to an uprising after the death of Herod the Great (4 BC) by crucifying 2,000 Jews near Nazareth. One can fully appreciate the people's desire to be freed from Roman occupation, but Jesus rejected those designs on His ministry. He taught the love of enemies (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27, 35) and putting away the sword (Matthew 26:52; John 18:11). We see in John 6:66 that even some of His disciples abandoned Him and followed Him no longer. Thus, when Jesus flees the crowd's political designs on His future (6:15), the compassion shown in the feeding of the 5,000 is set in striking contrast to the revolutionary aspirations of the crowd (see Lesson 6).

I. Retreat

(John 6:15)

A. Sensing the Crowd (v. 15a)

15a. When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king.

Jesus' supernatural perception is on display. *They* refers to the Jewish crowd of thousands still gathered on the hillside, bellies full of miraculous bread and fish. The sign Jesus performed causes them to decide He is the one for whom they've waited. They desperately desire freedom from Rome and hope Jesus will be their political leader (*king*). Jesus knows they intend to *force* Him into leadership; they are eager for a swift coronation.

Jewish messianic hopes centered on the establishment of three key political roles: prophet, priest, and king. Some Jewish hopes centered around a king like David, whose throne was in Jerusalem and who would hail from David's Bethlehem (John 7:42). Other messianic expectations focused on the prophet like Moses, through whom God would speak to His people again (Deuteronomy 18:15–19). The community at Qumran (a reclusive Jewish sect that lived near the Dead Sea between the second century BC and the first century AD) also looked forward to a messianic priest who would oversee proper sacrifices and other rites.

B. Ascending the Mountain (v. 15b)

15b. He departed again into a mountain himself alone.

Jesus' reaction to the crowd's intention is to seek out solitude. He withdraws in this manner on several occasions, and Matthew and Mark's accounts indicate that He sought time and space away with His disciples before the crowd found them (Matthew 12:15; Mark 3:7). This time, Jesus sends His



Visual for Lesson 7. *Place this image in a prominent place. Point to it and ask, "Are you claiming God's presence with you amidst storms?"*

disciples away and goes off *alone* (Matthew 14:22; Mark 6:45).

Jesus' pursuit of seclusion accomplishes several things. First, it reflects His habit of withdrawing regularly to seek His Father through prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 22:39–46). Second, it aligns with the secrecy or veiled nature of His early ministry, where He warns people not to tell others after a healing or exorcism or even a correct confession (Matthew 9:30; Mark 1:32–34, 43–44; 3:7–12; 5:37–43; 8:29–30; 9:9; Luke 4:34–35, 40–41; 5:14). Rather than seeking attention, Jesus often seeks to avoid it. He does not promote Himself by riding the waves of momentum that come from popular opinion. Instead, Jesus leans into the Father and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Consider Jesus' choice after His baptism and God's declaration, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17): Immediately, Jesus follows the Spirit away, into the wilderness (4:1). There, just as here, Jesus proves His refusal to take any shortcuts to kingly power (compare 4:8–9).

What Do You Think?

How do you find rest when you feel the pressures of life?

Digging Deeper

In the coming season, how will you make space to be alone with God and find rest in Him?

Single-Minded Pursuit

In the year 1212, a teenager named Clare left her father's house in secret, with the help of her aunt Bianca. She cut her hair and exchanged fine clothes for a plain robe. Clare was a devout follower of Jesus; she'd believed in Him since she was a child. Clare felt God calling her to a life of poverty. Out of this conviction, she resisted the wealthy marriage and life of ease her family offered. In the monastic tradition of the thirteenth century, cutting a woman's hair symbolized laying aside the expectations of men and single-mindedly pursuing the will of God.

Clare's obedience to the Lord led to the establishment of the first monastic order for women in the Franciscan tradition. The group of nuns that she eventually came to lead was distinct among many other orders for their commitment to a life of poverty and devotion to God.

After miraculously feeding thousands on a Galilean hillside, Jesus had a choice—to seize the power of men, capitulating to the expectations of society, or to follow God. He escaped the crowd and withdrew to a mountain alone. What do you glean from the examples of Jesus and Clare? How do you resist societal pressures and human expectations?

—DS-G

II. Rescue

(John 6:16–21)

A. Facing the Storm (vv. 16–18)

16–17a. And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, and entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum.

As night falls, the disciples leave the shore of the lake (John 6:1). They descend from the mountainside and return to their boat. Their journey sends them from the east side of the *sea* of Galilee, across the northern tip, *toward* the western shore.

Jesus and His disciples use *Capernaum* as their ministry home base. It is the site of the home where Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:5, 14–15; Mark 1:21, 29–31; Luke 4:31, 38–39). In the first century, Capernaum was a small fishing village with an estimated 1,200 to 1,700 residents.

17b. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them.

The evening deepens into night. Several of the disciples are fishermen who are intimately familiar with this body of water, sailing, and the path they intend to take. Nighttime fishing was standard practice in first-century Galilee, so the timing of their departure is neither a problem nor a surprise. Fishermen often set sail in the *dark* to avoid the heat of the day and to prevent the fish from seeing their nets. However, Jesus has not returned to their company, so they set out alone.

What Do You Think?

Have you ever gone through a period of waiting for Jesus? What did it feel like to wait on Him?

Digging Deeper

Learning from David in Psalm 27, how will you seek God the next time He calls you to wait?

18. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.

The *sea* of Galilee is known for its sudden and violent storms. Cooler air from the mountains above the lake rapidly descends into the valley and pushes against the lighter, warmer air that rests over the water. When this happens, the warm air is displaced, creating turbulence. The air collides with the water, causing large waves to form.

B. Seeing the Savior (vv. 19–20)

19. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

Fishing vessels in first-century Galilee had a single mast with a square-shaped sail, as well as seats for four men with oars. With the wind blustering, the disciples probably took down their sail, attempting to maintain some control of the boat.

Twenty-five or *thirty furlongs* is the equivalent of three or four miles. Their rowing takes them about halfway between the eastern and western shores. Despite the inclement weather, there is no mention of the storm causing them fear (compare Mark 4:35–41; Matthew 14:30–31). Still, it is safe to assume that tensions are high.

However, when the disciples see *Jesus walking* toward them *on* the water, they do fear. Two things must be considered here. First, the natural bent of humanity is to sink or swim in bodies of water; Jesus' approach is supernatural. He walks among the tumultuous waves. Second, it is dark and stormy. Other Gospel accounts mention that the disciples thought that Jesus was a ghost (Matthew 14:26–27; Mark 6:49–51). Belief in ghosts was very prevalent in the first century. Regardless, in this moment, the disciples witness another sign of Jesus' divinity. As Creator, it is God alone who commands nature. The book of Job testifies that He "alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8).

20. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.

Jesus speaks directly to His disciples' fear, saying essentially, "Don't worry, it's me!" He uses a phrase that is translated elsewhere in the Gospel of John as "I am" (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1; etc.). This phrase bears resemblance to the divine name God reveals to Moses at the burning bush, "I Am That I Am" (Exodus 3:14).

C. Reaching the Shore (v. 21)

21. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.

Once the disciples realize who has approached them, they *willingly* allow Him to board the boat. The narrator's words here not only reflect the practicality of their relief (that Jesus is not a ghost!) but also remind us of the purpose of John's Gospel: for humanity to recognize who Jesus is and be receptive and responsive to the divine initiative.

How to Say It

Capernaum	Kuh-*per*-nay-um
Didache	*Did*-uh-kee
exorcism	*eck*-sawr-siz-um
Syrian	*Sear*-ee-un
Taheb	*Taw*-heb
Tiberias	Tie-*beer*-ee-as

As Jesus climbs aboard the boat, a second miracle occurs. Although Jesus meets His disciples halfway through their journey across the lake, when He joins their party, they *immediately* reach their destination.

What Do You Think?
Where are you expending energy, "rowing" out of your own strength?

Digging Deeper
Consider Zechariah 4:6. How will you let Jesus into your "boat" so that He can bring you to your destination?

III. Rebuke
(John 6:22–27)

A. Crowds Search (vv. 22–24)

22. The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone.

Morning dawns, and the crowds who had followed Jesus up onto the mountainside realize the disciples are gone, that they sailed to the *other side* of the lake. They also recognize that Jesus did not get into the *boat* with His disciples when they crossed—they know Jesus went off on His own (see John 6:15, above). Their observations uncover a mystery. Where is Jesus now? And how did He travel?

23. (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks.)

Before the mystery is solved, newcomers arrive. News has spread quickly about the miracle meal that Jesus served. *Boats* come from *Tiberias*, a town located on the southwestern side of the lake, about six miles south of Capernaum. Despite Jesus' desire to avoid sensationalism, people throng to see Him.

The narrator refers to Jesus here as *the Lord* and marks the miracle with thanksgiving. The author may be evoking connotations of the Lord's Supper. This story features Jesus' invitation to consume His "flesh and blood" (John 6:53–55).

What Do You Think?
From your observations, what are the most common reasons for people to seek Jesus?

Digging Deeper
How can your church help those who are searching for Jesus find Him?

24. When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.

Both the newcomers from Tiberias and the remaining crowd from the previous day pursue *Jesus* and His disciples. They travel by boat to *Capernaum*, presumably knowing that it was a place Jesus frequently visited.

B. People Question (v. 25)

25. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?

After crossing the lake themselves, the crowd locates Jesus. They address Him as *Rabbi*, a term of respect for Jewish teachers. They proceed to ask about His mysterious disappearance. Their question centers around the timing: "*When* did You arrive over here?" It seems that they imagine He walked around the lake.

What Do You Think?
Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 23:8 and Luke 6:46. What does it mean to call Jesus *Rabbi*?

Digging Deeper
Where are you calling Jesus *Rabbi* but not obeying Him? How will you get back in step with His leadership?

C. Jesus Corrects (vv. 26–27)

26. Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.

Jesus replies, but He does not answer their

question about the timing. Instead, Jesus deftly shifts the conversation to the heart of the crowd's seeking. They have failed to appreciate the true significance of the miracle, focusing only on their physical sustenance. Jesus reveals that they place a higher value on the physical feeding than the miracle itself (or what the miracle discloses). They did not see the sign—the miracle's significance is revelational rather than nutritional.

27. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

Jesus redirects the crowd's aim, using contrast to make His point. He asks them to put their energy into pursuing a different kind of food, the kind that doesn't spoil. His words echo the concept He approached with the Samaritan women at the well—there is food and drink that will eternally satisfy (John 4:13–14).

Later Christian leaders draw a similar contrast between things that fade and things that endure. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian church that their work will be tested, and a reward will come to those whose work survives (1 Corinthians 3:12–15). An early Christian manual of discipleship known as the *Didache*, dating back to the late first century AD, outlines virtues associated with the "Way of Life" and vices related to the "Way of Death." It categorizes human choices in this way, just as Jesus calls people to pursue life-producing "food" versus death-producing "food."

But Jesus goes further, instructing the crowd that the *Son of man* will give them this food that doesn't spoil. "Son of man" refers to the prophetic, messianic figure for whom the Jewish people are waiting. It is a phrase connected to a vision given to the prophet Daniel. He sees "one like the Son of man" who is given all authority and power (Daniel 7:13–14). This ruler reigns over a kingdom that will never pass away nor be destroyed (7:14).

The statement that God has *sealed* this person refers to God's approval. It links back to Jesus' baptism and the testimony of John the Baptizer: "I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God" (John 1:32–34 [Lesson 2]; compare Matthew 3:16–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22).

Later in the chapter, after many refuse Jesus' difficult teaching and choose to stop following Him (John 6:66), Jesus turns to the Twelve and asks if they too will abandon Him. Peter responds with the key to this passage and the choice to follow: "Lord, . . . thou hast the words of eternal life" (6:68).

Hungry for Jesus

I once worked with a ministry that helped people re-entering society after incarceration. One young man had recently given his life to Christ and was full of zeal. Each day, he prayed boldly for God to give him one million dollars. His hope was sincere, but his focus was on material blessings rather than growth in a relationship with Jesus.

This young man's eagerness touched me. I could tell that he really trusted God to hear him. Yet, he was missing the core of the gift he had been offered. Jesus told the crowds in John 6:26–27 that their hunger for bread, though real, was not their greatest need. He urged them to seek "that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27). Which do you seek—the perishable or eternal? —DS-G

Conclusion

A. Distinguishing Priorities

Jesus moved in every moment in accordance with the Father's instructions. He expressed compassion, met physical needs, refused inappropriate power, sought solitude, controlled the elements, and uncovered false motives. The signs He used to demonstrate His authority point to His identity as the Son of God, the one sent to seek and save humanity. For those who lean into the mystery and allow their eyes to be opened, eternity awaits. Each of us must answer who we believe Jesus to be, what we seek from Him, and whether we will follow.

B. Prayer

Father God, thank You for sending Your Son to bring us presence, provision, and peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus' presence brings provision and peace.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before class, collect pictures of various types of storms (thunderstorms, hurricanes, typhoons, blizzards, cyclones, dust storms, tornadoes, etc.). Project the images, or print the pictures and hold them up, one at a time. Ask the class to do the following: 1— identify the type of storm; 2—express the type of emotions they would feel if they encountered that storm; 3—answer whether they have any power to control such a storm.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "In today's lesson, Jesus demonstrates His power over nature. We'll see how His actions and presence brought peace to the disciples amid a storm. We'll also consider how Jesus' presence brings us peace today."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read John 6:15 aloud. As a class, review the previous events and miracles in John 6 (see Lesson 6). Then ask: 1–Why did Jesus retreat from the crowd? 2–What did the crowd want from Him? 3–Who had they decided Jesus was?

Then give a short lecture on the seven signs (or miracles) from the Gospel of John that point to Jesus as the Messiah (you prepare; see Lesson Context from Lesson 5). Alternatively, you may ask an interested class member to do research on the seven signs in the Gospel of John and prepare to present this lecture.

Alternative. Distribute pens and copies of the "Miracle Search" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Ask for a new volunteer to read John 6:16–21 aloud. Divide the class into partners to discuss: 1–Why were the disciples afraid? (Compare Matthew 14:26 and Mark 6:49–50.) 2–The disciples had just witnessed Jesus feeding the 5,000. Why were they surprised to see Jesus doing another miracle: walking on water? 3–What does this passage reveal about Jesus? Bring students back together to share their conclusions with the whole class.

Invite a third volunteer to read John 6:22–27 aloud. As a class, discuss:

1. What did the crowd realize? (v. 22)
2. Where did the new boats come from? (v. 23)
3. What did the crowd do after realizing that Jesus was no longer there? (v. 24)
4. Where did they find Jesus? (v. 25)
5. What did they ask Jesus after finding Him? (v. 25)
6. What does Jesus say was motivating the people? (v. 26)
7. What does Jesus tell the people to work for? (v. 27)
8. Who gives the "meat which endureth unto everlasting life"? (v. 27)
9. What do you think it means that God the Father has "sealed" the Son of man? (v. 27)

Into Life

Distribute a pen and an index card to each student. Ask participants to reflect on a time when they felt unsettled or fearful. Then ask them to reflect on the way God's presence brings peace. Instruct students to compose a journal entry or jot notes about their memories. To encourage quiet reflection without the discomfort of silence, you may play soft music while the students write. After ten minutes, ask volunteers to share examples of how God's presence brought them peace.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Elemental Power" exercise from the activity page. Encourage learners to complete the activity as indicated.

End your class session by collecting prayer requests. Specifically ask participants whether there is a particular area of life in which they need increased peace. Then lead a short prayer, asking for God's presence and peace to reign over any storms of life that might arise in the coming weeks.

Restoring Blind Eyes

Devotional Reading: Ephesians 5:8–20
Background Scripture: Isaiah 35; Ezekiel 18; John 9

John 9:1–9

1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

6 When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay,

7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

8 The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?

9 Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he.



Key Text

Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. **—John 9:3**

Image © Getty Images

Written That

You Might Believe

Unit 2: Signs and Miracles

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the underlying assumption in the disciples' question about the cause of the man's blindness.
2. Compare this healing account with the healing account in John 5:2–16 (Lesson 5).
3. Sing the hymn "Amazing Grace" as a response to God's restorative power.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Clarity of Sight
- B. Lesson Context: Historical
- C. Lesson Context: Literary
- D. Lesson Context: Blindness

I. The Condition (John 9:1–5)
- A. Confronting Blindness (vv. 1–2)
  Neuro-Ophthalmology
- B. Correcting Assumptions (vv. 3–5)

II. The Cure (John 9:6–9)
- A. Compound and Clay (v. 6)
- B. Command and Cleansing (v. 7)
- C. Confusion and Confession (vv. 8–9)
  Is It Real?

Conclusion
- A. Vision that Matters Most
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Clarity of Sight

Clear vision is everything! The activities we take for granted—reading, driving, working, etc.—all become more difficult as we lose the ability to focus properly. Clinicians and health organizations have sounded the alarm over a global pandemic of myopia, also known as nearsightedness. Some estimates suggest that a third of the world's population suffers from nearsightedness, and the most significant uptick is among young children, likely due to so much screen time on phones. Work remains to ensure that everyone has access to affordable and effective treatments, such as corrective lenses, without enabling any poor or voluntary habits that contribute to nearsightedness.

One preventive measure stands above the rest: spending more time outdoors and in larger spaces that require the eye's tiny muscles to work together to focus. For every hour that we focus on what is right in front of our faces, we need to be reminded to look up and look out, to focus on things that are far away. We were not designed to meet the world on a small, bright screen, merely an arm's length away. The Creator designed the human eye for peering at landscapes far and near. And so it also is with the eyes of our hearts.

B. Lesson Context: Historical

The healing mentioned in John 9 occurs within Jesus' later Judean ministry, which extends from John 7:14 to 10:39. The events of today's lesson text took place in Jerusalem in late September or early October of AD 29, the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths or Feast of Ingathering (Leviticus 23:33–36a; Deuteronomy 16:13–17; 31:10). Jesus' brothers had challenged Him to attend, but He hesitated (John 7:1–9). Ultimately, He attended the second half of the weeklong celebration, which seemed to reduce the threat level (7:10–14). Some commentators have questioned whether Jesus was still in Jerusalem by the time we get to the events of John 9, but there are contextual indicators that make Jerusalem the most likely location for the events related (compare 7:37; 8:12, 20).

The Feast of Tabernacles was one of the three pilgrimage celebrations prescribed in Exodus 23:14–17 (there referred to as "ingathering"). During the festival's seven days, the temporary use of tents commemorated the time in the wilderness after Israel's escape from Egypt, during which time they lived in tents.

C. Lesson Context: Literary

The Gospel of John reveals key theological truths about Christ: that He is God the Son, and having existed eternally with God the Father in heaven above (John 1:1–2), the Father then sent His Son to dwell among His people on the earth below (1:14). The Greek word translated "dwelt" in that verse is literally "pitched a tent" or "tabernacled."

John 9 describes an episode that might have happened as Jesus departed from Jerusalem and met a man along the road. It weaves together a variety of themes and images from the Gospel: sending and being sent, light and darkness, and faith and unbelief.

D. Lesson Context: Blindness

Some form of the word *blind* occurs more than fifty times in the New Testament. The Gospel of John has more such occurrences than any other New Testament book, both by actual number and by proportion of total words. The condition and treatment of blindness are important issues to him! But let's probe deeper: Exactly *why* is it important?

Let's first explore how cultures of antiquity understood those afflicted with blindness. The Bible gives a few cause-and-effect passages on this subject (examples: Genesis 19:10–11; Exodus 4:11; 2 Kings 6:18; Acts 13:6–12). However, it's unwarranted to conclude from such passages that *all* blindness (or any other physical disability, for that matter) is *always* God's punishment for someone's sin. Jesus' disciples fell into this kind of deficient thinking (John 9:2, below).

With this belief that one's own moral failings bring on blindness, many in the ancient world regarded those who happened to be blind as annoying or suspicious. Unable to make a living, they were typically beggars. Their physical and economic conditions were enough to suggest their moral disreputability.

We see this same fallacy at work today, evident in the old idea that "what goes around, comes around." Not necessarily true! Sometimes things just happen at random. This can be generally true in the sense that fitting consequences often follow (sometimes as a logical necessity) from our actions. But there are many circumstances for which we cannot find the cause, such as a disabling condition or a freak accident. Overall, the Bible teaches that our sins cannot be ruled out as a cause of a given effect, but neither are we in a position to rule on every effect's cause. That is within the domain of God's knowledge, and it is mostly a mystery to us.

Jesus frequently healed those who were blind. The four Gospels record five episodes when Jesus healed specific people of their physical blindness:

1. in Bethsaida..... Mark 8:22–26
2. in Jericho..... Matthew 20:29–34; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43
3. in Jerusalem..... John 9 (today's lesson)
4. in Galilee..... Matthew 9:27–31
5. in Galilee..... Matthew 12:22

Restoration of sight was an essential component of Jesus' ministry, so much so that such healings were included in summary statements of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 15:30–31; 21:14; Luke 7:21). Jesus understood His mission as fulfilling the vision of salvation prophesied in Isaiah (Matthew 11:4–5; Luke 4:15–20; 7:22), which included curing blindness (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5).

I. The Condition

(John 9:1–5)

A. Confronting Blindness (vv. 1–2)

1. And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

The chronological and geographic details of John 7:14 and 9:7 indicate that *Jesus* is still in or near Jerusalem after having attended the Feast of Tabernacles (see Lesson Context). The exact location where He *passed by* is not specified. We can speculate that the man who is blind sits in a high-traffic area where many people will notice

him and give him money (compare Acts 3:1–3; John 5:2–3).

That the man *was blind from his birth* means that he has a lifelong disability. This is the kind of blindness that is permanent (compare John 9:32). So, any hope of "healing" would require bodily transformation rather than mere restoration.

What Do You Think?

What obstacles or distractions most often prevent you from noticing the needs of others?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take this week to become more attentive to others and their needs?

Neuro-Ophthalmology

Bionic eye. Implantable microchips. Retinal and cortical prostheses. These devices sound like science fiction, but they are all technical terms in current neuro-ophthalmologic research. This medical subspecialty studies how the brain's nerve system interacts with the eyes. Research in this field has yielded some astonishing results in helping restore damaged vision.

But the word *restore* can imply that the patient previously had fully functional vision. What about those who have congenital blindness (that is, blindness from birth)? Much research has been conducted in overcoming this disabling condition, but we're not there yet.

In Ephesians 1:18, the apostle Paul prays that "the eyes of your understanding"—literally, your heart—would be enlightened. The implication is that our hearts do not see as they ought. Needless to say, no human technology has the power to correct our hearts' impaired "vision."

Perhaps we could say we need a divine cardio-ophthalmologist. —RLN

2. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

The disciples take it as a given that to be *born blind* can only be attributed to God. And for God to be just, the affliction must be the just consequence of someone's *sin*.

In their defense, blindness is included in Moses' list of afflictions that God would visit upon those who departed from the covenant (Deuteronomy 28:28–29; compare Exodus 4:11). God sent Israel and Judah into exile for precisely this failure. During the exile, prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel struggled to correct the popular impression that God punishes children for their parents' sin (see Jeremiah 31:29–30; Ezekiel 18:1–4, 19–20).

The disciples display a detached inquisitiveness concerning the man born blind. Is his disability due to some kind of preemptive punishment in the womb for sins he had not yet committed? Or is it due to some grave sin his parents committed prior to his conception? In modern logic, the disciples commit the fallacy of the false dilemma, presuming there are only two possible answers to their question.

B. Correcting Assumptions (vv. 3–5)

3. Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

Sin is indeed at the ultimate root of the man's disability, but it's sin in a general sense of living in a fallen world (Genesis 2:16–17; Romans 3:23). However, *Jesus* diverts the conversation away from human sin to the even more fundamental role that God's plan plays. Jesus answers the disciples' question directly with a third option they did not consider: the man's condition exists as an opportunity for *God* to *manifest in him* His *works* (compare John 11:4).

What are these works of God? It seems obvious that Jesus' impending miracle would be chief among them. But consider also that Jesus in John

How to Say It

Bethsaida	Beth-*say*-uh-duh
Gihon	*Gye*-hahn
Judean	Joo-*dee*-un
Siloam	Sigh-*lo*-um
Tabernacles	*Tah*-burr-*nah*-kulz

6:29 defines "the work of God" this way: "That ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

What Do You Think?

When have you witnessed God bringing glory to Himself through difficult or unexpected circumstances?

Digging Deeper

How might God be using your current circumstances—pleasant or painful—to display His works of glory through you?

4. I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

In this context, the word *works* refers to the deeds expected of Jesus and His disciples, each in accordance with their respective missions. Elsewhere, the writer of this Gospel uses a Greek word that is translated "miracles" (examples: John 2:11; 4:54; 6:2). Such deeds are intended to convince people to believe that Jesus has been sent from God as the Messiah (example: 7:31; compare 12:37). These works intend to provide evidence to bring about belief (see 20:30–31).

And these are to be done urgently, *while it is day*, which, for Jesus, means before His time on earth is up. Jesus uses the imagery of *day* and *night* as expressions for those times when light and darkness hold sway (compare John 11:9–10; 12:35–36). In an era without electric lights, nightfall means the end of productive work. Jesus uses this to impart a sense of urgency regarding His mission.

5. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

The theme of light versus darkness is a notable feature in this Gospel (John 1:5; 3:19; 8:12; 12:35, 46). In spiritual terms, the role of *light* is to dispel darkness. With light, people may live openly before God and one another (1:4–5, 9; 3:21; 1 John 1:5–7). But darkness stands for the kingdom of the enemy and the source of stumbling. God's moral perfection pierces the darkness, and coming to God means coming to the light who is Christ.

That Jesus is *the light of the world* is a spiritual truth, but it will have a physical effect on the man born blind. His physical experience of darkness will be dispelled and give way to sight when he encounters and obeys Jesus.

What Do You Think?

In what ways have you experienced Jesus as the "light of the world" who pierces the darkness?

Digging Deeper

What specific actions will help you fulfill Christ's call to be "the light of the world" in your community (Matthew 5:14–16)?

II. The Cure

(John 9:6–9)

A. Compound and Clay (v. 6)

6. When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.

This verse echoes Genesis 2:7 and its description of humanity's creation, specifically in its reference to Jesus gathering material from *the ground*. Jesus is signaling that this miracle is an act of creation. In the words of Genesis 2:7, "the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground." In Hebrew, the word for either an individual man or humanity is *adam* (which is the same as the proper name *Adam*, humanity's representative). And the word for ground is *adamah*—a wordplay emphasizing the idea that from the earth comes "the earthling." Thus, to heal and remake the man's eyes as the Creator would, Jesus uses the same raw material used at creation.

Two other accounts of healing mention a *spittle* factor (Mark 7:31–37; 8:22–26). Here, its significance may simply be that it is the moisture that Jesus uses to make the *clay*.

B. Command and Cleansing (v. 7)

7. And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

Some of Jesus' healings happen in an instant; others, like this one, involve a process (compare

Mark 8:23–25). There are two reasons Jesus asks the man to perform the secondary step of washing: first, to create the public record of conduct that will bolster the man's testimony in John 9:15; second, to test the man's faith (compare 2 Kings 5:1–15). Will the instructions be obeyed?

The *pool of Siloam* is an engineering achievement dating to the time of King Hezekiah, who reigned about 727–698 BC (2 Kings 20:20; compare Nehemiah 3:15). Since Jerusalem was frequently under attack, the residents needed secure access to fresh water. The Gihon Spring was the ideal source, and channels and conduits were built to bring it to the pool at the southern end of the city, where Jerusalem's residents could draw water.

John is careful to translate Semitic words that are not immediately understandable to those who speak Greek (compare John 1:42; 5:2; 19:13, 17). The *interpretation* that John gives for the name *Siloam* connects it to the Hebrew verb "to send." This parenthetical note from the author reinforces the central theme of "sending" in this Gospel. God the Father sends the Son from heaven into the world (examples: 3:17; 6:29, 37–38). Now that the Son, Jesus Christ, is directing the man where to go, so the man born blind is also *sent*. Jesus will later send His disciples into the world as representatives (17:18).

With all this buildup, John reports the healing itself briefly: The man *came seeing*.

What Do You Think?

What does the man's obedience to Jesus teach us about responding to God's commands even when we do not understand the outcome?

Digging Deeper

What practices and habits help cultivate a heart that is willing to obey Jesus?

C. Confusion and Confession (vv. 8–9)

8. The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?

When the man born blind returns home with no symptoms of blindness, the result is puzzlement among *neighbours* and observers. People with lifelong disabilities do not suddenly recover!

9. Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he.

The man's community divides into two camps. One side is open to the idea that this man really is the once-blind beggar, now sighted. But the other side considers this impossible therefore concluding that he is more likely the beggar's imposter. This may be an innocent discussion in which the community is trying to get to the bottom of an extraordinary happening. But as the narrative continues, we see that even as the evidence for the miracle's legitimacy and the miracle-worker's authority mounts, people will see what they want to see (or be blind to what they want to be blind to!).

The man's own testimony should end the debate. For the first time in the narrative, he speaks and lets everyone know *I am he*. This is, in fact, the same man who previously held no hope of gaining eyesight!

By the end of John 9, the man born blind explicitly confesses his belief in Jesus. So, the works of God manifested in this man include his healings from both his physical blindness and spiritual blindness—with the latter being Jesus' ultimate purpose for the man (see John 9:38–39). Later in the Gospel, the healing of a man born blind becomes key evidence to substantiate Jesus' divine identity (10:21; 11:37).

What Do You Think?

How has God worked in your life to give you a testimony that reflects His character and salvation?

Digging Deeper

In what context might your testimony serve as a meaningful witness to others?

Is It Real?

With the rise of so-called artificial intelligence (AI), I have found it increasingly challenging to determine which information, photos, and videos are real and which are generated by a computer. AI-produced media can easily take on a life of its

own as it circulates on social media, sometimes creating global pandemonium.

There is a certain irony here. On the one hand, we have more ways than ever to verify the truth of claims and events—fact-checking websites, DNA databases, doorbell cameras, etc. But on the other hand, AI makes certain things easier to fake. So here we are, some twenty centuries after Christ, still struggling to distinguish what is real from what is not.

The issues of Jesus' "real" person and work still confront humanity. Today, as in the first century, some people will deny Jesus' divinity no matter the evidence. Much of this is due to presuppositions of the heart that disallow certain conclusions about Jesus. That was the problem of the religious leaders who had Jesus crucified.

Is there something about Jesus—His divinity, His actions, His words, His claims on your life—that your heart still wants to deny the truth of? How can you confront it with faith today? —KS

Conclusion

A. Vision that Matters Most

Imagine that you are taking a survey among your fellow believers. Your survey consists of just one question: *What's the most important message the Gospel writer wants us to glean from today's lesson?* Many would probably respond with something like, "As Jesus was able to heal a man blind from birth, so also can He heal my own problem today."

That's certainly a true statement, but it's not the main point of the lesson. Let's refer again to John's purpose statement for his Gospel:

> And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. —John 20:30–31

Therefore, the healing accounts mentioned in this Gospel are aimed at creating and bolstering this belief.

At the same time, they also provoke opposition (John 5:16; 9:13–41). Although not part of today's lesson text, this is a key element from the fallout of the man's healing as the episode wraps up in John 9:39–41. The spiritual blindness of the religious leaders prevented them from recognizing the implications of a man cured of physical blindness (compare 12:40). Such division was predicted by Jesus Himself (Luke 12:51–53). To believe in Jesus was to invite the ire of the religious authorities (John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2).

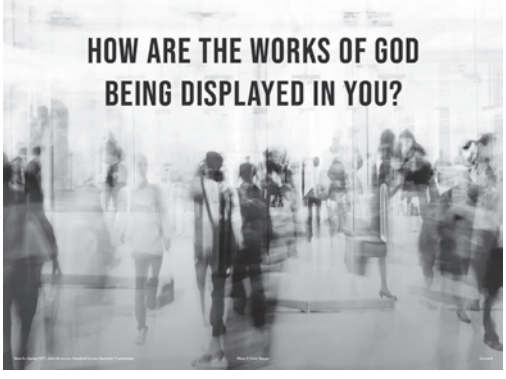
That Jesus, many times, healed the specific malady of blindness is not incidental. They were occasions for exposing the spiritually sighted from the spiritually blind. They were the perfect vehicle for Jesus to see whose hearts can really *see*. But let us not lose sight of one last aspect of the miracle: It was not just a strategy to expose the spiritual condition of the masses. It was chiefly an act of love for a beggar born blind, who could go forward and say, "I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25).

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant us awareness of the reality and dangers of spiritual blindness. Where our spiritual vision is hazy, give us clarity. Where we have hidden the truth, help us to face it. Where we question Your power, renew our minds with understanding that comes from You. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Know what matters most to Jesus.



Visual for Lesson 8. *Display this visual as you ask participants to consider how their actions and attitudes display the works of God.*

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before class begins, write the following prompts on the board:

- *One surprising way you have learned about God's work*
- *One time when God brought clarity to an unclear situation*

Instruct participants to spend one minute reflecting on either prompt. Then invite them to share their responses with a partner. Once the partners have shared, review both prompts with the entire class and encourage participants to share their responses.

Transition into Bible study by saying, "Today we'll explore a passage of Scripture in which Jesus illuminated a situation with God's light and showed those who witnessed it, as well as us, how God loves and restores."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read John 9:1–9 aloud, then divide the class into groups of three. Distribute handouts (you create) to each group with the following headers for in-group discussion: *Verse / Who Is the Focus? / Why Are They the Focus*?

Direct each group to work through each verse to complete the chart. Consider using John 9:1 as an example for how groups should complete the chart. (Answers may include: Verse 1 / Jesus AND the man / Jesus is entering the scene AND the man is seen by Jesus.) Allow time for the groups to work through the nine verses, discuss their responses, and record them on the handout. After calling time, reconvene the class and ask volunteers from each group to share conclusions.

Option 1. Invite a participant to reread verses 3–5 aloud. Assign one of the following Scripture texts to each group: Matthew 5:14–16; John 3:19–21; Romans 13:11–14; Ephesians 5:8–11; 1 John 1:5–7; Revelation 21:22–24. (Depending on the size of your class, you may assign the same references to multiple groups.) Invite groups to read their assigned texts and compare them with John 9:1–9. Then ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–What do these verses reveal about "light" as God's character? 2–What do these verses reveal about the "light" that is the work of Christ? 3–What do these verses reveal about followers of Christ living in "light"?

Option 2. Invite the class to review John 5:2–16, the text studied in Lesson 5. Write two headers on the board: *John 5 / John 9.* Work together to compare similarities and dissimilarities between these two healings. What do they tell us about Jesus? Conclude by inviting participants to share a time when they experienced restoration from Jesus.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Now I See" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow participants time to fill in the shapes before discussing their experience with a partner.

Into Life

Before class time, using hymnals, songbooks, or online resources, make copies of the lyrics to the song "Amazing Grace." Distribute the copies to participants and ask them to review the lyrics and make a mental note of words or phrases that stand out after studying this lesson. Have them share, with a partner, which words they chose and why.

Alternative. Have learners, in groups of three, share the following: 1–Describe a time when you were lost or blind, deeply afraid, or in danger. 2–What signs of God's saving grace or His restoring power have you experienced?

Conclude class time by singing "Amazing Grace," praising God for His restorative power.

Option. Distribute copies of the "I'll Testify" exercise from the activity page. Have participants complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing responses with a partner.

I Am the Good Shepherd

Devotional Reading: Psalm 23
Background Scripture: Ezekiel 34; John 10:1–21

John 10:1–11

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.



Key Text

Said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. **—John 10:7**

Image © Getty Images

Written That
You Might Believe

Unit 3: Jesus Proclaims

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. List the titles or roles that Jesus claims in this text.
2. Contrast the qualities of good shepherds with those of unfaithful shepherds.
3. Compose a poem that blends language from Psalm 23 and John 10:1–11 to express trust in Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. The Importance of Cat Videos
- B. Lesson Context: "I Am"
- C. Lesson Context: Timeline

I. The Proper Entrance, Part 1 (John 10:1–6)
- A. The Takers (v. 1)
  Enemies Hiding in Plain Sight
- B. The Shepherd (v. 2)
- C. Calling and Leading (v. 3)
- D. Knowing and Following (vv. 4–6)
  No Self-Identification Needed!

II. The Proper Entrance, Part 2 (John 10:7–10)
- A. The Door (vv. 7–8)
- B. Where to Enter (v. 9)
- C. Reason to Enter (v. 10)

III. The Good Shepherd (John 10:11)
- A. His Person (v. 11a)
- B. His Work (v. 11b)

Conclusion
- A. Knowing the Audience
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Importance of Cat Videos

Is it possible that cat videos saved the internet in its early days? Some people certainly think so. One observer has said that without those humorous cat videos, video-sharing websites might never have gotten off the ground!

The unpredictable antics of cats provide an endless source of entertainment. But if we zoom out for a moment, we begin to notice that many cultures share similar attitudes toward cats and other animals. At least three common themes emerge.

First, cultures tend to overlap, though not perfectly, in deciding which animals qualify as pets. In many Western countries, people's affection for their pets seems to defy all logic. Entire industries thrive on making sure these pets are well-fed, regularly groomed, and receive adequate medical attention.

Second, many societies view certain animals as essential parts of the workforce. Sheepdogs round up flocks with impressive skill; barn cats control the rodent population on dairy farms. The list goes on.

Third, cultures often regard some animals as valuable in and of themselves—assets to be protected. The more vulnerable and valuable the creature, the greater the need for protection—an important point in today's lesson text. Just as cultures instinctively safeguard the animals entrusted to them, Jesus shows even greater devotion to those entrusted to Him.

B. Lesson Context: "I Am"

A unique feature of John's Gospel is the occurrence of seven metaphorical "I am" statements. These statements reveal Jesus' divine identity, His character and mission. The seven are as follows:

- the bread of life (John 6:35 [Lesson 6])
- the light of the world (8:12)
- the door of the sheep (10:7, 9 [Lesson 9])
- the good shepherd (10:11, 14 [Lesson 9])
- the resurrection and the life (11:25 [Lesson 10])
- the way, the truth, and the life (14:6 [Lesson 12])
- the true vine (15:1, 5 [Lesson 13])

There are many more such statements not recorded in the four Gospels (John 20:30). John the Evangelist

has selected these seven along with certain miracles and other declarations so that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31).

C. Lesson Context: Timeline

The text in this week's lesson is set within a section of John's Gospel that mentions four Jewish feasts: an unnamed feast (John 5:1), Passover (6:4), Tabernacles (7:2), and Dedication (10:22). Today's text occurs sometime during the nine-week interval between the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication (compare Lesson Context, Lesson 8).

Against the backdrop of these feasts, readers of John's Gospel notice the increasing hostility between Jesus and the Jewish opponents during this time frame. For Him to leave the region of Galilee to teach in Judea was to invite death (John 7:1). His opponents set an ambush for Him at the Feast of Tabernacles (7:11). But Jesus countered their efforts by delaying His attendance (7:14).

Jesus' delay resulted in something like a counter-ambush against His opponents. Before His arrival, the mood of the crowd toward Him was that of a simmering pot of water (John 7:12–13). As He taught at the temple, tensions escalated, and the situation began to boil over (7:15–20). But Jesus did not try to de-escalate the antagonism; His responses intensified the division between belief and doubt (7:21–31). A hastily devised plan by the Pharisees to arrest Jesus failed (7:32–52).

There is no let-up to the pressure on Jesus throughout John 7–8, especially after He healed a man born blind (John 9:1–11 [Lesson 8]). This healing resulted in the man's being interrogated multiple times (9:10–34). A heated exchange of words between Jesus and the Pharisees sets the stage for today's lesson text (9:39–41).

I. The Proper Entrance, Part 1

(John 10:1–6)

A. The Takers (v. 1)

1. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

The doubled *verily* translates the Greek *amen*, which is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "truly" or "let it be so." The doubled use of this word occurs about two dozen times in John and is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. The unique repetition in this Gospel is further emphasized by its comparative rarity in the Old Testament, where it occurs only five times (Numbers 5:22; Nehemiah 8:6; Psalms 41:13; 72:19; 89:52). The repetition of this word highlights the significance of what is about to be said.

The figurative language Jesus uses here casts lofty spiritual ideas into familiar images drawn from sheep husbandry. A primary task for the original audience is to figure out what the metaphors refer to in real life. Sometimes Jesus' audience is successful in doing so (example: Matthew 21:45) and sometimes not, to Jesus' disappointment (example: Mark 8:14–21).

Jesus begins His illustration of a *sheepfold* with a negative picture of an intruder. The mention of a *door* might suggest a more formal sheep pen, complete with walls. That the intruder would *climbeth up some other way* to gain access is a red flag. A *thief* relies on stealth (examples: 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4; Revelation 3:3); a *robber* relies on violence, even in public view (examples: John 18:40; 2 Corinthians 11:26). Both were real threats to a shepherd's flock.

Enemies Hiding in Plain Sight

I've been scammed twice. One scam involved not being paid for an item I sold on an auction website, and the other involved me paying for a product that was never sent. Each scam cost me only $20. So, I paid a relatively low price for valuable "lessons learned."

One thing I came to realize is that some miscreants operate in the shadows, stealing small amounts of money frequently; they depend on not being noticed or on people not wanting the hassle of pursuing a small sum.

Others, by contrast, are quite brazen in going for "one big score." In the headlines at the time of this writing (October 2025) is the $100 million heist of jewelry from the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. The robbery happened in broad daylight as the criminals hid in plain sight as part of a work crew.

In a spiritual sense, sin and Satan can operate like either type of thief, aiming to rob you of your most valuable possession: eternal life with God. What are some temptations that entrap people in the privacy of darkness? What about in broad daylight? How can you guard against each tactic?

—RLN

B. The Shepherd (v. 2)

2. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

Jesus contrasts the previous negative picture with its opposite. *The shepherd* does not need to maneuver around the enclosure or climb the wall. By entering through *the door*, he proves himself to be the flock's rightful owner.

The Old Testament provides ample examples of shepherd-and-sheep metaphors. God and Israel are depicted in such a relationship (examples: Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10). Leaders within Israel are denounced as negligent and abusive shepherds to the people (Jeremiah 23:1–2; Ezekiel 34) and are therefore under God's judgment (Jeremiah 25:34–38).

Against this background, Jesus employs the metaphor not only to denounce His opponents but also to reveal Himself as the true shepherd of God's people.

C. Calling and Leading (v. 3)

3. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

We can pause here to note a particular challenge in interpreting figurative language. The challenge is to determine whether each element in the depiction has a real-life counterpart. Five objects or personalities have been introduced to this point in our text: the door, the sheepfold, a thief, a robber, and the shepherd. Now, another two are added: *the porter* and *the sheep*. We might even consider the shepherd's *voice* to be a distinct element. As the story unfolds, it will be easy to identify the shepherd and the door since the text does it for us (compare Matthew 13:36–43). But even this is complicated, for they both have the same referent!

Conversely, the identity of the porter cannot be discerned with certainty. Jesus likely intends for the porter not to be identified, as this character serves primarily to fill out the scene. The presence of a porter suggests a setting in which there are enough sheep for the shepherd to have an assistant to guard the door. What is clear is that the porter *openeth* the door specifically for the shepherd. This further reinforces the shepherd's authority over the flock.

Now Jesus describes the relationship between shepherd and sheep. They *hear his voice*. What do they hear? Their names as *he calleth* them. Sheep could be given names, much like we name pets today—and for much the same reason: names reflect affection and belonging. The sheep are responsive to the voice of their shepherd, for they obey when he *leadeth them out*.

What Do You Think?

How did you first sense Jesus calling you by name, drawing you to Himself?

Digging Deeper

How can we partner with Christ the shepherd by "opening the door" for others He is calling into His flock?

D. Knowing and Following (vv. 4–6)

4. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

The themes of obedience and belonging are now intensified. God names those who are His, and His children live in obedience to His words. Following Him involves dependence and describes a way of life. It is a picture of faithful discipleship (compare Psalm 23).

5. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

How to Say It

Galilee	*Gal*-uh-lee
Judea	Joo-*dee*-uh
Louvre	*Loo*-vruh
Tabernacles	*Tah*-burr-*nah*-kulz
Messiah	Meh-*sigh*-uh

Recalling the hostile audience to whom Jesus is addressing, He is engaged in a debate for the attention of the sheep. This is a relational battle. But Jesus projects confidence that those who are truly His own will listen to and follow Him. The sheep's lack of recognition of the *voice of strangers* highlights the absence of a relationship between the two.

What Do You Think?

How can we become better listeners so we can recognize the shepherd's voice and avoid misleading influences?

Digging Deeper

How do study, community, and practices help you better distinguish Christ's voice from competing voices?

No Self-Identification Needed!

When I was little, I remember being able to walk into a crowded room at church and hear my mom talking above everyone else. It was not that she had a particularly loud voice. She was just talking. But because I had a close relationship with her, I heard her voice above all others. My own children confirmed having the same kind of experience with me when they were young.

When I used to call my children in from playing outside, I didn't have to identify myself first. They knew my voice (whether they obeyed it was another matter!). Our voices are like invisible strings, able to pull us together and bind us.

We learn to recognize Jesus' voice by immersing ourselves in Scripture. As we spiritually mature, we become better at distinguishing His voice from the voice of temptation, from which we'll flee and say, "That's not Jesus!"

What "voices" do you struggle to distinguish from the voice of Jesus? How will you adjust the focus of your listening? —LMW

6. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

It is sometimes said that there are no parables in the Gospel of John. It is true that the Gospel of John does not use the same Greek term translated as "parable" found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Conversely, those Gospels do not use the same Greek word that John employs in the verse before us and elsewhere (John 16:25, 29).

It is also true that the Gospel of John does not contain any of the parable accounts present in the other three Gospels. But the different terms seem to refer to the same kind of thing Jesus employs in all the Gospels: a figure of speech drawn from ordinary life. These figures typically contain a riddle-like quality and convey a spiritual meaning.

John notes that the group of Pharisees *understood not* Jesus' figure of speech—perhaps to draw a contrast to His followers, who know His voice (John 10:4, above).

What Do You Think?

What parts of Scripture cause you confusion? How do you seek clarity when you encounter these parts?

Digging Deeper

How can we grow in attentiveness to the Holy Spirit, who reveals "the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10)?

II. The Proper Entrance, Part 2

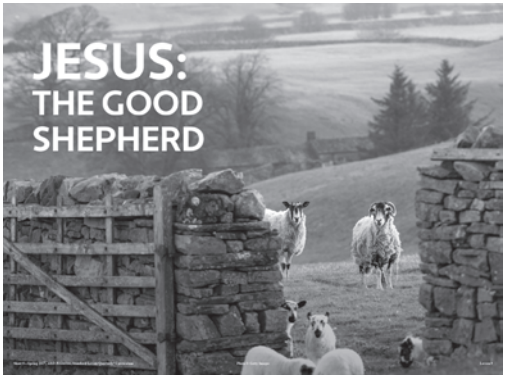
(John 10:7–10)

A. The Door (vv. 7–8)

7. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

Because Jesus' opponents do not understand the meaning of the metaphor, Jesus makes another attempt, this time spelling things out a bit more. The same *verily, verily* introduces this second attempt (see commentary on John 10:1, above). Jesus adds a surprising twist to the metaphor, morphing Himself from being the shepherd walking through the door into being *the door* itself!

This verse marks Jesus' third "I am" statement in John's Gospel (see Lesson Context: "I Am"). Jesus has been engaged in a verbal confrontation with His opponents since arriving in Jerusalem. The struggle is regarding His identity. Positions are hardening, and there is no middle ground on which to compromise. Either Jesus is from God,



Visual for Lesson 9. *Display this visual as you lead a whole-class discussion on what it means that Jesus is our Good Shepherd.*

or He is not (compare John 9:15–16, 30–33). Either He is the Messiah, or He isn't (compare 7:25–43).

There is much to learn from the "I am" statements regarding what Jesus offers for us in terms of protection, guidance, etc. But we should not let these insights overshadow their primary purpose: to clearly affirm Jesus' divine identity.

There is no record of Jesus' claiming outright to be the Messiah, the Son of God, before being arrested and tried by Jewish leaders (Matthew 26:63–64; Mark 14:61–62; Luke 22:70; John 19:7). But some in the crowd are drawing that conclusion because of Jesus' authoritative teaching and miracles (compare John 5:18; 10:33).

8. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

The Old Testament records many instances of Israelite leadership failing in their duties as "shepherds" of the people—to God's great displeasure (example: Ezekiel 34:1–10).

But Jesus' sights are narrower here; He almost certainly does not intend to denounce the entire history of Israelite leadership. Instead, He targets the corrupt leadership of His day. They have opted to continue the age-old pattern of exploiting the powerless (see Matthew 23:13–15; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:46–47). Jesus is confident that those He came to rescue *did not hear them* because their hearts have instead been waiting for His coming.

B. Where to Enter (v. 9)

9. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

Jesus repeats His earlier statement to eliminate any confusion and intensify the message for His hostile audience. The principle here is that of a single door representing the only access to what lies beyond. Because Jesus is that *door*, salvation is inextricably linked to Him. To *be saved* is to *find pasture*, an extension of the Old Testament metaphor (examples: Jeremiah 50:19; Ezekiel 34:14).

Echoes of well-known Psalm 23 are easy to detect in this verse, as are parallels to John 14:6 (Lesson 12). Also noteworthy is Psalm 118:20, which speaks of "this gate of the LORD."

What Do You Think?

How has life with Jesus led you into "pastures" of spiritual provision, rest, or salvation (compare Psalm 23:1–3)?

Digging Deeper

How has the salvation you received in Christ strengthened you through life's darkest valleys (compare Psalm 23:4)?

C. Reason to Enter (v. 10)

10. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

This verse might be seen as a summary and fulfillment of Jeremiah 23:1–6, which condemns corrupt shepherds and prophesies the arrival of a righteous king. Israel had had faithful kings and prophets, but overall, the nation had not been well led or fed. The language describing stealing and destruction underscores the damage that evil shepherds have done. A *thief cometh not* for the flourishing of others but for the benefit of themselves—even if it means they must *kill* or *destroy*. So too are Israel's bad shepherds motivated.

In contrast, Jesus comes to provide abundant *life*. He is sketching out a choice His hostile hearers must make that boils down to this question: *Which side are you on?*

III. The Good Shepherd

(John 10:11)

A. His Person (v. 11a)

11a. I am the good shepherd.

The study of Jesus' life involves two categories of inquiry: the category of Jesus' *person* and the category of Jesus' *work*. The first examines Jesus' identity and the nature of His being; the second, what He accomplished during His ministry. The two categories are interrelated, and the writer of this Gospel wants readers to understand that Jesus' miraculous works establish His credentials as the Son of God (John 20:30–31).

The claim, *I am the good shepherd*, speaks to Jesus' identity. Given the lofty language of the preceding verses, Jesus' audience is primed to hear this statement as a claim to divinity. God is often likened to Israel's shepherd (examples: Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 40:11). By declaring Himself to be the *shepherd*, Jesus links His own person and work with God's. As Jesus identifies Himself more and more with God, the opposition grows.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to exhibit confidence that Christ knows us as His sheep?

Digging Deeper

How does deepening your understanding of the shepherd's identity and sacrificial work strengthen your trust in Him?

B. His Work (v. 11b)

11b. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

Sheep need protection from thieves and predators (example: 1 Samuel 17:34–37). *The good shepherd* will do more than merely risk His life for His flock; He is willing to give up *his life* for them.

In reality, sheep do not benefit from a slain shepherd, as this would leave them vulnerable to future dangers. Jesus intentionally pushes the metaphor to its limits because He is saving His people from something worse than natural threat. Jesus brings salvation from sin and death, and this comes only through His death.

We've all seen artistic representations of a good shepherd, often depicting a smiling man holding a lamb. This image contrasts starkly with the reality of Jesus dying on a cross, giving His life for the world. Unbeknownst to Jesus' audience here, He is stating that as the primary task that lies ahead of Him (compare John 10:15, 17–18).

Conclusion

A. Knowing the Audience

In the statement "I am the good shepherd," Jesus contrasts Himself with all the "bad shepherds" of Israel's past. Given the hostile nature of Jesus' initial audience, the implication is that there is a choice to be made: *You're either on their side or on my side; there's no in-between.*

At the heart of Jesus' message is the simple truth: His sheep hear and heed His voice. They live and walk in obedience; they submit to His leadership and depend on His care; they imitate His way of life.

A sobering reality in the narrative is that the people best positioned to welcome Jesus' teaching—the religious authorities—missed it completely. Their unwillingness to question long-held presuppositions about God and about themselves kept them from seeing what God was doing right in front of them. Their closed minds led to closed hearts.

Jesus' invitation remains the same. Will we live and walk in obedience, trust His leadership, and imitate His way of life? The Good Shepherd still speaks. Our task is to respond with open and obedient hearts.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant us the humility to suspend judgment, the courage to lay down our prejudices, and the wisdom to rethink what we take for granted so that we can see Jesus anew. May our lives reflect Jesus' desires, not our own. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The Good Shepherd gives abundant life.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Write the following statements on the board:

I really didn't feel safe when . . .
I couldn't enter my home / office / car when . . .

Divide the class into small groups. Assign half the groups to discuss how they would complete the first prompt, and the other half to discuss how they would complete the second. After about five minutes of small-group conversation, bring the class back together and invite a volunteer from each group to share their group's responses.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "All of us long to feel safe, and none of us wants to be prevented from entering a place. In today's study, we'll see how Jesus addresses both concerns through the saving work He came to accomplish."

Into the Word

Announce a closed-Bible pretest on the roles of the shepherd, the thief, and the porter in John 10. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following questions. Instruct participants to answer each question by choosing *shepherd, thief,* or *porter*. Some questions may have more than one correct answer. Afterward, invite participants to work with a partner to read John 10:1–11 to check their answers. Correct answers are in parentheses.

1. Who accesses the sheep by the door? *(shepherd; porter)*
2. Whose voice do the sheep recognize? *(shepherd; porter)*
3. Whom do the sheep follow? *(shepherd; porter)*
4. Who takes care of the sheep*? (shepherd; porter)*
5. Who cares for the other sheep beyond the immediate fold? *(shepherd)*
6. Who gives their life for the sheep? *(shepherd)*

Review the correct answers, and then say, "Jesus makes it clear that this figure of speech is ultimately about Him. What do we already know about Jesus that shows He is the Good Shepherd?" Allow participants to name passages or accounts from Scripture that illustrate Jesus' shepherd-like care.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Pictures of Salvation" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite participants to work in small groups to complete as indicated.

Invite a participant to reread John 10:1–11 aloud. Then guide the class in discussion by asking the following questions: 1–How does Jesus "enter by the door"? (John 9:35–41) 2–How do the sheep recognize His voice? (Mark 1:21–27) 3–In what way is Jesus the "door" of the sheep? (Acts 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:8–13) 4–Who are the thieves and robbers? 5–Who are the "other sheep?" (John 10:16) 6–How does Jesus have the power to lay down His life for the sheep? (Matthew 26:53–54; Hebrews 5:7–9) Conclude by asking which characteristics of the good shepherd are most meaningful to participants.

Option. Divide the class into six small groups and invite each group to respond to one of the questions above. After calling time, ask a volunteer from each group to give a three-minute summary of their group's response.

Into Life

Invite a participant to read Psalm 23 aloud. Then ask volunteers to identify words or phrases from the psalm that describe God's role as shepherd.

Ask participants to pair up and compose a short poem or other piece of creative writing that weaves together the language and themes from Psalm 23 and John 10:1–11, expressing trust in Jesus as the Good Shepherd. After ten minutes, invite volunteers to share their creations with the whole class.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Pictures of Life" exercise from the activity page. Invite participants to work with a partner to complete as indicated before sharing results with the whole class.

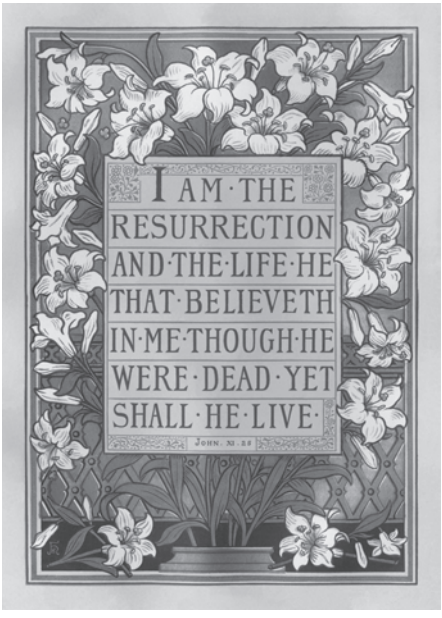
I Am the Resurrection

Devotional Reading: Philippians 1:21–26
Background Scripture: John 11:1–40

John 11:17–27

17 Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

18 Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:



19 And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

22 But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

23 Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

24 Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

27 She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

Key Text

[Martha] saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. **—John 11:27**

Image © Getty Images

Written That
You Might Believe

Unit 3: Jesus Proclaims

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. List the beliefs Martha asserts in her conversation with Jesus.
2. Explain how Jesus' claims and actions revised prevailing expectations regarding death, resurrection, and eternal life.
3. Share a personal story of how Jesus' resurrection power brings hope into daily life.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Eyes Opened to a New Reality
- B. Lesson Context

I. Jesus in Bethany (John 11:17–19)
- A. Arrival (vv. 17–18)
- B. Mourning (v. 19)

II. Martha and Jesus (John 11:20–24)
- A. Past and Future (vv. 20–22)
  The Whole Picture
- B. Promise and Faith (vv. 23–24)

III. Jesus and Identity (John 11:25–27)
- A. Necessity of Belief (vv. 25–26)
  Belief's Results
- B. Confession of Faith (v. 27)

Conclusion
- A. Life that Death Cannot Touch
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Eyes Opened to a New Reality

I spent my formative teenage years living in South America, near the Pacific Ocean. I delighted in a beach day under the sun, riding waves, and relaxing on the sandy seashore. When my wife and I moved to Michigan, leaving the Pacific behind hurt deeply! Yet, having spent some of my childhood and my college days near Lake Michigan, I knew the glory of its beaches. They lack the waves and salt of the Pacific but perform well enough as a substitute.

My wife, on the other hand, doubted the virtues of Lake Michigan. Ocean beaches had always brought her joy. What could a paltry lake offer in comparison? It was not until we traveled to northern Michigan that something changed. When we walked out to the pristine beach near Traverse City and lifted our gaze from the pure water into a cloudless, sunny sky, my wife's eyes were opened in a new way, and she exclaimed, "Now this is a beach!" Some realities are unimaginable until encountered and experienced.

B. Lesson Context

Jesus' public ministry began when He was about age thirty (Luke 3:23). It began when John the Baptist identified Him as "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29 [Lesson 2]). The evangelist notes that the end of Jesus' public ministry was prompted by a perceived death threat (John 11:53–54). John 11–12 serves as a transition between His years of public ministry and the narratives of His passion and resurrection.

In John 11, Jesus' close friends from Bethany faced a crisis: Lazarus, brother of Mary and Martha, was deathly ill. The sisters sent for Jesus (John 11:1–3). But rather than rushing to His friends' aid, Jesus waited two days before telling His disciples that He needed to travel to Bethany (11:6). The disciples expressed skepticism about this plan because Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem.

Jesus would not be swayed, however. And in the process, readers of this Gospel encounter the fifth of the seven "I am" declarations found in the Gospel of John.

I. Jesus in Bethany

(John 11:17–19)

A. Arrival (vv. 17–18)

17. Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.

The note about Lazarus' having *lain in the grave four days already* invites us to reconstruct the timeline of events. First is the need to determine where Jesus is coming from. After a hostile reception in Jerusalem during the Feast of Dedication (John 10:22–39), Jesus went "beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode" (10:40). That place is called "Bethabara beyond Jordan" (1:28). Its exact location is unknown, but the minimum distance between Jerusalem and the Jordan River is twenty miles. Walking at a pace of two miles per hour would therefore require a minimum of ten hours of daylight—and that's quite close to the amount of total daylight the region receives during the winter months (compare 10:22).

Even so, a walking speed of two miles per hour is likely unrealistic, given the various types of terrain and the elevation change of about 2,000 feet along the route. Additionally, there will be the challenge of traveling in the fading sunlight. Therefore, a more realistic estimate would be two days for the journey each way.

Another argument suggests that Jesus was in Batanaea, located east of the Sea of Galilee. This region is approximately eighty miles to the north-northeast of Jerusalem and Bethany. If this scenario is accurate, it would have entailed a journey of four to five days each way. In any reconstruction of the events, Jesus waits until Lazarus has passed away before starting the trek to Bethany. Consequently, Lazarus has been in the grave for four days by the time Jesus arrives.

This detail is significant for two reasons. First, some evidence exists of a Jewish belief that a person's spirit departs definitively from the body on the fourth day, once decomposition starts in earnest (compare John 11:39). Second, the number of days emphasizes that Lazarus is truly dead. When a man has been entombed for four days, no sleight of hand or trickery will bring him back.

What Do You Think?

Why is it often difficult to be patient when it feels as though Jesus is "running late" in responding to our requests?

Digging Deeper

What practices can help strengthen your trust in God when His timing is unclear or slower than you desire?

18. Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off.

The evangelist notes how close the village of *Bethany* is to *Jerusalem*. The measurement of *fifteen furlongs* or "stadia" corresponds to the length of a Roman stadium. This distance adds up to not quite one and three-quarters miles. This short distance explains the disciples' fear of returning to the center of Jewish life so soon after people had made attempts on Jesus' life (John 11:8; compare 10:22–39). This detail also serves as important background material for the next verse.

B. Mourning (v. 19)

19. And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.

When a Jewish person passed away in the first century, a seven-day period of mourning followed. During that period, immediate relatives remained at home, where they received condolences from friends and extended family members. We see that practice here, as *many of the Jews* come *to comfort* Martha and Mary *concerning their brother*.

In writing his Gospel, John signals something more by mentioning "the Jews." He uses the underlying Greek term seventy-one times; the other Gospels use it only sixteen times. More often than not, John refers to "the Jews" in contexts of conflict with Jesus. In these cases, the term represents a group—often the religious and political Jewish leaders—who oppose Jesus. In other instances, John uses the term to describe festivals and practices of the Jewish people (example: John 2:6).

In one instance, a Samaritan woman recognizes that Jesus Himself is a Jew (John 4:9), and Jesus

tells her that salvation comes from the Jews (4:22). After all, she is correct that Jesus—who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (14:6 [Lesson 12])—is indeed Jewish. Additionally, Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of "the Jews," demonstrates great interest in Jesus (3:1).

Finally, at several points in this Gospel, "the Jews" witness Jesus' actions and believe in Him. Thus, John uses the term in a variety of ways and not to express any kind of anti-Jewish bias. We shouldn't forget that Jesus was a Jew too!

The disciples' fear of returning to Bethany due to the presence of "the Jews"—the religious and political leaders living in Jerusalem—is real (John 11:8). Yet the Jews who come to visit are not looking to hunt Jesus down; instead, they come to care for a grieving family. The fact that "many" visited suggests that Lazarus and his family were prominent and had significant means.

What Do You Think?

What are helpful ways believers can comfort someone who is grieving?

Digging Deeper

How can our group cultivate rhythms of care and support for one another when any of us experiences loss?

II. Martha and Jesus

(John 11:20–24)

A. Past and Future (vv. 20–22)

20. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.

Jesus and His disciples arrive in Bethany, but they have not yet reached the house of Mary and Martha (compare John 11:30). They know this area well (Luke 10:38). *Martha* respects Jesus greatly, as evidenced by her willingness to leave a house full of mourners to meet Him.

That *Mary* decides to stay home does not reflect poorly on her; it shows the sisters' differing personalities. Whenever one or both are mentioned, Martha is the one taking the initiative, perhaps reflecting her role as the elder sister (Luke 10:39–40; John 11:39; 12:2).

21. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

One imagines *Martha* running to *Jesus*. When she finds him, she addresses Him as *Lord*. The underlying Greek term is respectful but not out of the ordinary. Neither is it necessarily a recognition of Jesus' divinity. The word is the equivalent of the English word *sir*, as it is translated numerous times (example: John 5:7).

Martha begins with an honest and desperate cry. Mary will express the same sentiment when she meets Jesus (John 11:32). Some interpreters argue that Martha's use of the conditional *if* suggests she is rebuking Jesus. However, others interpret this cry as an expression of faith.

It is essential to consider Martha's situation. In this era, adult men are responsible for their households. Lazarus' death could leave Martha and Mary in a precarious financial position. More significantly, Martha is grieving the loss of her beloved brother and grappling with the reality of a life without him. Complicating her feelings is her relationship with Jesus; she had likely witnessed His miracles and understood that He cared deeply for Lazarus and for her and her sister.

Martha undoubtedly did everything within her power to secure healing from the only person who could heal her brother. Yet, Jesus had not done so. The text does not indicate that Martha lingers over the question of *Why?* Instead, she expresses faith (see next verse).

22. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.

Martha displays trust *even now* after her prayers have (apparently) gone unanswered. Her statement of trust demonstrates her discipleship to Jesus. For her, a glimmer of hope remains because she recognizes Jesus' unique relationship to *God*. However, it is not clear what she wants Jesus to do. She believes in the general resurrection (John 11:24, below), but she does not seem to think that Jesus is able or willing to resurrect Lazarus right then and there.

What are we to make of Martha's apparent confidence? John is presenting Martha as a model of faith—faith in the absence of sight.

Even though she has no idea how God's power will be demonstrated through Jesus, she turns to Him for comfort and reassurance in her time of grief.

What Do You Think?

How can our prayers hold together both honest lament and reverence for God?

Digging Deeper

In what ways do the psalms model this balance (see Psalms 10:1–18; 13:1–6; 22:1–5; 137:1–9)?

The Whole Picture

It was a "tunnel vision" experience for me—a time I was so narrowly focused on achieving a particular outcome that I lost sight of the bigger picture. I was seeking a job change for a position and location that would better suit my family and me. When I found a position that looked promising, I applied and interviewed for it. Leaving that interview, I felt hopeful that I would receive an offer. However, my candidacy ended when the hiring organization decided that I would not be a good fit.

I was shocked by their decision, and I was confused as to why God would allow that result. Didn't God know how much better for His kingdom it would have been to have me in that new position?

Months later, I stumbled upon what seemed a divine appointment: I learned of an unadvertised position that was an even better fit than the one I had been rejected for! If I had been accepted for the first position, I would not have been available for the second one.

God invites us to have faith and trust in Him, reminding us that He always has the whole picture in view, which includes unrevealed details. We should be prepared to adjust our expectations and priorities in light of this understanding. That was Martha's strength. She did not let the shock of her loss undermine her trust in the fact that a larger plan was at play—the architect of which was sitting right next to her! As you ponder life-changing decisions, do you do so while imagining Him sitting next to you? —RLN

B. Promise and Faith (vv. 23–24)

23. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

In His typical style of teaching and testing, *Jesus* responds with ambiguity (compare Matthew 9:14–15; 12:38–39; Mark 10:2–3). His encouraging statement that *thy brother shall rise again* leaves the questions of "when" and "where" unaddressed.

24. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Martha responds by stating what she knows as she tries to internalize Jesus' message. The Old Testament says little about *the resurrection at the last day*; only a few passages seem to address the topic (examples: Isaiah 26:19; Ezekiel 37; Daniel 12:1–3). While there are instances of individuals being brought back to life in the Old Testament (1 Kings 17:7–24; 2 Kings 4:8–37; etc.), the concept of a general bodily resurrection did not play a significant role in Old Testament faith.

In the 430 years between the Old and New Testaments, the belief in a general resurrection emerged among some Jewish sects, though not all adhered to this view (see Acts 23:8). This belief is reflected in various extracanonical Jewish texts from that era (examples: 2 Maccabees 7:14; 12:43–45; 2 Esdras 2:23). Martha trusts that Lazarus will be counted among the righteous and faithful who will rise to eternal life at the end of time (Daniel 12:2).

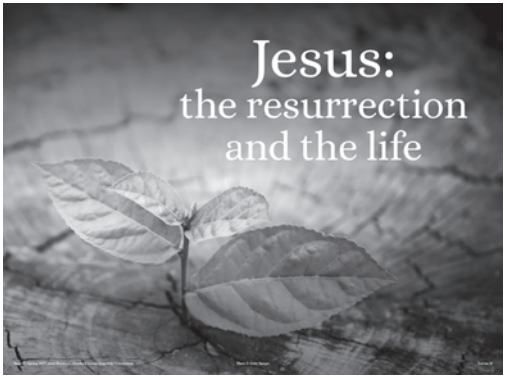
III. Jesus Identifies Himself

(John 11:25–27)

A. Necessity of Belief (vv. 25–26)

25. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

Jesus responds to Martha in a way that will deepen her understanding of His identity. He does so by means of voicing the fifth of His seven "I am" statements in John's Gospel (John 6:35; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9; 10:11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). In each of these statements, Jesus describes an aspect of His identity and role by using a metaphor. Regarding His self-identification as *the*



Visual for Lesson 10. *Display this visual as you discuss the commentary associated with John 11:25–26.*

resurrection, and the life, commentators debate whether the terms "resurrection" and "life" are synonymous (as in "resurrection, which is life") or two complementary but distinct concepts. The latter understanding seems to better reflect Jesus' intention, especially considering what He teaches in John 11:26–27 (below).

Because Jesus is *the resurrection*, even death cannot ultimately take away the life of those who believe in Him. This means that a believer's resurrection comes through Jesus, who is the resurrection. He is both the source of resurrection and the means through whom resurrection is achieved. Those who believe in Jesus can be sure that everlasting life is theirs beyond death (Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Acts 24:15).

Jesus speaks not only about the physical resurrection of human bodies at the end of time but also about spiritual resurrection, which He provides to those who believe in Him. Because Jesus is the resurrection, death no longer controls or oppresses believers. Death is ultimately defeated, both spiritually and physically, by the risen Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:20–34; Revelation 1:17–18). One day, Jesus will complete His victory and will throw even death into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14).

Belief's Results

As a chaplain in a children's hospital, I often encounter parents who hope for healing for their children. Even when staff members doubt that a child will survive, parents continue to hope for that miracle until the very end of their child's life.

One family expressed this hope to the nurses and other staff daily. Those caring for the child feared that the parents were in denial about their child's illness. One night, the mother confided to a nurse, "I know my baby will be healed—he will be healed in heaven when God makes him whole again."

Even though she recognized that her child's earthly life was coming to an end, she maintained her conviction that God would bring healing. She knew the promise Jesus gave in John 11:25. This promise is a comfort to those who know their healing will eventually and ultimately happen. Does this promise provide you with comfort in times of crisis? How can you maintain hope, even when the situation appears dire? —LMW

26a. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

Our first-hand experience tells us that faith in Jesus does not exempt anyone from physical death. So, that's not what Jesus is referring to in this half verse. Instead, He promises a character of life that death cannot touch or diminish. This image of life and death radically re-envisions the human condition. Life often feels like a slow and steady movement toward death, but Jesus sees things differently. Life in Him consists of steady movement toward more and fuller life (compare John 5:24; 8:51; 10:10). This reality, this incomparable life that Jesus gives, explains the apostle Paul's conviction that "to die is gain," for death means "to be with Christ" (Philippians 1:21, 23). The life that Jesus gives transcends death.

What Do You Think?

How does the hope of the future bodily resurrection shape your attitudes, priorities, and actions in the present?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take to let the truth of the resurrection influence your daily outlook (compare 1 Corinthians 15)?

26b. Believest thou this?

No single question is more important than this one. Jesus does not wonder whether Martha thinks that Lazarus will rise. Instead, He asks whether she believes that Jesus truly is the resurrection and the life. John uses Jesus' direct and poignant question to ask his readers the same. Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life?

B. Confession of Faith (v. 27)

27. She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

Martha responds to Jesus' question in the best way possible: *Yea, Lord: I believe*. She demonstrates a clear understanding of Jesus' question. The title *Christ* is equivalent to the title *Messiah,* both meaning "anointed one." It is evident that Martha recognizes the importance of these titles and their implications concerning Jesus' identity.

What Do You Think?

When has God used difficult circumstances to test your faith? How did you respond in that moment?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take to develop "spiritual endurance" so that you are ready to say "Yea, Lord," the next time your faith is tested?

Conclusion

A. Life that Death Cannot Touch

You may be wondering why this lesson tells only part of the story. Doesn't the account continue for another ten verses to record the resurrection of Lazarus? Why leave out the most important part?

The best answer is this: *First things first.*

The first thing we realize is that God's plan may not unfold or be revealed as quickly as we would like. Jesus' delay in responding was intentional; it served to test faith. When God's (seeming) delays seem overwhelming, how do we respond? In our modern lives, we face challenges such as serious illness, family conflict, and job loss, among others. At times, we may reach out to God only to feel met with silence in response.

Martha brought her pain and questions to Jesus, and Jesus patiently and kindly engaged her in conversation. In so doing, He helped her gain a deeper understanding of who He is and how His identity leads people to view life from an eternal perspective.

Martha's response serves as a model for how God wants us to respond when we are hurting. God welcomes our questions, no matter how difficult they may seem to us. God wants us to keep talking to Him, so that He can reveal more of Himself as His plan unfolds before us.

We have all heard of, or perhaps experienced, instances where individuals have turned their backs on God after tragically losing a spouse, sibling, or child to death. The pain of such a loss is real and unrelenting. It can be a vicious cycle. The relentless question of *Why?* dominates and overpowers our thoughts.

It's important to understand that it is natural and appropriate to ask *Why?* in the wake of a loss or personal tragedy. However, to move forward as God intends, this question must eventually be replaced with *What's next?* This forward-looking question will help keep the eternal perspective of resurrection to eternal life.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to keep faith and believe through times of pain and difficulty that Your Son is indeed the resurrection and the life. Fill us today with Your abundant life as we cling to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

How to Say It

Apocrypha	Uh-*pock*-ruh-fuh
Batanaea	Be-tah-*nay*-uh
Bethabara	*Beth*-**ab**-uh-ruh
Bethany	*Beth*-uh-nee
Lazarus	*Laz*-uh-rus
Samaritans	Suh-*mare*-uh-tunz

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Divide the class into small groups. Invite them to brainstorm a list of adjectives that describe a funeral, a memorial, or a celebration of life service.

Option. Direct groups to complete an internet search of an article recounting a recent funeral or memorial service of a famous person. Invite groups to brainstorm adjectives for that service.

After calling time for either activity, invite groups to share their responses and write them on the board. Discuss similarities and differences between the different lists.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Reflections on Loss and Hope" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing the questions with a partner.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "The inevitability of death frames the narrative of today's study. Let's explore how our response to death is connected to how we recognize and respond to Jesus."

Into the Word

Option. Using the commentary and other resources, such as reputable online Bible studies or Bible background commentaries, prepare a brief three-minute presentation on first-century Jewish expectations about death, resurrection, and the afterlife. Highlight how Jesus' claims and actions in John 11 challenged and redefined those expectations. After the presentation, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–What does Jesus proclaim in these verses? 2–Why is His proclamation significant, both in its original context and for Christian faith? 3–How should Jesus' proclamation shape our own perspectives today?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 11:17–27. Divide the class into five groups, each representing one character or role: **Jesus Group, Mary Group, Martha Group, Disciples Group,** and **Comforters Group**. Ask participants in each group to briefly discuss what their character might be thinking or feeling at each point in the account. Conclude small group time by asking each group to choose one or two volunteers to portray that role in a brief reenactment.

Bring all volunteers to the front of the class. Serve as the **Narrator** by reading John 11:17–27 slowly and clearly. Pause at natural moments so volunteers can act out the key movements and express the major lines or emotions of their character.

After the reenactment, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–What stood out or felt different when you watched the passage instead of just reading it? 2–What did this help you notice about Jesus' conversation with Martha? 3–How does this account speak to the reality of grief, hope, and faith?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Voices from Bethany" exercise from the activity page. Ask small groups to complete the activity and share their entry with the class.

Into Life

Distribute index cards and pens to all participants. Invite them to take a minute to write down one specific way Jesus' resurrection power has brought hope into their daily lives. After calling time, invite participants to pair up and share their reflections, including a personal story that illustrates this hope at work. As time allows, invite two or three volunteers to share with the whole class.

Option. Conclude class with guided prayers. After saying each of the following prompts, allow time for participants to complete the prompt with a silent prayer of their own:

1. God, I thank You for the resurrection hope given us by Jesus.
2. God, forgive us when we misunderstand Your power.
3. God, show us ways to demonstrate this hope to a watching world.

Peace Be with You

Devotional Reading: Joel 2:28–32
Background Scripture: Genesis 2:7;
John 14:15–31; 15:18–27; 16:4b–15; 20:19–23

John 16:13–15

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.



John 20:19–23

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Key Text

When [Jesus] had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.
—John 20:22

Image © Getty Images

Written That
You Might Believe

Unit 3: Jesus Proclaims

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. List the roles of the Spirit as described by Jesus.
2. Explain the significance of Jesus, breathing on His disciples, in light of the creation account in Genesis 2:7.
3. Engage in a prayer using the words of John 20:21–22, focusing on breath as a symbol of the Spirit's presence and power.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Elijah's First Pitch
- B. Lesson Context

I. Spirit of Truth (John 16:13–15)
- A. Ultimate Guide (v. 13)
  God's Good Guidance
- B. Shown to You (vv. 14–15)

II. Message of Peace (John 20:19–20)
- A. Jesus Appears (v. 19)
  Promised Return
- B. Disciples Rejoice (v. 20)

III. Breath of God (John 20:21–23)
- A. Jesus Speaks Peace (vv. 21–22)
- B. Forgiveness of Sins (v. 23)

Conclusion
- A. Peace to You
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Elijah's First Pitch

"I can't do it, Coach!" Eleven-year-old Elijah trudged out of the dugout and toward the mound with a dejected look on his face.

"Elijah, you've got this. Don't worry about the crowd or the other dugout. It's just you and the batter. We've practiced this—you're ready. Take a deep breath, find your spot, and let it fly," Coach reassured him.

Turning around slowly, Elijah grimaced. The look on his face tugged at Coach's heart. He knew Elijah had great potential if he could just overcome his timidity. There was plenty of time for that; the season lasted several months. The first game always presented the most challenges.

"Coach, I'm scared."

"Elijah, no matter what happens, it'll be okay. You've got this."

Slowly the boy turned around, walked up to the mound, and threw the first pitch of what would be a lengthy Little League career.

Fear can easily hold us back from worthy things. Thankfully, Jesus does not leave us alone in our fears.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of John depicts the Holy Spirit as an advocate, intercessor, comforter, counselor, sanctifier, giver of gifts, and helper. The Spirit works in unison with God the Father and God the Son. The Spirit is also identified as the "Spirit of truth" (John 16:13).

The Holy Spirit is a powerful witness, a purveyor of truth who glorifies both the Father and the Son (John 15:26; 16:14). The Spirit's work bookends the Gospel of John. The Holy Spirit's movement and presence confirm what God (the Father) had told John the Baptist he would see: the Spirit descending and remaining on the Son (1:33). In the end, after the resurrection, Jesus appears to His disciples and invites them to receive the Holy Spirit, lighting the fuse for the Spirit's outpouring on Pentecost. This initiated a new age in which all believers can participate in the Spirit's blessings (20:21–23).

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches about the Spirit's work. He instructs individuals such as Nicodemus (John 3:1–21) and the Samaritan woman at the well (4:1–26), explaining mysterious concepts like rebirth and living water by referencing the Spirit. He also speaks of the Spirit to groups of various sizes, such as the five thousand whom He fed (6:60–66), festivalgoers in Jerusalem (7:37–44), and His twelve disciples (14:1–16:15). Jesus teaches that we must be born of the Spirit to inherit the kingdom of God (3:5–6), that the Spirit gives life (6:63), and that the Spirit empowers worship (4:23–24). Jesus also teaches that the Spirit will fill believers with rivers of living water (7:38–39).

Just before today's text, Jesus informs His twelve disciples that He will soon be leaving them (John 13:31–33). In the process, He promises that there is something (or someone) better to come.

I. Spirit of Truth

(John 16:13–15)

A. Ultimate Guide (v. 13)

13a. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.

Although Jesus' earlier announcement of His pending departure distresses the disciples (John 14:1, 27; 16:6), He promises not to abandon them. Jesus has already told them three times that the Father will send the Holy Spirit (14:16–17, 26–27; 15:26–27) and that He must leave for this to happen (16:7). Now He explains more about the Holy Spirit's future role in their lives. Just as Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), the Holy Spirit is *the Spirit of truth*. This Spirit *will guide* the disciples with divine wisdom.

Jesus assures His disciples that they can trust the Spirit because the Spirit does not work independently. The Spirit will only *speak* what He hears from the Father and the Son. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will work in perfect unison. Just as Jesus only moves and speaks as the Father directs, so it will be with the Spirit (John 12:49–50).



Visual for Lesson 11. *Point to the visual and ask, "In what ways has Jesus been the sender of Spirit and peace for you?"*

God's Good Guidance

"I have a job interview this weekend. Will you please pray for me?" my friend asked. "I wasn't looking for a new job, and I don't know if I want it—I don't do change well. . . ," her voice trailed off.

"Yes, of course I'll pray," I replied.

Over the next two weeks, we texted back and forth often. She sent messages full of apprehension, questioning, and a deep desire to follow God's will. I sent messages of encouragement, prayers, and ideas for discerning next steps. I knew my support paled in comparison with what she needed and wanted: a clear directive from the Lord.

"I know Jesus said it was better that He go away so that the Holy Spirit would come. I know He is supposed to be my advocate, helper, and guide. But I'm really struggling to know how to hear Him," she admitted.

"Well, have any Scriptures come regularly to mind as you've prayed?" I asked.

Her eyes grew wide. "Yes. Psalm 23. It doesn't make sense, but I can't get the words out of my head. 'The Lord is my shepherd. . . . He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. . . . I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.'" She paused and then continued, "I think God wants me to know that His guidance is good and His presence will protect me. I think I'm supposed to take the job." The peace that settled into my friend's demeanor spoke volumes. How does the Holy Spirit guide you? —BRT

13b. And he will shew you things to come.

The Spirit of truth will also reveal future events. With the Spirit's help, the disciples need not fear being caught off guard. They will experience a warning or comprehension of what is yet *to come* (compare Acts 20:23). Some of what will happen may be new, but the Spirit will also help the disciples understand what Jesus has already said and taught. The Spirit ministers through enlightenment and knowledge. In the future, as certain disciples write the elements that comprise our New Testament, the Holy Spirit will grant them knowledge and understanding. Our Scriptures contain these truths spoken by the Spirit.

What Do You Think?

How should believers balance intellectual effort and reliance on the Holy Spirit while studying Scripture?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to depend on the Spirit of truth while you study?

B. Shown to You (vv. 14–15)

14. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

The Spirit seeks not His own glory, but to *glorify* Jesus. He is sent by Jesus' authority and directed by what He receives from Jesus. Therefore, the disciples' connection to Jesus will remain through the work of the Spirit.

The humility modeled by both Son and Spirit is paramount. They see no need to exalt themselves but rather reflect the will and glory of the Father.

How to Say It

Caiaphas	*Kay*-uh-fus or *Kye*-uh-fus
Elijah	Ee-*lye*-juh
Ezekiel	Ee-*zeek*-ee-ul or Ee-*zeek*-yul
Magdalene	*Mag*-duh-leen or Mag-duh-*lee*-nee
Pharisees	*Fair*-ih-seez
Septuagint	Sep-*too*-ih-jent

While Jesus does only what He sees His Father do (John 5:19), the Spirit reveals only what He receives from the Son.

15. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

A common purpose unites Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 3:16). The Spirit glorifies and reveals the things of the Son, and the Son reveals the Father (1:18). Every possession is shared (17:10). For this reason, Jesus encourages His disciples that His departure brings good things (16:7). The Holy Spirit will continue to offer guidance, comfort, and divine presence as they journey through the world and establish the church without Jesus' physical presence. He will make divine knowledge available to believers.

II. Message of Peace

(John 20:19–20)

A. Jesus Appears (v. 19)

19. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

John's reference to *the same day* connects this encounter to the morning when Mary Magdalene, Peter, and another disciple discover Jesus' empty tomb (John 20:1–8). Both disciples return from the tomb without coming face-to-face with Jesus (20:9). However, Mary Magdalene stays behind and encounters the risen Jesus (20:15–17 [Lesson 4])! She goes to the whole company of disciples to tell them the news (20:18).

Even so, the disciples' *fear* has not subsided. The mystery of what has happened, and what it all means, remains. Jesus had predicted His resurrection, but they do not yet fully comprehend (John 2:19–22).

John repeats the information that it is *the first day of the week* (compare John 20:1). The repetition alerts readers to the importance of the detail. John opens his Gospel with an allusion to Genesis: "In the beginning . . ." (John 1:1 [Lesson 1]). Here, he begins the closing of his Gospel with

another reference to Genesis. Just as God began creation on the first day of the week, He now initiates a new creation through Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week! It is no wonder that Christians throughout the centuries have gathered to worship on Sunday, the "first day."

The Jews referenced here are the religious and political leaders of first-century Judaism. The disciples fear these leaders because they had been the decision-makers behind Jesus' execution (John 11:48–50; 19:19). The disciples worry that their association with Jesus makes them vulnerable to persecution as well.

Suddenly, Jesus appears among the disciples, despite the *doors* being closed and locked. Physical limitations, such as doors and tombs, do not hinder His new body.

Jesus utilizes a standard Jewish greeting to extend *peace*. Although the words are traditional, Jesus' message is profound. In a previous conversation with His disciples, He assured them, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27). Surely, His miraculous presence in their midst, paired with this greeting, brings previous conversations to mind.

What Do You Think?

When is it appropriate for Christians to take practical measures for physical safety, and when does it reveal a lack of trust in God?

Digging Deeper

How do Matthew 5:39; 10:16; and Acts 9:23–25 influence your answer?

Promised Return

My three-year-old great-nephew recently started preschool. During his first week of school, he was very hesitant to go into the classroom. He didn't want to let go of my hand. I knew that his clinging made him feel safe. He wanted my presence; he didn't want me to leave. The thought of being left alone made him afraid, even though I'd explained that I would return as soon as school was over.

When I came to pick him up three hours later, he ran into my arms. With a giant smile on his face, he said, "Gigi, you did come back to get me!" "Of course, I did," I replied. "I said I would."

Although Jesus worked to prepare His disciples for His death, when the reality of it hit, they were afraid. They clung to what they knew and to the safety of closed doors. But Jesus returned, doing and providing everything He said He would. What scenarios cause you fear and apprehension? How do you hold onto the faith that God will do what He says He will do? —AS

B. Disciples Rejoice (v. 20)

20. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

A belief in disembodied spirits was common in the ancient world. To prove His identity, Jesus shows His disciples His *hands* and *side*. They bear the marks of the torture He endured—the nails driven through His hands and the spear that penetrated His side (John 19:18, 34). The confirmation that it is Jesus who stands before them elicits joy. This emotional response is another promise fulfilled, as is seeing Jesus (16:16).

The title *Lord* conveys reverence and honor toward a superior. It can refer to a master or teacher. However, it seems likely that John intends more by his use of the title. When Thomas encounters the risen Jesus, he blurts out, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). The disciples' recognition of Jesus as Lord signals His exalted status as their sovereign.

John the Evangelist delights in details that take on multiple meanings. After Jesus declares peace (John 20:19, above), He shows His disciples the physical signs of how God won that peace. Rightly and ironically did Caiaphas, the high priest, declare "Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (11:49–50). On later reflection, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, John declares:

> This spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation

only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. —John 11:51–52

Jesus' death secured the peace named by every Jewish person when they greeted each other in the traditional way. Jesus' wounds confirm that peace has truly come.

III. Breath of God

(John 20:21–23)

A. Jesus Speaks Peace (vv. 21–22)

21. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

Jesus responds to the disciples' joy with a second message of *peace*. His words emphasize the outlook they are to hold. They do not need to fear; God's peace has arrived through Jesus' sacrificial death and glorious resurrection (compare John 14:27). Jesus had promised this peace, and He now fulfills the promise.

Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus asserts His connection with the Father and Jesus' commission from Him (examples: John 1:14, 18; 5:19–23, 30; 6:57; 14:9–10, 24; 16:28; 17:25–26). These claims were one of the reasons that the religious leaders desired to kill Him (5:18). Jesus now passes along the commission, inviting the disciples to participate in bringing God's peace to the world.

What Do You Think?

How does the commission of Jesus in John 20:21 compare with Matthew 28:18–20 and Acts 1:8?

Digging Deeper

To whom are you sent to carry the peace of Jesus?

22. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.

The demands of Jesus' commission are far above the disciples' ability to carry it out on their own. Yet Jesus has already promised to equip them for the task (John 14:16–27; 15:26–16:15). He fulfills this promise by inviting them to *receive* the *Holy Ghost*, the Comforter, and "Spirit of truth" (14:16–17). In doing so, He includes the disciples in the vital relationship that exists between the Father and Son (14:20). Jesus' miraculous, resurrected life offers the disciples belonging—they have become a dwelling place for God (14:23).

John uses a unique Greek word in this verse, translated as *breathed*. This word does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. However, it does occur several times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). The first appearance is in Genesis 2:7 when "the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." It occurs for the second time in 1 Kings 17:21 when Elijah resurrects a widow's son. Ezekiel 37:9 uses the same word when God instructs the prophet to "breathe upon these slain, that they may live," with the result that God resurrects dry, dead bones. In each case, the breath brings new life.

What Do You Think?

How does the disciples' receipt of the Holy Ghost in John 20:22 compare to the outpouring of the Holy Ghost in Acts 2:1–4?

Digging Deeper

How do Genesis 2:7; 1 Kings 17:21; and Ezekiel 37:9 increase your understanding of what is happening here?

B. Forgiveness of Sins (v. 23)

23. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

Jesus goes on to explain a core part of how the disciples are to participate in God's mission: they will extend the hope of forgiveness for *sins*. To *remit* means to set something aside or to release someone from guilt or penalty. Throughout his Gospel, John presents Jesus as the means through which humanity may experience freedom from the punishment we deserve. He begins with John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29 [Lesson 2]). Then, he emphasizes Jesus' teaching

that if "ye believe not that I am he," that is, the Son of God, "ye shall die in your sins" (8:24). He also records when Jesus warns a group of Pharisees that, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth" (9:41). One's belief in Jesus as the Messiah determines what happens with a person's sin.

Earlier, Jesus had taught His disciples about the Holy Spirit's role in dealing with sin (John 16:8). Therefore, Jesus' invitation to the disciples, to receive the Holy Spirit, paves the way for this new commission. Jesus' disciples now have a role to play in extending forgiveness.

Jesus calls His disciples to become His emissaries. He gives authority and responsibility to them, which includes the kind of witness that facilitates acceptance of Jesus as the awaited deliverer. The proclamation of Jesus' victory over sin and death and the advent of God's peace have the power to lead others to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. With such an admission, God forgives. But rejecting the message leads to a lack of forgiveness.

What Do You Think?

Why does God ask believers to participate in the process of forgiveness?

Digging Deeper

What additional insight do you glean from Matthew 6:12–15?

Conclusion

A. Peace to You

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work in perfect unison. The Father sent Jesus, and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide His disciples. The Holy Spirit is not a poor substitute for the physical presence of Jesus. Instead, the Spirit is a comforter who leads and guides in truth! The Spirit makes a way for all believers, in any era, to come to the Father through the Son. And the Spirit empowers believers toward life, peace, and fulfillment. The Spirit enables disciples of Jesus to faithfully proclaim the gospel message to a world in desperate need of forgiveness.

Fear is a natural human response to bewildering, painful experiences. Yet God has not left us alone in our fear. Instead, His Spirit fills us with new life, conscience, and peace. We are commissioned to be God's emissaries to a needy world. As modern disciples, we are called to the same purposeful testimony as the original disciples: to spread the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the means through which we may enjoy forgiveness of sins (Matthew 28:19–20). Filled with the Holy Spirit, believers may offer words of hope, peace, and restoration that find their embodiment in the love of the Father, the life of the Son, and the empowerment of the Spirit. A relationship with Jesus as Lord brings ultimate absolution, the right to approach the very throne of God as children of promise and inheritance. His presence continues to prompt joy, speak peace, and breathe newness of life.

From the beginning, God's desire has been to be with humanity. He walked in the garden in the cool of the day with Adam and Eve. He led the Israelites in the wilderness as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. His glory filled the temple. God sent His Son, Jesus, to live among men and women of the first century, naming Him *Immanuel*, which means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14). After Jesus' resurrection, God sent the Holy Spirit to inhabit and enable His people to live divinely empowered lives. The promise of the Holy Spirit's truthful guidance will remain until the moment when we join God in eternity.

As those who receive the gift and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are called to live free and vibrant lives, remembering the renewing breath of our Lord. Are you confidently filled with the power of the Holy Spirit? How does the Spirit's guidance and help bring you comfort? How do you offer others the very peace of God?

B. Prayer

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank You for forgiveness, for Your empowering presence that guides us, and for Your peace that overcomes all sin, rebellion, and fear. May we remember that Your breath brings newness of life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's peace has come!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before the session begins, write the following words or phrases on the board: *Completeness / Blessings / Tranquility / Harmony / Absence of Conflict*. Divide learners into pairs. Ask them to define each of the words or phrases. Then ask them to compare the meanings of the terms. As pairs finish discussing, invite the class to reconvene as a large group. Ask pairs to share their definitions and comparative thoughts. Then ask, "Is there a single word that pulls all these ideas together?" Write students' ideas on the board but direct the discussion toward the word *peace.*

Then, lead a brainstorming session around the definition of the word *peace*. Expand your discussion to include ways in which Scripture uses the word.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today we're going to consider the peace Jesus extends to His disciples. We will also think carefully about Jesus' breath that invites acceptance of the Holy Ghost. Lastly, we will contemplate the role of the Holy Ghost in disciples' lives."

Into the Word

Invite a volunteer to read John 16:13–15 out loud. Then choose one of the following options to continue in Bible study:

Option 1. Divide your class into groups of three or four. Distribute copies of "The Roles of the Holy Ghost" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have group members work together to complete the exercise as indicated.

Alternative. Write each of the following references on an index card: John 1:29–34; 3:3–8; 4:23–24; 6:63; 7:38–39; 14:16–17; 15:26–27; 16:7–11; 16:13–15. Divide the cards among participants and pass out pens. Ask students to look up each Scripture and record the role of the Spirit mentioned in it. Then invite them to share their answers with the class. Lead a whole-group discussion around the question: How does the Holy Ghost bring us peace and/or a sense of unity with God?

Option 2. Lead a group discussion about the role of the Holy Ghost as a guide to truth. Use the lesson commentary as needed for clarification. Ask: 1–How do you know that the "Spirit of truth" Jesus references here is another name for the Holy Ghost? 2–How do you make that connection?

After completing one of the above options, ask a new volunteer to read John 20:19–23 aloud. Then ask, "Why did Jesus say, 'Peace be unto you' twice when He appeared to His disciples?"

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Christian Responsibilities" exercise from the activity page. Have participants work in pairs to complete.

Continue your class discussion by having a volunteer read Genesis 2:7 aloud. Consider together: 1–How is this passage similar to John 20:22? 2–What is the significance of the word "breathed"? 3–In what ways does the breath of God give life? 4–In what ways do "breath" and "Spirit" overlap?

Into Life

Explain that a breath prayer is a short, repetitive prayer linked with the rhythm of our breathing. It is often practiced using a phrase that one prays on the inhale, with an echoing phrase on the exhale. An example from today's text might be: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost / Peace be unto you."

Take a minute to practice this type of prayer with your group. Ask participants to sit quietly, eyes closed, hands open in their laps, heads bowed. Have them inhale slowly (perhaps for a count of five), then breathe out slowly. As they breathe, encourage them to imagine being breathed on by Jesus, filled with the Holy Ghost. After a few breaths, say on the inhale, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" and then say on the exhale, "Peace be unto you." Repeat these phrases for two or three more breaths, then invite participants to end with a silent, personal prayer.

I Am the Way

Devotional Reading: 1 John 5:6–13
Background Scripture: John 14:1–14

John 14:1–7

1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

4 And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.



Key Text

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.
—John 14:6

Image © Getty Images

Written That
You Might Believe

Unit 3: Jesus Proclaims

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Recount Jesus' promises regarding the place He is preparing.
2. Explain how these promises are fulfilled through Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.
3. Compose a prayer of thanksgiving for the hope we have as followers of Jesus, the way to the Father.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Longing for Presence
- B. Lesson Context

I. Jesus Comforts (John 14:1–4)
- A. Be Not Troubled (vv. 1–2a)
- B. Prepared for You (vv. 2b–4)

II. Thomas Questions (John 14:5)
- A. Where Are You Going? (v. 5a)
- B. How Can We Know? (v. 5b)

Directionally Challenged

III. Jesus Answers (John 14:6–7)
- A. I Am the Way (v. 6)
- B. Know My Father (v. 7)

Standing on the Promises

Conclusion
- A. His Promise
- B. Your Odometer
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Longing for Presence

The worst two hours are the first ones after they drive away. The silence in the house makes my awareness of their absence all the more acute. I expect to hear my wife's voice in the hallway or my children's laughter floating toward me from their bedrooms. The house's living areas feel foreign when they are gone.

This strangeness happens especially on holiday weekends, when they travel to the beach to be with grandparents. Unfortunately, the demands of work and graduate studies often leave me behind. It is usually productive solo time, but I dearly miss their presence and find that our house feels less like home when I'm alone.

I look forward to the moment when my wife texts, "We're on our way back!" I go into high gear, cleaning the dishes, doing laundry, or cutting the grass. She never asks me to do those chores, but I can't help but want my efforts to say, "I've been waiting for you! You make all of this *home* when you're here. It's ready for you—for us to be a family again!"

Consider the traditional adage, "Home is where the heart is." In the spiritual life, Jesus' presence is our true home. Although we may now experience a taste of the abiding comfort of Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit, we also know that there is more to come. Eventually, we will enjoy complete union with God and the fullness of His presence (Revelation 21:3). In the meantime, we anticipate His return.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of John naturally divides into three major sections. Not counting the brief introduction (John 1:1–18), the sections are:

- Chapters 1–12, which relate the events of Jesus' public ministry;
- Chapters 13–17, which record Jesus' last words to His disciples;
- Chapters 18–21, which recount Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.

Almost all the material in the second of these three sections is unique to the Gospel of John

and is not repeated in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This middle section is often called "the farewell address" because it contains Jesus' final private teaching to His disciples set in the minutes and hours before His arrest.

Today's text finds the disciples gathered with Jesus in the upper room to celebrate Passover. John's Gospel lacks detailed descriptions of the meal, which differs from the Synoptic Gospels. Instead, John focuses on a significant amount of conversation and teaching. Jesus washes His disciples' feet, modeling humble service and love (John 13:1–17). Afterward, He announces that one among them will betray Him (13:21–30), and He predicts that Peter will deny knowing Him (13:31–38).

Today's text presents the sixth of Jesus' "I am" declarations (John 6:35 [Lesson 6]; 8:12; 10:7–9, 11–14 [Lesson 9]; 11:25 [Lesson 10]; 14:6 [today's text]; 15:1 [Lesson 13]). As we catch up with the disciples, Judas has departed on his mission of betrayal (John 13:18–30), and Peter, having had much to say in John 13, falls silent (until 18:17). Another disciple picks up the discourse with Jesus.

I. Jesus Comforts

(John 14:1–4)

A. Be Not Troubled (vv. 1–2a)

1. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

Jesus' predictions about Judas and Peter leave the disciples destabilized and disoriented at the most personal level: the *heart*. Jesus knows they are *troubled,* so He acknowledges their distress and speaks directly to their need.

Jesus states the antidote to their worries very concisely. The repeated word *believe* as a different-yet-the-same action yields the solution. The closer the disciples can identify Jesus with God, the better (See John 1:1–2 [Lesson 1]). The way the disciples are to trust and commit to God is the same way they should respond to Jesus.

What Do You Think?

What does it look like to obey Jesus' command, "Let not your heart be troubled"?

Digging Deeper

How do you purposefully keep your heart free from anxiety?

2a. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.

In the Old Testament, expressions about one's *house* can refer to all the members of a family or tribe (example: 2 Samuel 7:16). The word can also refer to the temple (examples: 7:5–7, 13), the place where God's presence dwells with His people on earth. Because God is enthroned in heaven (Deuteronomy 26:15), we may also conceptualize God's house in association with heaven. This latter sense seems indicated in this context.

The heavenly interpretation especially fits with the use of the word *mansions.* The Greek word used here appears only one other place in the New Testament, in John 14:23, where it is translated as "abode." The desire for details about the future seems to be a trait of all humanity, ancient and modern. Jesus' promise here is not only enigmatic to contemporary readers, but it also seems to have confused the disciples.

The emphasis in this verse is on belief in Christ and trust in the Father through Jesus. Therefore, the text is primarily concerned with the personal presence of God, regardless of the spatial logistics of a physical building or various other "housing concerns."

B. Prepared for You (vv. 2b–4)

2b. I go to prepare a place for you.

Some commentators raise a logical question about this verse: if the Father already has room for the disciples, why does Jesus need to *go* and *prepare* a space for them? There are a handful of

How to Say It

ascension	uh-*sen(t)*-shun
crucifixion	croo-si-*fik*-shun
substitutionary	sub-stih-*too*-shee-un-ary
Synoptic	Sih-*nawp*-tihk
transliterates	trans-lih-tuh-ratez

possible interpretations, but the principal focus of Jesus' words is to remind His disciples that even when they can no longer see Him, they are not forgotten. There is a plan, and they have a secure future with Him.

It is also helpful to note that the word translated as "mansions" in the previous verse is not the same as the word translated as *place* here. Effectively, Jesus tells His disciples that He will bring them to His home.

What Do You Think?

When you think of heaven, what comes to mind?

Digging Deeper

How do Isaiah 65:17–25; Revelation 21:1–4; and Revelation 22:1–5 challenge or affirm your understanding of heaven?

3. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

This verse further clarifies the spatial and relational elements under consideration. We approach it in two segments.

The first segment, *if I go and prepare a place for you,* requires the reader to see the connection between what comes next and what was just said. The thoughts are connected like links in a chain. We note again that the word translated as "place" here is not the same word as the one translated as "mansions" above (John 14:2a).

The meaning and import of the second segment, which begins *I will come again, and receive you,* is entirely unclear to the disciples as they hear it. The broader context reveals their uncertainty regarding what is about to happen. They are in the presence of Jesus right now, so why go anywhere only to return later?

Another challenge presents itself in recognizing that for Jesus to "go" somewhere to "prepare a place" for the disciples has at least two possible meanings. One possibility is that Jesus is referring to a preparation that takes place in heaven after His ascension in Acts 1:9. Another possibility is that the place where Jesus is to "go" is the cross. This interpretation views the substitutionary atonement that occurs at Jesus' death as the way He prepares His disciples, paying the price of admission to eternity with the Father.

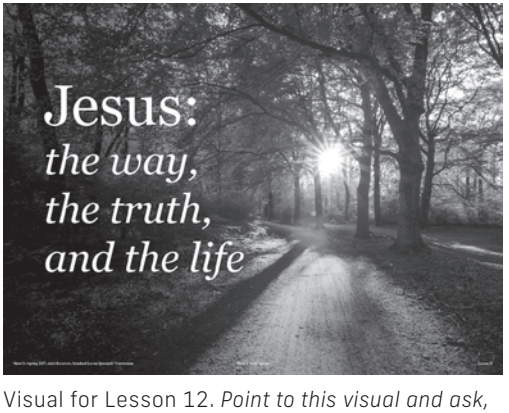
In either case, what is unclear to the disciples is crystal clear to Jesus. Therefore, we do not take Jesus' use of the word *if* to imply a conditional uncertainty. He intends to be with them, and they will need the ironclad assurance of His promises in the days to come.

What Do You Think?

Does the thought of Jesus' second coming excite or intimidate you?

Digging Deeper

Considering Matthew 24:42–47 and 1 Thessalonians 5:13–18, how can we encourage one another to be prepared for the coming of the Lord?



Visual for Lesson 12. *Point to this visual and ask, "In what ways has Jesus proved to be the way, the truth, and the life for you?"*

4. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

Based on Jesus' ministry and teaching to this point, the disciples should understand who Jesus is and what is about to happen to Him (compare Matthew 16:21–28; 17:22–23; Mark 9:9–10). They should realize that heaven is both His origin and destination (*whither I go*) and that He must die (*the way*) so that they might be admitted to their heavenly home. But what the disciples "should understand" isn't reality, as the next verse reveals.

II. Thomas Questions

(John 14:5)

A. Where Are You Going? (v. 5a)

5a. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest.

Thomas is one of the original twelve apostles (see the New Testament's four listings in Matthew 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:13–16; Acts 1:13). Many modern Christians connect him with the unflattering designation "doubting Thomas," because of his statement in John 20:25. But two other texts also reveal his character and/or mental state. One is John 11:16, where Thomas speaks with great courage. The other is the verse before us, where he reveals that he does not understand Jesus' teaching, even though Jesus expects the opposite from the disciples. Here, Thomas is honest—he admits, "I don't get it!"

Thomas uses the personal pronoun *we,* boldly speaking for the whole of the disciples. Peter usually takes this spokesman role, but he seems to have fallen into silence at Jesus' prediction of his forthcoming denial (John 13:38; see Lesson Context). Thomas is not alone in lacking comprehension; Jesus' disciples constantly struggle to understand His teaching because He often speaks figuratively or in parables (examples: Matthew 15:15–20; Mark 4:13; 7:17–18; John 16:25–30). It is confusing; Jesus speaks of a spiritual and heavenly reality, while Thomas contemplates a physical location. In essence, the exchange is something like this: Jesus says, "You know where I'm headed," and Thomas replies, "No, we *don't* know where You're headed."

But Jesus has already told them more than once where He is headed in terms of the cross (examples: Luke 9:22–27, 43–45) and His ascension and exaltation (John 6:62; compare Psalm 68:18).

B. How Can We Know? (v. 5b)

5b. And how can we know the way?

Thomas's query expands. He adds a *how* question to his *where* question. Without specific destination-driven directions, Thomas struggles to comprehend. Thomas is likely thinking of something concrete, like a physical address.

We may imagine the contemporary tools we use when someone expects us to be somewhere at a particular time. If we possess an invitation and an address, or coordinates for the destination, then we can usually figure out the best way to get there. We may use GPS, paper maps, or personal experience with the route. Our tools bring us confidence that we know the way. But the destination expectations that Jesus states have the opposite effect here. Thomas expresses the disciples' uncertainty and anxiety with his two questions.

However confused, doubtful, or despairing Thomas is at this point, Jesus' response (below) is one of the most profound and significant statements in Christian history.

What Do You Think?

When you are unsure of a decision, how do you seek God's wisdom?

Digging Deeper

In future crossroads, how will you intentionally bring Jesus into your decision-making process?

Directionally Challenged

I am directionally challenged. I've honestly tried to learn navigation, but unless the sun is actively rising or setting, I don't have a clue about which compass direction I'm facing. Although I've learned to make my way around, it's still easy for me to get lost. When I'm going to new places, I usually let the kind voice known as GPS tell me when to turn.

Jesus invites us to follow Him. Some people can quickly trust His voice and follow with ease, but others, like me, struggle to confidently understand the next step. If I can't see the path clearly, I get scared, or I let other voices distract me. Therefore, I resonate with Thomas and his questions.

I know that God is constantly speaking to me through the pages of Scripture. Yet, I still think things like "if only He would give me a sign." I want my knowledge to be concrete, my subsequent actions articulated by a step-by-step plan. But the reality is that God has already provided many signs and instructions. I have to ask for the spiritual eyes and ears to hear and understand His truths and

guidance. God's whisper is often difficult to discern, but that's just when He's calling us to draw close and lean into Him in extra measure (compare 1 Kings 19:11–12). And sometimes, we realize we know more than we think as we walk along the way; His directions will not lead us astray.

Is there a situation in your life where God is calling you to set aside the need for concrete directions and trust the provision of His presence?

—AS

III. Jesus Answers

(John 14:6–7)

A. I Am the Way (v. 6)

6a. Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

We may first notice how Jesus does *not* respond here: there is no reprimand for failing to comprehend; a rebuke is delayed until verse 7, below. Jesus does not hesitate to admonish His disciples when circumstances require it—He has done so in the past (example: Matthew 16:5–12), and He will do so again, soon (John 14:7, 9). But that is not His initial reaction or answer. Jesus receives Thomas's skepticism twice in the Gospel of John (compare 20:24–29). In both cases, Jesus teaches without scolding or shame.

What's infinitely more important is what Jesus *does* say. Jesus Himself is *the way*; He is the road, guide, or pathway to an eternal life that is reconciled with God (compare Romans 5:10–11; 2 Corinthians 5:18–19; Colossians 1:19–22; Ephesians 2:13–16). Like most words, the meaning of the word translated as "way" depends on its context. The underlying Greek word is used more than one hundred times in the New Testament. It usually refers to an ordinary road or path (examples: Matthew 21:19; Mark 8:27; Luke 19:36). But in the four uses of this word in the Gospel of John, it always carries spiritual significance; three of those four occurrences are in today's lesson text (the fourth one is in John 1:23). Spiritual significance in this regard is also seen in the Old Testament (examples: Psalm 1:6; Proverbs 2:12–13).

The statements that Jesus is also *the truth* and *the life* are supporting details. Other New Testament passages link "way" with "truth" (compare 2 Peter 2:2). And Proverbs combines "life" with "way" (Proverbs 10:17). Jesus' introduction of truth in the discourse foreshadows the Spirit's guidance "into all truth" (John 16:13). His words support John's initial description of Him in the Gospel: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4; [Lesson 1]).

6b. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

To modern culture, Jesus' declarations here sound intolerant and non-inclusive—and they are! The witness of Scripture is that God does not tolerate sin; the issue becomes sharper still when we discover that He sometimes even forbids tolerating sinful people (example: Revelation 2:20–23). But God's love is harmonized with His holiness: although God's holy nature requires a punishment for sin, in His love, He has sent His Son to take that punishment upon Himself (Romans 3:21–26). Therefore, Jesus can truthfully claim that no person may take the place prepared for them in the presence of *the Father* except *by me.*

In theology, the idea of Jesus taking humanity's punishment is called "substitutionary atonement." The four Gospels do not fully explain the concept. Instead, the writers of the New Testament epistles develop it. That is because the writers of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John recognized the need to first establish Jesus' status and credibility as the divine Son of God (compare Luke 1:1–4; John 20:30–31). Therefore, the disciples' lack of complete comprehension is understandable at this point (compare 13:7).

B. Know My Father (v. 7)

7. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

The first half of this verse is a rebuke; the second half is a promise. Having followed Jesus throughout His ministry, the disciples believe that they know Him. But in knowing Him, they ought to know His *Father* as well. The Father is the one of whom Jesus has taught, whom He has served, to whom He has prayed, with whom He is fully united (John 1:18; 10:30; 1 John 2:23). Thomas's

words have revealed a lack of understanding, and Jesus does not shy away from pointing it out.

A key feature of the Gospel of John is the care the writer takes to document the close relationship between the heavenly Father and Jesus, the Son. John describes connections between the Father and the Son about three times as often as the three other Gospel writers combined!

The knowledge that Jesus has of the Father is relational. It is deep and personal, born out of encounter and experience. Yes, He knows about the Father in the sense that Jesus can communicate content concerning the Father and their relationship. But the knowledge of which He speaks is "insider information," the kind that accompanies lived experience. As the disciples remain in a relationship with Jesus, they will know and see God the Father as well.

What Do You Think?

What do we learn about the heart of the Father through the life of Jesus?

Digging Deeper

How might you grow in understanding the Father's love for you?

Standing on the Promises

Hymns are a special type of religious song designed to praise or celebrate God. They communicate theological truth in a way that is easy to memorize and recall, making their messages accessible to believers of all ages.

The hymn "Standing on the Promises" was written in 1886. The author wrote the lyrics to encourage followers of Christ toward strength and perseverance. The second stanza particularly helps with endurance through hard times. It reads: *Standing on the promises that cannot fail / When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail / By the living Word of God I shall prevail / Standing on the promises of God.*

But if we don't *know* the promises that God gives us, then this is just a catchy tune with poetic words that fall short (compare Ezekiel 33:32).

Jesus promises that He is the way to God and that if we know Him, then we also know God (John 14:6–7). He promises a place for all who believe in Him, that we might spend eternity with Him (14:2–3). And He warns that salvation comes only through Him. God doesn't break His promises. Which Scriptural promises do you stand on when facing fear or doubt? —AS

Conclusion

A. His Promise

Perhaps you can recall seeing a particular TV game show called *Let's Make a Deal.* The main draw of the show was the tension created by a contestant's decision between keeping a semi-valuable prize in their hands or trading it for something hidden behind one or more doors. Uncertainty rises to a fever pitch—the choice is a gamble.

Blessedly, Jesus' promises are no gamble. God is not a game-show host trying to get you to trade the seen for the unseen, knowing that sometimes the exchange is a bad bargain. No, the prize is the same on earth and in eternity: God Himself is the treasure—His presence, His nearness, His friendship.

B. Your Odometer

When Jesus declared Himself to be "the way," He used a Greek word that transliterates into English as *odos* (or, for purists, *hodos*). This word is the root behind our English word *odometer*—you know, those little numbers on your car's dashboard that tell you how many miles you've driven? Next time you buckle into the driver's seat, let the odometer be a faith-reminder: Jesus is "the way." Your relationship with Him, how far you've traveled together, and the distance you have yet to cover are the directions. The journey and the destination may well be the same thing.

C. Prayer

God our Father, may we be bold in believing and proclaiming Jesus to be the way, the truth, and the life. Give us hope and vision for the future. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

D. Thought to Remember

See the Son; see the Father!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

As class members arrive, write *FUTURE* in block letters on the board. Then post large pieces of paper around the room with the following open-ended sentences written on them:

1–*The future seems exciting to me because . . .*

2–*The future seems daunting to me because . . .*

3–*I try not to think about the future, because . . .*

Hand out pens or markers and invite students to complete at least one of the posted sentences each. When everyone is finished writing, walk around the room and read several of the sentences aloud. Then take a poll, asking students to determine whether they approach the future with anticipation, dread, or ambivalence.

Alternative. Draw a straight line on the board with arrows on either end. Label your continuum "*How I approach the future . . .*". Underneath the line, add the number "1" on the left side, "3" in the middle, and "5" on the right. Then label the numbers: Very Hesitantly (1), Neutrally (3), and With Happy Anticipation (5). Ask group members to mark where they land on the continuum.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today's Scripture offers encouragement about the future in a way we may not have considered before."

Into the Word

Distribute handouts (you create) of the following discussion questions: 1–What do we learn about God from this passage? 2–What do we learn about Jesus? 3–What do we learn about the future? 4–When Jesus talked about going away, He was talking about His imminent death. (T/F) 5–When Jesus talked about going away, He was talking about His ascension. (T/F)

Ask a volunteer to read John 14:1–7 out loud. Then work as a class to answer the first three questions on the handout. It might help to write learners' answers on the board, utilizing the headings: *God / Jesus / Future*.

Next, divide the class in half, designating one half the **Imminent Group** and the other half as the **Ascension Group**. Refer them back to their handouts. Ask the Imminent Group to decide whether statement 4 is true or false and why. Ask the Ascension Group to decide whether statement 5 is true or false and why.

Bring the groups back together to share their conclusions. As a whole class, discuss: How do Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension impact our understanding of John 14:1–7?

Option. Distribute copies of the "Who Is Jesus?" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask learners to complete the activity in small groups. Discuss their conclusions as a class.

Review the main ideas that arose from today's opening discussion about the future, then expand your discussion: 1–How do the promises of Jesus in John 14:1–7 help believers face the future with confidence and peace? 2–Does today's text help you change the answer(s) you gave about the future at the beginning of our session? Why or why not?

Into Life

Declare the promises of Jesus, as found in today's Scripture text. They are paraphrased below:

- "My heart may release trouble."
- "God's house has room for me."
- "Jesus is preparing an eternal place for me."
- "I may dwell with Jesus."
- "In Jesus, I may know God."
- "Jesus is the way to the Father."

Divide students into small groups and assign each group a promise. Invite each group to write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the hope this promise inspires.

Option. Distribute copies of the "What Besides Jesus?" exercise from the activity page. Invite participants to complete it with their groups.

Close in prayer. Ask a volunteer from each group to read the prayer of thanksgiving they created.

I Am the Vine

Devotional Reading: Psalm 1
Background Scripture: John 15:1–17

John 15:1–11

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.



8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

Key Text

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. **—John 15:5**

Image © Getty Images

Written That
You Might Believe

Unit 3: Jesus Proclaims
Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Describe each component of Jesus' vine metaphor.
2. Contrast the characteristics of branches that bear fruit with those that do not.
3. Create and present a dramatic retelling of the vine metaphor to reflect its spiritual implications.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. To Speak Better Than One Knows
- B. Lesson Context

I. Identities and Actions (John 15:1–4)
- A. Two Metaphors (v. 1)
- B. Two Situations (v. 2)
  Why Prune?
- C. Two Outcomes (vv. 3–4)

II. Vine and Branches (John 15:5–8)
- A. Much or Nothing (v. 5)
  Efficient and Effective Fruit Bearing
- B. If-Then Disapproval (v. 6)
- C. If-Then Approval (vv. 7–8)

III. Fruit of Love (John 15:9–11)
- A. Continue in Love (v. 9)
- B. Keep My Commands (v. 10)
- C. Complete Your Joy (v. 11)

Conclusion
- A. Complete My Love
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. To Speak Better Than One Knows

Name a time and place when you "spoke better than you knew."

Now, allow me to predict that you can't come up with an answer to that prompt quickly, or even at all. There are at least two reasons why. First, chances are that you've never even heard that phrase. Second, people may interpret the phrase's elements in various ways. For example, to "speak better" can mean improving the mechanics of speech by practicing enunciation. But that's not the sense intended here.

What "to speak better than one knows" addresses is a situation in which someone makes a statement or prediction that turns out to be true and holds implications that the speaker did not realize. Perhaps the clearest biblical example of this is the statement by the high priest, Caiaphas. During a meeting of the Sanhedrin, after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, Caiaphas said it was better that "one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50; compare 18:14). The declaration was true, but not in the way that Caiaphas understood!

It is possible to make a similar observation about Pilate. After Jesus spoke, testifying to the truth (John 18:37), Pilate shut down the conversation with the dismissive question, "What is truth?" (18:38). That is an excellent question, but not in the way Pilate intended it. Consider how hard it is to distinguish truth from fiction. For example, it can be virtually impossible to determine what is real from what is a computer-generated fabrication! Nevertheless, our ultimate guide to what is true is Jesus, for Jesus is is truth (see Lesson 12).

B. Lesson Context

Vineyards were a common sight in first-century Israel. More than five hundred times, the Bible mentions the cultivation of grapes, their harvest, post-harvest processing, and the wine that resulted. Many passages assume familiarity with vineyards and cultivation practices (example: 1 Corinthians 9:7). But in every context,

the language that is associated with this type of agriculture could be either literal or figurative. Consider the following examples related to the production of wine in ancient times:

Sample Uses of Grapes-to-Wine Imagery

	Literal	Figurative
Grapes:	1 Corinthians 9:7 . . .	Isaiah 5:2, 4
Vineyards:	1 Kings 21:6	Isaiah 3:14
Vines:	Psalm 78:47.	Psalm 128:3
Pruning:	Leviticus 25:3	John 15:2
Harvests:	Leviticus 26:5	Revelation 14:18
Processing:	Zechariah 14:10	Revelation 14:19
Wine:	Titus 2:3	Jeremiah 25:15

Jesus used vineyard imagery often. Consider these parables: the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16), the two sons (21:28–32), and the evil tenants (21:33–39). Some students also consider today's text to be a parable, but it is more accurately categorized as an illustrative comparison—in other words, a metaphor (more on this below).

We catch up with Jesus and His disciples in Jesus' final week (the same time frame as the previous two lessons). The text of John 13:31–17:26, which constitutes about 15 percent of John's Gospel, quotes Jesus almost continuously. Clearly, He had a lot to say, and time was short—His crucifixion loomed.

I. Identities and Actions

(John 15:1–4)

A. Two Metaphors (v. 1)

1. I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

We come to the last of Jesus' "I am" statements in the Gospel of John. Even though this Gospel account does not include parables about the kingdom of God as do the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), John records Jesus using figurative language to identify Himself, primarily metaphor. Some grammarians count a dozen or more types of figurative speech within John's Gospel. However, it can be challenging to tell some of them apart; their various shades of meaning can be very similar.

The Old Testament frequently refers to the people of Israel as a "vine" (examples: Psalm 80:8–18; Jeremiah 2:21; compare the extracanonical 2 Esdras 5:23). Therefore, this is not an entirely new metaphor for the disciples. However, Jesus' declaration that He is the *true vine* may confuse. He begins by distinguishing roles: He is the *vine*, and His *Father* is the farmer or gardener. The separation between His role and His Father's aligns with His previous declarations that the Father is the one who sends and Jesus is the one being sent (John 5:23, 36; 6:44, 57; 8:16, 18; etc.).

B. Two Situations (v. 2)

2. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Although Jesus used two specific associations in the previous verse, notice what He does *not* say: He does not say "you are the branches." Instead, Jesus leans into the role of *every branch.* Perhaps He does this because He expects His disciples to make the association themselves. It could be another test: have they grown in their ability to understand Jesus since He chided them for their dim-wittedness (Mark 7:17–18; 8:14–21)? Scriptural evidence suggests that they had problems comprehending Jesus right up to the crucifixion (John 8:27; 11:11–14; 12:16; 16:29; 20:9). In any case, what Jesus implies here is made explicit below. Jesus is taking no chances on incorrect associations!



Visual for Lesson 13. *With this visual posted in a prominent place, lead a discussion about the role of Jesus as the true vine.*

The word translated as *purgeth* here has a double meaning in Greek. It can mean "to prune," but it can also mean "to cleanse." Jesus seems to imply that becoming spiritually clean and being pruned to *bring forth more fruit* go hand in hand.

Additionally, a close reading of this verse reveals two levels of pruning. The one noted above is the first, less severe level. The more severe level is indicated by the phrase *he taketh away.* It is connected to those branches that are completely barren, and it means to remove completely. The severity of that action may be akin to the pending fate of the fig tree in the parable of Luke 13:6–9. In that parable, the unfruitful tree faces an extremely severe pruning—the whole thing will be cut down! The reason? In its unfruitfulness, it "cumbereth . . . the ground," implying a waste of resources (13:7).

Acts 15:9; 2 Corinthians 7:1; etc. also relate to the idea of spiritual cleansing. Hebrews 12:10–11 and James 1:2–4 support the need for pruning and describe its outcome.

What Do You Think?

What has God purged from your life so that you can "bring forth more fruit"?

Digging Deeper

Is God asking you to trust Him with any additional "dead branches"?

Why Prune?

I once heard a master gardener share insights about pruning. He gave the example of a young peach tree. The trunk and root systems of young trees are not very strong. Yet, it is normal for them to start sending out branches. To support the tree's healthy maturation and longevity, and to increase its future fruitfulness, the recommendation is to prune those early branches. Their removal will help the tree direct its energy into strengthening its core and root system. A gardener might prune like this for several years before allowing branches to develop.

Once branches and fruit begin to form, other aspects of pruning come into play. For example, dense clumps of fruit may appear on a branch. If left to develop naturally, the peaches will grow too close together, resulting in small, misshapen fruit. On the other hand, careful pruning will encourage healthy, well-formed fruit.

Sometimes, large clumps of fruit become too heavy and break a branch. Therefore, careful pruning also protects the tree from damage. When damage does occur, it leaves wounds. These injuries can allow pathogens to enter the tree, leading to disease and even death. A good gardener removes damaged branches for the sake of the tree's overall health. Though pruning stresses a plant, proper trimming promotes growth, health, and, eventually, abundant fruit.

Are you putting too much energy into unfruitful endeavors? Or are there dead or diseased areas of your life that are allowing pathogens to slip in? Ask the Lord to prune you where you need pruning . . . but be prepared for Him actually to do it!

—DG

C. Two Outcomes (vv. 3–4)

3. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

The double meaning discussed in the previous verse is made transparent here through Jesus' use of the word *clean.* Jesus often spoke of the need for spiritual cleansing and purity, so the concept is not foreign to His disciples (examples: Matthew 5:8; 23:25–27; John 13:10–11). The notion is picked up elsewhere in the New Testament by the apostle Paul (examples: 1 Timothy 1:5; 2:9; 2 Timothy 2:22).

The theological word for spiritual cleansing is "sanctification." It integrates the concepts of consecration, purification, and holiness. Scripture demonstrates a connection among *the word,* Jesus, God the Father, and truth in the process of sanctification (compare John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26). To remain in God's presence, one must be sanctified (made holy). Jesus is assuring His disciples that they are prepared for what He describes next.

How to Say It

Synoptic	Sih-*nawp*-tihk
Caiaphas	*Kay*-uh-fus or *Kye*-uh-fus
Pilate	*Pie*-lut

What Do You Think?

Do you find it easy or difficult to remember that "ye are clean through the word"?

Digging Deeper

How will you remind yourself in times of shame that you are cleansed by Christ's word?

4. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

To *abide in* implies tenaciousness in clinging to someone or something (compare John 15:9 below, where the same word is translated as "continue"). The vital importance of this concept is seen in the fact that the word *abide* appears ten times in today's lesson text. An abiding branch is one that is still attached to the main trunk of the vine. Jesus warns His disciples that successful fruit bearing requires this level of attachment—it's all or nothing. Detached branches *cannot bear fruit*.

What Do You Think?

In your own words, what does it mean to abide in Christ (see also 1 John 3:24)?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to grow in abiding in Jesus every day?

II. Vine and Branches

(John 15:5–8)

A. Much or Nothing (v. 5)

5. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

In this verse and the three that follow, Jesus repeats what He says in the previous four verses, but with greater intensity and specificity. He begins by identifying the disciples as *the branches.* What was only implied in the earlier verses He now states explicitly, leaving no room for interpretation. We also notice that the "in me" of John 15:2 (above) intensifies to *in me, and I in him*. When a believer clings to Jesus, there is a special qualification to the connectedness. It is a dwelling together, a reciprocal kind of relationship. Furthermore, the expectation of bearing fruit in 15:2 is now qualified with *for without me ye can do nothing.* The implication here is that believers are completely barren without Jesus.

What Do You Think?

Think back on a time when you learned the lesson that "without [Christ] ye can do nothing." How did you discover the futility of trying to do it alone?

Digging Deeper

In future endeavors, how will you remain tethered to Jesus?

Efficient and Effective Fruit Bearing

Do you know the difference between "being effective" and "being efficient" in your fruitfulness for Christ? Here are two hints: (1) to be effective is to get the job done; (2) to be efficient is to work without wasting time and energy in doing so. A classic way of stating this is that *efficiency* is about doing things rightly, while *effectiveness* is about doing the right things.

Exodus depicts a simultaneous near failure in both areas (Exodus 14:15). In this passage, Moses is on the brink of being ineffective (stalled in his task of getting the people across the Red Sea). He is being inefficient in the process (spending time and energy on prayer rather than on leadership action). In contrast, a great example of efficiency without effectiveness is the parable of the ten pounds in Luke 19:11–27, where the man entrusted with one pound is certainly efficient but woefully ineffective.

The apostle Paul also understood the interplay between effectiveness and efficiency (1 Corinthians 1:16–17). He informs the Corinthian church that his purpose is to preach, not to baptize; doing the latter would take time away from the former. He reasons that many others may administer baptisms, but few, if any, could preach like him (compare 1 Corinthians 9:26; Ephesians 5:15).

As we abide in Christ, He wants us to be both effective and efficient. The effective part is easy to agree with; after all, if you're not producing the fruit of the Christian life, your service for Him isn't effective. It's the efficiency part that challenges us. You may be functioning at a certain level of effectiveness in ministry. Still, a different place might render your time and spiritual giftedness more efficient (and therefore, more fruitful). How will you test this idea? —RLN

B. If-Then Disapproval (v. 6)

6. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

This verse presents the first of three if-then statements in today's text. This first conditional statement sharpens Jesus' declaration in John 15:2 (above) in two ways. First, the subject of Jesus' criticism morphs from "every branch in me that beareth not fruit" to a person who does not *abide* in Jesus. The increase in intensity is hard to miss as the spotlight becomes more focused—*if* one chooses a life separate from Jesus, there are consequences.

The second intensification is the stated result. The general "taketh away" fate of unfruitful branches in 15:2 gives way to complete annihilation; they will be *burned* with *fire*.

C. If-Then Approval (vv. 7–8)

7. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

This verse presents the second of the if-then statements. Again, Jesus adds detail. He explains *how* the disciples are to *abide* in Him (compare John 15:4, above). They must allow His *words* to linger and live within them. As John writes this Gospel account, that's precisely what he has done—he has recalled the words of Jesus some forty or more years later!

The phrasing *ye shall ask . . . it shall be done* is the "then" part of this if-then statement. As in modern language, the writers of the Bible sometimes choose to include the actual word *then* in such conditional statements (examples: Romans 8:17; Hebrews 12:8), but often they leave it implied.

We must take care not to misunderstand Jesus' "then" statement. The context in which it is spoken (and later written) does not promise things like winning the lottery merely because we ask. It is not a just-ask-for-it way to gain worldly desires or prestige. Christ's will for the world must be the touchstone. Thus, word-filled disciples pray in Christ's name and according to His will (compare John 14:14). We are subservient partners with Christ; our desires are harmonized with God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (compare Matthew 6:10).

8. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

As Jesus' extended metaphor (or collection of metaphors) began with reference to *my Father*, so now He uses the same phrase to conclude. We might say that the repeated use of this designation serves as "bookends" for the illustration.

Among the four Gospels, the Gospel of John mostly strongly urges the glorification of God (compare John 12:28; 14:13; 17:1, 5). Jesus teaches that God is *glorified* when His disciples are fruitful. But what does it look like to be productive for God? Is being fruitful the same for everyone? Or does God have a "fruitfulness plan" that is unique to each person?

Those are all good questions, but a detailed inquiry is for another lesson. For a personal study on fruitfulness, a good place to start is Galatians 5:19–26 or Ephesians 5:8–11.

What Do You Think?
How is fruit an indicator of discipleship?

Digging Deeper
How does fruit-production bring glory to God?

III. Fruit of Love

(John 15:9–11)

A. Continue in Love (v. 9)

9. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

Following the metaphor of the vine and the branches, Jesus connects discipleship with love on a very personal level. The Father's love for His Son, Jesus, is a marvel to consider (John 3:35; 10:17); it is eternal, existing "before the foundation of the world" (17:24). To add to the mind-blowing nature of this love, Jesus compares it to His love for the disciples! The correlation brings to mind that favorite verse: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Many modern Christians think of the writer of John as "the apostle of love." There is a good reason for that: his use of verbs and nouns meaning "love" totals more than those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined; on a length-proportional basis, the Gospel of John speaks of love three times as often as the Synoptic Gospels. And that's not counting the dozens of times you can find the love of God described in 1 John!

B. Keep My Commands (v. 10)

10. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

This verse establishes an essential distinction between the two loving relationships mentioned in John 5:9 (above): the first love (between the Son and His disciples) is conditional, while the second love (between the heavenly Father and His Son) is unconditional. The condition on which a disciple may remain in Jesus' love is communicated as the third if-then statement: *If ye keep my commandments*. The disciples are to follow Jesus' example: as He has shown love for the Father by keeping the *Father's commandments,* so too the disciples can show their love for Jesus by keeping His commandments (John 14:15, 21; 1 John 2:3–5; 3:22; 5:3; compare 1 Kings 15:5).

C. Complete Your Joy (v. 11)

11. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

Jesus' final week is full of confusion and uncertainty for the disciples (John 13:22, 36–37; 14:5, 22; 16:18). Unbeknownst to them, it will soon include great sorrow. That sorrow will result from the traumatic events of Jesus' arrest, trials, torture, crucifixion, and death, which are but a few hours away. But on the other side of this great sorrow will be the *joy* of Jesus' resurrection (compare 16:22). Jesus promises them joy that is *full* and lasting (compare 17:13). We know, with the advantage of hindsight, that Jesus' words are marvelous and true. But the permanence of joy won't be apparent to those first-century disciples for several days—gladness of eternal depth is at hand.

Conclusion

A. Complete My Love

Jesus indicates that to be a true disciple, one must learn to abide in Him. If we desire to be with our Lord, we will cherish all the pieces of that relationship, even when it costs us. Abiding in Jesus means staying connected to the source of light and love, which sustains our ability to bear good fruit. It means closely following Jesus' example of sacrificial love.

There is an inherent cycle of completion in Jesus' words. The Father loves Jesus, Jesus loves us, and we are called to continue in that love (John 15:9). To speak of love's completion is to point to what love for God leads us to do: it guides us in patterns of faithfulness and directs us to sincere joy. In the closeness of this relationship, we can count on God's provision for our needs—just as the vine nourishes the branches and gives them everything necessary for yielding an abundant harvest. Are you abiding in Jesus?

B. Prayer

Thank You, heavenly Father, for inviting us into dynamic and life-producing fellowship with You. May we rest securely in Your love. Teach us to obey Jesus' commands so that we may remain in You always. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God wants you to be fruitful.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Begin the session by asking if there are any gardeners in your group. Then invite a volunteer to quickly explain the pruning process for a vine or a tree. Lead a discussion on the merits of pruning by asking: 1–Why do we prune plants like trees and vines? 2–What happens if we fail to prune? 3–What does proper pruning produce?

Option. Bring a plant that needs pruning to class, along with a set of pruning shears. Invite a volunteer to trim the plant as you lead the discussion about pruning.

Alternative. Before class, search the internet to find a short, informative video about pruning grapevines. Show the segment to your class and then lead a discussion using the questions above.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "In today's lesson, Jesus uses a series of metaphors about grapevines, pruning, and fruit to teach His disciples about healthy discipleship. His warnings and encouragements still apply to us."

Into the Word

Invite a volunteer to read John 15:1–11 out loud. Divide the class into three groups: the **Vine Group**, the **Branch Group**, and the **Gardener Group**. Ask each group to use study Bibles and the lesson commentary to research their assigned metaphor. Ask: 1–Who does your metaphor represent? 2–What is their role in fruit production? 3–How does your metaphor relate to the other metaphors present in the passage? Allow several minutes for groups to work before bringing them back to share their conclusions with the whole class.

Option. Distribute pens and copies of the "Who Are They? What Do They Do?" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants complete it individually in a minute before discussing the second part with a partner.

Alternative. Write the following sentences on the board or distribute them on a handout (you make). Answers are in parentheses (for teacher's use only): 1–"I own the garden." (*God*) 2–"Without the right connection, we might be eliminated." (*Branches*) 3–"I am proof that the right thing is happening." (*Fruit*) 4–"I am the key liaison between what happens and who makes it possible." (*Jesus*)

Divide your class into pairs and ask them to identify the speaker of each statement. Refer them back to John 15:1–11 if they get stuck. After several minutes, reconvene as a whole class and ask volunteers to share their answers.

Distribute pens and paper. Expand your study of Jesus' metaphor by asking groups to create a chart contrasting fruit-bearing branches with barren branches. Encourage students to include the outcomes of each. After a few minutes, combine the groups' charts into a whole-class chart. Focus on what makes a fruitful spiritual branch.

Then lead a whole-class discussion on the following scenario: Suppose you are asked by a new Christian, "How do I live a fruitful life that is pleasing to God?" What would you say? How would you describe the roles of God, Jesus, and the believer in the fruit-bearing process?

Into Life

Invite participants to return to their original groups (**Vine**, **Branch**, **Gardener**). Ask each group to prepare a one-minute skit personifying their element. After a few minutes, ask groups to perform their short drama.

Distribute index cards. Write or post the following prompt: *How will I stay connected to Jesus this week?* Ask learners to write down one or two specific ideas. Then invite them to share their answers with a partner. Encourage pairs to pray for each other's fruitfulness.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Daily Discipleship" exercise from the activity page. Challenge learners to complete the journal page at some point during the week.

Just a Closer Walk

Special Features

	Page
Quarterly Quiz	338
Quarter at a Glance — Editorial Team	339
Get the Setting — Andrew J. Panaggio	340
This Quarter in the Word (Daily Bible Readings)	341
"The Prison Epistles" (Chart Feature)	343
Guardrails for Fruitful Discussion (Teacher Tips) — Joey Schwartz	344
Activity Pages (annual Deluxe Edition only)	497
Activity Pages (free download) — www.standardlesson.com/activity-pages	
In the World (weekly online feature) — www.standardlesson.com/category/in-the-world	

Lessons

Unit 1: Walking the Walk

June 6	Reconciled Through Christ	*Ephesians 2:11–22*	345
June 13	Unified by the Spirit	*Ephesians 4:1–16*	353
June 20	Renewed in Jesus	*Ephesians 4:17–32*	361
June 27	Loved by Christ	*Ephesians 5:1–17*	369

Unit 2: Staying the Course

July 4	Proclaim the Gospel	*Ephesians 6:19–20; Philippians 1:12–14; Colossians 4:2–4*	377
July 11	Be Qualified in Christ	*Colossians 2:16–23*	385
July 18	Remain Unified	*Colossians 3:9–17*	393
July 25	Serve the Lord	*Exodus 3:9–10; Ephesians 6:5–9; Colossians 3:22–4:1; Philemon 15–17*	401

Unit 3: Serving the World

August 1	The Person of Christ	*Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:15–18; 2:9–10*	409
August 8	The Work of Christ	*Ephesians 1:3–11; 2:4–5; Colossians 2:11–15*	417
August 15	Serving Joyfully	*Philippians 2:14–18; 3:1a; 4:4–7*	425
August 22	Standing Firm	*Philippians 2:27–30; 3:20–4:1; Colossians 1:21–23*	433
August 29	Being Content	*Philippians 4:10–20*	441

Quarterly Quiz

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

Lesson 1

1. Which option describes Christ's work as a "wall breaker"? (prophet, hope, peace) *Ephesians 2:14*

2. Who is the foundation of the household of God? (choose two: disciples, apostles, priests, prophets) *Ephesians 2:19–20*

Lesson 2

1. Paul describes himself to the Ephesians as a soldier of the Lord. T/F. *Ephesians 4:1*

2. Paul exhorted the Ephesians to keep "the _____ of the Spirit." *Ephesians 4:3*

Lesson 3

1. "Let not the sun go down upon your _____." *Ephesians 4:26*

2. Paul teaches believers to be benevolent, just as God is benevolent. T/F. *Ephesians 4:32*

Lesson 4

1. Believers are directed to "walk" in which of the following? (peace, hope, love) *Ephesians 5:2*

2. An immoral person will not receive an _____ in the kingdom. *Ephesians 5:5*

Lesson 5

1. Paul identifies himself as an "ambassador in _____." *Ephesians 6:20*

2. Paul tells the Philippians that he is bound because of the gospel. T/F. *Philippians 1:13*

Lesson 6

1. Some practices and observances are described as being in relation to which things to come? (whisper, vapor, shadow) *Colossians 2:16–17*

2. We are alive in Christ to follow the "rudiments of the world." T/F. *Colossians 2:20*

Lesson 7

1. The _____ of God should rule in our hearts. *Colossians 3:15*

2. Christians should teach and admonish each other through singing. T/F. *Colossians 3:16*

Lesson 8

1. Paul encouraged work for the reward of an _____ from the Lord. *Colossians 3:23–24*

2. Paul hopes that Philemon will consider Onesimus as a beloved _____. *Philemon 16*

Lesson 9

1. Christ Jesus took the nature of which? (servant, creature, king) *Philippians 2:7*

2. Which describes the relationship between the Son and the "invisible God"? (firstborn, head, image) *Colossians 1:15*

Lesson 10

1. In Christ, God has made known to us the _____ of His will. *Ephesians 1:9*

2. Paul uses the metaphor of being "buried with" Christ in baptism. T/F. *Colossians 2:12*

Lesson 11

1. The actions of believers will cause them to shine like "_____ in the world." *Philippians 2:15*

2. Which mindset of believers is to be known by all? (anxiety, moderation, focus) *Philippians 4:5*

Lesson 12

1. The Lord will change our bodies so they will be like His "glorious body." T/F. *Philippians 3:21*

2. Paul describes the Philippians as which? (choose two: his peace, his sheep, his joy, his crown) *Philippians 4:1*

Lesson 13

1. Paul received aid from the Philippians when he was in which city? (Colossae, Rome, Thessalonica) *Philippians 4:16*

2. Who brought Paul the gifts of the Philippians? (Epaphroditus, Epaphras, Eunice) *Philippians 4:18*

Quarter at a Glance

by Editorial Team

This quarter covers four New Testament letters that Paul wrote while imprisoned in Rome between AD 60 and 64. Three of these letters are addressed to church communities spread across Macedonia and Asia Minor, specifically the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. The letter is written to an individual—Philemon, who lived in Colossae. Each of these letters serves to teach believers how to interact with one another and with the world in Christlike ways.

How to Walk

Christians are invited to live in unity and reconciliation with Christ and other believers. By doing so, we embrace our new identity in Christ as children of the light. In Christ, the barriers that once excluded people from citizenship in God's kingdom and from the blessings of His covenant promises are removed (Ephesians 2:11–16). Now, through Jesus, all people have access to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit (2:18 [Lesson 1]). As a new, united people, we live in peace, remembering that seven "ones" bind us: body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and Father God (4:4–6 [Lesson 2]).

To live in the ways that Paul promotes, we must set aside our old selves and "be renewed" in the spirit of our minds (Ephesians 4:23 [Lesson 3]). To achieve this, we speak and pursue truth, avoid anger, and work diligently toward building others up. Paul urges believers to set aside impure, foolish, and filthy behaviors, and instead, to "walk in love" (5:2 [Lesson 4]).

How to Be Faithful

Paul asks his original audience to pray for him in his imprisonment (Ephesians 6:19–20; Colossians 4:2–4 [Lesson 5]). He recognizes the positive side of his situation: His incarceration contributes to the spread of the gospel (Philippians 1:12). Prayer serves as a way for believers to support one another, bound in mission together.

Paul knows firsthand the importance of setting aside the things of the world, which will soon perish (Colossians 2:22 [Lesson 6]). He encourages believers toward long-term faithfulness by remaining connected to Christ, who is our "Head" (2:19). As members of Christ's body, His "beloved," we extend forgiveness and model compassion, humility, kindness, meekness, and patience (3:12–13 [Lesson 7]). Our love for God binds all these together. God is our true master; He is the one we should aim to serve wholeheartedly (Ephesians 6:7; Colossians 3:23 [Lesson 8]).

How to Serve

Paul points believers to Jesus, the Son of God, the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15 [Lesson 9]). He is the one we should emulate (Philippians 2:5). God accomplishes our salvation through Christ's work of redemption, whereby we receive forgiveness of sin, adoption as God's children, and an eternal inheritance together with Christ. Therefore, we live with the knowledge that He has disarmed all "principalities and powers" (Colossians 2:15 [Lesson 10]).

God's grace, provision, and salvation all provide plenty of reason for believers to rejoice (Philippians 4:4 [Lesson 11]). Even as he admits to being "offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith," Paul remains glad and calls the rest of us to do the same (2:17–18). Gratitude works as the antidote to anxiety (4:6), and our steadiness comes from the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:23 [Lesson 12]).

The quarter ends with one of Paul's most famous lines: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11 [Lesson 13]). Paul knows that God will meet every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Therefore, we trust God's provision, reflect His glory, and hold tight to the faith that He will provide us with the strength we need to accomplish whatever He asks.

Get the Setting

by Andrew J. Panaggio

Paul wrote three of his "Prison Epistles" to communities of believers living in cities within the first-century Roman Empire: Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae. Paul planted the churches in Philippi and Ephesus. His time in both cities, though successful in birthing a Christian presence, ended in opposition. Conflicts arose over the economic impact of his preaching ministry on each city's inhabitants.

Philippi was an important Roman military colony located in Macedonia. Many of its inhabitants were retired Roman soldiers who regarded their citizenship as a badge of honor. When Paul and his companions arrived, they met a God-fearing businesswoman named Lydia (Acts 16:14). God opened her heart, and she opened the doors of her household, welcoming Paul and his team. Paul cast out a "spirit of divination" from a slave-woman who worked for her masters as a soothsayer; this ended their lucrative business (16:16). These people became angry, stirred up a crowd, had Paul thrown in jail, and then had him expelled from the city (16:22–40).

The city of Ephesus sat near the coast of southwestern Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). By one estimate, it was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire and the capital of the province of Asia. Its influence stemmed from its key location near major trade routes and its commercial harbor. Additionally, the city was the center of religious activity. Worship of the goddess Artemis (called Diana by the Romans) dominated the city, which hosted a massive temple (see Acts 19:27). In addition to Artemis, the Ephesians worshiped other pagan deities and practiced sorcery and divination (see 19:19).

When Paul proclaimed the gospel message in Ephesus, the result was a large-scale conversion. The rise in Christianity led to a significant decrease in the purchase of pagan silver idols (Acts 19:23–27). The economic blow angered silversmiths, who threatened Paul, prompting him to leave the city in haste (19:28–41).

Paul's ministry in Ephesus lasted over two years (see Acts 19:9–10), longer than his time in any other city. During his time there, the gospel message spread throughout the region of Asia, reaching both Jews and Gentiles (19:10). This likely included Colossae, a smaller city, of which the New Testament records no visit from Paul. Much of the religious situation in Colossae remains a mystery, but Paul's letter gives us insights. He warns the Colossians about empty philosophy (Colossians 2:8). He also refers to the religious practice of worshiping angelic beings and a fascination with visions (2:18). The book of Acts does not mention Paul's being in Colossae. However, we believe that Philemon (the recipient of a letter from Paul that bears his name) lived there. This belief stems from the knowledge that Onesimus, the enslaved person whom Paul sent back to Philemon (Philemon 10–12), lived in Colossae, for he is mentioned in Colossians 4:9 as "one of" the Colossians.

Paul wrote to each of these churches with a message of encouragement and to reframe their understanding of reality. In the first century, the Roman Empire controlled most of the known world. The Roman government excelled at spreading imperial propaganda throughout the empire and especially in important cities like Ephesus and Philippi. They created statues, carvings, murals, and gladiatorial performances to reinforce a consistent message: Rome is the all-powerful, world-dominating force that brings peace and justice; all other people lack culture and dignity; and the gods favor the Romans, above all, the nearly-divine emperor. This messaging identified the emperor as "savior" and "son of God." No person or nation should ever dare to oppose Rome, or Rome would use its military dominance to destroy them violently.

The apostle Paul tells a different, better story: the gospel. Jesus, the all-powerful Lord of creation (Colossians 1:16), gave up his position and humbly came to serve (Philippians 2:5–11).

Mon, Aug. 16	**The Heavens Declare God's Glory**	Psalm 19
Tue, Aug. 17	**Called to Share in Jesus' Glory**	2 Thessalonians 2:13–17
Wed, Aug. 18	**Fear God and Keep His Commandments**	Ecclesiastes 12:9–14
Thu, Aug. 19	**An Example for Believers**	1 Timothy 4:11–16
Fri, Aug. 20	**The Return of the Messenger**	Philippians 2:25–30
Sat, Aug. 21	**An Everlasting Dominion**	Daniel 7:9–14
Sun, Aug. 22	**Citizenship in Heaven**	Philippians 3:17–4:1
Mon, Aug. 23	**Godliness with Contentment**	1 Timothy 6:2b–10
Tue, Aug. 24	**Do Not Worry**	Matthew 6:25–34
Wed, Aug. 25	**Contentment in God's Courts**	Psalm 84
Thu, Aug. 26	**God's Grace Is Sufficient**	2 Corinthians 12:1–10
Fri, Aug. 27	**Trust in God, Not in Riches**	Proverbs 28:18–28
Sat, Aug. 28	**God Will Provide**	Deuteronomy 8:1–10
Sun, Aug. 29	**Content Whatever the Circumstances**	Philippians 4:10–20

Answers to the Quarterly Quiz on page 338

Lesson 1—1. peace. 2. apostles, prophets. **Lesson 2**—1. False. 2. unity. **Lesson 3**—1. wrath. 2. False. **Lesson 4**—1. love. 2. inheritance. **Lesson 5**—1. bonds. 2. False. **Lesson 6**—1. shadow. 2. False. **Lesson 7**—1. peace. 2. True. **Lesson 8**—1. inheritance. 2. brother. **Lesson 9**—1. servant. 2. image. **Lesson 10**—1. mystery. 2. True. **Lesson 11**—1. lights. 2. moderation. **Lesson 12**—1. True. 2. his joy, his crown. **Lesson 13**—1. Thessalonica. 2. Epaphroditus.

This Quarter in the Word

Mon, May 31	**One Body in Christ**	1 Corinthians 12:1–14
Tue, June 1	**United in Heart and Mind**	Acts 4:32–37
Wed, June 2	**Two Are Better than One**	Ecclesiastes 4:7–12
Thu, June 3	**Where Two or Three Are Gathered**	Matthew 18:15–20
Fri, June 4	**Love Made Complete Among Us**	1 John 4:16b–21
Sat, June 5	**Living Together in Unity**	Psalm 133–134
Sun, June 6	**Fellow Citizens**	Ephesians 2:11–22
Mon, June 7	**The Lord Looks at the Heart**	1 Samuel 16:1–13
Tue, June 8	**Walk Blamelessly and Do Right**	Psalm 15
Wed, June 9	**Christ Makes Us Worthy**	1 Corinthians 6:1–11
Thu, June 10	**Examine Yourselves**	1 Corinthians 11:23–32
Fri, June 11	**Follow Christ in All You Do**	Hebrews 13:1–14
Sat, June 12	**Praise the God Who Saves**	Psalm 68:15–20
Sun, June 13	**Growing Together Toward Maturity**	Ephesians 4:1–16
Mon, June 14	**God's Glorious Light**	Revelation 21:22–27
Tue, June 15	**God Delights in Blamelessness**	Proverbs 11:16–20
Wed, June 16	**Born by the Word of Truth**	James 1:12–18
Thu, June 17	**Joseph Forgives His Brothers**	Genesis 50:15–21
Fri, June 18	**Faith Is Known**	1 Thessalonians 4:1–10
Sat, June 19	**Teach Me Your Way, Lord**	Psalm 86:8–17
Sun, June 20	**Put on the New Self**	Ephesians 4:17–32

Mon, June 21	**Waiting Expectantly**	Matthew 25:1–13
Tue, June 22	**Walk in the Light of the Lord**	Isaiah 2:1–5
Wed, June 23	**Come to the Light**	John 3:16–21
Thu, June 24	**Friendship and Love**	1 Samuel 18:1–4
Fri, June 25	**Love Covers All Wrongs**	Proverbs 10:6–12
Sat, June 26	**Be on the Watch**	Luke 21:29–36
Sun, June 27	**Walk as Children of Light**	Ephesians 5:1–16
Mon, June 28	**Christ Is Proclaimed**	Philippians 1:12–18
Tue, June 29	**Plans for the Temple**	1 Chronicles 28:11–20
Wed, June 30	**Whom Shall I Fear?**	Psalm 27
Thu, July 1	**Paul Preaches with Boldness**	Acts 28:23–31
Fri, July 2	**God Has Delivered**	Psalm 56
Sat, July 3	**Be Strong and Courageous**	Joshua 1:1–9
Sun, July 4	**An Ambassador in Chains**	Ephesians 6:18–23
Mon, July 5	**God's Appointed Festivals**	Leviticus 23:1–8
Tue, July 6	**We Are No Longer Enslaved**	Galatians 4:1–11
Wed, July 7	**God Sets the People Free**	Exodus 14:21–31
Thu, July 8	**Accept Others of the Faith**	Romans 14:1–12
Fri, July 9	**What Does the Lord Require?**	Micah 6:1–8
Sat, July 10	**Lord of Sabbath**	Matthew 12:1–8
Sun, July 11	**No Longer Belong to the World**	Colossians 2:16–23
Mon, July 12	**The High Priest's Garments**	Zechariah 3:1–5
Tue, July 13	**All One in Christ Jesus**	Galatians 3:23–29
Wed, July 14	**Do Good to All**	Galatians 6:1–10
Thu, July 15	**Job's Good Actions**	Job 29:11–20
Fri, July 16	**Walk in the Light**	1 John 2:3–17
Sat, July 17	**God Will Rebuild and Restore**	Isaiah 61:1–9
Sun, July 18	**Clothe Yourself with Love**	Colossians 3:9–17

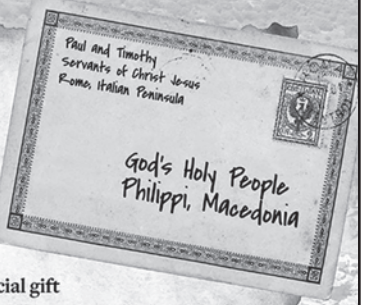
Mon, July 19	**Do Right and Seek Justice**	Isaiah 1:12–17
Tue, July 20	**Put on the Armor of God**	Ephesians 6:10–17
Wed, July 21	**God Enacts Justice**	Isaiah 59:15b–20
Thu, July 22	**God Hears the Israelites' Cries**	Exodus 3:1–10
Fri, July 23	**Remember God, Who Set You Free**	Deuteronomy 5:6–15
Sat, July 24	**Welcome Onesimus as a Brother**	Philemon 4–18
Sun, July 25	**Work as to the Lord**	Colossians 3:22–4:1
Mon, July 26	**Who Is the Son of Man?**	Matthew 16:13–20
Tue, July 27	**I Desire to Do Your Will**	Psalm 40:1–10
Wed, July 28	**Rooted and Built Up in Christ**	Colossians 2:1–10
Thu, July 29	**God, Come Quickly to Help**	Psalm 22:14–21
Fri, July 30	**The Reward for Humility**	Proverbs 22:1–5
Sat, July 31	**Jesus, the Son of the Father**	Hebrews 1:5–12
Sun, Aug. 1	**Christ's Humility**	Philippians 2:5–11
Mon, Aug. 2	**God's Servant Brings Justice**	Matthew 12:14–21
Tue, Aug. 3	**God's Servant Is a Light**	Isaiah 49:1–6
Wed, Aug. 4	**Blessed with Every Spiritual Blessing**	Ephesians 1:3–12
Thu, Aug. 5	**Saved by the Grace of God**	Ephesians 2:1–10
Fri, Aug. 6	**God Will Vindicate His Servant**	Isaiah 50:4–9
Sat, Aug. 7	**The Lord Will Suddenly Appear**	Malachi 3:1–6
Sun, Aug. 8	**Made Alive with Christ**	Colossians 2:11–15
Mon, Aug. 9	**Rejoice in God's Word**	Nehemiah 8:6, 9–12
Tue, Aug. 10	**Rejoice in Times of Testing**	James 1:2–8
Wed, Aug. 11	**Rejoice in God's Protection**	Psalm 5
Thu, Aug. 12	**Rejoice in the Lord Always**	Philippians 4:4–9
Fri, Aug. 13	**God Rejoices Over Me**	Zephaniah 3:14–17
Sat, Aug. 14	**God Has Clothed Me with Joy**	Psalm 30
Sun, Aug. 15	**Paul Rejoices Despite His Trials**	Philippians 2:14–18

The Prison Epistles



Ephesians

- Written between AD 60–64
- Circulated throughout Asia Minor
- Addresses unity in Christ, household behavior, and the dangers of cultic practices



Philippians

- Written between AD 60–64
- To the church in Philippi, a key city in Macedonia, on a major highway (Via Egnatia)
- Expresses gratitude for a financial gift
- Encourages joy amidst suffering
- Cautions against false teaching

Colossians



- Written between AD 60–64
- Sent to the church in Colossae, a small city in western Asia Minor
- Warned against false teachings that blended elements of mysticism, mystery cults, and Hellenized Judaism

Philemon

- Written between AD 60–64
- The shortest of Paul's epistles
- Addressed to Philemon and his household, requesting freedom for the runaway slave Onesimus

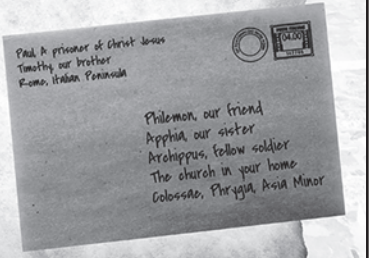


Photo © Getty Images

Guardrails for Fruitful Discussion

Teacher Tips by Joey Schwartz

One of the most challenging tasks for teachers is guiding a group into appropriate, practical discussion. You might arrive with a set of planned questions—but what do you do when a group member derails the plan with a drawn-out personal story or a rabbit-hole topic?

When I first started leading Bible studies, I discovered that some of my leadership habits held the group back from its full potential. For example, I would ask intricate "Bible trivia" questions that sometimes discouraged newcomers. Or I would fill every bit of silence with additional commentary and rephrased questions, thus preventing the participation of other voices. No wonder the young men stopped speaking up! Over time, I learned a few simple rules to guide discussion. While these guardrails don't guarantee success, they *can* keep us from unwittingly steering our groups into dry or ineffective conversation.

Guardrail #1: Embrace the Silence

James was speaking wisely when he wrote, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak . . ." (James 1:19). Ask yourself: *Are you swift to speak? Or swift to listen?*

Because it is uncomfortable when no one answers a question immediately, it is tempting to jump in and break what may feel like awkward silence. But the truth is that in the silence, God is doing His best work. He is stirring up minds and softening hearts as the members of your group process the question, chew on it, and prepare their answers. If you have trouble allowing for silence, consider using the "Fifteen Second Rule." After you ask a question, count to fifteen in your head before you say anything else. This practice cultivates the expectation that there will be ample space to process queries and contribute thoughtfully to the conversation.

Guardrail #2: Stir Up Mind and Heart

One of my favorite verses about asking good questions is Proverbs 20:5: "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." Inside every member of your group, there is a deep sea of hopes and dreams, concerns and worries, gifts and ideas. A wise leader will draw those out with questions and reflective space.

It is good practice to avoid "yes/no" or fact-based questions, as they can tighten the room and close down conversation. Instead, offer broad, open-ended questions that expand participants' imaginations and allow for free-flowing speech. Swap a fact-based question like, "What did Jesus say to the disciples when He came into the room?" (John 20:19) for an open-ended question like, "In what part of your life do you need Jesus to speak peace?" Both types of questions encourage group members to search. But fact-based questions push them to grasp the "right answer," whereas open-ended questions allow for wonder and variation.

Guardrail #3: Follow the Plan—Until God Shows You a Better One

As leaders, we've all had our share of times when a meeting goes off the rails. It only takes one member of the group to veer into an unhelpful topic and sabotage what would otherwise be an engaging discussion. In those cases, the best practice is to reel in the conversation with a gracious, focused question.

But have you ever had your plan go off course *for good*? For example, someone in your group opens up about difficulties in their family, another member asks for prayer over a burden, or someone is convicted by God's Word and wants to confess their sins.

In these moments, it is good to remember Proverbs 19:21: "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." Remember, the ultimate goal is not sticking to your plan; it is to make room for the transformative power of God. If God opens up a different route, take it with joy.

Reconciled Through Christ

Devotional Reading: John 17:20–24
Background Scripture: Acts 18:18–22; Ephesians 1:1–14; 2:1–10

Ephesians 2:11–22

11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Key Text

He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.
—Ephesians 2:14

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 1: Walking the Walk

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Describe the benefits that both Jews and Gentiles receive through Christ.
2. Explain how Jesus has broken down the dividing wall and united the two groups as one.
3. Write a psalm or poem of thanksgiving for being included in the household of God.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. The Power of Citizenship
- B. Lesson Context: Imprisonment
- C. Lesson Context: Ephesus

I. Remember Your Past (Ephesians 2:11–13)
- A. Without Hope (vv. 11–12)
- B. Brought Near (v. 13)

II. Rejoice in Jesus (Ephesians 2:14–18)
- A. Reconciled as One Body (vv. 14–16)
  Suspicion or Peace?
- B. Given Access to God (vv. 17–18)

III. Embrace Your Identity (Ephesians 2:19–22)
- A. Fellow Citizens (vv. 19–20)
  Of the Same Family
- B. Unified Building (vv. 21–22)

Conclusion
- A. The Church's Opportunity
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Power of Citizenship

I grew up as a foreigner; my family lived in a country other than the country of my birth. As a child, I did not realize that I was an outsider. But as a teenager, I began to notice. When I visited certain parts of the city, I would get strange looks or perceive hushed conversations as I passed. Strangers sometimes walked up to me, speaking in English, and it communicated: You are different. The realization hit me hard.

Being a foreigner limited me. When I was about fifteen, the national basketball federation put together a traveling team. They planned to attend a tournament in a neighboring country. Some of my teammates were invited to participate, and my coach wanted me to try out. He even had conversations with the federation about the possibility. Unfortunately, my status as a non-citizen firmly closed that door. I found myself desperately desiring to be a citizen. I imagined all the benefits—citizenship is powerful!

B. Lesson Context: Imprisonment

Paul wrote Ephesians—as well as Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon—during an imprisonment in Rome between AD 60 and 64. Although the Roman Empire had him under arrest, he considered himself a "prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:1). Paul's incarceration was a time of relative freedom (Acts 28:16, 30–31). He lived in a rented house, guarded but able to freely welcome guests. His ministry continued with "no man forbidding him" (28:31).

C. Lesson Context: Ephesus

The book of Acts attests to Paul's close relationship with the church in Ephesus. He visited the city at least twice (Acts 18:19; 19:1), his second visit lasting for over two years (19:10). During his time in Ephesus, Paul publicly spoke, taught, and argued for the kingdom of God. For the first three months of that second stay, Paul boldly taught in the Jewish synagogue (19:8; compare 18:19). When opposition arose, however, he moved his daily teaching and debate to a lecture hall (19:9).

Paul's leadership during this time resulted in the spread of the gospel throughout Asia Minor.

The city of Ephesus was an economic and cultural hub, located on the western coastline of modern-day Turkey. The city housed at least two influential pagan temples: one for cultic worship of the Roman emperor and the other for Diana (also known as Artemis), the city's patron goddess. Throughout Asia Minor, people believed that spiritual powers impacted every aspect of life. Thus, worshiping the gods and goddesses, especially Diana/Artemis, was central to local culture (Acts 19:23–34).

I. Remember Your Past

(Ephesians 2:11–13)

Paul begins his letter to the Ephesian church by declaring the many blessings that God bestows on believers through their connection to Jesus (Ephesians 1:3–14). Then he prays, thanking God for the Ephesians' faith and love (1:15–19). Paul emphasizes Jesus' authority over all other earthly rulers and spiritual powers (1:19–23) and then encourages believers to recognize their new lives with Jesus (2:1–5). He fervently reminds believers that we are saved by grace, created as new beings in Christ—our salvation is a gift (2:6–10).

A. Without Hope (vv. 11–12)

11. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands.

After describing the Christian's new life and commission to good works (Ephesians 2:1–10), Paul asks his audience to recall their lives before conversion, commanding them to *remember*. He specifically speaks to the *Gentiles*. Most of the Christians in the church in Ephesus likely fit this category. Sometimes, New Testament authors use the term "Gentiles" in a spiritual sense to speak of non-Christians (example: 1 Peter 2:12; 4:3). However, Paul makes clear that he has ethnicity in mind, referring to them as Gentiles *in the flesh*.

To first-century Jews, there were two categories of people in the world: Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). God had established a covenant with the Jews' first forefather, Abraham, promising to make him into a great nation, one that would bless all families of the earth (Genesis 12:1–3). God reaffirmed this commitment to Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, setting them apart from all other nations (Deuteronomy 7:7–10). Paul alludes to this categorization of people by noting that *ye* (Gentiles) *are called Uncircumcision*. The designation is given by those *called the Circumcision* (Jews).

Circumcision was the physical sign that God gave to Abraham as a representation of the covenant between them (Genesis 17:10–14). This practice marked Abraham's descendants as a separate and distinct people. Circumcision became a dividing line. Paul notes that this division takes place *in the flesh* (contrast Romans 2:29). It is a separation of ethnicities.

What Do You Think?

What old labels have you carried that no longer align with your identity in Christ?

Digging Deeper

Considering today's text, Galatians 6:15, and Colossians 3:11, what new labels has Christ given you?

12. That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

Paul completes the thought he started in the previous verse, asking Gentile believers to remember five things about their former life. First, they lived separated from *Christ*. As pagans, they had not been expecting a Messiah. However, as Christians, the idea of living *without Christ* is a bleak and hopeless thought. Second, *Commonwealth* is a political term, referring to a socio-political entity with boundaries. These Gentiles had no place within the nation *of Israel*. Third, they were *strangers* to God's *covenants.* This designation means that they did not receive the benefits and blessings of God's *promise* to the Israelites, primarily that He would be their God and they would be His people (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12; Ezekiel 36:28). Fourth, as an inevitable result of their

alienation from God, they lived *having no hope*. Even if they claimed to hope in the emperor or in their gods, it was not true hope. Fifth, they are to remember the worst status of all, they lived *without God*. As converted Christians, they know the difference between life then and now.

B. Brought Near (v. 13)

13. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

Paul makes a hard turn from the past to the present with the word *but*. The Gentile believers no longer live *far off* from God, separate from God's chosen people with no claim on God's promises, no hope, and no true God (compare Acts 2:39). *The blood of Christ* removes the distance; Jesus' blood, shed on the cross, brings them close to God. Paul has already stressed the power of Christ's blood in this letter (Ephesians 1:7) as he does in other letters (example: Colossians 1:20).

Throughout the book of Ephesians, Paul repeatedly refers to Christians' status "in" Christ (Ephesians 1:3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11–13; 2:13, 15, 21, 22; 3:6, 12). *In Christ* describes the new location of Christians of Gentile background: they no longer live "in the world" (2:12, above); instead their citizenship has been transferred to God's kingdom (see Colossians 1:13). So, although the Gentiles still live in the same houses, in the same city, under the same emperor, *now* everything has changed.

Only through Christ can people be *made nigh* to God. In fact, the Christians of Gentile background at Ephesus are now much nearer to God than are the devout non-Christians of Jewish background, who still rely solely on the covenants that were made before Christ appeared and are now fulfilled.

II. Rejoice in Jesus

(Ephesians 2:14–18)

A. Reconciled as One Body (vv. 14–16)

14. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.

For indicates an explanation of the preceding statements. Here, Paul explains what he means by the Christians of Gentile background being brought near to God. *He* is Christ, who brings *peace* and unity. Jesus' peace starkly contrasts with the first-century Roman definition of *Pax Romana*—a peace won through force and maintained through taxation and military presence. Jesus' peace makes Jews and Gentiles *one* people. In Him, divisions can cease.

For centuries, the Jews, proud of being God's people, had scorned the Gentiles, who did not share that privilege. For centuries, the Gentiles had responded with enmity of their own. Now the city of Ephesus houses both Jews and Gentiles who identify as God's people in a different way: They have been born again in Christ Jesus. All believers are new creatures, joined by the unity of their faith.

The *wall of partition* that Paul mentions may be linked to the Law of Moses, which embodies commands such as circumcision that mark the boundary between Jew and non-Jew. However, it is more likely that Paul has in mind the physical wall that divides the outer area of the temple from the inner area. Gentiles are prohibited from entering the inner courts. In Christ, they are not kept out of the new temple of Ephesians 2:21 (below).

What Do You Think?

What is the definition of peace?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does Christ bring believers peace?

Suspicion or Peace?

As a missionary in middle-belt Nigeria, I sometimes faced hostility in my hometown, but the community of missionaries in Jos had an excellent reputation with the surrounding area. Our reputation came from our work in meeting physical needs and from our respectful partnership with national churches.

As a fair-skinned person, I stood out, and my arrival frequently elicited cries of "bature!" (the Hausa word for *foreigner*). Curious children often shouted the term when they wanted to touch my skin or hair to see if it was real, and they were mostly friendly.

Once, however, on a vacation to a popular river in southern Nigeria, I noticed a difference. Here, the cries of "bature!" were replaced with hostile stares and the term "oyibo." Startled, I asked my friend's father what it meant. The man shook his head and explained that foreigners in southern Nigeria were associated with oil companies that had abused the local populace and dumped dangerous chemicals on their land. I was sad to have my face associated with such terrible actions. I didn't blame people for their suspicion of me.

Foreigners are treated suspiciously all over the world. But I rejoice in knowing that among Christians I am a beloved sister in the great mosaic of God's family. How will you reflect the cessation of division in Christ? How will you respond to foreigners? —DS-G

15a. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances.

Paul's thought continues: Jesus put an end to this contentious division *in his flesh*. The *enmity* between Jews and Gentiles is gone.

The law of commandments refers to the Law of Moses in some capacity, possibly in its entirety, but most likely in its function as a divider of people. After all, Jesus clearly states, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). In other places, Paul upholds the goodness and validity of the law (Romans 3:31; compare 1 Corinthians 7:17–20) while repeatedly claiming that in Christ all ethnicities stand on equal ground (Romans 3:22–23; 10:12–13; 1 Corinthians 12:12–14; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). Jewish believers may not claim superiority over Gentile believers because they inherited the law.

15b. For to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.

Jesus' goal is to unite Jewish and Gentile believers into a *new* thing, a new humanity. Paul uses creational language; *make* is also the word for "create." His language here recalls the creation story of Genesis 2. In a world torn apart by ethnic differences and racial discrimination, characterized by enmity between people groups, Jesus creates a new humanity—Christians—*so making peace* where division has so long existed.

16. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.

Jesus' work on *the cross* served, first and foremost to *reconcile* people to God, Jews and Gentiles alike (Romans 5:10). There is a unification between believers; they become *one body* (compare Romans 12:4–5; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 1:18).

What Do You Think?

How have you personally experienced reconciliation with other people because of Jesus' transforming work in your life?

Digging Deeper

Is there any place in your life where enmity or bitterness remains?

B. Given Access to God (vv. 17–18)

17. And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

Paul's use of *you* refers to the Gentiles, the primary audience of his discourse. *Them* refers to the Jews. Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection all effectively *preached peace* to both groups. The divisions between Jews and Gentiles cease to exist in Jesus. Paul's words echo the message of Isaiah 57:14–21: God's heart is for the healing of all peoples, to bring about forgiveness, comfort, and rest.

18. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Paul expands on the nature of the peace won by Christ: It gives believers *access* to *the Father*. Both Jews and Gentiles may approach God the Father *through* Christ and *by* the *Spirit*.

What Do You Think?

How has the accessibility of your earthly father influenced your view of God the Father?

Digging Deeper

With Romans 8:14–16 in mind, how will you reject fear and run to your heavenly Father with confidence?

III. Embrace Your Identity

(Ephesians 2:19–22)

A. Fellow Citizens (vv. 19–20)

19. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Paul reverses the titles placed on his Gentile Christian audience. They are no longer outsiders; now they participate as *fellowcitizens* in God's *household*. The Gentiles not only possess access to the same covenantal promises as *the saints*, but they've become children of God, brothers and sisters with those of Jewish descent.

What Do You Think?

What can the church do to function more healthfully as the "household of God"?

Digging Deeper

How does Acts 2:42–47 affect your answer?

Of the Same Family

Recently, my family and I went to our favorite walk-through coffee shop. We struck up a conversation with a woman in line. She told me she could sense that we were trustworthy people. She was on her way to a birthday party and asked for prayer—she was concerned that people might not come and her young daughter would be disappointed. Many in our community are afraid of such gatherings because of political and cultural tensions.

My husband and I quickly agreed to pray, and she began tearing up. I wondered why the prayers made her teary-eyed, and then realized that underneath her request lay a question we all often ask: *Will others consider me a part of their community?* Everything in me wanted her to know that the Spirit in me acknowledged the Spirit in her.

I consider her a sister in Christ, and her daughter's birthday celebration matters to me because Christ has removed the dividing wall between us—there is only unity in the family of God. Our interaction renewed my zeal to find moments to let others in God's family know that I see them and that they matter. Is there someone that the Holy Spirit is asking you to notice and affirm as a valued member of Christ's body of believers?

—DS-G

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh-*losh*-unz
Ephesians	Ee-*fee*-shunz
Ephesus	*Ef*-uh-sus
Gentiles	*Jen*-tiles
Philippians	Fih-*lip*-ee-unz

20. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

Paul speaks of *the apostles and prophets* three times in Ephesians (here; 3:5; 4:11). The apostles include the twelve disciples appointed by Jesus (with Matthias replacing Judas), plus Paul and Barnabas (compare Acts 1:23–26; 14:1, 4; 1 Corinthians 9:5–6). Prophets could refer to those in the Old Testament, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, although some propose that Paul refers to the prophetic ministry of first-century church leaders. Together, the message of the apostles and prophets maintains the unity and integrity of the church, not deviating from its foundation: *Jesus Christ himself.*

Ancient builders laid a single stone on which all the rest of their construction relied and called it the cornerstone. This stone was crucial to the building's alignment. Although rejected by many, Jesus is the *chief corner stone* of the church, ensuring its alignment with God's purposes (compare Isaiah 28:16; 1 Peter 2:4–7).

B. Unified Building (vv. 21–22)

21. In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.

Paul concludes this section by describing two aspects of the *building* that is God's household (the church). First, he expands his audience's definition—it is a *temple*. Temples in the ancient world, such as the magnificent temple of Diana/Artemis in Ephesus (considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World), were built of stone or

brick. Although Paul refers to Jesus as the "corner stone," evoking similar imagery, this temple being constructed here uses a different material: people! Therefore, this building has the capacity to grow into a habitation for God.

Paul recognizes how outlandish this must have sounded to two groups that did not get along. He assures his audience that these living stones are *fitly framed together* in Jesus (compare 1 Peter 2:5). This building could never work apart from Him; the hostility runs too deep. But in Jesus, everything fits together into something *holy*.

22. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Second, ancient temples existed as homes for their fictitious deities (compare Acts 17:24). Jesus, however, builds this temple for the true God's *habitation*. The church is the locus of God's presence in the world. Paul emphasizes not the individual believer but the building comprised of all Christians: *ye* are being built *together*. This building, made up of humans from every nation, serves as God's place of residence on earth.

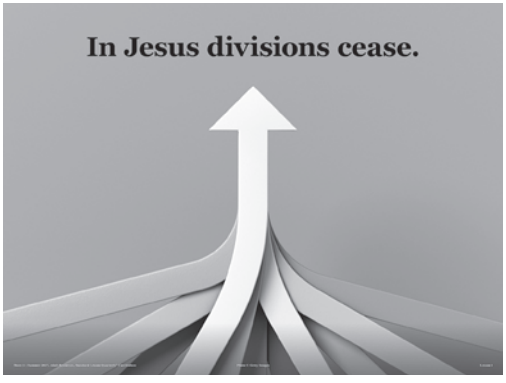
Jesus reconciles humans to the Father and each other, and then God dwells with them through the Holy *Spirit*. This reality in Christ recalls the building of the tabernacle and the temple, when God's presence filled these structures so that He might dwell with His people (Exodus 40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:10–11). It anticipates the future when "the throne of God and of the Lamb" will be in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:3).

Conclusion

A. The Church's Opportunity

We live in a world where ethnic and racial differences lead to ostracism, bullying, and even killing. Humans band together in groups and often define themselves as "us" against "them." Into this reality, Jesus speaks peace, reconciling humans with God and each other.

God offers to make people new creations through Christ. He desires a new unified humanity, comprised of people who otherwise have no business being together. He has built a new temple out of pieces that cannot fit together on their own.



Visual for Lesson 1. *Place this visual in a prominent place. Point to it and invite your class to share examples of unity in Christ.*

Yet, in Christ, this seemingly mismatched, patchwork building project becomes a holy temple that God may inhabit through His Spirit.

The secular world is searching for an answer to division. Nearly everyone agrees that polarization harms nations and the world. Yet no one agrees on the correct approach to fix these problems. Therefore, the church has a unique opportunity to demonstrate the reconciling power of God. We do this by actively welcoming people of every background into the family—because, in Christ, all have equal access to God through Christ's sacrificial atonement on the cross. Are you living in harmony with other believers? How will you model Christ's reconciliation to the world?

B. Prayer

Father God, thank You for blessing us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Teach us to live reconciled to You and with others. May we glorify You in our unity. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Believers are built into one body in Christ.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 351) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Summer Quarter. Order ISBN 978-0-784-74063-7 from your supplier.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite participants to reflect on their childhood memories. Ask them to share one or two ways they have changed over the years. (*Example*: As a child, I refused to eat broccoli, but as an adult, I enjoy eating broccoli in weekly meals.)

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Before and After" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow one minute for participants to complete the exercise on their own, then check the answers with the whole group.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "We often think that change is a bad or difficult thing, but in many cases, change is wonderful. In today's text, the apostle Paul describes aspects of life 'before' and 'after' life in Christ."

Into the Word

Draw three columns on your board or a large sheet of butcher paper. Label them: *Jews* / *Gentiles* / *Now in Christ*. Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:11–13 out loud. Invite participants to identify the words or phrases in this passage that describe each group and write them under the correct heading. Then divide participants into groups of three or four and ask them to read Genesis 17:1–14 in their small groups. Allow a few minutes for discussion around the question: "How does this passage clarify the old covenant distinction between Jews and Gentiles?" When you notice that the conversation is beginning to lull, call everyone back together and encourage groups to share their conclusions.

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:14–17 aloud. Find a space on your board or butcher paper, and write *What did Jesus do?* Then ask your class to make a list of Jesus' action points from the passage. (*Possible answers*: made two groups one, destroyed the partition, abolished the law, created one new humanity, made peace, reconciled believers to God, put to death the enmity, and preached peace) Then instruct participants to return to their small groups and read Mark 15:16–39 together. Ask groups to identify one detail from the passage that they see relates to the verses in Ephesians. Then allow a few minutes for groups to share their findings.

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 2:18–22 out loud. Invite participants to identify the words in this passage that describe our relationship to God because of the blood of Jesus. (*Possible answers*: access, citizens, members, household, joined together, building, temple, dwelling) Divide participants into three groups: the **Citizens Group**, the **Household Members Group**, and the **Dwelling Place Group**. Have them discuss the meaning and implications of their role as presented in this passage. Ask, "How do we relate to God, one another, and the world through the lens of this role?"

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Holy Dwelling" exercise from the activity page. Invite students to complete it in small groups as indicated. Then give groups a few minutes to share a summary of their thoughts on this activity.

Into Life

With the class still divided into small groups, pass out index cards and pens, and say, "In response to these truths, let's work together to write a psalm or poem of thanksgiving for being included in the household of God." Decide as a whole group what the rhyme scheme will be for a four-line stanza (AABB, ABAB, ABBA, or AAAA) and then brainstorm ideas of words, phrases, or topics to include. Then ask each small group to choose one idea from the list. Instruct them to write one stanza on their index card. When stanzas are complete, invite a volunteer from each small group to read theirs aloud. Afterward, consider collecting the index cards and compiling all the stanzas into one larger psalm.

Unified by the Spirit

Devotional Reading: Psalm 138
Background Scripture: Ephesians 3:1–13

Ephesians 4:1–16

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Key Text

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.
—Ephesians 4:1

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 1: Walking the Walk

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. List the seven things that Paul says unite believers.
2. Describe the purpose of spiritual gifts.
3. Write a prayer using language from today's text, asking the Lord to strengthen the church in unity and maturity.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. The Beauty of Unity
- B. Lesson Context

I. Be Unified (Ephesians 4:1–6)
- A. Bear with Love (vv. 1–2)
  Papa Roy
- B. Strive for Peace (v. 3)
- C. Live with Unity (vv. 4–6)

II. Live Equipped (Ephesians 4:7–13)
- A. By Gifts of Grace (vv. 7–8)
- B. Through Christ's Humility (vv. 9–10)
- C. For the Body (vv. 11–13)
  Successful Solution

III. Become Mature (Ephesians 4:14–16)
- A. No Longer Children (v. 14)
- B. Built Up in Love (vv. 15–16)

Conclusion
- A. The Beauty of Unity (Revisited)
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Beauty of Unity

I love the orchestra. Different sections and instruments combine to play some of the most beautiful pieces of music ever written. To perform well, the musicians must tune their instruments, listen to one another, and keep the same tempo.

However, elementary school orchestras rarely meet these standards. Students often struggle to play the same notes or at the same tempo. But with time and practice, as the musicians mature in their technique, learn to listen well, and follow the conductor with precision, they may make beautiful music together.

Today's passage focuses on unity in the church. Like an orchestra, believers must grow in awareness of one another, work toward maturity in their skill sets, and learn to watch their leader (Jesus!). Also like an orchestra, everyone is needed for full expression and power. In this text, Paul challenges his audience to pursue unified collaboration, working and growing together like parts of a single body.

B. Lesson Context

Paul wrote Ephesians—as well as Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon—from prison (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; Colossians 4:3, 18; Philippians 1:13; Philemon 1, 9). In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul emphasizes that Jews and Gentiles are equal members of one family in Christ. This new relationship shocked many Jews, who believed that Gentiles must become Jews to be counted as God's children. Paul knows that God has surprised everyone with His plan to "reconcile both" Jews and Gentiles "in one body" (Ephesians 2:16 [Lesson 1]). This "mystery" had been long hidden, but now God has revealed it to His apostles (3:1–6).

The revelation comes at a cost. Paul himself is a "prisoner" because he preached to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:1). Yet Paul sees his suffering as worthwhile because it serves God (3:7–9) and benefits his Gentile audience (3:13). In the verses that follow, Paul urges his audience to preserve unity within the gospel community. But the church is not left to do this alone. Paul prays for God's

Spirit to strengthen them and teach them the full depth of Christ's love (3:14–19). They can count on the help of the God who does "above all that we ask or think" (3:20).

I. Be Unified

(Ephesians 4:1–6)

A. Bear with Love (vv. 1–2)

1. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.

The word *therefore* marks a key transition in this letter (compare Romans 12:1). After laying out the gospel message in chapters 1–3, Paul explains in chapters 4–6 how believers should live because of it. *Beseech* translates the verb Paul typically uses to introduce a serious command (12:1; 15:30; 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 4:16; 16:15; 2 Corinthians 2:8; 6:1; 10:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:1; 5:14; 1 Timothy 2:1). He identifies himself as *the prisoner of the Lord* to show his commitment to Christ and establish the authority of his command.

Paul uses the familiar metaphor of "walking" to depict a lifestyle that is faithful to the way of Christ (compare Romans 6:4; 8:4; 1 Corinthians 7:17; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 4:17; 5:8, 15; etc.). The term *vocation* refers to God's special purposes for the entirety of His people (compare 1:9–12), rather than individual ministry roles or occupations. Paul exhorts his hearers to behave in a way that respects God's gift to them (compare Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12).

2. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.

Paul expands on the verse above by describing *how* Christians are to live out their calling in relationship with others. Paul lists qualities that center on putting others' interests before one's own (compare Colossians 3:12–13 [Lesson 7]). Instead of pride and arrogance toward others, believers should show *lowliness* and *meekness*. Rather than getting angry at slights or failures, they should be *longsuffering*, shouldering one another's burdens *in love* (compare Galatians 6:2).

Papa Roy

When my family served as missionaries in Nigeria, my mother's father used to visit periodically to help us show *The Jesus Film*. In the culture of the indigenous tribe we served, the father-in-law ranked highest in honor. So, when my grandfather turned up, they expected my dad to bow before him (literally!) and for Grandpa to supervise all comings and goings from a comfortable chair.

But my grandfather did not cooperate! More than anyone I have ever known, he loved to serve. Grandpa didn't like the spotlight, loved solving problems, and especially enjoyed lifting others' burdens. He was always the first person to help carry a load—even putting generators on his head the way the indigenous women carried equipment for the film's tech crew. Grandpa climbed mountains alongside the people we served, always assisting in any way he could. At first, our indigenous friends tried to stop him, but when they realized they couldn't, everyone began affectionately referring to him as "Papa Roy." Dozens of children were named Roy in his honor.

Roy's humble and gentle service, paired with an enormous capacity to bear with others in love, won him respect. He lived a life worthy of emulation, setting an example for us in Christ. How does your life model the calling we have in Jesus?

—DS-G



Visual for Lesson 2. *Point to this visual and ask learners to consider how they are fostering encouragement and unity among believers.*

B. Strive for Peace (v. 3)

3. Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul ends this actionable list by drawing on themes from earlier in the letter. Christ has made peace among believers, uniting Jews and Gentiles in a new humanity that is filled with God's Spirit (Ephesians 2:14–22 [Lesson 1]). Here, Paul states the practical implication of these truths: His audience must apply their efforts to preserve the *unity* and *peace* Christ gave them.

What Do You Think?

How have you experienced the power of Christian unity (see Psalm 133:1)?

Digging Deeper

How do you endeavor to keep "the bond of peace"?

C. Live with Unity (vv. 4–6)

4. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.

Now Paul shifts and supports his call to unity by listing seven common foundations for believers. He uses a similar list in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 to encourage believers toward unity and mutual respect despite their varied gifts.

He begins with *one body*, which is one of Paul's favorite metaphors for the church (Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 1:22–23; 2:16; 4:12–13 (below); 5:29–30). Drawn from ancient political speeches, this image emphasizes that believers are bound to one another—dependent on each other.

Believers also share *one Spirit*, who works among them in diverse ways (1 Corinthians 12:4, 7–11). Earlier, Paul describes the Spirit as the down payment that proves God's commitment to give His people eternal life (Ephesians 1:14). This future gift (eternity with God!) is the *one hope* to which they are *called* (compare 1:18).

5. One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

The community of believers also unites under *one Lord*, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2; 8:6; 9:1; compare Romans 8:39; 10:9; etc.). Paul fittingly links *one faith* and *one baptism* to Christ. He is the object of our shared faith, and we have been baptized into His death (Romans 6:3; compare Galatians 3:27).

What Do You Think?

Why does the church still struggle with division, despite having "one Lord," "one faith," and "one baptism"?

Digging Deeper

What steps might you take to promote unity among churches in your community?

6. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Paul concludes his list with the ultimate basis of believers' unity: the *One God*. This God is the *Father of all*, a title that emphasizes His role in creating the new humanity that connects Jews and Gentiles in Christ. This title also challenges the polytheism (belief in many gods) prevalent in Ephesus (Acts 19:23–41)—first-century Ephesians knew Zeus as the "father of gods and men."

Paul closes with repetitive language that identifies God as ruler (*above all*), life-giver (*through all*), and caretaker (*in you all*). These descriptions speak to God's transcendence, His activity in creation, and His proximity to believers.

II. Live Equipped

(Ephesians 4:7–13)

A. By Gifts of Grace (vv. 7–8)

7. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

After establishing their unity, Paul turns to the diversity of gifts that Christ has given believers. In context, Paul's use of *grace* most likely refers to the spiritual gifts that enable believers to serve others. Paul calls his ministry the "gift of the grace of God" (Ephesians 3:7), diverts to ministry roles later in the chapter (4:11–12, below), and describes spiritual gifts in similar terms elsewhere (Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12:7–11). The phrase *according to the measure of the gift of Christ* likely refers to Christ's role in obtaining these gifts for His people (see below).

8. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

Here, Paul quotes a portion of Psalm 68:18. In the original psalm, the passage describes God's enthronement and His victory over His enemies. The second line of the poem, *led captivity captive*, translates a phrase that refers to taking prisoners in battle. For Paul's audience, the image of an ascent accompanied by prisoners of war and gifts likely evokes a Roman triumph. In this ceremony, a joyful army celebrates its victorious general by parading war spoils, including captives, into the city of Rome. Paul uses the imagery of a Roman triumph to depict Christ's return in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Here, the image applies to Christ celebrating His victory through the cross.

However, Paul's use of Psalm 68 makes two changes. First, he shifts the subject of the verbs from the second person "thou" to the third person *he*. This minor difference reflects Paul's use of the psalm to depict Christ's actions. Second, in a more significant change, Paul transforms how the *gifts* operate. In the original Hebrew psalm (and the Greek translation in the Septuagint), God receives gifts from people, including His enemies. But, in Paul's quotation, Christ is the one *giving* gifts—the receiver has become the giver.

Paul may be quoting a text that differs from the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts we have available to us today. But it is also possible that Paul changed the wording to summarize the psalm in a single quotation. The original psalm concludes with God gifting "strength and power unto his people" (68:35). Paul may have adapted the wording of the original psalm to capture the ending: God gives (spiritual) gifts to His people.

What Do You Think?

As best as you can discern, how has God gifted you for ministry?

Digging Deeper

In the coming season, how will you use your gifts to build up the body of Christ (compare 1 Peter 4:10)?

B. Through Christ's Humility (vv. 9–10)

9. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?)

Paul explains how the quote relates to Christ's earthly life and ministry: Christ's ascent implies His initial descent to the lower parts of the earth. Some read this phrase as a reference to Christ's descent to the underworld after His crucifixion (compare 1 Peter 3:19–20). But the phrase could simply mean *the earth*. In that case, the descent would be Christ's incarnation, and the ascent would refer to His return to the Father after His resurrection (Philippians 2:6–11 [Lesson 9]).

10. (He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Paul emphatically notes that *the same* Christ who *descended* in the previous verse has now *ascended*. The same Christ who emptied Himself and suffered the disgrace of death (Philippians 2:6–8) is now exalted *above all heavens* and given lordship over creation (Philippians 2:9–11). Earlier in Ephesians, Paul presents the same theme in more detail, writing that, following the resurrection, God exalted Christ to His right hand and put all things under His feet (Ephesians 1:20–23). In that context, Paul also mentions Christ's fullness, the way He "filleth all in all" (1:23). The expression translated as *fill all things* refers to Christ's position as the ruler of the universe. Nothing stands outside His authority (1 Corinthians 15:25–27).

C. For the Body (vv. 11–13)

11. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.

Having explained the nature of Christ's ascent, Paul now expounds on the content of Christ's gifts. Here, he describes the equipping of individuals for different roles within the church. This verse features a narrower scope of gifts than lists in other letters (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:7–10, 28–30). Here, Paul focuses on specific ministries that Christ gave to the church, rather than on all spiritual gifts. *Apostles* and *prophets* provide the foundation upon which the body of

Christ is built (Ephesians 2:20). *Evangelists* proclaim the gospel and bring others into the spiritual community. *Pastors* and *teachers* nurture and disciple the church toward maturity.

The underlying Greek term translated as "pastor" here broadly means "shepherd." The verse at hand is the only place in the New Testament where the term is used as a title. Some Christian traditions have adopted this term to describe those tasked with tending the "flock" that is the church (1 Peter 5:2). This noun is also used to depict Christ as the good shepherd who cares for His sheep (John 10:11–16).

12. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

This verse outlines the purpose behind Christ's gifts. The syntax is significant. Paul uses two different prepositions: one lies in the first phrase (*for the perfecting of the saints*). The second is found in the two other phrases (*for the work of ministry*, *for the edifying of the body of Christ*). The way these linguistic elements work together in the original language suggests that the first phrase modifies the preceding sentence (verse 11). Therefore, it describes the purpose of the roles that Paul mentions—those who fall into the categories above are tasked with using their gifts to equip other Christians.

The other two phrases are secondary to the first. They explain that this equipping is so that the entire church can *work* to build up *the body*. Rather than limiting ministry to a select few, this verse promotes the sense that all believers should be involved in the growth of the church. The Old Testament includes similar sentiments, primarily that God calls His people to be "a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). The New Testament specifically presents this inclusion through the concept of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

Successful Solution

For my dad's birthday, my family went to an escape room. My dad was especially excited to have my kids join, but there was a problem: We had never successfully solved an escape room. Internally, I wondered how my kids would handle failure on their grandpa's big day.

Oh, but I needn't have worried! A beautiful collaboration began to unfold the minute we entered the room. My daughter is a gifted artist and helped to solve a picture puzzle in record time. My son, a diligent musician, helped to solve a music puzzle. My dad is an excellent mathematician, so he solved a math puzzle, while my sister and husband (who love logic puzzles) worked together on the word puzzles. I found myself bouncing around the room, watching, noticing, and helping when perspectives needed to shift or someone needed a breakthrough. Our celebration was jubilant when we escaped with three minutes to spare! We needed the creativity, skills, and abilities of the whole group.

God calls His people to a similar partnership. In what ways do you contribute to the "body of Christ"? How do you work in unity with other believers? —DS-G

13. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Paul outlines the goal of building up the body: *unity*, perfection, and the imitation of Christ. Paul connects the concept of unity with time and effort. Although unity is built on the nature and work of God, believers must nurture it and strive toward it (Ephesians 4:4–6, above). The *fulness of Christ* indicates completeness, which bolsters the idea of maturity in Him and continues a theme Paul began back in chapter 1 of this letter—Christ's filling of all things (1:23; 4:10, above).

III. Become Mature

(Ephesians 4:14–16)

A. No Longer Children (v. 14)

14. That we henceforth be no more children,

How to Say It

Ephesus	*Ef*-uh-sus
evangelists	ih-*van*-juh-listz
incarnation	in-car-*nay*-shun
polytheism	*pohl*-ee-thee-iz-um
Septuagint	Sep-*too*-ih-jent

tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Paul contrasts believers' maturity with their previous state as *children*. New Testament texts often use child imagery to denote immaturity (examples: 1 Corinthians 3:1–3; 13:11; Hebrews 5:11–14). In today's text, immaturity involves gullibility. Paul illustrates its drifting nature by using the metaphor of being tossed by the wind and waves (compare James 1:6). The source of this instability is false teaching based on the *sleight of men* (trickery), *craftiness*, and deception. This deceit contrasts with the knowledge of God's Son mentioned in the preceding verse.

What Do You Think?

Should believers be surprised by craftiness and deceit (consider Matthew 10:16)?

Digging Deeper

How will you guard against being "tossed to and fro"?

B. Built Up in Love (vv. 15–16)

15. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

Paul now offers an antidote to the immaturity brought about by deception: *truth*. This truth must be characterized by *love*, and in the context of the broader passage, *love* is the means by which believers should interact with one another (Ephesians 4:2), protect against false teaching (4:15), and build up the body of believers (4:16). The goal of this work is growth toward the standard of *Christ*.

Paul continues his body metaphor, reminding his readers that Jesus is the Lord and leader of the church by referring to Christ as *the head*.

What Do You Think?

How does speaking truth foster maturity?

Digging Deeper

How does one speak "in love"?

16. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Paul concludes his discussion of unity with a detailed description of the *body*. He emphasizes its interconnectedness—*every* part works *together* to support one another in growth (compare Colossians 2:19). The healthy development of one part depends on the others. In combination with the preceding verse, the metaphor presents a vital ecosystem in which the church is led and sustained by Christ and grows toward maturity.

Conclusion

A. The Beauty of Unity (Revisited)

Despite the centuries that have passed, today's church faces many of the same challenges as the Ephesians. A brief survey of modern Christianity will undoubtedly reveal situations marked by profound disunity, severe contempt for one another, and the threat of schism. Too often, we succumb to these obstacles and erode the bond of Christ.

Therefore, Paul's exhortation still rings true. We, too, are called to maintain the supernatural unity given through Christ. Paul's antidote to immaturity still stands: Bear with one another in love and spur each other on with words of truth. Although this work is difficult, we are not left to our own devices. God continues to equip His people with spiritual gifts, building up the household of faith. How are you serving the body of Christ? In what specific ways will you work toward unity and encourage other believers this week?

B. Prayer

Gracious Father, unify us with Yourself and Your body, the church. Faithfully mature us into the image of Your Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God calls believers to unity and maturity in Christ.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Invite participants to think about the word *unity*. Conduct a brainstorming session, asking them to suggest symbols or images that the word evokes. List their ideas on the board. Then ask learners to use the compilation as prompts to tell the story of a time when they felt truly connected with others.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "bones cards" created from the "Bones (Facilitator's Page)" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Instruct participants to complete the activity as indicated in the facilitator instructions. After the activity, give groups time to discuss the necessity of all parts for the completion and full function of a limb.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Unity doesn't mean that we are all the same. Instead, it means that unique parts work together for a common goal or because of a common bond. As we study today's Scripture, consider the common bonds that unite believers."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 4:1–6 aloud. Distribute paper and a pen to every participant. Invite learners to list the seven "ones" Paul mentions in these verses. Divide participants into pairs and ask them to review and define these seven "ones." (*example*: "one body" is the church)

Option. Distribute copies of your church's beliefs statement (often found on the church website). Ask pairs to read the statement together and highlight references they find to these unifying truths.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "One and Only" exercise from the activity page. Ask pairs to complete it as indicated before checking learners' answers as a whole group.

Invite another volunteer to read Ephesians 4:7–12 aloud. Have participants identify the five spiritual leadership roles mentioned in verse 11. Divide participants into five groups, designating them as the **Apostles Group**, the **Prophets Group**, the **Evangelists Group**, the **Pastors Group**, and the **Teachers Group**. Then assign the following Scripture references: **Apostles**–Matthew 16:13–19 (Peter); **Prophets**–John 1:29–34 (John the Baptist); **Evangelists**–Acts 8:26–39 (Philip); **Pastors**–1 Timothy 3:1–7 (Timothy); **Teachers**–John 3:1–10 (Nicodemus). Have all groups discuss the following prompts: 1–What does your passage reveal about your assigned role? 2–How does your assigned role accomplish the two purposes Paul gives for these gifts in Ephesians 4:12? Then call groups together to discuss their insights.

Ask a third volunteer to read Ephesians 4:13–16 aloud. Have participants identify the five qualities that describe a mature believer in these verses. Write their answers on the board. Then invite participants to rejoin the five groups used earlier in the lesson. Assign one of the qualities to each group and have them discuss how the attribute looks in daily life—challenge participants to recall real-life examples of progress toward maturity in their own lives and their church communities.

Into Life

Say, "Spiritual maturity is a goal of the Christian life, but maturity and unity are only possible through the grace of God working in us. Let's cooperate with God toward faithful growth."

Distribute an index card to each participant. Invite learners to write a brief prayer, using language from today's text, asking the Lord to strengthen the church in unity and maturity. Then bring the whole group together for a time of spoken prayer, inviting volunteers to read their prayers aloud. When everyone who desires to share has had a chance to pray, conclude with your own prayer about being unified in the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Renewed in Jesus

Devotional Reading: Romans 13:8–14
Background Scripture: Acts 19:1–10

Ephesians 4:17–32

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

20 But ye have not so learned Christ;

21 If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Key Text

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. **—Ephesians 4:32**

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 1: Walking the Walk

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Paul's instructions for leaving behind the old way of life.
2. Compare the attitudes and behaviors that believers are called to set aside with those they are called to take up for Christ's sake.
3. Make a plan to replace unwholesome talk with words of blessing and edification.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. The Former *I*
- B. Lesson Context

I. Worldly Living (Ephesians 4:17–19)
- A. Separated from God (vv. 17–18)
- B. Indulgent Lifestyle (v. 19)

II. Holy Living, Part 1 (Ephesians 4:20–24)
- A. Finding Truth (vv. 20–21)
- B. Putting Away the Old (v. 22)
  Straight to the Landfill
- C. Being Made New (vv. 23–24)

III. Holy Living, Part 2 (Ephesians 4:25–32)
- A. Truth and Unity (vv. 25–28)
- B. Kindness and Forgiveness (vv. 29–32)
  "Foot-in-Mouth" Disease

Conclusion
- A. Live as the Redeemed
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Former *I*

In his work *On Repentance*, the fourth-century church leader named Ambrose (AD 339–387) shares a story to illustrate the power of personal transformation. In this tale, a young man, once in love with a prostitute, leaves town. During his time away, he undergoes a spiritual transformation that leads him to a new life of prayer. Upon returning to his town, he encounters the prostitute but chooses to ignore her. She assumes he simply does not recognize her and approaches him again, saying, "It is I." The young man responds, "But, I am not the former I."

Many believe that the young man in the story represents Ambrose's famous student, Augustine (AD 354–430), who left a life of sin to pursue holiness and obedience to God. Regardless of whether the young man was actually Augustine, this story illustrates the total transformation that an encounter with Christ can bring.

B. Lesson Context

As this is the third lesson studying the letter of Ephesians, the Lesson Context sections from Lessons 1–2 also apply here. The city of Ephesus was a major religious center in first-century Asia Minor. Among its many pagan cults was a famous temple dedicated to the goddess Diana, also known as Artemis. Through this temple, worshipers could claim a unique relationship with the pagan deity. Their worship was part of their identity.

Idolatry had deep roots in the culture of Ephesus. Challenges to this religious order would have created hostility. The events of Acts 19 illustrate this danger. For the Ephesian church, the decision to follow Christ could never include compromise with the pagan culture around them. But their loyalty to Christ also put them at odds with their neighbors. In this context, Paul urges them to abandon the way of the pagan Gentiles.

I. Worldly Living

(Ephesians 4:17–19)

A. Separated from God (vv. 17–18)

17. This I say therefore, and testify in the

Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.

The word *therefore* connects Paul's appeal to his earlier argument about the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–16). This verse begins with a stark warning: Past pagan practices (*walk*) and beliefs (*mind*) must remain in the past. Since the Gentile converts of Paul's original audience have become part of God's family, they must abandon the *vanity* that is linked to paganism. By doing this, they will prevent these practices and beliefs from influencing the church. Paul has more to say about all this in Romans 1:18–32; 6:6; and Colossians 3.

18. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.

The effect of sin leads to people's *understanding* becoming *darkened* to God and His truth. As a result, sinful humanity chooses to reject obedience to God and replaces knowledge of Him with idolatry (Romans 1:21–23). The pagans in Ephesus remain in a state of *blindness* (compare 2 Corinthians 4:4). They are "aliens" and "strangers" without the hope that comes from *the life of God* (Ephesians 2:12 [Lesson 1]; compare Colossians 1:21). By having darkened *hearts*, they are in willful *ignorance* that leaves them unaware to their need.

What Do You Think?

What practices help guard your heart and mind against the darkening effects of sin?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take to help others resist spiritual darkness?

B. Indulgent Lifestyle (v. 19)

19. Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Spiritual blindness is evident in the indulgent and immoral lifestyles of some individuals. Their ignorance of spiritual matters leads them to behave with a callousness that is *past feeling* any sense of right or wrong (compare 1 Timothy 4:2).

Extravagant sexual vice, characterized by a lack of self-control, is *lasciviousness*. The term suggests a willingness to shock others without regard for decency (compare Romans 13:13; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19). *Uncleanness* results from improper sexual acts. This term was also used in conjunction with purity codes of the Law of Moses (Leviticus 5:3; 7:21; etc.). God desires that His people recognize the holiness of their bodies and act accordingly (see 1 Corinthians 6:19–20). These acts result from darkened hearts consumed with *greediness* that pushes toward self-indulgence and pleasure (compare Ephesians 2:3).

It is important to note that Paul does not accuse all Gentiles in Ephesus of this depravity. Instead, he highlights the widespread pagan lifestyle that aligns "according to the course of this world" (Ephesians 2:2). All people, regardless of their background, are under the power of sin and in need of salvation (Romans 3:9–10).

II. Holy Living, Part 1

(Ephesians 4:20–24)

A. Finding Truth (vv. 20–21)

20. But ye have not so learned Christ.

The pagan lifestyle, characterized by a darkened heart and a self-centered lifestyle, stands in stark contrast to the way of life of those who follow *Christ*. To truly follow Him, we must learn about His person and work (see Philippians 3:10). This requires more than merely knowing facts; it requires us to follow His commands and understand what is necessary to be His disciple. Jesus invites us to, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

21. If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.

Through the teachings of Paul and the ministry of local leaders, like Apollos, Aquila, and Priscilla (see Acts 18:24–28), the Ephesians have *heard* the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus. Further, they *have been taught by* Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 1:13). This intimate instruction is possible because God's *truth* is found in the person of Jesus (John 14:6; compare 1:14;

1 John 5:20). As believers align with Christ as the embodiment of truth, our actions and attitudes become better aligned with His.

What Do You Think?

Who first introduced you to the gospel of salvation in Christ, and how did they help you understand?

Digging Deeper

How will you follow that example by intentionally discipling others toward faithful obedience to Christ?

B. Putting Away the Old (v. 22)

22. That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.

Paul elaborates on the teachings that the believers in Ephesus have received. At one time, they had lived among the pagans under the influence of sin (Ephesians 2:3). The phrase *the old man* describes this *former* way of life under the rule of sin (4:17).

In this section of the letter, Paul uses one of the most frequent metaphors in all of his writing: that of putting on or taking off garments (compare Romans 13:12; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 3:8–9). He illustrates the idea that people "wear" their deeds as if they are clothing, meaning that their actions are visible for all to see. In this way, the status of their hearts is revealed to all people. This earlier way of life, before receiving the gospel, was marked by the *deceitful lusts* of sensuality, selfishness, and greed (Ephesians 4:19, above).

Because believers have been taught the good news of salvation in Christ, we must remove *corrupt* ways of living. We are new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17), and we live under a new master as "new" people (Ephesians 4:24, below).

Straight to the Landfill

One day, my wife looked at my favorite pair of jeans with unmistakable disapproval. She thought it was time for me to let them go. They were riddled with holes, frayed at the cuff, and clearly worn out. Still, they were so comfortable, and I was more than willing to overlook their obvious state of decay.

However, the moment of decision arrived. As I prepared to part with the jeans, a thought crossed my mind: *Maybe someone else could get some good use out of these!* With that in mind, I decided to put them up for sale at a yard sale. It was a convenient way to convince myself that they still had value. In reality, those jeans were good for nothing except the landfill. They needed to be discarded and forgotten.

In much the same way, we often cling to old habits and sinful patterns. They feel familiar. They fit us comfortably. Over time, they can even begin to feel like part of who we are. Yet, Paul reminds us to put off the old self and discard what belongs to our former way of life, no matter how comfortable those things feel. What habits and practices in your life need to go straight to the landfill? What old pattern is Christ calling you to put off, once and for all? —AEA

C. Being Made New (vv. 23–24)

23. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

This new way of life includes a complete and total healing of one's *spirit*, enabling obedience to the will of God (compare Romans 12:2). The process by which a person is *renewed* occurs through the power of the Holy Spirit, the "spirit of wisdom and revelation" who dwells in and transforms believers (Ephesians 1:17; compare 3:16).

24. And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

After instructing his audience to "put off" the old self, Paul continues with the same metaphor to explain what they should *put on.* Whereas the old self wore corruption and "deceitful lusts" (Ephesians 4:22, above), the *new man* dons that which reflects new life. Although Paul uses masculine language in this verse, he intends for it to apply to all people.

This new person has been *created* in the likeness of God (compare Genesis 1:26–27). When we try to understand God, we find that He possesses two kinds of attributes: communicable and incommunicable. The communicable attributes are those that we should imitate. An example is the mandate to *righteousness* and *holiness* (compare Matthew 5:6; 6:33; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Peter 2:9–11; etc.).

Paul reminds readers that when we become Christians, we ask Christ to cleanse us, putting to death our former lives of rebellion and raising us to lives of obedience to Him (Colossians 2:12–13 [Lesson 9]). What are we saying to Him, and what are we saying about ourselves, if we continue to live as if we had never asked Christ to make us new?

What Do You Think?

What are the behaviors and attitudes that distinguish the new person in Christ?

Digging Deeper

Who can encourage you and hold you accountable as you grow in habits that reflect your new status in Christ?

III. Holy Living, Part 2

(Ephesians 4:25–32)

A. Truth and Unity (vv. 25–28)

25. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

The term *wherefore* indicates a shift from the general exhortations of Ephesians 4:20–24 to specific instructions. In doing so, Paul provides particular examples to illustrate the difference between the way of the "old" self and that of the "new" self in Christ. Paul revisits the clothing metaphor, urging his audience to embrace their new identity by *putting away* aspects of the old self, such as *lying* (compare Colossians 3:9).

To *speak . . . truth with* one's *neighbour* echoes the guidance given by the Old Testament prophet Zechariah to the exiled Israelites (Zechariah 8:16–17). As the people return to Jerusalem from exile, the prophet encourages them to embody unity. By drawing on Zechariah's words, Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that they are all one body, *members one of another* in Christ Jesus (compare Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12:14–26). Truth-telling is an essential practice while working toward unification.

26. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

This verse is a quotation from the ancient Greek version of Psalm 4. In this psalm, the writer affirms that the Lord hears the cry of His people in their distress (Psalm 4:3). However, the Lord encourages the people not to act on their anger (4:4). The apostle Paul utilizes the psalmist's language to affirm legitimate, justified anger (example: Exodus 32:19). He warns, however, that such anger should not lead to *sin*.

The expression *let not the sun go down upon your wrath* is not meant to be taken as a literal time limit on feelings of anger. Instead, the phrase encourages a quick resolution to justified frustration. If reconciliation or correction is possible, we should seek it promptly. When it is not possible, we should refrain from seeking revenge and, instead, leave the matter to God, who has the proper authority (see Romans 12:19). Letting go of anger prevents it from consuming us. We are to be "slow to wrath" (James 1:19) and "not easily provoked" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

27. Neither give place to the devil.

Unchecked anger and unresolved division among believers create an opportunity for *the devil* to infiltrate and disrupt the community of faith. Paul advises believers to put on God's armor to resist the devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:11). The devil is constantly on the prowl, seeking to undermine our faith and commitment (compare 1 Peter 5:8).

28. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

A community of believers should aim for the greater good and refrain from depriving others. In a wealthy city like Ephesus, stealing could take

How to Say It

Apollos	Uh-*pahl*-lohs
Aquila	Uh-*kwih*-luh
Artemis	*Ar*-teh-miss
Ephesians	Ee-*fee*-shunz
Ephesus	*Ef*-uh-sus
lasciviousness	luh-*sih*-vee-us-nuss
Philippians	Fih-*lip*-ee-unz
Priscilla	Prih-*sil*-uh
Zechariah	*Zek*-uh-*rye*-uh

various forms beyond the act of a simple pickpocket. The rich and powerful often took advantage of the poor, bribing courts or officials to take what little property they had. Those who were once thieves, in any capacity, must *steal no more* (compare Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19; Mark 10:19; Romans 13:9), as this reflects a life transformed by the putting on of the new self.

Instead, Paul exhorts believers to *labour* to support themselves and to share with others who *needeth* (compare 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13; 1 Timothy 6:18; Titus 3:14). Such good works are ordained by God for the Christian life (see Ephesians 2:10).

B. Kindness and Forgiveness (vv. 29–32)

29. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

This verse includes the only mention of the underlying Greek term translated as *corrupt* in the Pauline Epistles. However, the word also appears in the Gospels, where it is used in metaphors to describe spiritual "fruit" that is rotten and bad (Matthew 7:15–18; 12:33; 13:48; Luke 6:43). *Corrupt communication* refers to speech characterized by rottenness, lacking any spiritual value (compare Matthew 12:34; Luke 6:45). Such speech tears down the community of believers through slander, cursing, gossip, boasting, anger, and empty words (compare Colossians 3:8–9; 2 Peter 2:18).



Visual for Lesson 3. *Display this visual as you invite participants to spend one minute in silent prayer, considering those they need to forgive.*

In contrast to speech that tears down, there is *good* and *edifying* speech that God favors. Such constructive speech builds up the community and serves to benefit (*minister grace*) others, thereby helping to fulfill the goal of strengthening the body of Christ, which is the church (see Ephesians 4:12, 16; see also 2:21). Later in this letter, Paul will revisit the topic of rotten speech, emphasizing that it should be replaced with thanksgiving (5:4).

What Do You Think?

Why does destructive or careless speech pose such a serious threat to unity and spiritual growth?

Digging Deeper

How will you apply Paul's instruction to speak words that build others up?

"Foot-in-Mouth" Disease

As a young adult, I was eager to make my opinions known. I spoke freely—perhaps *too* freely. I said whatever I wanted without giving a second thought to whether it was edifying or destructive. That habit did not immediately change when I became a Christian. I assumed that with "biblical" justification, I was free to say whatever I wanted.

My attempts to witness to others were often crass and rude. Once, I told a young woman, "Hell is hot, so don't wait too long!" Another time, when a friend shared struggles in her marriage, I responded with a snide and insensitive remark. At the time, I was convinced that if people would listen to me, they would understand the truth.

Now I see how much I had overlooked Scripture's teaching regarding our speech. Words are powerful; they can build others up or tear them down. More than thirty years have passed since I first began asking the Lord to place a filter on my words, yet I still find myself asking for the Holy Spirit's help to avoid chronic "foot-in-mouth" disease. How do you guard your mouth so that what you say builds others up? —VM

30. And grieve not the holy Spirit of

God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

The language of this verse recalls that of Isaiah 63:10. The prophet describes Israel's rebellion as an act that distressed God, leading Him to act as if He were their enemy. Paul's reference to this passage could imply a prohibition against similar acts of rebellion.

It is likely that acts that *grieve the holy Spirit of God* include anything that destroys the unity of the body of Christ. The Spirit forms this body of believers and preserves its unity (see Ephesians 2:18, 22; 4:3–4). The mention of those who are *sealed* recalls an earlier statement that the Holy Spirit guarantees the promised redemption of the people of God (1:13–14; compare 2 Corinthians 1:22).

31. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

Paul concludes his list of commands with a series of vices that believers are to reject. There are about two dozen such "vice lists" in the New Testament (Romans 1:29–31; Galatians 5:19–21; Colossians 3:5, 8–9; etc.). Such lists were never intended to be exhaustive catalogs for readers but were meant to represent behaviors to avoid.

Bitterness has no place in the Christian life (Galatians 5:23; Hebrews 12:15). *Wrath* is an intense burst of *anger* stemming from an impetuous mindset. *Evil speaking* includes slander or injurious speech to others. *Malice* carries the sense of evil actions in general. Such actions can be motivated by greed, spite, jealousy, or other moral failings; they intend to harm another person. The list reflects the close connection between the status of a person's heart and the mouth: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34; compare Luke 6:45).

32. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Following the list of vices, Paul introduces virtues that reflect the holiness of the "new" self. Kindness, tenderness of heart, and forgiveness counteract the effects of these vices. The basis for these virtues is God's action in Christ toward His people. God demonstrates kindness to us (Titus 3:4–5), and thus, we are called to practice kindness toward others (Galatians 5:22; compare 1 Peter 2:3). Additionally, Christians should forgive because they have themselves experienced the forgiveness of God (compare Colossians 3:13).

What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to grow in kindness and forgiveness toward others?

Digging Deeper

What barriers challenge you from doing so, and how will you address these barriers?

Conclusion

A. Live as the Redeemed

Paul urges his audience to avoid the habits and mindsets of their pagan neighbors. Instead, believers should live in a way that reflects their redemption in Christ. For the church in Ephesus, encountering the good news of Christ transformed their actions, words, and hearts.

Paul's message still resonates today. In whatever context we live, we see brokenness, deceit, and the effects of sin in the world. Like the believers in Ephesus, we should reflect Christ's truth and righteousness to both fellow believers and the unbelieving world. Our lives testify to the work Christ does in transforming us.

Christ does not leave us to navigate this life on our own. He reveals who He is and transforms us into His image. The Holy Spirit, who seals us, assists us in walking in God's ways. As the church, let us abandon the ways of the world and strive to live in a manner that pleases Christ. Because He has redeemed us, we must live as the redeemed.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for redeeming us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Strengthen us through Your Spirit to obey You as we become followers of Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Put on the new self and live as the redeemed.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

As students arrive, distribute a slip of paper to each person. Ask learners to write a noun on their paper, fold it in half, and place it in a hat. Use the collected words to play "Twenty Questions." Invite a participant to choose a slip of paper from the hat. Then ask the group to take turns asking yes-or-no questions about it. When twenty questions have been asked, invite three people to offer guesses. Whoever guesses the noun correctly gets to choose a new slip from the hat. If no one gets it correct, the person on the right goes. Play as many rounds as time and interest allow.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Which Is Different?" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Allow one minute for participants to complete the page as indicated before checking their answers with the whole group.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Discernment is a valuable skill. In today's Scripture, we'll discover how Paul describes the qualities and behaviors that distinguish believers from unbelievers."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 4:17–19 aloud. Divide participants into six small groups: **Darkened**, **Alienated**, **Blinded**, **Insensitive**, **Indulgent**, and **Greedy**. If your class is small, divide students into three groups and assign two terms per group. Say, "Paul uses these words to describe the way 'Gentiles' (unbelievers) think." Instruct groups to discuss the meaning and implications of their word. Then ask, "What behaviors and consequences result from these characteristics?" (*Example*: Insensitive thinking results in careless comments that can hurt or mislead others.) Allow a few minutes for small groups to brainstorm examples and then invite a volunteer from each group to share their conclusions with the whole group.

Ask another volunteer to read Ephesians 4:20–24 aloud. Ask students to return to the same groups. Assign one of the following references to each group: Job 29:14; Isaiah 61:3, 10; Romans 13:12–14; Ephesians 6:13–17; Colossians 3:12–14; and 1 Peter 5:5. Invite groups to read and discuss what their verses reveal about righteous and holy "clothing." After calling time, invite groups to compile a list of these virtues on the board. Allow time for the whole class to reflect and respond. Ask participants to share which virtues they find: 1–easy to put on, 2–difficult to put on, and 3–why.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Change Your Outfit" exercise from the activity page. Allow a few minutes for small groups to complete the exercise as indicated. Consider providing colored pencils or markers to enhance students' sketches.

Invite a third volunteer to read Ephesians 4:25–32 aloud. Assign each group a "don't/do" instruction from the passage: 1–lies/truth (v. 25), 2–anger/resolve (vv. 26–27), 3–steal/labor (v. 28), 4–corrupt/edifying speech (v. 29), 5–grieve/please (v. 30), and 6–bitterness/forgiveness (vv. 31–32). Instruct each group to identify how following their Scriptural instruction will: 1–benefit individual believers who obey it, 2–help others, and 3–bring glory to God. When discussion time has elapsed, invite a volunteer from each group to summarize their answers.

Into Life

Challenge participants to define "corrupt communication," providing several general examples. (*possible answers*: insults, criticisms, lies) Then ask the class to brainstorm a list of opposites, those things that "may minister grace unto the hearers." (*possible answers*: compliments, encouragements)

Distribute an index card and a pen to each participant. Ask students to plan how to replace unwholesome talk with words of blessing and edification. Encourage them to write at least five edifying statements that they might use in real-life situations during the following week. Pray to close.

Loved by Christ

Devotional Reading: Psalm 69:13–18
Background Scripture: Isaiah 11:1–3; Acts 20:17–38

Ephesians 5:1–17

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

13 But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

14 Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

Key Text

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.
—Ephesians 5:15–16

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 1: Walking the Walk

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

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

1. List the attitudes and behaviors that believers are to remove from their communities.
2. Describe how the metaphor of "light" is used in this passage and explain its meaning for the Christian life.
3. Light a candle as an act of worship, praising God for making us "light in the Lord."

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Preventing Weeds in God's Garden
- B. Lesson Context

I. Imitate God (Ephesians 5:1–7)
- A. Walk in Love (vv. 1–2)
- B. Reject Impurity (vv. 3–5)
- C. Avoid Deception (vv. 6–7)

II. Live as Light (Ephesians 5:8–17)
- A. Bear Fruit (vv. 8–10)
  Needing Light, Being Light
- B. Expose Darkness (vv. 11–14)
- C. Walk in Wisdom (vv. 15–17)
  W.I.S.E.

Conclusion
- A. All Choked Up?
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Preventing Weeds in God's Garden

Our English Bible uses a form of the verb "choke" in several places. These occur most often in Jesus' parable of the sower (Matthew 13:7, 22; parallels in Mark 4:7, 19; Luke 8:7, 14). The parable gains its force from common knowledge: weeds threaten plants. If not contained, weeds can crowd out the purposefully seeded, intentional plants. Weeds also leech nutrients from the soil. If a gardener neglects her plot, weeds can overrun it, and then the carefully planted seeds will struggle instead of flourishing. On the other hand, the careful pruning, watering, and positioning of plants allows a garden's desirable plants to thrive.

If God is planting a garden, and if we are the "plants," then what are the weeds that threaten to choke out our growth and life? And what can we do to prevent them from cropping up?

B. Lesson Context

Ephesians 5:1–17 continues Paul's description of what is expected of those living as God's new creations in Christ. The Ephesian Christians faced daily pressure to conform to pagan values and lifestyles. Therefore, Paul emphasizes the believer's new identity and the necessary transformation that must accompany it.

Today's text belongs to the "walk" section of the epistle (Ephesians 4:1–6:9). Having described the unity and holiness of the church, Paul now exhorts believers to "walk" in ways befitting their calling. These imperatives flow naturally from the earlier doctrinal truths of chapters 1–3, where Paul affirms the Spirit's work on behalf of believers. In that light, today's text illustrates what it means and looks like to live out a divine calling in an unrighteous world.

I. Imitate God

(Ephesians 5:1–7)

A. Walk in Love (vv. 1–2)

1. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.

At first glance, we might interpret this

command as an instruction to reject false gods and begin following the real God. Sage advice—but Paul is writing to people who are already believers! In this and other contexts, the word *followers* means "imitators." Paul frequently encourages this, often using himself as an example to imitate (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9). This specific call to be imitators *of God* is unique, though the concept is supported by other passages of Scripture that instruct us to imitate God's attributes (examples: Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36; 1 Peter 1:15–16).

Imitation should take place *as dear children*, implying a parent-to-child model of learning in a spiritual sense (compare 2 Timothy 1:2, 13; 1 John 3:2). Just as it is natural for children to resemble their parents, believers should become ever more like their heavenly Father, who offers the ultimate model of righteousness.

2. And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

To *walk* is one of Paul's favorite images for the life of discipleship and obedience to Christ (examples: Romans 8:1; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 2:6). Our lives as believers are to be characterized by *love* for God and for others. Jesus told His disciples that others would recognize them as His disciples by witnessing their love for one another (John 13:35). Love takes precedence over all else (1 Corinthians 13:13). To live as children of God is to love as *Christ also hath loved us.*

The phrase *hath given himself for us* refers to Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross, which is the ultimate example of love (1 John 4:9–10). Unlike the pagan religions practiced in Ephesus, only Christianity proclaims a God who sacrifices out of love for humanity. Christ's *sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour* echoes the sacrificial system of the Law of Moses, which depicts the sacrifice of a burnt offering or incense as a pleasing aroma to God (examples: Leviticus 1:9; 3:16). When we live lives shaped by Christ's self-sacrificial love for others, we not only imitate God but give Him pleasure.

What Do You Think?

How does God's example of self-sacrificial love in Christ differ from the ways that love is commonly defined and expressed in our culture?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to practice Christlike love toward others?

B. Reject Impurity (vv. 3–5)

3. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints.

What is the opposite of a life characterized by self-sacrifice? It is one marked by self-indulgence, as this short vice list highlights. The underlying Greek word translated as *fornication* refers to all manner of sexual immorality (compare 1 Corinthians 5:1). Sexual immorality is widespread in Ephesus, even linked to pagan worship. Ephesus is home to the temple of Diana (Acts 19:34), also known as Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and fertility.

Covetousness may relate to the desire for someone else's possessions, but it can also pertain to *uncleanness* and *fornication* as the desire of another person for sexual gratification. Covetousness disregards God and His proper place in our hearts, and this is never clearer than in the commission of sexual sin in deliberate violation of God's intent for our lives (Colossians 3:5). Paul emphatically states that not even a hint of such evils can be squared with believers' calling to be *saints*. Because believers are holy in Christ, we must resist matters of unrighteousness.

4. Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

Continuing his list of vices, Paul turns to sinful speech, using three Greek words that are found only here in the New Testament. Taken together, *filthiness*, *foolish talking*, and *jesting* represent empty, vulgar speech, especially of a sexual nature.

The phrase *which are not convenient* means that such talk is not compatible with the Christian life (compare Romans 1:28). The *giving of thanks*

is the Christian's proper mode of speaking. For Paul, gratitude to God erodes the temptation to live indulgently. Thanksgiving is also a cure to covetousness, which Paul warns about in verse 3.

What Do You Think?

In what sense does gratitude reflect speech that is holy?

Digging Deeper

How will you cultivate a habit of gratitude in your conversations and attitudes?

5. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

The three characterizations of *whoremonger, unclean person,* and *covetous man* correspond to the three categories of unrighteousness mentioned in verse 3 (above). It is important to note that *an idolater* is not a separate category, but rather is a description of the "covetous man." Greedy people are guilty of idolatry because they love the things of this world more than they love the Lord (compare Colossians 3:5).

When we encounter the word *idolater*, we may picture a tangible object worshiped, such as described in Isaiah 44:13–19. But there are also idols of the heart (see Ezekiel 14:1–7). These idols demand our devotion to personal desires or cultural values instead of to God. Anything that is loved more than God becomes an idol (compare Matthew 6:24). Believers cannot love the world and love God at the same time.

The consequences of idolatry are severe, as they involve one's *inheritance in the kingdom of Christ*. The concept of *inheritance* is significant in the Bible (see Matthew 25:34; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; 15:50; Galatians 5:21; James 2:5; Revelation 21:7–8; etc.). Those who make a habit of idolatrous and evil living without repentance risk losing the inheritance that is God's gift of eternal life. In this way, they demonstrate that they are not God's children and are therefore not His heirs.

How to Say It

Artemis	*Ar*-teh-miss
Colossians	Kuh-*losh*-unz
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-*ahn*-uh-me
Ephesians	Ee-*fee*-shunz
Ephesus	*Ef*-uh-sus

C. Avoid Deception (vv. 6–7)

6. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

Paul sees *these things*—the vices of impure living (Ephesians 5:3–5, above)—as being a source of deception. Any attempt to downplay or ignore the seriousness of immoral behavior and speech is an effort to *deceive* people *with vain words*. False teachers often promote sinful lives (2 Timothy 3:1–9; 2 Peter 2:1–2). The consequence of falling prey to such teaching is severe: *the wrath of God*, which is His righteous judgment upon unredeemed sinners.

The expression *children of disobedience* is a figure of speech used to describe those characterized by their rebellion against God (compare Ephesians 2:2–3). They stand in contrast to the "dear children" of God in both status and conduct (5:1, above). In most ancient cultures, the parent-child relationship is marked by the child's obedience to the father (compare Ephesians 6:1; Exodus 20:12; contrast Deuteronomy 21:18–21). The children of disobedience are those who follow their spiritual father of unrighteousness, the devil (John 8:44; 1 John 3:10). While the children of God receive His promised inheritance, the disobedient receive His wrath.

7. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

This verse is the negative counterpart of Ephesians 3:6. Common to both verses is the word *partakers*. We can share either in God's promises or in the conduct (and therefore fate) of those who walk in immorality—but not both. To be clear, Paul commands non-participation in sin, not disassociation from sinners.

II. Live as Light

(Ephesians 5:8–17)

A. Bear Fruit (vv. 8–10)

8. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now

are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.

Carefully notice the phrasing. This verse does not say that the readers are "in" the dark; Paul says they *were* the *darkness*. This means that the Ephesians had, at some point, transitioned from being victims of darkness to being perpetrators of it! But *now* they have become *light in the Lord*. This follows a familiar "once-now" pattern of transformation (Ephesians 2:1–10, 11–22).

The New Testament frequently uses light and dark imagery to represent not just two different moralities (righteousness and unrighteousness), but also two opposing powers or realms. Because Christ is completely righteous, fellowship with Him is akin to walking in light; this excludes ongoing participation with sin, which is pictured as walking in *darkness* (see 1 John 1:5–7). Sinners are drawn to the darkness because it conceals their sins (John 3:19–21). Darkness rules over all of us until we find rescue in Christ's kingdom (Colossians 1:13; see also Luke 22:53).

The command to *walk as children of light* recalls Paul's previous command to walk in love as God's children (Ephesians 5:2, above). Light and love go hand-in-hand in the life of the believer. Jesus is the light of the world (John 8:12), and His disciples are called to reflect Him in this regard (Matthew 5:14). We can only be the light of the world as we faithfully dwell with the true, ultimate light of the world—Jesus (compare Romans 13:12).

What Do You Think?

Who exemplifies what it means to "walk as children of light"? How has this person's life helped push back darkness?

Digging Deeper

How can you "put on the armour of light" (Romans 13:12) to better pursue holiness?

Needing Light, Being Light

I've lived in my house for over thirty-five years and know it well. Sometimes I do laundry at night. As I walk from my upstairs bedroom down to the basement, I don't turn on any lights. Why? I don't need to! I know the feel of the bottom stairs. I know the length of the hallway. I know where every furniture corner is on my path and how to avoid running into them. I know exactly where the clothes dryer is, and I can operate and unload it without reaching for the light switch.



Visual for Lesson 4. *Display this visual as you discuss the commentary and questions associated with Ephesians 5:8–10.*

But if I stayed with a friend overnight at their house, I'd need some lights to navigate—otherwise I could end up stubbing my toe on the furniture or falling down the stairs. (I'd also have to explain why I'm doing laundry in their house in the middle of the night!)

We live in a world that is dark and in need of light to navigate. It is not the kind of place that we can stumble around in without getting hurt or hurting others. People need light to find their way—or rather, "the way" (compare John 14:6). Jesus proclaimed that He is the light of the world (8:12). But He also commissioned His followers to similarly provide light to the world (Matthew 5:14–16).

What's something specific you can do to help "turn on the lights" for a stumbling and struggling family member, neighbor, or coworker? —VM

9. (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.)

The fruit of the Spirit is the natural product of walking in light. Paul offers an expanded discussion of spiritual fruit in Galatians 5:22–23. Paul's categories of *goodness, righteousness, and truth*

summarize aspects of this fruit. These aspects encompass moral excellence, purity of heart, honesty, and integrity. As believers walk in the light of God's holiness, they not only receive its benefits but also begin to produce them for others.

10. Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

The word *proving* means discerning or finding out. *What is acceptable unto the Lord* is not always evident or straightforward. Life is filled with ambiguities and is constantly changing, which is why spiritual wisdom from God is necessary. It is through the journey of walking in light, as children of light (Ephesians 5:8, above), that we acquire this insight. Ultimately, the goal is to bring pleasure to God.

B. Expose Darkness (vv. 11–14)

11. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

Paul's instruction is direct: Light and darkness are opposites, with no "in-between" category or "middle ground" for compromise. The way of *darkness* and the way of light oppose one another in every way.

In contrast to the fruit of light, darkness only produces *unfruitful works*. Christians have two responsibilities when confronted with such dark deeds. First, we are to *have no fellowship with* them. Sin must be renounced, not participated in—full stop.

Second, believers are to actively *reprove* works of darkness. The believer must expose and oppose evil (compare John 3:20). Christians are light (Ephesians 5:8, above), so godly conduct is what reveals the surrounding darkness as evil.

What Do You Think?

How can believers faithfully obey Matthew 28:19–20 without becoming indistinguishable from the world?

Digging Deeper

What practices help ensure that correction or rebuke is offered with humility and love?

12. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

Recall Paul's focus on sexual immorality in Ephesians 5:3–5 (above). In this context, Paul's mentioning of evil works done *in secret* is not surprising, as well as his own refusal *even to speak of those things* in detail. Jesus promises that secret sin will ultimately be exposed for what it is (Luke 12:2–3). Christians are to renounce the secretive ways that hide such sin (2 Corinthians 4:2).

13. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

When exposed to *light*, sin is *made manifest* (John 3:20–21). Not only that, the light transforms what was once dark into *light* (compare 2 Corinthians 4:6). The one who accepts the truth and endures exposure to the light becomes a light. To be a light, one must follow the Word of God, which is "a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105).

14. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

This verse is not a direct quotation from the Old Testament. It may be a composite text made by Paul, drawing on Isaiah 60:1, or possibly Daniel 12:2, and then paraphrasing those texts. Some suggest that it predates Paul and originally functioned as a baptismal formula or an early Easter hymn in which the gospel message is expressed poetically in just a few words. In this sense, the passage evokes a death-and-resurrection theme in which those who are *dead* in darkness are called to live as children of *light* (compare 2 Corinthians 6:14).

Christ is the giver of *light*. Salvation comes only through Christ, who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). God justifies sinful humanity only by the blood of His Son (Romans 5:1–11; 1 Peter 1:18–19).

C. Walk in Wisdom (vv. 15–17)

15. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

Again, Paul employs the term *walk* to denote the whole Christian life.

The calls to live life in love and light are now joined with a call to live *circumspectly*—that is, *as*

wise. Wisdom entails knowledge of God and obedience to His commands (see Job 28:28; Proverbs 30:3). Being unwise is the result of ungodly living and rebellion against God (Proverbs 1:7).

W.I.S.E.

I created an acrostic to help me remember how to walk in wisdom: *WISE*.

The *W* stands for "Wait on the Holy Spirit." The older I get, the more I learn about the Holy Spirit. Scripture refers to Him in promises that involve His comfort, truth, holiness, freedom, and wisdom (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; Romans 1:4; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Ephesians 1:17). I need to ask for His assistance constantly!

The *I* stands for "I admit how little I know." Earlier in my life, I was "Miss Know-It-All." I had an answer for everybody about everything. The older I get, the less I truly understand (compare 1 Corinthians 2:2). My daily prayer is "Lord, I don't know. But You know everything. Please take the lead."

The *S* is "Stillness and silence make space to hear God" (compare Psalm 46:10; Habakkuk 2:20). I look forward to those times with no movement, no people, and no sounds. In those quiet moments, I can better hear the voice of the Lord.

The *E* is for "Everywhere I go, God has already gone before me." I don't have to rely on my own intellect to figure things out. I just need to look for the path He's already cut out for me (Psalm 142:3).

What's a creative way you can remind yourself to live "as wise"? —VM

16. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Wisdom understands the importance of timing. Paul urges his readers to make the most of their *time* by seizing opportunities as they arise (compare Colossians 4:5). The phrase *the days are evil* reflects Paul's view that he was living in the last days—that is, the period between the first and second comings of the Messiah. Evil and immorality characterize these days (2 Thessalonians 2:1–4). However, Christians are called to rise above it by walking in love, light, and wisdom.

What Do You Think?

What has the Lord taught you about the difference between using time foolishly and wisely?

Digging Deeper

Where do you currently need greater spiritual discernment to "redeem the time" for God's purposes?

17. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

The will of the Lord does not refer to God's will for an individual's personal circumstances. In the context of this letter, God's "will" refers to His plan of redemption (Ephesians 1:5, 9, 11). However, wise living extends beyond simply *understanding* this plan; it guides us in applying it to our lives.

Jesus is the ultimate example of understanding and fulfilling the will of God. True wisdom is active; it shapes our decisions, priorities, and relationships. It calls us to live in accordance with God's authority. When our understanding of God's will informs every aspect of our lives, we not only enhance our ability to obey Him but also align ourselves with the unfolding of His plan of salvation.

Conclusion

A. All Choked Up?

Spiritual growth is a process. Like a garden, our lives can produce weeds of unrighteousness that choke out gospel-fruit. The solution is to imitate God by walking in light. The alternative is to allow the temptations of the world to "choke" our growth. Just as a gardener understands the needs of each plant, so too Christians are urged to discern God's will by living wisely in a world filled with spiritual weeds.

B. Prayer

Lord, help us imitate You as we walk in Your love, light, and wisdom. Teach us to make the most of every opportunity by filling our lives with righteousness and truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Live as the light of the world!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Announce a "Family Feud" style game. Give each participant an index card and a pen, and ask them to write down three activities typically done in the dark (examples: sleep, developing photographs, stargazing). Allow one minute for responses.

Collect the cards, review the responses, and identify the five most common responses. Write the numbers *1–5* on the board to represent these answers. Divide the class into two teams and begin a simple round of "Family Feud." Teams take turns guessing the answers. When a team guesses correctly, they may continue guessing until they miss. At that point, the other team takes over. The team that correctly identifies the most answers wins the game.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Afraid of the Dark" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants work in pairs to complete it as indicated.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today's lesson evaluates the nature of spiritual darkness and why we don't need to fear anything that lurks there."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Ephesians 5:1–7 aloud. On the board, write two phrases as column headers: *What Not to Do* and *What to Do*. Ask participants to identify the actions and attitudes these verses prohibit for believers, and record responses under the "What Not to Do" header.

Next, invite participants to work with a partner to suggest corresponding actions or attitudes that help believers avoid the behaviors listed in the first column. Record these responses under "What to Do." Conclude this section by asking, "In what ways does the Holy Spirit help us to live out our identity as children of God?"

Invite a second volunteer to read Ephesians 5:8–14 aloud. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following questions. Allow time for participants to discuss them in pairs or small groups.

1–What do you think Paul means by describing people not merely *in* darkness, but *as* darkness? How does this shape your understanding of transformation in Christ?

2–What does it look like to live as "children of light" in everyday life? Where is this easiest for you, and where is it most challenging?

3–How can we discern whether something produces the fruit of light—goodness, righteousness, and truth—especially in morally complex situations?

4–What might it look like to "expose" darkness in healthy, Christlike ways?

5–What are some signs that a believer may be spiritually asleep? What practices help us stay spiritually alert and responsive to Christ's light?

After the discussion, invite a third volunteer to read Ephesians 5:15–17 aloud. Ask participants to work with a partner to create two lists: ways a wise person spends their time and ways an unwise person spends their time. Then invite individuals to reflect privately on their own habits and consider whether their patterns align more closely with wisdom or foolishness as described in this passage.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Our Role and Response" exercise from the activity page. Invite participants to work with a partner to complete it as indicated.

Into Life

Lead into the closing activity by saying, "We do not have to strive in our own strength to meet the standards described in this passage. Instead, we can praise the Lord because He has set us free to fully live as His children, born of His love and light."

Provide a candle for each participant. Light them together as a shared act of worship, praising God for making you "light" in Him. Allow participants to take home their candles and invite them to light the candles throughout the week as a tangible reminder that they are children of light.

Proclaim the Gospel

Devotional Reading: Matthew 10:16–25
Background Scripture: Acts 21:27–36; 28:11–31; Ephesians 6:18–23; Philippians 1:12–26; Colossians 4:2–6

Ephesians 6:19–20

19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,

20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Philippians 1:12–14

12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;

14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Colossians 4:2–4

2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

4 That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.



Key Text

And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. **—Ephesians 6:19–20**

Image © Getty Images

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 2: Staying the Course

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify Paul's specific prayer requests.
2. Describe the background and circumstances of Paul's imprisonment.
3. Make a plan to pray regularly for a missionary supported by your group or church.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. The Paradox of Persecution
- B. Lesson Context

I. Requested Prayers (Ephesians 6:19–20)
- A. Guardian of the Gospel (v. 19)
  Readiness in Prayer
- B. Ambassador Under Arrest (v. 20)

II. Confident Communication (Philippians 1:12–14)
- A. Chained for Christ (vv. 12–13)
- B. Daring to Deliver (v. 14)

III. Revealed Mystery (Colossians 4:2–4)
- A. Obvious Openings (vv. 2–3)
  Prayer Made a Way
- B. Make It Manifest (v. 4)

Conclusion
- A. Everyone's Missionary Call
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. The Paradox of Persecution

In 2018, the doors of Zion Church in China slammed shut. This unregistered house church of several hundred people had been meeting privately. They refused to comply with the government's attempts to control their Christian message. So, the government forcibly shut Zion down, confiscated their property, and questioned some of their members.

Church leadership had to make a series of quick decisions. Since they were known as Christian leaders, the government might target them for further persecution. Yet, they held responsibility for their church. Without hesitation, these leaders decided to continue in active ministry. They switched to a hybrid model of worship, delivering sermons online and encouraging smaller gatherings in homes. And the result? The church grew! More people came to saving faith in Christ despite—some might say "because of"—the increase in persecution (compare Acts 11:19).

The gospel paradoxically claims that God provides strength in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Amid persecution and opposition, God strengthens and emboldens His children to witness faithfully.

B. Lesson Context

The apostle Paul traveled extensively throughout the Roman Empire to preach the gospel, plant churches, and train leaders. Soon after Paul's encounter with Jesus (Acts 9:1–8), God appointed him as a missionary to the Gentiles (9:15–16). Although Paul's standard practice was to begin new church plants by first preaching to fellow Jews (examples: Acts 13:5; 18:5), he is specifically identified as the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13; 15:16; Galatians 1:15–16; 2:7–9).

Bible scholars typically categorize Paul's travels in terms of three missionary journeys:

- First Journey (AD 47–49): Acts 13:4–14:26
- Second Journey (AD 52–54): Acts 16:1–18:22
- Third Journey (AD 54–58): Acts 18:23–21:16

These journeys included both short and extended stays in various cities. The longest vis-

its were eighteen months in Corinth and over two years in Ephesus (Acts 18:11; 19:10). Receptiveness to the gospel message and the level of opposition in the city often determined Paul's length of stay.

Paul's journeys also included episodes of imprisonment (Acts 16:16–40; 21:33–28:31), and Paul himself refers to these in what we call his "Prison Epistles," namely Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. When Paul returned to Jerusalem after concluding his third journey, a group of Jews stirred up opposition against him, accusing him of teaching Jews to violate the Law of Moses (21:21, 28). The Romans arrested him to save him from a murderous mob, then moved him to Caesarea to protect him from a subsequent plot.

Despite neither Jewish nor Roman officials finding cause for guilt (Acts 23:9), Paul spent two years in prison in Caesarea (24:27). Then, he used his rights as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to Caesar in Rome (25:11). There, Paul spent two years under house arrest (28:30). Paul took advantage of every situation and continued sharing the gospel. In Rome, he received visitors and wrote letters to the many churches scattered throughout Macedonia and Asia Minor. Even Roman chains could not hinder the progress of the gospel (28:30–31).

I. Requested Prayer

(Ephesians 6:19–20)

As we pick up today's texts, the year is about AD 63, and Paul writes from his imprisonment in Rome to the Christians in Ephesus. This text comes from the conclusion of the letter. As Paul draws his message to a close, he exhorts the Christians in Ephesus to persist in praying for "all" God's people (Ephesians 6:18). He uses the word "all" three times in that single verse. The sweeping nature of the repetition reveals a way of life that regularly turns to God as the source of help and strength. Paul models a lifestyle of prayer by including two prayers for the readers (1:15–23; 3:14–21). He knows what it means to need God's help.

A. Guardian of the Gospel (v. 19)

19a. And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly.

The phrase *and for me* connects this verse to the imperative toward prayer in the previous verse (Ephesians 6:18). Thus, Paul is asking that, when his audience prays for others, they also pray for him. Paul, like all other Christians, requires assistance in the form of intercession from fellow believers.

A key reason for his prayer request is the nature of his opponents. Paul has just clarified who Christians fight against—"principalities," "powers," and "the rulers of the darkness of this world" (Ephesians 6:12). Although Paul is under arrest by the Roman Empire, that governing authority is not his primary opponent. Instead, the main threat is from spiritual powers. Against such powerful forces, Christians are to wield weapons such as truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the Word of God (Ephesians 6:13–17). Prayer empowers Christians to use these spiritual weapons effectively.

Notice that Paul does not request prayer for comfort or release from his current situation, despite the less-than-ideal circumstances. While comfort or release might be important, Paul focuses his energy on a different task—he desires that God will grant him opportunities to speak. The Romans have restricted his movement; he cannot travel to new cities and establish new churches and leaders, the task to which he has dedicated his life. If Paul is to share the good news in person, now people must come to him. When these God-given opportunities present themselves, he desires the ability to speak *boldly*, knowing just what to say. Paul wants the Holy Spirit to give him the right words.

19b. To make known the mystery of the gospel.

This phrase speaks to the content of the message that Paul desires to share. Paul and others in the first century used the term *mystery* not to refer to a case that needed to be investigated or solved. Rather, a mystery is something hidden that God has revealed. Paul uses this word twenty-one times in his letters, and six of those are in this letter (the other five in the underlying original language are Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32). In Ephesians 3:6, Paul defines the mystery as God's disclosure that Gentiles could become "fellowheirs, . . . and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel."

The unification of these people groups—Jews and non-Jews—into one body constitutes a central aspect of God's plan to unite all things "in heaven" and "on earth" in Christ (Ephesians 1:10). This truth offended many Jews because they considered it blasphemous to refer to Jesus as God (examples: Matthew 26:65; Luke 5:21; John 10:33). Even if they didn't see it as a heresy, however, the unification surprised them. They conceptualized the idea as being contrary to their understanding of the Law of Moses (Acts 10:45; 11:18).

Gentiles (non-Jews) were offended by the concept of unification in Christ because it implied that their gods were non-gods. Paul was on the receiving end of the ire of both Jews and Gentiles regarding these oppositions to the gospel message (examples: Acts 17:5–9; 19:23–34). Therefore, Paul certainly needs the boldness he requests!

What Do You Think?

How would you concisely share the "mystery of the gospel"?

Digging Deeper

How essential is praying for "utterance" from God to make Christ known?

Readiness in Prayer

A teacher in my school's cooperative approached me to chat. We had not been talking long when she suddenly said, "Several months ago, my husband was traveling for work. He ended up with a lot of free time at his hotel in the evenings, and he chose to use it to read a Bible he found in the nightstand. My husband came home from the trip and couldn't stop talking about all he'd read. It's made me curious. I have so many questions. Can you help?"

Silently, I prayed for wisdom, asking God for the right words. I wanted to answer her questions clearly and accurately! Amazingly, God quickly answered my prayer.

My friend asked numerous questions. With each one, I found the right words filling my mind and smoothly flowing from my mouth. I could see the fire of understanding light her eyes. After a while, she said earnestly, "What you've said here makes sense to me. I want the joy I've seen in you and the promises you've explained. I want to trust Jesus and follow Him." Praise the Lord!

In what situations do you need God's words? Do you regularly ask God for empowerment and boldness? —KS

B. Ambassador Under Arrest (v. 20)

20a. For which I am an ambassador in bonds.

Paul's dedication to making the divine mystery of the gospel known has led to his arrest; the good news of Jesus Christ is the reason for which he is in *bonds*. Even so, he considers himself to be an *ambassador* (compare 2 Corinthians 5:20). This title highlights the revolutionary and countercultural nature of Christianity: its core values and priorities differ from those of the Roman Empire. Paul sees himself as a representative of God's kingdom.

20b. That therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Here we see Paul's priority again: He must continue to preach. Paul repeats his request, asking the Ephesians to pray that God will empower him to *speak boldly*. He comprehends that the message should be communicated with courage.

II. Confident Communication

(Philippians 1:12–14)

We now shift to Paul's letter to the Christians in Philippi. Paul planted this church about a decade earlier, around AD 51 (Acts 16:11–40). After beginning the letter with thanksgiving and prayer for his readers (Philippians 1:3–11), Paul turns to giving a situational report.

A. Chained for Christ (vv. 12–13)

12a. But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me.

Paul desires to help the believers in Philippi *understand* how his personal circumstances have influenced the communication of the gospel message. In other words, he wants his readers to comprehend God's interpretation of *the things which happened* to him.

Paul does not clarify the events to which he

refers, but they most likely connect to his current imprisonment. The Philippians already know that Paul is imprisoned, having sent Epaphroditus to check up on him (2:25). In fact, Paul sends this letter, in part, to thank them for their renewed care for him (4:10).

12b. Have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

Paul does not focus on his suffering or the details of the things that have happened to him. Instead, he emphasizes the outcome of the circumstances. The statement that his imprisonment has worked *unto the furtherance of the gospel* indicates that Paul keeps his attention focused on his mission. For Paul, "to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). Even if negative things occur, he refuses to see them adversely if they contribute to the growth and strengthening of God's kingdom.

A period of imprisonment would seem to impede missionary progress. However, physical restraints hinder nothing! Good has come from this situation. The gospel has gone forth; more people have heard and believed the good news. Paul wants the Philippian church to understand this, possibly because they too suffer for the gospel (Philippians 1:29–30). He wants them to grasp that God can use their suffering for the sake of Christ and for the progress of the kingdom. Paul holds a divine perspective on his situation and seeks to share it with his audience (compare 2 Kings 6:16–17).

What Do You Think?

Why do difficult circumstances, like suffering, advance the gospel?

Digging Deeper

How does 2 Corinthians 12:9 influence your answer?

13. So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places.

Paul notes the result of his paradoxical reality. The reason for his imprisonment is *manifest* (made known) *in all the palace*, and the logical conclusion is that the spread of the gospel message will stall. But the opposite has happened. Ironically, Paul also witnessed this same phenomenon when he was on the side of the persecutors (Acts 8:1–8).

The phrase *in Christ* is of great importance to Paul. He uses the phrase seventy-nine times throughout his thirteen letters. It often describes the believer's inclusion in the new humanity founded by Jesus. In this context, however, the implications run deeper. *Bonds in Christ* implies that Paul's imprisonment is a direct result of his commitment to Jesus. Roman officials arrested him in Jerusalem because of the uproar his presence caused in and around the temple. Jewish authorities wanted to kill him because of the message he preached and the lifestyle he taught. Paul's crime is not a typical criminal act like theft or murder. Rather, he sits in jail guilty of loyalty to Christ.

As a Roman citizen, Paul owes a certain loyalty to Rome (compare Romans 13:1–7). But his ultimate allegiance, submission, and even servitude belong to Christ. Even as Rome thinks they hold him captive for crimes against the state, Paul is a prisoner for the sake of the Lord. This reality subverts the messaging of the Roman Empire, and people around Paul recognize it.

B. Daring to Deliver (v. 14)

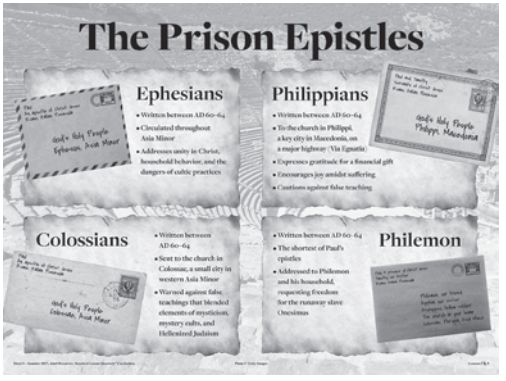
14. And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Once again, Paul draws attention to the paradoxical nature of the gospel. One might assume that persecution against believers would cause other believers to renounce their faith or at least stop speaking publicly about it. Paul explains to his Philippian friends that the exact opposite is happening! He uses emphatic language and points out that their fellow believers are boldly proclaiming *without fear*.

Paul wants the Philippians to understand all

How to Say It

Caesarea	Sess-uh-*ree*-uh
Colossians	Kuh-*losh*-unz
Epaphroditus	Ee-*paf*-ro-***dye***-tus
Ephesians	Ee-*fee*-shunz
Ephesus	*Ef*-uh-sus
Gentiles	*Jen*-tiles
Philippians	Fih-*lip*-ee-unz



Visual for Lesson 5. *Use this visual to explore similarities and differences between the churches to whom Paul wrote.*

this because they are also in a time of suffering (Philippians 1:30). He desires that they be inspired by his example and empowered by the Holy Spirit to persevere in the faith (1:27).

What Do You Think?

Why is boldness necessary in preaching the gospel?

Digging Deeper

How does the boldness of other believers influence or encourage your faith (consider Hebrews 10:24)?

III. Revealed Mystery

(Colossians 4:2–4)

The following excerpt comes from the letter Paul wrote to the Colossians while imprisoned in Rome. This passage transitions into the letter's conclusion. It is a section dedicated to exhortations—language, arguments, or advice given in a manner that strongly urges someone toward a particular course of action (Colossians 4:2–6).

A. Obvious Openings (vv. 2–3)

2. Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.

To *continue in prayer* refers to a life characterized by prayer (compare Ephesians 6:18). Paul wants his audience to remember that the power for holy living comes not from themselves but from God.

He offers two further descriptions of the way they should pray. First, they must *watch*. This term refers to staying awake and prepared, like a guard keeping watch at night (compare Mark 13:34–36).

Second, Paul reminds them to pray *with thanksgiving*. Here, he stresses the need to acknowledge what God has already provided instead of focusing solely on their desire for certain things to happen. If the believers in Colossae need a listing of the former, they need only to look back to the beginning of this letter (Colossians 1:3–14)!

3a. Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance.

As the Colossians live prayerful lives, Paul asks that they keep him on their prayer list. He likely refers to his co-worker, Timothy (Colossians 1:1), in his use of the word *us*. As in Ephesians 6:19 (above), Paul specifically asks for prayer that God will *open* opportunities for them to share the gospel message. Again, he does not ask for bodily comfort. He deems it more important that God prepare people's minds and hearts, and bring them into his path, so that he can share the good news he carries.

Prayer Made a Way

People involved in ministry and missionary labor often ask other believers for support. Such assistance usually takes two forms. The first is through monetary funds or physical supplies. Ministers ask for donations to cover their basic needs so they may live in a particular place and focus on the service God assigns them. The second request relates to prayer. All ministry workers, even if they don't need to do a lot of fundraising, are greatly in need of intercessory support. Paul's prayer requests for the success of his ministry are a model for us.

For several years, I lived abroad and worked as a missionary. When I wrote letters to my friends or met with believers while on leave, I struggled to describe how much their prayer support meant to me. The best explanations came in the form of testimonies. I told story after story of situations in which I'd asked for prayer for a particular need or for a specific local person, and God answered mightily! I know firsthand that intercession is essential. The Lord works powerfully through our prayers and faithfully opens doors for people to minister in His

name. I think I have an idea of how Paul felt, wanting the Philippian church to know that praying was not the least they could do; in fact, it was the most important way they could support his ministry.

What's the name of one minister, missionary, people group, or country you will pray for earnestly today, asking God to open doors for them to proclaim the gospel boldly? —KS

3b. To speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.

Paul's *bonds* shape his prayer request. His wording here is the first time in this letter that he directly mentions his incarceration (compare Colossians 4:18). If Paul is to find opportunities to preach the gospel in his current state, God must bring people to him.

We noted in the commentary on Ephesians 6:19 (above) that *the mystery* includes God's revealed plan to allow Gentiles to join God's family. Here in Colossians, there is an added feature of this revealed mystery: the person of Jesus, the *Christ*. Jesus is believers' "hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27), the one who has "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3). Now, Paul asks the Colossian church to partner with him in prayer for others to have access to the same hope.

What Do You Think?

Where are you facing a "closed door" in your desire to share the gospel with others?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to devote yourself to prayer, asking that God would "open unto [you] a door of utterance"?

B. Make It Manifest (v. 4)

4. That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

Paul now prays for clarity in his speech. God commissioned him to make known the mystery hidden for ages (Colossians 1:26). When he communicates the gospel, he is God's representative, articulating God's truth to others. As a minister, appointed by Christ to preach to the Gentiles, he desires to *make it manifest*. However, to do so, he needs God to empower him. Therefore, the Colossians play an essential role in advancing the gospel through their intercession.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways we can mistakenly confuse people in our sharing of the gospel?

Digging Deeper

How will you align your life and speech so that you may clearly communicate "the mystery of Christ"?

Conclusion

A. Everyone's Missionary Call

Paul reached out to several congregations, requesting that they partner with him by praying for him. His exhortations to the Ephesian, Philippian, and Colossian churches remind us of two things. First, Paul held a divine perspective on the paradoxical nature of the kingdom of God. Persecution and suffering, although not preferable, do not limit the gospel's success. In fact, God often uses these things to spread the gospel message. Do you pray to see the world with God's eyes?

Second, God does not call all Christians to leave their homes and travel the world as missionaries. Nonetheless, God does call all Christians to commit their lives to the advancement of the gospel. This forward movement will look different for everyone, but every believer has an essential missionary role. Are you actively praying for those on the front lines of ministry? Do you recognize that the strength and success of all ministers comes from the Lord?

B. Prayer

Father God, Your Son reigns supreme over every authority. Strengthen Your servants, especially those who are suffering, to boldly preach the mystery of the gospel. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Pray for a missionary today.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before class, recruit a class member (or some other member of your congregation) to offer a five minute testimony beginning with these three words: "Because someone prayed . . .". Ask them to focus on the beauty of intercessory prayer and the impact of others' prayers on their faith journey.

Alternative. Write "Because someone prayed . . ." on the board. Distribute pens and index cards. Then ask class members to complete the sentence in one minute or less. Encourage volunteers to share their testimonies with the whole class.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today we will look at one of the most famous and effective ministry leaders of all time. Even *he* needed others to pray for him!"

Into the Word

To set the stage for today's Bible study, use the commentary, Lesson Context, and other resources to prepare a five minute lecture that answers the question, "What do we mean by the title *Prison Epistles*?" (Alternatively, recruit a volunteer to prepare and present this material.)

Then inform class members that they will work in groups to discover the historical background for today's texts. Divide the class into three groups: the **Ephesians Group**, the **Philippians Group**, and the **Colossians Group**. Ask a volunteer to read Acts 21:27–36 out loud. Instruct all groups to discuss these three questions: 1–How do you think Paul felt when he was arrested? 2–What do you think Paul expected to happen to his ministry after his arrest? 3–Do you think Paul was tempted to give up on his work?

After a few minutes, call the class back together and ask one person from each group to summarize their answer to one of the questions.

Send members back to their groups to examine today's texts. Pass out a handout (you create) of the questions below. Ask a volunteer from the **Ephesians Group** to read Ephesians 6:19–20 out loud. Ask a volunteer from the **Philippians Group** to read Philippians 1:12–14 out loud. Ask a volunteer from the **Colossians Group** to read Colossians 4:2–4 out loud. Then instruct each group to answer the following questions, using all of today's texts but focusing on their assigned letter (suggested answers are indicated inside parentheses): 1–What do these three passages have in common? (Paul's opportunity to share the gospel while imprisoned) 2–What are Paul's specific prayer requests? (Ephesians: the right words, boldness; Colossians: open doors, the ability to communicate clearly) 3–What is the result of Paul's prison witness? (The gospel advances among non-Christians; boldness to witness increases among Christians)

Option. Distribute copies of the "An Apostle in Prison" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite students to complete the activity as indicated with their group.

Lead a whole-class discussion of each group's findings. Then ask: 1–Are Paul's prayer requests what you expected? 2–What kinds of intercessory prayers do missionaries and ministers need today?

Into Life

Before class, prepare a report on the various missions your church supports. For each mission, convey the following information: 1–the nature of the mission, 2–the obstacles they face, and 3–specific prayer requests. Ask participants to choose one ministry to pray for every day in the coming week. Distribute index cards and ask students to write the name of the ministry or ministry leader(s) they chose across the top. Then encourage them to brainstorm a specific prayer topic for each day.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Letter to a Missionary" exercise from the activity page. Instruct students to complete it as indicated in the same groups as before.

Close by praying for missionaries and ministers.

Be Qualified in Christ

Devotional Reading: Psalm 118:1–9
Background Scripture: Colossians 2:6–15

Colossians 2:16–23

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

20 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not;

22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.



Key Text

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world.
—Colossians 2:20a

Image © Getty Images

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 2: Staying the Course

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the habits, practices, and beliefs that Paul describes as a "shadow" of things to come in Christ.
2. Explain the metaphors of "head" and "body" and how they relate to the growth and unity of the church.
3. Identify one superficial standard they will reject to better align with Christ's teaching.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Rooted in Christ
- B. Lesson Context

I. Resist Disqualification (Colossians 2:16–19)
- A. Do Not Be Judged (vv. 16–17)
  Relationships, not Reminders
- B. Do Not Be Troubled (v. 18)
- C. Do Not Be Disconnected (v. 19)
  Staying Focused

II. Refuse Worldly Rules (Colossians 2:20–23)
- A. Do Not Submit (vv. 20–22)
- B. Do Not Be Deceived (v. 23)

Conclusion
- A. Seeking True Wisdom
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Rooted in Christ

I can still remember the season when my faith became my own. I was curious and eager to grow as a follower of Jesus. I sought guidance in studying Scripture and looked for active ways to apply what I was learning. Along the way, I encountered a wide range of Christian practices—different ways of praying, studying, and worshiping. It felt as though the richness of the Christian life was unfolding before me.

Over time, my relationship with those practices began to change. Not because I lost a passion for obeying Christ, but because I began asking questions about what strengthened my faith in Him. I realized that practices only matter if they genuinely draw me closer to Jesus and nurture our relationship. Human traditions can be valuable, but only if they lead us toward faithful obedience and a deeper love for Christ.

For centuries, Christians have wrestled with this concern. The apostle Paul addresses this issue with a particular community. He invites them to examine whether their practices are rooted in Christ, who alone gives life and growth.

B. Lesson Context

The apostle Paul wrote the epistle to the Colossians in the first half of the AD 60s. The recipients of the epistle were a community of believers in Colossae (see Colossians 1:1–2), a city in the region of Phrygia, which is located in modern-day Turkey. The town was under Roman control and contained a large Jewish and Greek population.

When Paul composed this letter, he had not yet visited the area (see Colossians 1:4–7; 2:1). He likely wrote it while under arrest in Rome (see 4:3; compare Acts 28:16, 30). Throughout the letter, Paul expresses delight in hearing positive reports about the Colossian believers from Epaphras (Colossians 1:7–8; 4:12–13). Paul intended for the letter to encourage the Colossians (2:2–3) and address false teachings that had infiltrated the church (see 2:4–5).

The exact nature of the false teaching in Colossae is debated among contemporary

commentators. The Colossians understood precisely what Paul meant, so he did not have to explain himself. However, modern readers do not share that same context, so we must infer the situation based on clues in the text and our knowledge of the Greco-Roman world.

These clues suggest a mix of Jewish and pagan beliefs along with Greco-Roman philosophy. Within the Roman Empire of the first century, members of different religions and philosophies often exchanged ideas and insights. This blending of beliefs, known as syncretism, likely influenced the Colossians.

Paul refers to lifestyle markers that separated Jews and Gentiles, such as circumcision (Colossians 2:11–15 [Lesson 10]), diet, and the observance of holy days. Leaders in the first-century church often debated the appropriate role of these markers in the lives of Gentile followers of Christ (Acts 15:1–35; Galatians 2:14–4:8).

These false teachings also included teachings regarding behaviors and practices. Many Greek and Roman thinkers advocated for ascetic practices, which influenced some Jewish groups as well. Paul labeled these beliefs as "philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men" (Colossians 2:8). They concerned Paul because they placed additional requirements on believers beyond what God accomplished through Jesus.

Paul reminds the Colossians of Christ's preeminence. Christ has made believers complete (Colossians 2:9–10 [Lesson 9]) and raised them to a new life (2:12–14 [Lesson 10]). Further, Christ has defanged the "principalities and powers" that have reigned over human lives (2:15). These other philosophies, beliefs, and practices had taken the Colossians spiritually captive. If they continued to follow the false teachings, they would essentially deny the power of Christ's work.

I. Resist Disqualification

(Colossians 2:16–19)

A. Do Not Be Judged (vv. 16–17)

16. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.



Visual for Lesson 6. *Display this visual and ask, "What practices or habits help you grow healthfully, as God desires for you to grow?"*

The Law of Moses forbids the people of Israel from eating particular animals (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14:2–20). First-century church leaders debated whether Gentile believers needed to obey these commands (Acts 15:1–2, 5–19). The apostles determined that converts must follow only two dietary rules. First, the meat that pagans offered to idols was off-limits if it meant attending and participating in feasts to false gods (see 1 Corinthians 10:14–22). Second, the apostles warned against eating meat of strangled animals or containing blood (compare Genesis 9:4). On whether it was permissible to eat idol-meat outside of religious settings, Paul invites converts to discern and to follow God's promptings (1 Corinthians 8).

Alcoholic *drink* is common in the first century (example: John 2:3–10). The Law of Moses does not prohibit alcohol in general but only for certain people in specific situations (examples: Leviticus 10:8–11; Numbers 6:1–4). Paul here rejects false teachings that require believers to limit their consumption. Merely ingesting certain foods or drinks does not affect one's relationship with God (see Mark 7:14–19).

Religious celebrations and holy days hold importance in Judaism (examples: Leviticus 23; 1 Chronicles 23:28-31; Ezekiel 45:17). The New Testament uses the underlying Greek word translated as *holyday* when mentioning Jewish feasts (examples: Luke 2:41–42; John 6:4; 7:2). The Jewish

religious calendar is partly based on the lunar cycle. Therefore, a *new moon* marks the beginning of a new month and the timing of certain celebrations (see Numbers 10:10; 28:11–15). Additionally, the Law of Moses requires observance of the *sabbath days* for rest (see Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 23:3).

The churches in Rome and Galatia face similar conflicts over regulations and observances (see Romans 14:1–10; Galatians 4:8–11). Paul rejects such regulations because they will cause division (Romans 14:13–18; Galatians 4:17). Believers should serve others with love, rather than chase the appearance of holiness that disregards love. Out of this care and love for others, believers may limit their freedom to avoid causing other believers to sin (see Romans 14:19–21; Galatians 5:13–15; compare 1 Corinthians 9:1–23).

What Do You Think?

When might believers willingly limit their personal freedoms in order to promote love and unity within the body of Christ?

Digging Deeper

How would you respond to the claim that personal freedoms should take priority over unity and love among believers?

17. Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

By calling these practices *a shadow*, Paul may be drawing on the language of Greek philosophy of his day. Plato, a Greek philosopher who lived approximately three hundred years before Paul, is one possible reference. In his philosophical work, *Republic*, Plato describes the physical world as a shadow of the ideal reality. He suggests that the physical realm is a temporary copy of the ideal realm, and points to the original. Paul uses this metaphor to make a point. The Law of Moses and its commands are temporary. They are a mere "shadow of good things" that point to Christ, the ultimate reality (Hebrews 10:1; compare 8:5; Galatians 3:19, 23–25).

The phrase *things to come* is one way Paul describes the coming of Christ Jesus (compare Galatians 3:19; 4:4–5). Christ is the goal and purpose of the law (see Romans 10:4). He is the *body* of which the law is the *shadow*. Salvation comes through faith in Christ's merciful and generous gift (Himself), not by keeping the law (Galatians 2:15–16; Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5).

Relationships, not Reminders

A bright card sits on my cabinet, reflecting the enthusiastic work of a four-year-old. At the center of the card is a photo of my young grandson. Beneath it are the words, "Love you, Granny!" Although he is older now, I still cherish the card. I see it every day, and it never fails to make me smile.

The card serves as a precious reminder of our love for one another, but it is just that: a reminder. It cannot replace the actual presence of my grandson. How foolish would it be for me to admire the card while ignoring him during his visits? The card points to something real; it is a tangible reminder. But it is not my grandson himself.

In the church in Colossae, some people began to replace devotion to Jesus with adherence to various rituals, rules, and observances. While these things have some value, Paul explains that they are merely a "shadow." That which is "real" is found in the resurrected Christ. Salvation and life are found not in human practices but in the grace of God.

What things—even good things—might prevent you from noticing the presence of Christ? Are you content to cherish these reminders, or will you turn your attention toward the presence of the resurrected Christ? —VM

B. Do Not Be Troubled (v. 18)

18a. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels.

To *beguile* here means to deceive or lead someone astray. This is the only time the underlying Greek word appears in the New Testament. The Colossians are in danger of being deceived by false teaching. The deception will cost them the *reward* of a life submitted to God's rule.

How to Say It

Epaphras	*Ep*-uh-frass
Phrygia	*Frij*-e-uh
Plato	*Pley*-toh

Paul commands the Colossians to live with humility (Colossians 3:12). However, the pagan teachers in Colossae have developed a false sense of *humility*. The nature of their displays of false humility is unknown. One possibility is that Paul is referring to *voluntary* practices of self-denial, such as fasting (see Lesson Context). Jesus warns His followers regarding public spectacles of fasting (Matthew 6:16). These displays reveal an insincere or misdirected sense of humility. Rather than showing humility, the false teachers in Colossae have become hypocritical and prideful through their actions (compare Colossians 2:18, below).

The exact meaning of the phrase *worshipping of angels* is unknown. No first-century Jewish groups are known to have practiced such worship. Worshiping a created being is a misdirected form of worship (see Revelation 22:8–9; see also Luke 4:7–8; Romans 1:25). However, Paul's words do not necessarily imply that these individuals view angels as equal to God. Some Jewish thinkers believe that God charged angels with ruling over the world. By attributing such authority to angels, the false teachers are giving them the role and devotion owed to God alone. Throughout this letter, Paul highlights the superiority of Christ over the created order (examples: Colossians 1:16–17; 2:9–10).

18b. Intruding into those things which he hath not seen.

Extreme practices of self-denial can sometimes result in dramatic (and unhealthy) physical responses, such as hallucinations. Some false teachers in Colossae may be experiencing such hallucinations, perhaps brought on by excessive self-denial. Whatever their cause, the false teachers claim to have special knowledge.

Scripture describes instances in which God reveals Himself to people through visions (examples: Genesis 46:2–4; Acts 9:10–16). However, not all such occurrences come from God (examples: Ezekiel 13:6–7; Zechariah 10:2). The false teachers in Colossae lead people astray by claiming a misguided humility that portrays their experiences as evidence of their supposedly heightened spirituality.

18c. Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

Paul uses the adjective form of *flesh* to describe rebellious human behavior. This represents human desires that are hostile to God (compare Romans 13:13–14; Galatians 5:16–17, 19–21). The flesh and its *mind* are antagonistic to God and God's will. The false teachers in Colossae have reached a point of misdirected spiritual "wisdom." Instead of listening to God as the source of wisdom, they seek worldly wisdom that feeds their fleshly desires. As a result, their so-called knowledge has puffed them up with pride (compare 1 Corinthians 8:1).

C. Do Not Be Disconnected (v. 19)

19. And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

The comparison of the church to *the body* frequently appears in Paul's writings (examples: Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 4:14–16). He has declared Christ as *the Head* of the church (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:15–18). If a body is cut off from the head, the body will die.

The Colossian church is on the verge of perishing if it does not maintain a connection with Christ. A believer's connection to Christ is the only way to ensure their health (compare John 15:1–11). Colossae's false teachers risk obstructing their students' connection to Christ by replacing Christ with selfish spirituality. Spiritual death is inevitable if the church is not rooted in Christ.

As the head directs the activities of the human body, so does Christ direct the activities of the church. Each member of the church has a particular role, just as *joints and bands* have in the human body. The church will *increase* in strength as its members abide in Christ (example: Acts 2:42–47). The church grows because *God* empowers it to do so (see 1 Corinthians 3:6).

What Do You Think?

In your experience, what influences and circumstances most often pull believers away from life with Christ?

Digging Deeper

How will you resist the things that weaken your connection to Christ?

Staying Focused

Workout videos, weights, beginner running programs, and fancy home-gym equipment. I've tried them all, only to set them aside when I did not achieve the desired results. After discarding one program, my wife reminded me why I failed to reach my goals: I had ignored the program's dietary plan. Just working out would not lead to success; my eating habits also had to change.

The same thing can happen in our faith when we focus on external practices and neglect to maintain a connection to Christ. When we disregard Him, we fail to receive the life that He promises for His followers. The most important part of our "spiritual fitness" is our relationship with Jesus. Does your life bear fruit (see John 15:4) that demonstrates this connection? —JM

II. Refuse Worldly Rules

(Colossians 2:20–23)

A. Do Not Submit (vv. 20–22)

20. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances.

The phrase *rudiments of the world* likely refers to the visible and invisible forces that hold power in the world (see Colossians 2:8). These forces are the "principalities and powers" that lead people to follow false and purely human teachings (2:15).

Paul's focus with this phrase is on life before one confesses Christ as Lord. Now, we have been raised into a new life *with Christ* through His death and resurrection (see Colossians 2:11–13 [Lesson 10]). As a result of this new life, we will reorient our hearts toward heavenly things (see 3:1–3) and live as the holy people of God (3:12–17).

What Do You Think?

In what ways do you orient your life away from the ways of the world due to your having "died with Christ"?

Digging Deeper

How do you rely on the Spirit's guidance rather than self-effort as you seek to live out your identity in Christ?

21. (Touch not; taste not; handle not.)

Paul summarizes the commands of the false teachers. To *taste not* likely refers to their judgment regarding the consumption of food and drink (see Colossians 2:16, above). The meaning behind their commands to *touch not* and *handle not* is unclear. The Law of Moses prohibits people from handling certain items (example: Leviticus 5:2–3). However, the false teachers in Colossae might be expanding those prohibitions beyond the scope of the law.

22. (Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

Human *commandments and doctrines* are not always worthless. Some can lead to growth and spiritual maturity. However, adherence to these practices does not reliably indicate the status of a person's heart toward God (see Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:1–9). The things these rules are meant to regulate (food, drink, etc.) are temporary (compare 1 Corinthians 6:13).

What Do You Think?

Is it ever appropriate to observe a tradition for the sake of maintaining peace or continuing a relationship?

Digging Deeper

How do the actions of Paul in Acts 16:1–4 and 21:17–26 inform your response to the previous question?

B. Do Not Be Deceived (v. 23)

23a. Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body.

The strict teachings of the false leaders have the ring of real wisdom. However, they never lead to the wisdom of God or spiritual maturity. Instead, they lead to worldly *wisdom* and foolishness (see Romans 1:21–23; 1 Corinthians 3:19–20).

Paul unpacks three aspects of their commands and teachings. First, they add strict, human-made requirements for *worship*. They replace the will of the Creator with their own. Second, their teachings display false *humility* (Colossians 2:18a, above). Their practices of self-denial and devotion to angels look like humility, but it is not genuine.

Third, their practices involve neglecting the body (see Colossians 2:16, 21, above). Practices of self-denial are not inherently harmful. Scripture commands believers to "glorify God" with their bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20). Therefore, denying certain physical pleasures can help shape a believer's faith and trust in God. These practices, however, are not required to have a right relationship with God. The false teachers in Colossae are more concerned with demonstrating self-denial than spiritual maturation.

True wisdom comes from the knowledge of God's will, not through misdirected worship and rituals (see Colossians 1:9). God gifts His wisdom to His people (Ecclesiastes 2:26; James 1:5) and wants His people to share this wisdom with others (see Colossians 3:16).

Paul is not attacking all spiritual practices. Paul himself observed certain customs, such as fasting (Acts 9:9; 14:23; etc.), upholding special days (20:16; etc.), and the Lord's Supper (see 1 Corinthians 10:16–17; 11:23–26). Rituals such as these are external expressions of an internal orientation of the heart. The false teachers in Colossae are misguided in their teaching because their practices reveal selfishness and false humility.

What Do You Think?

How do you evaluate the spiritual value of religious practices, disciplines, or celebrations?

Digging Deeper

How do you ensure that these things lead you closer to Christ rather than becoming ends in and of themselves?

23b. Not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

The attempts of the false teachers to control the flesh through misdirected worship and self-denying practices had failed (see Colossians 3:5–8). Only people who demonstrate faith in Christ and receive God's Spirit can confront the flesh—these people have new life in Christ (see 3:9–10). Even if self-denying practices and expressions of worship were of some value, such things could not entirely prevent sinful desires.

Conclusion

A. Seeking True Wisdom

False teachers in Colossae had made the Christian life more complicated than what was required by God. They had added obligations beyond those of Scripture to the Colossian believers. We do not know why these teachers presented the Colossians with these things. The false teachers had forgotten or altogether disregarded the importance of a connection to Christ, the Head of the church. Instead of seeking life in Christ, they vainly sought wisdom through human regulations.

Our world is much the same, offering a dizzying array of human regulations that each promise wisdom and a vibrant life. It can be tempting to believe that we don't add anything extra to our faith. Yet, the reality is that we often do. Sometimes we set explicit or implicit rules for ourselves and, by extension, for other believers. Our observance of these rules or guidelines does not mean that our hearts are automatically more or less holy. But issues arise if we raise these rules to the same level as God's Word. We may be spiritually harmed.

We should carefully examine our behavior regarding such regulations. Above all, we must ensure that we prioritize our relationship with Jesus. What, after all, can be added to the gospel of salvation through Christ? Only when we accept that Christ's work has accomplished what is needed for reconciliation can we be filled with His wisdom. Ask for the Spirit's guidance to discern whether you are following the world's wisdom or God's wisdom. At the Spirit's leading, we will be free to engage in practices that lead to the glory of God and the edification of other believers.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we want wisdom that only You can give. Please guide us through Your Spirit to maintain our connection to Christ. Help us prioritize His transforming power in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Life comes from Christ, who is the Head.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Distribute a sheet of paper and a pen to each participant. Invite them to spend one minute listing religious or secular practices and traditions they once followed with sincerity. These might include adherence to a particular spiritual discipline, a strict religious rule set, a popular self-improvement philosophy, or even a trendy diet or wellness plan.

After one minute, ask learners to review their lists, considering how much time, emotional energy, and discipline they invested in maintaining or adhering to those practices or traditions.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–In what ways did these practices or traditions improve your life? 2–In what ways did they become burdensome? 3–What promises did they make that initially made them seem appealing?

Transition into Bible study by saying, "Today's lesson examines Paul's message to the Colossians, where he addresses wrong assumptions that added to the gospel message."

Into the Word

Before class, ask a volunteer to prepare a brief (approximately five-minute) presentation on the historical and theological context of Colossians. Encourage the volunteer to consult trusted online resources, Bible commentaries, and even the Lesson Context section of the commentary. The goal is to help the class understand the diverse influences that threatened to distort the gospel in Colossae.

Then invite a volunteer to read Colossians 2:16–19 aloud. Divide participants into small groups and ask them to answer the following questions: 1–Based on the Scripture reading and Lesson Context, what possible rituals or traditions might Paul be addressing? 2–Why does Paul describe these things as a "shadow"? 3–What does Paul mean by the metaphor of Christ as the "Head" and believers as the "body"? 4–In what ways do Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; and Ephesians 1:22–23 help us understand Paul's use of these metaphors and his vision for the church? After calling time, reconvene the class and invite volunteers to share their responses with the whole class.

Invite a second volunteer to read Colossians 2:20–23 aloud. Ask participants to return to their small groups to discuss the following questions: 1–What does it mean for believers to be "dead with Christ" regarding the spiritual forces of the world? 2–How does freedom in Christ enable believers to resist worldly systems of control or measures of righteousness? 3–What practices or expectations might appear spiritually wise or mature but subtly shift our focus away from Christ and His sufficiency? After calling time, reconvene the class and invite volunteers to share their responses with everyone.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Colossians Crossword" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work with a partner to complete it as indicated.

Into Life

Write the following statement on the board:

I will set down _____ and embrace my freedom in Christ.

Invite participants to spend one minute in silent reflection, prayerfully considering how they would fill in the blank to complete the statement. Encourage them to think specifically and carefully. After calling time, ask participants to share their response with a partner. Emphasize confidentiality and grace in listening.

Alternative. Provide a handout (you create) with the same prompt and invite learners to complete it as a take-home reflection.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Freedom in Christ" exercise from the activity page. Have participants work with a partner to complete it as indicated.

Remain Unified

Devotional Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16–21
Background Scripture: Colossians 3:1–8

Colossians 3:9–17

9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

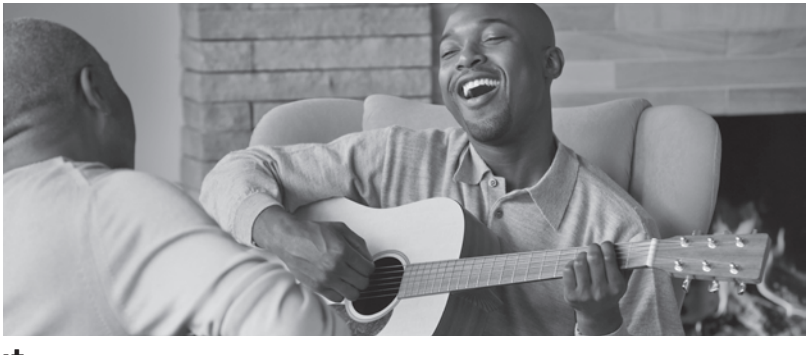
13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.



Key Text

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering. **—Colossians 3:12**

Image © Getty Images

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 2: Staying the Course
Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. List attitudes and behaviors Paul associates with godly living.
2. Explain the meaning and significance of taking off the old self and putting on the new self in the Christian life.
3. Use the lyrics of a favorite psalm, hymn, or spiritual song to compose an encouraging note to another believer.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Spiritual Walks, Sprints, and Marathons
- B. Lesson Context

I. Christ in All (Colossians 3:9–11)
- A. New Self (vv. 9–10)
- B. New Identity (v. 11)
  To See as God Sees

II. Love over All (Colossians 3:12–14)
- A. Chosen People (vv. 12–13)
  Dressed for Success
- B. United People (v. 14)

III. Peace Rules All (Colossians 3:15–17)
- A. In One Body (v. 15)
- B. With Hearts of Worship (vv. 16–17)

Conclusion
- A. Living as a New Creation
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Spiritual Walks, Sprints, and Marathons

I was born into a Christian household; I cannot remember a time when I was not a Christian. Therefore, I did not have a profound conversion experience that resulted in my entire life being turned upside down. Instead, maturation and laboring after the example of Christ has been a series of slow, small steps over the years, consistently moving closer, one tiny shift at a time.

I know several other people with the opposite story, however. They had dramatic conversions to Christianity and their lives changed in an instant as the Holy Spirit worked. These people experienced their attitudes, desires, and goals drastically shift overnight. They became observably new and different.

Everyone has a personal testimony, and neither of these two narratives is necessarily normative. However, they each bear witness to the fact that Christians become new creations in Christ. The process is never finished; there is always work to be done as we grow closer to Jesus.

B. Lesson Context

The contents of the book of Colossians can be divided into two main sections. The first consists of chapters 1 and 2, which focus on the foundational aspects of the Christian faith and form its doctrine. The second section consists of chapters 3 and 4, which concentrate on applying that doctrine to everyday life. Today's lesson bridges the two sections. It serves as a transition between the broader doctrinal discussions of the earlier part of the letter and the practical applications found in the latter part.

I. Christ in All
(Colossians 3:9–11)

A. New Self (vv. 9–10)

9. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

To *put off* and "put on" certain things is a favorite metaphor of Paul's, as he uses one or both phrases in about a dozen instances across his

letters (Romans 13:12; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:22–23 [Lesson 3]; etc.). The *old man* represents the person we were before becoming Christians. Although Paul uses masculine language in this verse, he intends for it to apply to all people.

Believers have taken off the old self in the sense that we have spiritually and symbolically died with Jesus on the cross (Romans 6:1–7; compare Colossians 2:12). In that previous, unsaved state, we lived in the manner of the world. But now we *lie not one to another* because such behavior is sinfully inconsistent with God's desires (compare Ephesians 4:25 [Lesson 3]). That is just one of the *deeds* of the old self, representative of the life of sin.

It is important to note the past tense of the verb phrase *have put off.* This construction indicates that Paul is not writing in an evangelistic manner, encouraging people to become Christians. Instead, he writes to those who are already followers of Christ. However, the temptation to return to that former way of life remains, and not everyone successfully resists it.

What Do You Think?

What practices help cultivate honesty and vulnerability among believers?

Digging Deeper

How can we ensure that truthful speech flows from love for God and one another rather than from pride or self-interest (Ephesians 4:15–16 [Lesson 2])?

10. And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

Putting off the old self is necessary, but it is not sufficient on its own. One must also *put on the new* self. To understand this more fully, we recall that the Christian's life involves two things, broadly speaking. These two are known as *justification* and *sanctification.*

To be "justified" is to be declared righteous as God imputes righteousness to us. It is not a process; it happens instantaneously (Romans 3:21–31). "Sanctification" refers to being "set apart" in holiness (compare 1 Corinthians 6:11). It is a lifelong process of continuing transformation (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22–24; 2 Peter 3:18). While we can never accomplish perfect sanctification in this life, it is the standard toward which we aim (Matthew 5:48). Living as a Christian means more than just avoiding sin. It means being consecrated by acquiring a new perspective and committing to a different way of life. This is the nature of the new self, a life modeled after Christ.

This verse's point builds on the idea that God created humankind in His image (see Genesis 1:26–27). Paul's language echoes an earlier section of this letter, in which he describes Christ as *the image of* the invisible God (Colossians 1:15 [Lesson 9]).

When we sin, we distort God's image, living in contempt of Him. But Christ lived a perfect life of obedience to God, displaying God's righteousness and mercy. Thus, the life that Christ lived serves as the example of the new life that we are to lead. We strive to imitate Christ as we follow Him in obedience, putting on the new self and renewing our habits and behaviors to model His (compare Ephesians 4:23–24 [Lesson 3]).

What Do You Think?

What daily practices help you put off the old self and consistently put on the new?

Digging Deeper

How do you strike a balance between your own efforts and God's necessary work in your rebirth?

B. New Identity (v. 11)

11. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

The universal application of the image of Christ finds expression in Paul's description of Him as being *all, and in all*, transcending human divisions.

Paul emphasizes the destruction of the barrier between *Greek* (Gentile) and *Jew*. Physical *circumcision* was the practice that identified a person as a part of God's people under the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10–14; compare Acts 7:8).



Visual for Lesson 7. *Display this visual as you ask volunteers to share how they practice "putting on" the listed virtues.*

However, under the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus, physical circumcision no longer symbolizes belonging to God's people. Instead, spiritual circumcision is the defining characteristic (Romans 2:29; 1 Corinthians 7:19; compare Jeremiah 4:4).

The term *barbarian* is a historical label used in the first century to refer to non-Greek speakers who were considered uncultured and uncivilized. The *Scythian* culture, which inhabited territory along the Black Sea, was nomadic and aggressive. Paul is not putting these groups down. Instead, he is telling the Colossians—who think of themselves as educated, cultured Greeks—that donning the image of Christ is possible even for those whom society has regarded as the least cultured.

Paul also notes how the gospel creates equality between those who are *bond* (enslaved) and those who are *free.* This fact does not remove the social and physical barriers that existed in the first century between enslaved and free people. But as far as being a spiritual barrier between the two socioeconomic classes, it is dissolved.

As a result of putting off the old self and becoming a new person in *Christ*, Christians experience a new framework. In God's kingdom, value is not determined by cultural belonging, ethnic identity, or social class, but rather by faith in Jesus. The divisions that have historically separated humanity are (or should be) irrelevant in the church. It is important to note that Paul does not suggest these backgrounds are unimportant. Paul himself continued practicing Jewish customs (examples: Acts 16:3; 18:21; 21:23–26; 24:17–18; compare 1 Corinthians 9:20). While the revelation of Jesus radically transformed Paul's life and understanding of God, other aspects of his spiritual life were reoriented rather than abolished.

What Do You Think?

What cultural, social, or personal divisions most threaten unity within the body of Christ today?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to overcome division to pursue unity reflective of the status that Christ is in all?

To See as God Sees

Libraries organize materials, such as books and recordings, to enable quick location and access. A significant part of library work involves arranging resources using specific categorical systems. Examples of these systems include the Dewey Decimal Classification or the Library of Congress Classification. Without these systems, finding a particular resource could take hours.

The need to categorize and organize reflects how we tend to function in other aspects of life as well; we often rely on distinct categories to keep things clearly sorted in our minds.

However, when it comes to our identity in Christ, God ultimately views us as unified and whole. We become one with Christ; He is in us, and we find our identity in Him. So, while it may be tempting to categorize other Christians, the Lord compels us to see them through the lens of their primary identity in Him. Can you consider others without labels? —KS

II. Love over All

(Colossians 3:12–14)

A. Chosen People (vv. 12–13)

12. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.

Christians are new creations, people whose

value is not defined by background or status. As such, we are not to live as the world lives. Instead, we conduct ourselves in light of the attributes that God desires to see in us. Even so, this "virtue list" isn't exhaustive (compare Galatians 5:22–23; 2 Peter 1:5–7). But the five listed here are a good start.

The phrase *put on* can also be understood as "clothe yourselves with" in the sense of putting on a garment. The metaphor of putting on a garment is not uncommon in ancient Jewish and Christian literature (Psalm 132:16, 18; Isaiah 50:3; etc.) and typically refers to a person or object donning specific characteristics, as it does here.

The word *bowels* is perhaps unexpected here. The underlying Greek is also translated "affection" in 2 Corinthians 7:15, and that is the sense here. *Kindness* indicates a positive, generous, gracious response to others' needs. *Humbleness of mind* and *meekness* both emphasize adopting a posture of lowliness, seeking to serve others instead of asserting one's own rights or privileges. *Longsuffering* indicates the willingness to wait as long as it takes for others to make the correct response, just as God waited for us to respond to Him (Ephesians 4:32 [Lesson 3]).

Dressed for Success

Have you ever seen people wearing pajama bottoms in public? The lack of propriety can be quite surprising. At work, my typical attire is considered "business casual." Even on days when my boss allows a more relaxed dress code, I avoid wearing overly casual clothes. I hold to my conviction even on days when I work from home. I find that dressing sloppily negatively affects my mindset while I work. Therefore, I prefer to dress in a way that boosts my confidence in fulfilling my duties and helps me maintain a focused attitude.

The character traits and virtues I "put on" also affect me. They reflect what I value. If I choose to "put on" filthy language, slander, angry words, and an ugly attitude, I foster discord in my relationships. Worse than that, I dishonor my Creator. But when I choose to "put on" such traits as love, compassion, and humility, I cultivate peace, unity, and harmony with others.

Which of the character traits or virtues in this verse do you find most challenging to put on? Why?
—KS

13. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

Paul's comments reflect Jesus' teachings on forgiveness (Matthew 6:14–15; 18:21–35; compare Ephesians 4:32 [Lesson 3]). Paul likely has in mind minor disputes among believers. It is all too common for people—including Christians—to hold grudges over little more than perceived slights. These verses emphasize the importance of setting aside small grievances to purposefully choose forgiveness (compare 1 Corinthians 6:1–11). Additionally, Luke 17:3–4 connects forgiveness with repentance.

It is important to note that the act of forgiveness does not necessarily mean that wrongdoing is resolved. Complexities arise in cases of sin within the church that call for a break in fellowship. Possible instances fall into three categories: doctrinal defection, moral defection, and divisiveness (see Romans 16:17–18; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14–15; 1 Timothy 6:3–4; Titus 1:10–16). Jesus established the procedure for dealing with serious sin in Matthew 18:15–17. While forgiveness is an essential aspect of the Christian life, it does not include covering up serious sins like crimes or abuse.

B. United People (v. 14)

14. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

The word translated as *charity* is the same word that is translated as "love" in Colossians 1:4, 8;

How to Say It

Aquinas	Uh-*kwahy*-nus
Colossae	Ko-*lahss*-ee
Colossians	Kuh-*losh*-unz
Ephesians	Ee-*fee*-shunz
Scythian	*Sith*-ee-un
Thessalonians	*Thess*-uh-***lo***-nee-unz (*th* as in *thin*)

2:2. This indicates that, in this verse, Paul is not focusing on the concept of charity as giving money to others, though he does encourage this elsewhere (Ephesians 4:28 [Lesson 3]; etc.).

Much can be said about *love*. It is the fundamental element that enables Christians to undertake a life of obedience to Christ. The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) defined love as "willing the good of the other." This definition helps clarify the attitude one must adopt to forgive, be humble, show kindness, and be patient toward others. By shifting the focus away from oneself and desiring good for others, we exhibit the attitudes that Paul encourages throughout this passage.

Love binds the body of Christ together in *the bond of perfectness* (compare 1 Corinthians 13). It is foundational to holy living in the kingdom of God. Moreover, love is the ultimate goal, the place where our attitudes, convictions, character, and lifestyle choices converge. From the beginning to the end, love maintains the processes of unity and maturity. Let us love one another as Christ first loved us (John 13:34; 15:12).

III. Peace Rules All

(Colossians 3:15–17)

A. In One Body (v. 15)

15a. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts.

This verse complements Jesus' promise of peace in John 14:27. Christ's *peace* is to dwell in the *hearts* of believers. The heart is the seat of human emotion and thought. Peace is to guide our conduct and actions there—that is, peace should *rule* and reign over our actionable center. Peace will strengthen us as we grow and develop in Christian maturity.

What Do You Think?

What attitudes, behaviors, or priorities most often prevent God's peace from ruling in your heart?

Digging Deeper

How can practices of love and thanksgiving soften hearts to allow God's peace to reign?

15b. To the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

In Colossians 1:18 (Lesson 9), Paul uses the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ. In this metaphor, Christ is the "head" of that body and directs the church just as the head directs the body's movements. The peace that the church demonstrates (see Colossians 3:15a, above) results in its unity: *one body* seeking peace and love. Spiritual maturity is evident in the church's commitment to one another, demonstrated through obedience and Christlikeness. A loving church will naturally be a peaceful church, and for this we should be *thankful*. Unity and peace are not engineered by anything we have done but by following the example of Christ and conforming to His image (Romans 8:29).

B. With Hearts of Worship (vv. 16–17)

16a. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.

We can interpret the phrase *word of Christ* in at least two ways. One way is to interpret it as referring to "the word *about* Christ;" the other way is to see it referring to "the word *from* Christ." It's difficult to separate the two since the gospel message comes from Christ and speaks about Him. This good news is to dwell among believers and inform our attitudes toward one another. Knowing that our salvation and our place in God's family are assured, we can properly orient ourselves toward God and one another.

During the four-hundred-year period between the Old and New Testaments, Jewish writers often described God's law as dwelling among God's people in the form of wisdom. Paul may be drawing on this language for his description of the word of Christ as divine *wisdom*: Just as the law once resided with the chosen people, now the word of Jesus—the gospel message—dwells with the people of God and defines their identity (compare James 3:17).

In contrast to this metaphor, Paul describes in Colossians 2:23 (Lesson 6) the misleading wisdom of worldly philosophy, which poses a challenge to the Colossian church. He emphasizes that the true substance of wisdom is found in Jesus; anything else is merely a shadow.

16b. Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

This verse is one of the few passages in the New Testament that mentions the use of song in spiritual practice (compare Ephesians 5:19; James 5:13; Revelation 14:3). It's tempting to try to differentiate *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* from one another, but there's little evidence that our conclusions will ever rise above guesswork. The repeated use of the phrase *in your hearts* encourages authentic, substantive praise and not mere lip service *to the Lord*.

17a. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's list of virtues, attitudes, and practices in this passage is not exhaustive. Conforming to the example of Christ is both the journey and the goal of the Christian life; it involves changing attitudes and behaviors, as Paul recommends in this epistle. But such conformity cannot be reduced to merely modifying one's behavior. Everything that Christians do and say must be informed by their relationship to God through Christ (compare 1 Corinthians 10:31).

Our actions should be informed by the disposition that Paul encourages: we should do and say everything *in the name of the Lord Jesus*. This means living and working in alignment with God's will. Since Paul did not personally establish the church at Colossae (see Colossians 2:1), he is not intimately familiar with the specific problems facing that church. Therefore, he does not offer directed correction (contrast Philippians 4:2).

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure that you "do all" in the name of the Lord?

Digging Deeper

How can you consciously offer ordinary tasks—such as work, errands, or household responsibilities—as acts of worship and gratitude to God?

17b. Giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

It's all too easy for one's prayer life to focus on asking for things to meet needs. When that happens, prayers of thankfulness get squeezed out. This should not be!

Conclusion

A. Living as a New Creation

The Christian life is one of becoming a new creation. In baptism, we are symbolically buried with Jesus and raised with Him (Colossians 2:12). The old self has been buried and remains dead, and the new self is born. This new identity is not meant to conform to the patterns of the world, characterized by strife and division, but rather to conform to the example set by Jesus. This applies on both personal and congregational levels. Each of us is to put our heart in order, intentionally living out the attributes and attitudes that God desires, while also seeking peace with others in the church. This is essential for the body of Christ to function as it should. Everyone has room to grow in this regard.

Paul's encouragement to the Colossians is still relevant to modern Christians. As new creations, we must strive to follow the example of Jesus in our spiritual lives and in our interactions with fellow members of the body of Christ. The Christian life is a journey. The attitudes listed in this epistle are practices that all Christians, regardless of era, need to adopt to conform to the image of Christ. The path may be difficult, but with the strength of the Holy Spirit, we can take a step closer to Christ every day by being merciful, kind, humble, and loving.

B. Prayer

Father, we offer thanksgiving for the salvation available through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Please help us as we strive to conform to His image. Lead us into mercifulness, kindness, and humility; show us how to love even as You so love the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

You are a new creation—
act like it!

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Bring three outfits to class: one that you might wear to an office, one that you'd wear at a formal gathering (wedding, etc.), and one that you'd wear to work out at the gym. (*Option*. For simplicity, search for images online and project them or print them out instead.) Display each outfit and invite participants to suggest situations or events where each set of clothes might be worn appropriately.

Transition into Bible study by saying, "The way someone dresses can tell a lot about them. Occasionally, we can infer a person's occupation, destination, or activity based on their attire. Similarly, the apostle Paul uses a metaphor linked to spiritual clothing. The way we clothe ourselves spiritually communicates a great deal about who we are and where we are going."

Into the Word

Invite a volunteer to read Colossians 3:9–14 aloud. Ask participants to identify the attitudes and behaviors Paul associates with living as new creations in Christ. Write responses on the board, grouping similar ideas together as appropriate.

Divide the class into two groups, the **Fruit Group** and the **Clothing Group**. Ask groups to discuss the following questions, particularly focusing on fruit or clothing according to their group name: 1–What does it mean to take off the "old self" and put on the "new self"? 2–How do these attitudes and behaviors shape our relationship with God? 3–How do they influence our relationships with other people? 4–Read Galatians 5:22–23. How do the "clothes" listed in Colossians 3:12–14 compare with the fruit of the Spirit? 5–What actions could our class take that would represent our commitment to putting away old, unhealthy behaviors? Allow ten minutes for small-group discussion, then reconvene the class and invite a representative from each group to share their responses.

Option. Plan a group project that symbolizes a "new start." Possibilities might include: planting a tree or flowers on the church grounds as a sign of growth and renewal, or inviting participants to clean out their closets and donate clothing to a local charity as a practical expression of "putting off" the old and "putting on" the new.

Invite another volunteer to read Colossians 3:15–17 aloud. Ask, "Are the commands of verses 15–17 referring to things to 'put on,' or are they the expected *results* of the 'putting on' in verses 12–14?" Allow time for whole-class discussion.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Personal Change" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask students to complete the exercise as indicated.

Into Life

Distribute note cards, envelopes, and pens to each participant. Invite them to think of a favorite psalm, hymn, or spiritual song that has encouraged them in their walk with Christ. Ask them to draw from the lyrics of that song to compose a brief note of encouragement to another believer. Suggest that they select one virtue listed in Colossians 3:12–15 and affirm how they have seen that virtue lived out in the life of the person to whom they are writing.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Personalizing Scripture" exercise from the activity page. Allow one minute for students to complete the activity as indicated. Then ask participants to find a partner. Ask partners to read their personalized prayers out loud to one another.

Conclude your class time by encouraging participants to look for concrete opportunities during the coming week to "put on" their spiritual clothing through words, actions, and attitudes. Invite them to pray that God would use their written notes to encourage others in the body of Christ. Pray to close.

Serve the Lord

Devotional Reading: Psalm 33:1–5
Background Scripture: Exodus 3:4–10; Ephesians 6:1–17; Philemon 8–14

Exodus 3:9–10

9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10 Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Ephesians 6:5–9

5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;

6 Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart;

7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men:

8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

9 And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Colossians 3:22–4:1

22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

1 Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

Philemon 15–17

15 For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;

16 Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

17 If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

Key Text

Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. **—Colossians 3:23**

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 2: Staying the Course

Lessons 5–8

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify Paul's specific instructions regarding service and work.
2. Explain the implications of Paul's request to Philemon.
3. Make a plan to serve wholeheartedly, as unto Christ, in a context where little human recognition or gratitude is expected.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Parental Response
- B. Lesson Context

I. Israel's History (Exodus 3:9–10)
- A. Oppressed Cry (v. 9)
- B. Promised Rescue (v. 10)

II. Paul's Teaching, Part 1 (Ephesians 6:5–9)
- A. Rewarded for Good (vv. 5–8)
  Call of Duty
- B. Treated the Same (v. 9)

III. Paul's Teaching, Part 2 (Colossians 3:22–4:1)
- A. Promised Inheritance (vv. 22–24)
- B. Fair Treatment (v. 25)
- C. Just Provision (v. 4:1)

IV. Paul's Request (Philemon 15–17)
- A. Beloved Brother (vv. 15–16)
  Reunited as Brothers
- B. Welcomed Partner (v. 17)

Conclusion
- A. Bonded Family
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Parental Response

My wife and I read several parenting texts as we prepared for the birth of our first child. In our research, we discovered diverging opinions on what to do when a child cries. In the end, we had the best of intentions and a solid plan. But the readings did not prepare us for the reality we faced—whenever she cried, our instinctive response overtook all our intentions. Inevitably, we would rush to her side to tend to her needs.

Today, parents have access to technological monitoring that allows them to see their children from a distance. Instead of rushing to the child's side with every cry, the instinctive parental response might be vigilant monitoring. In fact, these days, it is possible to notice and attend to the needs of a child even before there is enough discomfort to cause her to cry!

Today's lesson is rooted in God's parental response to the needs of His children. He sees, hears, and even breaks into history to attend to us.

B. Lesson Context

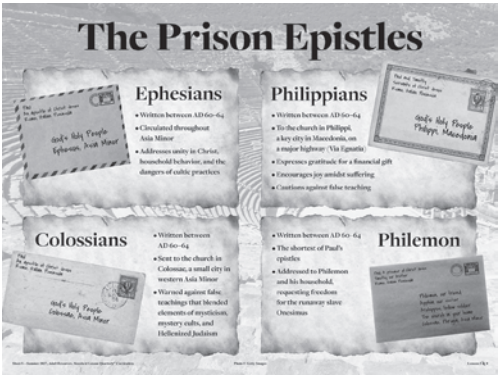
Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the theme of *service* is central to the relationship between God and His people. There is also a close connection between the concepts of *service* and *worship* (examples: Jeremiah 25:6; Matthew 4:10). Both ideas imply submission or compliance; God deserves our honor. As our sovereign Lord, we act as His servants and submit to His rule over our lives. We serve Him in all that we do, and our obedient actions convey worship.

As God's servants (and children!), God cares for us. He is particularly concerned with those who are unjustly treated and oppressed. God desires freedom for those in captivity, a release from the misery of forced servitude (Isaiah 61:1). God's kingdom value is liberty, which stands in stark contrast to the reality of life in a fallen world. In the economy of the kingdom, exploitative ways of treating one another will come to an end. In the meantime, believers are called to relate to one another in ways that value, welcome, and protect.

New Testament authors use the noun translated

into English as *servant* in two ways. First, it describes a person's role in society, such as that of a servant or an enslaved person. But it also shows up as a metaphor that portrays a person who is devoted to God, a disciple who honors God with every decision and action. In this way, the term depicts how the person views their relationship to Jesus. For example, the apostle Paul claims to be "a servant of Jesus Christ" in the opening line of his letter to the Romans (1:1). Today's texts refer to the first definition. Yet, the second is helpful to keep in mind as we consider the believer's role in the household of God.

Contemporary culture shies away from the title "servant." We deem it disrespectful and unprofessional and often link the term to past eras when influential people took advantage of others, degrading those in helping roles, denying fundamental human rights, and generally considering some people as "less than" others. The term *slave*, which is also sometimes used in the English translation of the underlying Greek term in today's texts, bears even stronger negative connotations—for good reasons. We must set aside our contemporary contexts and comprehension, however, to more clearly understand what the Scriptures are (and are not!) saying through the use of the terms *servant* and *slave*. The Greco-Roman environment from which Paul wrote operated very differently from the North American antebellum context. Servants held rights, and Roman law protected them, offering opportunities for both social mobility and freedom.



Visual for Lesson 8. *Use this visual to review the connections between Paul's letters, his readers, and the social contexts in which they lived.*

I. Israel's History

(Exodus 3:9–10)

A. Oppressed Cry (v. 9)

9. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

The year is about 1450 BC. Moses is in the wilderness near Horeb (the mountain of God), tending the flock of his father-in-law (Exodus 3:1). He stands before a bush that is on fire and yet not burning up (3:2). God speaks to Moses from the burning bush (3:4) and introduces Himself as the God of Moses' ancestors (3:6). Though Moses grew up in Pharaoh's palace, he was aware of his identity as a Hebrew. He would have known the story of how the children of Jacob (renamed "Israel," Genesis 32:28) found their way to Egypt in about 1877 BC and began a 430-year stay there (Exodus 12:40).

Moses had first-hand knowledge of the Israelites' *oppression* by *the Egyptians*. His presence in the wilderness is directly related to a violent exchange with an Egyptian who mistreated a Hebrew (Exodus 2:11). Moses fled to Midian, a region located about 250 miles northeast of the royal city of Thebes (modern-day Luxor), after killing the man (2:12–15). Since Moses' father-in-law was a "priest of Midian" (3:1; 18:1), one may assume that Moses lived in a context where gods other than the God of Isaac, Abraham, and Jacob were worshiped.

God speaks of *the children of Israel* as "[His] people" (Exodus 3:7). While the covenant will be ratified later at Sinai to make the relationship between God and Israel official, the previous covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob serves as the basis for God to treat the people of Israel as His own and to act on their behalf. God informs Moses that He hears the Israelites' cries and acknowledges the duress they are under because of the Egyptian's cruel exercise of power.

B. Promised Rescue (v. 10)

10. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

God's answer to the suffering of His *people* is Moses! God sends Moses back to *Egypt* to deliver the Israelites from their distress. Through Moses, God offers His people a path to liberty, a life free from the burdensome opulence of Egyptian power and culture—they may come *out* of their oppression. This story is the beginning of a Scripture-wide narrative that teaches identity in God and trust in His provision as an emancipation from worldly coercion and constraint.

What Do You Think?

What does Exodus 3:9–10 indicate about God's perspective toward oppression?

Digging Deeper

How can we, like Moses, help bring relief to those who are oppressed?

II. Paul's Teaching, Part 1

(Ephesians 6:5–9)

A. Rewarded for Good (vv. 5–8)

5. Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.

Twice, Paul presents sections in his letters that scholars call "household codes" (Ephesians 5:22–6:9; Colossians 3:18–4:1). The apostle Peter includes a similar section in 1 Peter 2:18–3:7. This verse and the next are part of one of these larger instructional sections. The codes give directions to various household members present within the first-century Roman social structure, shifting norms to align with following *Christ*.

The underlying Greek word, translated here as *servants*, can also be translated as "slaves," depending on the context. In the Greco-Roman period, positions of servitude ranged from prisoners of war to people who voluntarily offered their service to a family (indentured servants) to climb the social ladder (compare Exodus 21:1–11). In the context of this verse, Paul addresses the entire spectrum, although we may note that the King James Version uses the word *slave* only twice (Jeremiah 2:14; Revelation 18:13). Instead, its translators preferred the word *bond* to indicate slavery (example: Ephesians 6:8, below).

Here, Paul's mandate addresses those who are in positions of servitude. He calls them to *be obedient to* human (*according to the flesh*) masters. For proper understanding and application, the mandate must be read against the backdrop of who we know God to be and how He is actively involved in our well-being. Paul's directive points toward a person's attitude and posture before Christ. This stance is critical because the call to obedience ultimately rests on an allegiance to God rather than earthly masters (compare Acts 4:19; 5:29). As members of the household of God, servants are expected to behave as children of God. This call connects to the larger theme of mutual submission within the entire household (Ephesians 5:21).

Singleness of your heart refers to being resolute, focused, tenacious, and sincere with the aim of one's motives. These are characteristic traits of the righteous; believers are to follow the way of God wholeheartedly. The apostle James addresses the importance of single-mindedness in the life of a faithful disciple (James 1:5–8; 4:8).

6–7. Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men.

Outward appearance plays a significant role in how people live. That was true in the Greco-Roman world and remains true today. People spend a great deal of time and effort presenting themselves in particular ways, depending on who is watching. Paul warns against this by using the phrase *not with eyeservice, as menpleasers.* He wants his readers to realize that their primary audience is

How to Say It

Onesimus	O-*ness*-ih-muss
Philemon	Fih-*lee*-mun or Fye-*lee*-mun
Phrygia	*Frij*-ee-uh

God, not humans. Yet, we hasten to add that what other people see reflected in our speech, behavior, and respect for others is not unimportant—quite the contrary (examples: 1 Timothy 3:7; 1 Peter 2:12). The issue at play here comes down to motive (compare Matthew 6:1–6).

What Do You Think?

What is the difference between performing because someone is watching and serving Christ "from the heart"?

Digging Deeper

Do you need to adjust your motives in a current role of service?

Call of Duty

If you were on a committee to nominate someone, living or dead, to receive the award *Person of the Twentieth Century*, who would it be? One obvious candidate might be Winston Churchill (1874–1965). As the United Kingdom's prime minister during World War II, he motivated the western democracies to defeat the evils of Naziism.

Stories of how leaders rise to power and exercise it are fascinating, and Churchill's rise to leadership is no exception. To me, however, the most intriguing stories come from the individuals who work tirelessly behind the scenes for such a leader. These men and women shape and support the leader's time in office. They "make it happen" so to speak. These hidden managers and administrators work tirelessly to ensure the public figure's success (sometimes in underground bunkers during wartime). Supporting roles require a careful balance of expertise and skill—as well as great respect for the leader. Their careers are often marked by a "call of duty."

How do you serve and support Christ? Are you sensing a spiritual call of duty today? If not, perhaps Luke 17:10 will help. —NV

8. Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

Doing good aligns a person with God's nature (Romans 8:28). God is our good Father who provides good things for His children (James 1:17–18). A key example of God's ability to bring good things from a life of bondage is the Old Testament narrative of Joseph (summarized in Genesis 45:5; 50:20).

What Do You Think?

Have you ever experienced a reward for a good deed?

Digging Deeper

How do you remain focused on heavenly rewards rather than instantaneous ones?

B. Treated the Same (v. 9)

9. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.

The message here is simple: God is watching. The behavioral standards that apply to those in bondage or servitude apply equally to those who are in charge. Paul thus subverts Greco-Roman household codes by creating an accountability framework that includes *masters*. Masters are to serve their servants as though serving God and to abstain from *threatening* them. Both concepts tip authority and power on their head!

III. Paul's Teaching, Part 2

(Colossians 3:22–4:1)

A. Promised Inheritance (vv. 22–24)

22–23. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.

Paul's directives here largely duplicate those of Ephesians 6:5–7, above. See commentary on those verses.

24. Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

This verse parallels Ephesians 6:6 and 6:8 (above) in two ways. First, they both refer to the *reward* that believers will *receive* from *the Lord*. Paul adds the concept of *inheritance* to

that reward here. This inheritance refers to eternal life (Hebrews 9:15; 1 Peter 1:4). The point is that a person's earthly status—whether enslaved, free, or somewhere in between—has no bearing on their ability to receive God's acceptance and approval.

The second parallel points to whom we *serve*. It is not men that Christians ultimately aim to please, but *the Lord Christ*. By pointing to the eternal prize, Paul assures his readers that earthly situations and stations are temporary.

B. Fair Treatment (v. 25)

25. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

This verse also parallels Ephesians 6:8 (above). However, in Ephesians, Paul mentions the positive result of obedience. Here, he presents the concept in negative form—there is a consequence for disobedience. The rationale for doing good and being rewarded, alongside the warning of punishment for evildoers is also reflected in Deuteronomy 30:11–20.

Paul reminds his readers that God does not hold bias against people, treating some with partiality. There is no favoritism in the kingdom; God judges with equity. We will receive the suitable reward, good or bad, for our actions.

C. Just Provision (4:1)

1. Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

The content of this verse is nearly identical to that of Ephesians 6:9 (above). The commentary there applies here as well.

What Do You Think?

Is it appropriate to translate Paul's message to first-century servants and masters to contemporary workers and supervisors?

Digging Deeper

Which pieces apply, and which should be left in the first-century context?

IV. Paul's Request

(Philemon 15–17)

A. Beloved Brother (vv. 15–16)

15. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever.

We now arrive at a section of Paul's shortest letter (fewer than 450 words), a letter to a man named Philemon. The letter also greets Apphia, Archippus, and the church that meets in Philemon's home (Philemon 2). Paul's primary reason for writing is as an advocate for Onesimus, a runaway slave from Philemon's household. The letter does not give a definitive reason for Onesimus's flight. Instead, Paul focuses on how he would like Philemon to receive Onesimus on his return, since Paul is sending the man back to his master.

After leaving Philemon's household, Onesimus has connected with Paul. It is possible that Onesimus knew Paul from Paul's earlier missionary visits to Phrygia. But Paul does not offer any analysis of why Onesimus ran away; Paul remains focused on the bigger picture—he wants Philemon and Onesimus to consider *"What's next?"* Paul emphasizes the timeline, suggesting that Onesimus's departure may have been the catalyst for a new development in their relationship.

16. Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

Throughout the letter, Paul uses familial language to describe what connects him to Philemon and Onesimus. Use of familial language in a spiritual sense is nothing new to Paul (compare 1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 2:13; 1 Timothy 1:2). By describing Onesimus as *a brother beloved*, Paul elevates the man's status. He uses this language to establish how he wants Philemon to treat Onesimus. The specific terminology Paul uses throughout the letter crafts a very careful argument for something beyond mere release—Paul desires for Philemon and Onesimus to remember that their relationship is both physical and spiritual. He wants Philemon to consider the association they have *in the Lord* (compare deity language also used in Philemon 3, 5, 8, 20).

What Do You Think?

How should our familial union in Christ change the way we perceive hierarchy?

Digging Deeper

How will you purposefully relate to others as equal siblings in Christ?

Reunited as Brothers

My grandfather, Allan, was recruited by the British government to be a "coder" during the Second World War. He worked at a large institution based in Bletchley Park. Allan spent many years deciphering and intercepting secret messages from various parts of Europe. He recalls the work fondly, especially the camaraderie and friendships he built with his fellow coders.

Several decades after the war ended, my grandfather was introduced to a gentleman at church. The man, Arthur, had moved to England several years prior and was new to the congregation. Allan and Arthur began exchanging stories. It quickly became clear that both men had been coders during the war—on opposing sides! They realized there was a good chance that at some point they had intercepted each other's codes. And yet, decades later, here they were, worshiping together and joyfully exchanging stories. Over the years, Allan and Arthur kindled a special friendship. It was amazing to see two men who were once enemies now interacting as brothers.

Do you have spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ? What miraculous barriers has Christian unity broken for you? —NV

B. Welcomed Partner (v. 17)

17. If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

We come now to the only specific request that Paul makes of Philemon. We know that the actions Paul expects are directed to Philemon personally, not to members of that man's church generally. Paul makes this designation in his use of the words *thou* and *thee*. In the underlying Greek, Paul uses the plural form of those words only in Philemon 3, 22, and 25; everywhere else the usage is singular, thereby referring to a specific individual—Philemon himself.

Paul asks Philemon to *receive* Onesimus with gospel hospitality, welcoming the man as he would presumably welcome Paul. Paul presents his relationship to Philemon as one of partnership. The underlying Greek word that is being translated here is also translated as "partakers" (examples: Matthew 23:30; 1 Corinthians 10:18; 2 Corinthians 1:7), "companions" (Hebrews 10:33), or "fellowship" (1 Corinthians 10:20). It denotes the special relationship that is present between believers when we fully identify with one another as bonded in Christ. Paul wants Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his physical household, remembering his place in the spiritual household of God.

Conclusion

A. Bonded Family

In first-century Roman society, enslaved people were among the most vulnerable. Paul wanted the church to know how to interact with believers from all social strata. He wanted believers to consider all those within the household of Christ as bonded family members, and he did this by focusing on the most vulnerable—slaves, women, and children. The exhortations in his household codes aimed to help the church be countercultural, caring for the least among them. God, who watches out for the oppressed and has taken steps to protect them and change their misfortunes, asks us to serve one another as though serving Him. It is not a coincidence that the spiritual themes of service and worship overlap.

B. Prayer

Father, give us the strength and humility to trust You when we are vulnerable. Teach us to be faithful even when we face difficult circumstances. Show us how to wield power with righteousness and equity, caring for the oppressed and marginalized. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Serve God with your whole heart, regardless of the circumstances.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Greet your students as they arrive. Then ask participants to brainstorm a list of famous bosses. Write their answers on the board. (examples: Miranda Priestly, Michael Scott, Vito Corleone, Mr. MacMillan, Captain James T. Kirk) Next, invite participants to brainstorm adjectives to describe the people they listed. Write these words next to their examples.

Continue the conversation by asking, "What is the general stereotype attached to people who hold a lot of power? How do they treat the people under them?" Then take a quick poll: How many people in your classroom identify themselves as leaders or bosses? How many identify themselves as workers?

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today's texts teach proper Christian behavior related to servants and masters. Although the positions and relationships related to those terms in the first century were different than the relationships between workers and bosses now, let's discover principles to guide our relationships toward faithful alignment with God's kingdom values."

Into the Word

Distribute a handout (you create) that contains a table with three columns labeled: *Discover*, *Ephesians*, and *Colossians*. Under the "Discover" column, make four rows that contain the following questions: 1–What are servants to do? 2–Why? 3–What are masters to do? 4–Why?

Divide students into groups of four. Ask groups to work together to compare the instructions in Ephesians 6:5–9 with those in Colossians 3:22–4:1, using the handout to summarize their findings. After several minutes, review their answers as a whole class.

Option. Prepare, or ask a volunteer to prepare, an explanation of slavery in the first-century Roman Empire. Be sure to touch on how it was similar to and different from slavery in the antebellum period.

Invite a volunteer to read Exodus 3:9–10 out loud. Ask another volunteer to read Philemon 15–17 out loud. Then divide students into two groups: the **Exodus Group** and the **Philemon Group**. Instruct the **Exodus Group** to use Exodus 3:9–10 to answer the following questions: 1–What did God hear? 2–With whom did the Israelites struggle? 3–Who did God send to assist the Israelites? 4–What was this person's job? Invite the **Philemon Group** to use Philemon 15–17 to answer the following questions: 1–How does Paul classify Onesimus and Philemon's separation? 2–How does Paul want Philemon to consider Onesimus? 3–How is Philemon to receive Onesimus?

After several minutes, ask the groups to report to the whole class. Then discuss with the large group: 1–How does God view oppression? 2–How does God want servants to serve? 3–How does God want masters to serve? 4–How does God want us to consider one another in the family of God?

Into Life

Option 1. Distribute copies of the "A Manifesto for Christian Workers" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask groups to complete it as indicated. After several minutes, ask volunteers to share their work with the whole class.

Option 2. Distribute copies of the "Welcoming Everyone" exercise from the activity page. Ask groups to complete it as indicated. After several minutes, ask groups to share their work with the whole class.

To close, ask students to brainstorm a list of places where service is required but little human recognition or gratitude is given. Then ask, "Are you feeling led to serve wholeheartedly, as unto Christ, in any of these contexts?" Distribute index cards and pens. Invite participants to write the answer to your question on their cards. Then encourage them to make a plan to serve as they feel called. Pray for your class before you dismiss.

The Person of Christ

Devotional Reading: Psalm 33:1–5
Background Scripture: Philippians 2:1–11; Colossians 1:15–20; 2:1–12

Philippians 2:5–11

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Colossians 1:15–18

15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Colossians 2:9–10

9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

Key Text

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. **—Philippians 2:5**

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 3: Serving the World

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Describe how Christ humbled Himself as explained in Philippians 2:6–8.
2. Compare the titles "image of the invisible God" and "firstborn" of creation.
3. Write a personal statement of faith that summarizes who Jesus is as outlined in today's texts.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Types of Kings
- B. Lesson Context

I. The Mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5–11)
- A. His Humiliation (vv. 5–8)
  Leadership Through Humility
- B. His Exaltation (vv. 9–11)

II. The Supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:15–18)
- A. Through Creation (vv. 15–16)
- B. Before All Things (v. 17)
  Holding Everything Together
- C. Head of the Body (v. 18)

III. The Authority of Christ (Colossians 2:9–10)
- A. Complete in Deity (v. 9)
- B. Complete in Dominion (v. 10)

Conclusion
- A. From Humiliation to Exaltation
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Types of Kings

I come from a town in West Africa where we have high-level rulers called "kings." They receive nicknames such as "second to the gods" or "royal majesty" that indicate their power and authority. Because of such perceptions, their interaction with the populace is curtailed. But it's all too easy for a king to be more conscious of his position than the care of his subjects.

However, today's study reveals another king—one who has descended from His throne and mingled with people—even dying for them! His kingship was and is unlike any other.

B. Lesson Context

Readers have long noticed that the New Testament contains several passages that exhibit characteristics of early Christian hymns. Such passages often include elevated language, rhythmic structure, poetic parallelism, and doctrinal depth. These hymn-like texts promoted worship, teaching, and the spiritual formation of the community.

Today's study looks at two notable examples. They celebrate the humility and exaltation of Jesus Christ. The passages feature elevated language and a poetic character. They are rich in content, full of biblical allusions, and demonstrate a number of the most moving features of hymns. They portray Christ's preexistence, incarnation, and glorification in a structured and lyric format, suggesting they may have been recited or sung during worship. Other possible hymn texts include John 1:1–14; 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 1:3; and 1 Peter 3:18–22.

I. The Mind of Christ

(Philippians 2:5–11)

A. His Humiliation (vv. 5–8)

5. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

This verse introduces what is often called the "Christ hymn." It runs from here through verse 11. There are two theories regarding how Paul intends for his audience to interpret this hymn. He may have both theories in mind as he writes.

The first is known as the "ethical interpretation," which suggests that this passage establishes a moral imperative for Christian behavior. Proponents of this view emphasize the requirement stated in this verse as the key to understanding the subsequent verses. The phrase *this mind* serves as an invitation to allow the ideals presented in Philippians 2:5–11 to shape the behavior and relationships of believers.

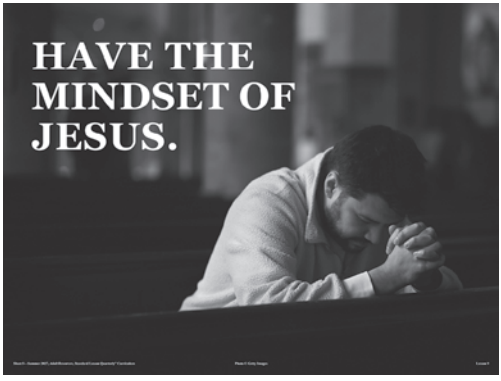
Paul (as Saul) was guilty of wrongful behavior due to an improper mindset (compare Acts 22:19–20). But as Paul has changed his perspective to align more closely with that which is *in Christ Jesus*, so now he challenges the church to do likewise. He makes this challenge three times throughout this letter: here and in Philippians 2:2 and 4:2. The second interpretive theory is based on the next verse.

6a. Who, being in the form of God.

Alongside the "ethical interpretation," noted above, we encounter the second possible interpretation known as the "proclamation interpretation." The idea suggests that this "Christ hymn" primarily focuses on the preaching and teaching that Jesus is God. In so doing, it proclaims elements of Jesus' person and work, including His preexistence, incarnation, resurrection, and exaltation.

This interpretation largely derives its support from the use of the word *form.* This term typically conveys the idea of the visible, outward appearance of a person or object. However, its usage in this verse reveals an inherent mystery. On one hand, it is true that those who have seen Jesus have seen God (John 14:8–9; compare 10:30). On the other hand, it also remains true that no one has seen God the Father (1:18; 6:46; 1 John 4:12). We attribute this mystery to the nature of the Trinity (the doctrine stating that God is one in essence but exists as three distinct persons). If you're struggling to comprehend this, welcome to the club! We easily imagine Paul himself struggling to find the right words to describe God.

The only other occurrences of the word translated as "form" here appear in Philippians 2:7 (below) and Mark 16:12 (in the disputed ending of the Gospel). In the verse before us, Paul's wording aligns with the doctrine taught in John 1:18; 6:46; Colossians 1:15 [below]; and 1 Timothy 6:16.



Visual for Lesson 9. *Display this visual and ask, "How should believers model the mindset of Jesus in our daily interactions?"*

6b. Thought it not robbery to be equal with God.

As God, Christ possesses equality *with God*. That is, sharing the divine nature with God the Father, Christ experiences the fullness of divine existence. Existing eternally, Christ possesses all power. Thus, He did not consider that equality *robbery.*

The term *robbery* has two possible ways to be understood. First, it might refer to taking possession of something by force, which aligns with our modern concept of robbery. Given that the verse is stated negatively (*thought it not*), however, a second interpretation suggests that Jesus did not need to consider *becoming* deity by force because He already is deity, possessing all the attributes of God.

7. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.

This verse presents one of the most theologically significant phrases in the New Testament: What does it mean for Christ to have *made himself of no reputation*? There is widespread agreement that to be made "of no reputation" means to empty one's self. This encompasses not only the moment of Christ's incarnation but also the whole of His earthly mission. But what exactly did this self-emptying involve? The text does not provide specific details regarding what the Son of God gave up in the incarnation. Nevertheless, commentators have offered several proposals.

An early theory suggests that Jesus temporarily

set aside part of His divine essence when He *took upon him the form of a servant*. However, this proposal has serious doctrinal concerns. Jesus did not cease to be God during the incarnation. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus consistently said and did things that only God could say and do (examples: Matthew 7:24–29; 9:1–8; 12:1–8; Mark 4:39; Luke 6:8). A much better explanation is that Jesus voluntarily and temporarily restrained Himself from using His divine attributes (examples: Matthew 4:3–10; 24:36; 26:53). By becoming fully human, the incarnate Son of God experienced human life, including its struggles and limitations (Hebrews 4:15). His humanity was real; He wasn't pretending.

In Paul's world, a *servant* had no rights, status, or honor (see the Lesson Context of Lesson 8). This is precisely the position Jesus willingly accepted because of His love for the world and His obedience to His heavenly Father (see John 5:19; compare Matthew 26:39). This verse echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah, who describes the coming servant of the Lord as one who would willingly give His life for others (Isaiah 53:3, 11).

The Philippians would have understood the status of servants. By spurning the right to rank and reputation in the eyes of people, Jesus identified with the lowest of the low and the poorest of the poor. Christ's self-renouncing attitude was a conscious, deliberate, and active choice. He led a life completely characterized by humble service to others (compare Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:14–18).

8. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The fact that Christ *humbled himself* and *became obedient unto death* is not a sign of weakness but an expression of divine willpower. His decision to become a servant did not, at any moment, demonstrate a lack of strength—quite the opposite! His death is, among other things, an expression of obedience (Hebrews 5:8).

Death on *the cross* was repugnant and shocking to Roman citizens. Crucifixion functioned as ancient Rome's most extreme form of torture—an instrument of imperial control designed to intimidate and subdue subject peoples. It was typically reserved for notorious criminals and insurrectionists. For the Jews, death by crucifixion not only brought shame and pain, but it was also considered accursed by God (Deuteronomy 21:22–23; compare Galatians 3:13). But Jesus willingly chose the path of obedience (see John 10:18), not simply to death, but to death on a cross, taking His self-humiliation to a depth beyond our comprehension.

Leadership Through Humility

A mentor of mine worked as a prison warden for over two decades. During his career, he encountered all types of criminals and had to navigate every scenario imaginable. The role of prison warden is demanding—maintaining security and order, navigating government budget cuts, and ensuring prisoners receive proper care. But he had an inspiring approach to leadership. His motto was, "Every drug dealer is a businessman using his gift in the wrong way." Instead of viewing prisoners as problems, he recognized their abilities and potential to contribute positively to society.

A poignant example of his leadership is when he would pick up a broom and sweep the grounds alongside the prisoners. It was unprecedented. By doing so, he built such a strong rapport with the inmates that he achieved one of the lowest return rates in our country's prisons and the highest success rate in reintegrating individuals into society. Instead of using his position to assert power, he saw himself as a man who stood alongside others who had made poor choices. He used his authority to help them find a better path in life. In what ways can you emulate this approach in the name of Jesus? —NV

What Do You Think?

In what specific ways does Jesus' humble service shape how you live each day?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to reflect Christlike humility through your acts of service?

B. His Exaltation (vv. 9–11)

9a. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him.

God's response to Christ's self-renouncing humility is expressed through two closely related actions. The verb translated as *highly exalted* is rare, appearing only here in the New Testament. The phrase indicates fulfillment of the "suffering servant" passages of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 (compare Acts 2:32–33; Ephesians 1:20–21; Hebrews 2:9).

9b. And given him a name which is above every name.

A *name* is far more than an identifier; it reveals character and discloses identity (examples: Genesis 25:26; 1 Samuel 25:25). Bestowing a new name on someone can signify the conferral of status or the inauguration of a new role or destiny (examples: Genesis 17:5; 32:28). The name conferred upon Jesus thus reflects and communicates His exalted character and supreme status.

What is this name that is *above every name*? Most likely, it is the title "Lord" proclaimed in Philippians 2:11, below. Another possibility is "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16).

10. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.

Paul draws on Isaiah 45:23 both here and in Romans 14:11. Christ's glory is the glory that belongs to God alone, the glory of the universe's supreme king. As Paul refers to *heaven . . . earth . . . under the earth*, he names every place imaginable and so every being imaginable (compare Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:18–20).

Bending the *knee* is an expression of reverence and submission (compare Ephesians 3:14). While the usual posture for prayer was standing (example: 1 Samuel 1:26; Mark 11:25), special moments of prayer called for kneeling (examples: Acts 20:36; 21:5).

11. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Imagery from Isaiah 45:23 continues. In proclaiming that *Jesus Christ is Lord*, the hymn acknowledges the earliest form of a confession of faith among Christians (see Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:3).

In Paul's time, Roman subjects and citizens, including the Roman citizens of Philippi, identified themselves as loyal subjects of the empire by saying, "Caesar is Lord." But "Jesus Christ is Lord" is the greater confession. Absolute lordship belongs not to the emperor who asserts power for his own advantage, but to the incarnate Son of God who sacrifices Himself for the unworthy.

II. The Supremacy of Christ

(Colossians 1:15–18)

A. Through Creation (vv. 15–16)

15a. Who is the image of the invisible God.

This verse takes us on a brief visit to the letter to the Colossians. An *image* refers to someone or something that looks like another person or thing (examples: Romans 1:23; 8:29). When Paul states that Jesus is the *image* of *God,* he does not mean that Jesus is a "copy" of God. Instead, Paul means that Jesus is "imaging" or revealing the unseen God (John 1:18). Christ, as the image of God, is the perfect manifestation of God because Christ is God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3). By looking at Jesus, we may know more of what God looks like, we may understand facets of the *invisible God* (John 14:9; compare Colossians 1:19; 2:9).

15b. The firstborn of every creature.

The word *firstborn* suggests the "first person to be created" in terms of time (examples: Genesis 41:51; Luke 2:7). In the Old Testament, the time-sequencing factor of the word *firstborn* may be very indirect. In some cases, it is specific to birth order. In others, it is a title of honor or priority (example: Exodus 4:22; compare Genesis 48:14, 19 with Jeremiah 31:9). In other instances, the term refers to preeminence in rank (Psalm 89:27; etc.).

As Paul uses the term, it does not emphasize the idea of birth but of priority—stressing the concept of being the ruler over all creation. Christ is first in both time and position. As God's Son, Christ is uncreated; He exists without beginning and so exists before all things. And as the eternal God,

How to Say It

Colossians	Kuh-*losh*-unz
Philippi	Fih-*lip*-pie or *Fil*-ih-pie

He has authority over all things. Thus, Christ is supreme over all creation.

16. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.

Scripture affirms Christ's role in creation (John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:2; etc.). Through Him, the entire cosmos serves as a testament to God's creative power. In the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments, various non-biblical writings credited angelic beings with certain aspects of creation. However, this work is to be correctly attributed to Christ (compare Romans 8:38; Ephesians 1:20–21; 6:12).

What Do You Think?

What challenges from various "powers" have you encountered, and how does Christ's authority help you face them?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to ensure that you prioritize Christ in all areas of life?

B. Before All Things (v. 17)

17a. And he is before all things.

The apostle again affirms the priority of God's Son. Christ is preexistent. He stands before and apart from all creation (John 8:58). If the Colossians accept that the "firstborn" (Colossians 1:15, above) is *before all things*, they can be assured that nothing else is worthy of their worship.

17b. And by him all things consist.

The word *consist* indicates ongoing existence. Christ not only created the world; He also sustains its existence (see Hebrews 1:3).

What Do You Think?

How have your experiences of creation deepened your worship of Jesus as the Creator?

Digging Deeper

What practical steps might help you further celebrate Christ as the Creator?

Holding Everything Together

Assembling furniture can be either deeply satisfying or utterly frustrating. A few summers ago, our neighbor enlisted my husband to help assemble a large 15-foot trampoline for his three-year-old daughter. It was no small task.

Our neighbor began methodically laying out each pole in the order specified by the instructions. However, whenever he tried to stretch the trampoline bed across the frame, the entire structure collapsed. Since trampolines rely on stretch and tension to create the bounce, this was a problem.

For more than four hours, under the watchful gaze of a very patient toddler, our neighbor wrestled with poles, joints, and springs to keep the contraption from falling apart. Eventually, he realized he hadn't threaded the cables correctly through the trampoline's edges and around the frame, which meant the whole structure couldn't hold together properly. Once he figured this out, the trampoline came together in minutes.

Reflecting on this experience, my husband realized something similar is true with Jesus; He is the "cord" that holds everything together. What difference does it make to you to know that Jesus' power and authority are holding everything together? —NV

C. Head of the Body (v. 18)

18a. And he is the head of the body, the church.

Not only is all of creation centered in Christ, so also is the *church*. Against any attempt to reduce the church to a mere human institution, Paul insists that the church derives its mission and vitality from Christ, its authoritative *head*, using the metaphor of the church as Christ's *body* (compare Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12–14; Ephesians 1:22–23; 4:15; 5:23).

18b. Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

The phrase *he might have the preeminence* clarifies that Christ's resurrection, being *firstborn from the dead,* confirms His ultimate sovereignty. The word translated as "preeminence" is rare, found only here in the New Testament. It means first

place or the highest rank. There is no authority in the church that exceeds the authority of Christ in any matter. It is His church, not ours. We must remind ourselves that we exist as the church for His service and for His glory.

III. The Authority of Christ

(Colossians 2:9–10)

A. Complete in Deity (v. 9)

9. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

In this passage, Paul notes the all-sufficiency of Christ. By so doing, he counters the claims of the false teachers by pointing out that their "philosophy" fails precisely because it is not grounded in Christ (compare Colossians 2:8).

The language Paul uses here parallels that of Colossians 1:19. In both, Paul emphasizes the significance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ by referencing *all the fulness*. His use of the present-tense verb *dwelleth* highlights that the incarnation is not simply a historical event; it is also a present reality with contemporary significance. Christ fully enters the human condition, subject to its limitations, and is obedient unto death (Philippians 2:8; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 4:15).

The term *Godhead* underscores that Paul speaks not of divine attributes or intermediaries but of the very essence of God in Christ. Against the prevailing traditions that assigned mediating roles to angels, Paul proclaims that the fullness of God's being is present in the incarnate Christ, the Messiah or "anointed one," sent to save humanity from sin.

What Do You Think?

What does it mean for your faith (and life experience) that all the fullness of God dwells in Christ?

Digging Deeper

Why is it significant that Christ Jesus is both fully God and fully human?

B. Complete in Dominion (v. 10)

10. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.

As members of Christ's body, believers lack nothing before Him. Christ is not merely the head of the church; He is *head* over all cosmic forces. The *principality and power* Paul refers to here is the same as those referenced in Colossians 1:16, above.

Conclusion

A. From Humiliation to Exaltation

By quoting the Christ hymn, Paul reminds the Philippians of the Lord's credentials. In doing this, Paul emphasizes that the church's identity comes from having the mind of Christ. This way of life encompasses two extremes: humiliation and exaltation. The hymn, therefore, not only defines Christ's lordship but also acts as a critique of both triumphalism, which abandons the path of service and obedience, and humiliation, which fails to recognize the glory found in the Lord.

Christ's supremacy also lies at the heart of Paul's message to the Colossians. Christ is the perfect image of God, the eternal agent of creation, the sustainer of the cosmos, and the risen head of the church. He occupies a position unmatched by any earthly or spiritual power. Paul's calling for the church to rest confidently in Christ's unrivaled authority is an invitation that remains forever relevant.

What Do You Think?

Based on today's study, how would you summarize the key truths about the *person* of Christ Jesus?

Digging Deeper

How do truths about His *person* help you better understand the significance of His *work*?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, empower us to always stand in awe of Your Son, who paid the price for our sins. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus Christ: nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Divide your class into small groups. Ensure that each group includes at least one participant with an internet-connected device, such as a smartphone or tablet. Invite each group to conduct an online search for statements regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Encourage groups to explore a range of perspectives, including historical and contemporary sources, as well as Christian, secular, or other religious viewpoints. The goal is not to evaluate theological accuracy but to observe the diversity of claims made about Jesus. After five minutes, invite one volunteer from each group to share one or two statements they discovered. Conclude by asking the class to summarize what they notice. You might ask questions such as, "What themes came up repeatedly? Where did the descriptions differ? What surprised you?"

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "What Do You Say About Jesus?" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have participants work in pairs to complete as indicated, then discuss responses with the whole class.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today's study focuses on some of the Bible's strongest statements about the person of Jesus Christ. As we study, pay close attention to how Scripture's witness compares with what others have said about Him."

Into the Word

Invite participants to return to the same small groups as before. Provide each group with a sheet of paper and a pen, and ask them to designate one person to serve as the group's scribe. Instruct each scribe to write two headings at the top of the sheet of paper: *Divinity* and *Humanity*.

Ask groups to read Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:15–18; and Colossians 2:9–10, looking for specific words or phrases that explicitly state or clearly point to either Jesus' divinity or His humanity. Ask scribes to write those words or phrases on the sheet of paper under the appropriate heading.

Allow approximately ten minutes for group discussion and note-taking. Then invite scribes to share their findings with the class, one response at a time, citing the specific Scripture reference that supports each point. As each group reports, record their responses on the board. Continue until all groups have shared everything on their lists.

After completing the findings, ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1–What do these Scripture texts teach us about Jesus' humanity and His divinity? 2–How is Christ's servanthood evident in these passages? 3–What aspects of Jesus' servanthood are we called to imitate, and what aspects are unique to Him and not meant to be replicated exactly? 4–How do these texts correct or clarify the statements and viewpoints introduced in the Into the Lesson section?

Then, invite participants to turn to a partner and briefly discuss: "How do the passages we studied today help strengthen your faith?"

Into Life

Invite the class to go around the room, with each participant responding to the sentence, "Here is what I believe about Jesus . . ." As individuals share, record their statements on the board.

Then, distribute paper and a pen to each participant. Ask them to review the collective responses and select key words or phrases that reflect their own understanding of Jesus. Using those selected phrases, invite learners to write a brief personal statement of faith that summarizes who Jesus is to them. If time allows, invite a few volunteers to read their personal statements aloud. Affirm the variety of expressions while emphasizing the shared biblical foundation in the statements.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Learning About God, Learning About Jesus" exercise from the activity page. Instruct participants to complete the activity as a take-home in the week ahead.

The Work of Christ

Devotional Reading: Mark 10:41–45
Background Scripture: Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:1–10; Colossians 2:9–15

Ephesians 1:3–11

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

8 Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;

9 Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself:

10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:

11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

Ephesians 2:4–5

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

Colossians 2:11–15

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Key Text

In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. **—Ephesians 1:11**

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 3: Serving the World
Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. List the spiritual blessings that Paul names in these texts.
2. Explain the meaning and significance of the following terms: *grace*, *faith*, *predestined*, *adoption*, *redemption*, *baptism*, and *circumcision*.
3. Write a journal entry reflecting on God's purposes that were accomplished through Christ's redemptive work.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Living Trust
- B. Lesson Context

I. Blessed in Christ (Ephesians 1:3–11)
- A. Praised (v. 3)
- B. Chosen (v. 4)
- C. Adopted (vv. 5–6)
  Reflections of an Adoptee
- D. Redeemed (vv. 7–10)
- E. Willed (v. 11)

II. Alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4–5)
- A. Merciful (v. 4)
- B. Gracious (v. 5)

III. Raised with Christ (Colossians 2:11–15)
- A. Circumcised and Baptized (vv. 11–12)
- B. Forgiven and Enlivened (vv. 13–15)
  Extraordinary Forgiveness

Conclusion
- A. The Powerful Grace of Christ
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Living Trust

There are several ways to arrange for the disposition of one's assets upon death. In some cases—particularly when large amounts of wealth are involved—this distribution is managed through a *living trust*. Under this arrangement, one or more administrators (trustees) are appointed to distribute a specified amount of funds or property from the trust to the beneficiaries at certain intervals or upon meeting specific criteria.

However, a more common way to leave assets to heirs is through a "last will and testament." This legal instrument, unlike a trust, takes effect after a person has died.

In Paul's letters, Jesus is depicted both as the rightful heir and as the trustee responsible for distributing spiritual assets to God's spiritual beneficiaries, those He has redeemed from death. As we inherit eternal life through His death, we also become beneficiaries of His resurrection as we anticipate our own.

B. Lesson Context

Two important cultural contexts must be explained to understand the original writer's intent in today's passages: the concepts of grace and adoption. The Greco-Roman idea of "grace" always included the inherent expectation of *reciprocity*, meaning that doing someone a favor obligated the recipient to do likewise in return. It's like the modern concept of "Thanks, I owe you one." The writers of the New Testament used the Greek word we translate as "grace" more than one hundred times, but not in the way the wider Greco-Roman world did. The New Testament emphasis, instead, is on the unmerited nature of God's mercy and the inherent call to commit our lives to Him.

In the Greco-Roman context, adoption was primarily concerned with inheritance and succession;

How to Say It

Deuteronomy	Due-ter-*ahn*-uh-me
hendiadys	hen-*die*-uh-dus
Septuagint	Sep-*too*-ih-jent

it served as a way to transfer property and rights from one person to another (compare Galatians 4:1–7).

I. Blessed in Christ

(Ephesians 1:3–11)

A. Praised (v. 3)

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

Paul's letters typically begin with four elements: the sender's name, the addressee(s), a greeting, and an expression of gratitude. However, the letter to the Ephesians differs slightly. After the first three of those four elements, Paul inserts a lengthy section of praise starting here and extending to verse 15.

In contrast to the temporary blessings found in this world, the blessings Paul pours out are permanent and eternal. *Spiritual blessings* are not mere pleasures of the flesh. This distinction serves as a backdrop to Paul's more pointed thoughts on the fundamental nature of the readers' opponents as outlined in Ephesians 6:12.

For insight regarding *heavenly places,* see Ephesians 1:20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12.

B. Chosen (v. 4)

4. According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

The word *according* ties this verse and those that follow to the idea presented back in Ephesians 1:3. In so doing, it clarifies that the spiritual blessings available in Christ are rooted in God's eternal plan. What a distance in time that is! The plan precedes even creation itself.

As we marvel at the implications of God's eternal plan, we encounter a doctrinal divide within Christianity. That divide concerns the subject of "predestination," explicitly mentioned in the next verse but introduced here. Much of the debate centers around the phrase *he hath chosen us.* As we ponder the specifics of this choosing, we can make progress by using the time-tested inquiry questions of *who, what, where, when, why,* and *how.*

We can start with the easiest one—the question of *when.* The answer is given right here: The plan came into being *before the foundation of the world.* This statement dates God's plan to an era before the events of Genesis 1:1.

A bit more complicated is the question of *why.* This is addressed in the phrase *that we should be holy . . . before him in love.* Drawing on other texts, we may conclude that holiness and love are the two ethical attributes that foundationally describe how God interacts with humanity (examples: Exodus 3:5; Ephesians 5:25–27; 1 Peter 1:15–16; 1 John 4:8). As He is, so we must be as well.

Holiness refers to something or someone being distinct or set apart from whatever is common. The eternal God is holy by nature, while naturally "common" things may be consecrated, sanctified, or made holy by virtue of their connection to God (examples: Exodus 3:5; 30:30; Leviticus 20:7–8).

Moving to the question of *who,* this verse contributes to the answer with the word *us.* The next verse helps us probe deeper into that question.

What Do You Think?

What images or ideas come to mind when you think of the terms "holy" and "without blame"?

Digging Deeper

How do you pursue a life of holiness in response to God's gracious choice?

C. Adopted (vv. 5–6)

5. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

In our ongoing consideration of the question of *whom* the choosing applies to, this verse repeats the word *us* from the previous verse. At the very least, this includes the original recipients of the letter (Ephesians 1:1). However, a broader interpretation suggests that the invitation, as part of *the adoption of children by Jesus Christ,* is open to everyone (Matthew 28:19–20; 2 Peter 3:9; etc.). The invitation offers a transformation of status for eternity (Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5).

To address the question of *how* this adoption



Visual for Lesson 10. *Display this visual as you invite participants to explain each point by referring the lesson text.*

occurs, we turn to the phrase *having predestinated us.* There are several major viewpoints regarding the meaning of the word *predestination*. One major view of predestination for salvation holds that God unconditionally chooses those destined for eternal life. The word *unconditionally* implies that there are no actions or conditions humans can fulfill to influence God's decision. This viewpoint focuses on the sovereignty of God (compare Acts 13:48).

A second viewpoint focuses on the free will that humans have. According to this view, when someone chooses to accept Christ, that person is (pre) destined to eternal life. God in His foreknowledge already knows who will accept His plan and who will not. In this sense, predestination is *conditional* upon making a choice based on free will; therefore, on that basis, God makes His choices regarding salvation (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

A third viewpoint interprets this text as referring not to the predestination of individuals to eternal afterlife, but rather to the collective election of God's people for service to Him. This view draws a parallel between God's election of the people of Israel in the Old Testament (see Deuteronomy 7:6–8) and His election of the church for the present role of ministry and witness.

The Bible has important things to say about believers in terms of being "the elect" (Mark 13:22, 26–27; John 10:4–5; Colossians 3:12 [Lesson 7]; James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:1–2) and the nature of their "election" (Romans 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Peter 1:10). This takes us to the question of *what*. More specifically, when discussing the doctrine of election, we must ask, "Chosen for what?" This brings us full circle back to Ephesians 1:4, above, and the answer there.

Reflections of an Adoptee

When I was about one, my mother remarried, and her new husband legally adopted me. I didn't learn about this until I was thirteen, when a cousin revealed the truth. However, I didn't care; the man who had raised me for those thirteen years was my dad—the one who was always there for me. As the years passed, I found myself correcting others when they asked about my "real dad." I would say that the father I grew up with was my real dad.

I didn't hear from my biological father until the week of my high school graduation. That's when he showed up and tried to step into the role of father! His first words to me were, "I'm your daddy!" In this awkward situation, I remained polite but uninterested. He had made his choice, and I made mine.

An interesting outcome of this adoption is that I have two birth certificates—one for each of the two men, listing each as "father." We all have to decide who will be our father in a spiritual sense (compare John 3:7–8; 1 John 5:18–19; James 1:15). God invites us to consider Him to be our heavenly Father (Matthew 6:9). How does your "spiritual birth certificate" read? —RLN

6. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

The phrase *to the praise of the glory* is also used with slight variation in Ephesians 1:12, 14. The outcome of this *adoption* is the establishment of a relationship of *grace*. Our English translation does not readily show the connection between the first and second clauses of this verse. But in the original language, the word translated as *accepted* is the verb form of the noun translated as *grace* in the first clause. The status conferred by this gracious gift is *in the beloved*, that is, in Christ, who is the beloved Son and heir (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). Those

in Christ are considered God's own beloved (compare Colossians 3:12 [Lesson 7]).

The idea here is that God has acted as a benefactor, taking the initiative and establishing the relationship with those who have received the gracious gift of *adoption* as His children. God's bequest results in *the praise* He deserves. Thus, in a sense, God's grace returns to Him by the grateful response of those adopted through and into Christ.

What Do You Think?

How would you describe the relationship between our spiritual adoption in Christ and the consideration of us as God's beloved children?

Digging Deeper

In what ways will you remind yourself of your identity as a beloved child of God?

D. Redeemed (vv. 7–10)

7. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

In the Greco-Roman world, *redemption* was an economic term that referred to paying for the rescue or release from an obligation or debt. Paul uses this word as a metaphor to describe our new relationship with God through Christ. The premise is that prior to spiritual redemption, all humanity was enslaved by sin and subject to death (compare Romans 6:15–23).

Because the payment for sin's penalty is death, this redemption comes about also through death—specifically *through* Christ's *blood* (Romans 3:24–26; Hebrews 9:12–15, 22). Christ's death serves as the payment to liberate those enslaved to sin and subject to death (Colossians 1:13–14).

8. Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

This verse raises two interpretive issues. The first problem is that it is unclear whether the phrase *wherein he hath abounded toward us* refers to verse 7 or verse 9. In other words, is it "the riches of his grace" that Christ is not withholding (see Ephesians 1:7, above), or is it the knowledge of "the mystery of his will" that is being poured out abundantly (see 1:9, below)? Many contemporary commentators favor the former interpretation, suggesting that it is God's grace that is poured out in abundance upon His people (compare Romans 5:15).

Another issue of interpretation concerns the phrase *in all wisdom and prudence.* There are at least three possible meanings. First, it could mean that God exercised His wisdom when granting the riches of His grace (previous verse). Second, it could suggest that God used His own wisdom in deciding to reveal to us the mystery of His will (see Ephesians 1:9, below). Third, it could mean that, by acting in grace, God is revealing to us things that increase our own wisdom and prudence.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that the word translated as "wisdom" appears dozens of times in the New Testament, while the word translated as "prudence" occurs only twice: here and in Luke 1:17, where it is translated as "wisdom." The two underlying Greek words convey similar meanings and are not distinct concepts. This literary feature is known as a *hendiadys*. Additionally, these two words appear together in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, numerous times (examples: Proverbs 1:2; 3:19; 8:1; 10:23; Jeremiah 10:12).

9. Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

Modern communicators use the term *mystery* in the same way first-century communicators did: to refer to something not understood. But in biblical discourse, a *mystery* is knowledge that was once hidden and has now been revealed (examples: Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7). The word is a favorite of Paul's (compare Ephesians 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19).

The *mystery of his will* is later identified in Ephesians 3:6: "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." By labeling this a *mystery*, Paul indicates that this was part of God's plan all along but was kept hidden until the time of its revelation. This now-revealed plan is described as being rooted in God's *good pleasure*, within the very character of God (compare Ephesians 1:5, above).

10. That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all

things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.

The Greek word translated as *dispensation* here occurs in seven other places. It is translated as "stewardship" twice (Luke 16:2–4); as "dispensation" three times (1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 3:2; Colossians 1:25); and as "edifying" once (1 Timothy 1:4). The overall idea seems to be that of having and implementing a plan, similar to what an administrator would do to manage a household.

The point is that the mystery of God's will is established in Christ for a specific purpose and at a particular moment: *the fulness of times* (see Galatians 4:4). That plan involves the restoration and unification of *all things*—not only between Jews and Gentiles (compare Ephesians 2:14 [Lesson 1]; 3:4–6) but also encompassing heavenly and earthly things. Having become incarnated as a man and then being exalted to heaven (see Lesson 9), *Christ* works to unite the entire cosmos in Himself, thus bringing everything into order. While this has yet to be accomplished in its entirety, we continue to await the day when all of creation will submit to the universal reign of Christ (see Hebrews 2:8).

E. Willed (v. 11)

11. In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

Those who are adopted in Christ share in His inheritance. This outcome has been predestinated from the start—God knows both the beginning and the end (Isaiah 46:10). The inclusion of Gentiles in Christ's inheritance has been a surprise to devout Jews (Acts 10:34; 11:18). But it was not a last-minute decision. Instead, it has been according to God's *purpose* all along (Isaiah 2:2; etc.).

What Do You Think?

When was a time that you were anxious or frustrated about God's timing?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to grow in trust, surrendering anxiety to God's timing?

II. Alive in Christ

(Ephesians 2:4–5)

A. Merciful (v. 4)

4. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.

Whereas Ephesians 1:7 refers to "the riches of his grace," this verse focuses on another aspect of God's wealth: He is *rich in mercy* (Romans 11:30–32; compare Exodus 34:6).

B. Gracious (v. 5)

5. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).

Death is the consequence of sin (Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:26; Romans 6:23). But because of God's grace, death is not the end. Instead, God has provided a way to be *quickened* (made alive). Since *Christ* has passed through death, paying the penalty for our sins, He has defeated the consequence of sin (Revelation 1:18).

What Do You Think?

What practical steps will you take to live as someone who is "dead" to sin but alive in Christ?

Digging Deeper

Who can serve as an accountability partner to encourage you toward obedience and spiritual growth?

III. Raised with Christ

(Colossians 2:11–15)

A. Circumcised and Baptized (vv. 11–12)

11. In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

There are two types of *circumcision*: one of the flesh (Genesis 17), the other of the heart (Jeremiah 9:26; etc.). Paul describes the latter as inward and spiritual (Romans 2:28–29; compare Deuteronomy 30:6). The verse before us stresses the contrast between *the flesh* and the spirit (*Christ*).

12. Buried with him in baptism, wherein

also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

This spiritual circumcision is facilitated via *baptism*, in which a person reenacts the death and resurrection of Christ (compare Romans 6:1–14). Baptism requires *faith of the operation of God* (compare Acts 2:38; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21)!

What Do You Think?

How would you explain the relationship between circumcision, baptism, faith, and the experience of Christian life?

Digging Deeper

In what ways will you help others make the same connection?

B. Forgiven and Enlivened (vv. 13–15)

13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Not only are believers rejuvenated from sin and death and given new life (compare Ephesians 2:1), but those things are accompanied by forgiveness. The word translated as *forgiven* refers to a gift graciously given—not from a single trespass but from *all trespasses* (see 2:5).

Extraordinary Forgiveness

During World War II, Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983) and her family were imprisoned in concentration camps run by the Nazis. Although Corrie survived, her sister died in one of those camps. Many years later, Corrie was serving a church in Germany when a man entered whom she recognized as a guard from the camp. The man approached her and explained that he had accepted Christ as Lord. He asked for Corrie's forgiveness.

Conflicted, Corrie pondered how she could possibly forgive a man who was closely related to the death of her sister. She silently prayed for strength and asked Jesus to help her forgive. As she reached out and took his hand, she felt the power of the Holy Spirit and a love she knew could only come from God. "I forgive you, brother," she responded.

I often wonder whether I could muster the same level of forgiveness in the face of significant hurt. In what way might you need to extend forgiveness as you have been forgiven through Christ? —NV

14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

Christ's death on the cross pays the debt incurred by sin (see commentary on Ephesians 1:7, above). *The handwriting of ordinances* that specified the spiritual death penalty is the same as "the law of commandments contained in ordinances" in Ephesians 2:15. By enduring the consequences of those ordinances, Christ has left no debt for those who are in Him.

15. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Christ's death seemed to have been a defeat; His resurrection proved otherwise. There could be no resurrection without first having been death on the cross. The *principalities and powers* Christ defeated are the same as those in Ephesians 6:12 and Colossians 2:10.

Conclusion

A. The Powerful Grace of Christ

Christ is the trustee through whom all the promises of God are generously fulfilled. These promises include forgiveness, victory over sin, divinely empowered obedience, and indestructible, eternal life.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the life that You have given us in Christ. Guide our every step and give us wisdom so that we understand how to live in gratitude and obedience to You, our redeemer and Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

You are redeemed and adopted by God.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Before class begins, post a large sheet of butcher paper on the wall where everyone can easily see it. Begin by asking, "What do you consider to be your most cherished and beloved blessings?" Distribute markers and invite participants to write their responses on the paper.

Once everyone has responded, conduct a brief poll of the class members. Read each response aloud and ask participants to raise their hands if they would rank that item among their top three blessings. Count the raised hands and write the number beside the corresponding response on the paper. After the poll, observe which blessings received the most affirmation. Allow a few moments for informal comments or observations about the results.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "In today's study, we will turn our attention to the greatest blessing given to those who place their faith in Christ. Our response will echo the response of the apostle Paul: Praise to God!"

Into the Word

Prepare seven slips of paper, each printed with one of the following words: *grace, faith, predestined, adoption, redemption, baptism,* and *circumcision*. Divide the class into seven small groups and assign one word to each group. If the class size does not allow for seven groups, assign multiple words to each group, ensuring that all terms are studied.

Invite each group to survey Ephesians 1:3–11; 2:4–5; and Colossians 2:11–15, carefully noting what each passage reveals about their assigned word. Encourage each group to trace how the term is used in its original context, what it communicates about God's work in Christ, and how it contributes to Paul's larger doctrinal message. Groups may consult the Bible commentary, study notes, or reputable online resources to deepen their understanding. Inform groups that they will present a five-minute summary of their findings to the class, highlighting both the term's meaning and its doctrinal significance.

After ten minutes, invite a volunteer from each group to present their findings to the whole class. Following each presentation, guide a brief discussion using the following questions: 1–What stands out to you about the significance of this word? 2–How does this concept inform our Christian life and/or identity? 3–In what ways is this idea distinct from how similar concepts are understood in the broader contemporary world?

Option. Distribute copies of the "The Work of Jesus" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite participants to work with a partner to complete it as indicated.

Conclude this section by directing participants' attention back to the list of blessings composed during the "Into the Lesson" section. Ask: 1–How many of the blessings identified earlier are reflected in the passages studied? 2–What does this suggest about the nature of spiritual blessings? 3–In what ways might we be unaware of the richness of blessings that God has granted us through Christ?

Into Life

Distribute blank slips of paper or index cards to each participant. Invite them to choose one word from the list of key words studied in today's lesson. Ask them to write that word at the top of their card, then write why it is significant to them. Encourage participants to focus on how this word shapes their identity and daily walk with Christ. Once everyone has finished, ask for volunteers who are willing to read their responses aloud.

Challenge participants to keep their card in a visible place. Encourage them to use the word as a focus for gratitude and reflection in prayer.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Celebrating God's Work" exercise from the activity page. Invite participants to complete the activity as a prayer journal in the upcoming week.

Serving Joyfully

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 51:7–11
Background Scripture: Philippians 2:12–18; 3:1–3; 4:4–9

Philippians 2:14–18

14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

18 For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

Philippians 3:1a

1a Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

Philippians 4:4–7

4 Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.



Key Text

Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. **—Philippians 4:4**

Image © Getty Images

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 3: Serving the World

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the specific imperatives Paul gives to believers.
2. Outline why believers have a secure reason to rejoice in all circumstances.
3. Write personal anxieties on an index card and shred the card as a symbolic act of giving cares to God.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Staying Focused in Captivity
- B. Lesson Context

I. Blameless Children (Philippians 2:14–18)
- A. Living Without Complaint (v. 14)
- B. Shining Like Stars (vv. 15–16)
- C. Seeking Sacrificially (vv. 17–18)

II. Joyful Children (Philippians 3:1a; 4:4–7)
- A. Rejoicing Always (v. 3:1a)
  More Than a Catchphrase?
- B. Showing Gentleness (vv. 4:4–5)
- C. Praying Petitions (vv. 6–7)
  Two Ways to Think About Worry

Conclusion
- A. Commitment to Joy
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Staying Focused in Captivity

Terry Waite was the Assistant for Anglican Communion Affairs serving the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1980s. He had previous experience (and success) as a hostage negotiator. Thus, he was sent as an envoy for the Church of England to negotiate with the Islamic Jihad Organization on January 12, 1987, asking for the release of several hostages. On January 20, however, the jihad took Waite hostage as well, and he remained in captivity until November 18, 1991. He spent most of his imprisonment in solitary confinement.

Everything about Waite's experience was disorienting. His jail cell had no windows, keeping him in complete darkness for most of the time. To stave off madness, Waite used routines to keep himself hopeful. One habit that helped him transcend his setting was using a bit of his bread and water to recite a daily Communion ritual.

Similarly, the apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians about practices that keep him grounded, despite his captivity.

B. Lesson Context

The founding of the church in Philippi occurred in an unexpected, supernatural way. Paul was on his second missionary journey, around AD 52–54, and he did not plan to enter that city. When he reached the province of Mysia (a region in northwestern Turkey today), he intended to turn north

How to Say It

Bithynia	Bih-*thin*-ee-uh
Caesarea Maritima	Sess-uh-*ree*-uh Mar-uh-*tee*-muh
Epaphroditus	Ee-*paf*-ro-***dye***-tus
Ephesus	*Ef*-uh-sus
Macedonia	Mass-eh-*doe*-nee-uh
Mysia	*Miss*-ee-uh
Philippi	Fih-*lip*-pie or *Fil*-ih-pie
Philippians	Fih-*lip*-ee-unz
Praetorian	pray-*tor*-ee-an
Thessalonians	*Thess*-uh-***lo***-nee-unz (*th* as in *thin*)

and enter Bithynia, but the Spirit disallowed that plan (Acts 16:6–7). As a result, Paul and his companions ended up in the Roman province of Macedonia. Once there, they visited the city of Philippi, a Roman colony founded in 31 BC. Because of Paul's shift in destination, Christianity spread westward rather than to the northeast as the centuries passed.

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians during one of his Roman imprisonments (Philippians 1:7, 13–14, 17). Scholars debate which of Paul's multiple confinements is connected to the letter. Proposals have included Caesarea Maritima (Acts 23:23–33; 25:4), Ephesus (possibly implied in 1 Corinthians 15:32; 16:8), or Rome (Acts 28). The date of the letter depends on the incarceration to which one links the letter. Given the references to the Praetorian Guard in Philippians 1:13 and Caesar's household in 4:22, the most likely setting is Rome. Paul was imprisoned there from about AD 61 to 63.

As our lesson text begins, Paul has already stressed union with Christ and unity with fellow believers. This unity is upheld by having the mind of Christ, and it is expressed in humility (Philippians 2:5–11 [Lesson 9]). This humility is a "must have" as Christians receive the grace by which God has saved us and continues to work in us (2:12–13).

I. Blameless Children

(Philippians 2:14–18)

A. Living Without Complaint (v. 14)

14. Do all things without murmurings and disputings.

Considered in context with the verses just before it, *all things* refers to the obedience of faithfully working out one's salvation in light of God's grace. Therefore, Paul means that there should be no undercurrent of resentment or complaining regarding one's expectations of that accomplishment. A historical outcome of ungrateful *murmurings* is seen in Numbers 16:41–50, summarized by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:10. Paul wants the Philippian church to unite in their salvation through Christ rather than succumbing to arguments.

The word translated as *disputings* is the Greek root of our English word "dialogue." Words shift meaning over time, and we now think of a dialogue as a low-key exchange of viewpoints rather than a heated argument. The word, as it occurs in the New Testament, is invariably used in a negative sense when two or more people are involved (examples: Romans 14:1; 1 Timothy 2:8).

What Do You Think?

What task, service, or work tends to make you grumble?

Digging Deeper

What promises and actions might help you to be "blameless" instead of grumbling?

B. Shining Like Stars (vv. 15–16)

15a. That ye may be blameless and harmless.

The word translated as *blameless* in this text is rare in the New Testament, occurring only here and in Luke 1:6; Philippians 3:6; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; and Hebrews 8:7. The word translated as *harmless* is rarer still, occurring only here and in Matthew 10:16 and Romans 16:19. Together, these words shift readers' focus from the negative things that Paul wants them to avoid to positive things for which Paul would like these Christians to be known. The characteristics of blamelessness and harmlessness echo holiness and righteousness, which are both necessary for believers because God is holy (1 Peter 1:15–16).

15b. The sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.

Mid-thought, Paul includes a warning drawn from Deuteronomy 32:5. This passage provides a rather unmistakable connection to the wilderness wandering of the Israelites in 1447–1407 BC. As such, it serves as a warning to the future *sons of God*, those of every generation. God desired for the wilderness generation to live as His children. Instead, they became a *crooked and perverse* people. That generation stumbled continually on the way to the promised land (compare Matthew 17:17; Luke 9:41; Acts 2:40). Paul wants the

Philippians to act differently, to stand out as those who align with God rather than the world.

The word translated as *world* is the source of the English words "cosmos" and "cosmetic." As such, it is what we might call a "chameleon word," taking on different meanings depending on its context. The word can refer to the entirety of planet Earth (Acts 17:24), unholy spiritual forces (Colossians 2:8), a belief system to be rejected (James 4:4), outward adornment (1 Peter 3:3), or humanity as loved by God (John 3:16).

16a. Holding forth the word of life.

A Christian's attitude toward *the word of life* determines how brightly their light will shine. Notice that here Paul uses the phrase to refer to the gospel message about Jesus, but in 1 John 1:1, John uses the same phrase to refer to Jesus.

The action Paul describes as *holding forth* is about adhering to the gospel message and offering it to others through proclamation (compare Philippians 1:12–14, 27–28).

16b. That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

Some scholars refer to the letter to the Philippians as Paul's "joy letter." There's a good reason for that: Some form of the word *joy* or *rejoice* occurs eighteen times in it! On the other hand, the exact phrase *the day of Christ* is found only three times in the New Testament (here; Philippians 1:10; 2 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul uses variations of this phrase in several other places as well (examples: Philippians 1:6; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 1:14). This particular day is the day when Christ will return and render judgment. On the day of Christ, God will test the quality of the work that one has done (1 Corinthians 3:10–15). It will be both a day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30) and a day of wrath (Romans 2:5).

Often, Paul uses the imagery of running a race (1 Corinthians 9:24–26; Galatians 2:2) and labor (1 Corinthians 3:8; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3) to describe his ministry. Both images convey disciplined movement derived from training and practice, striving toward a goal (1 Corinthians 15:58; Colossians 1:29; 1 Timothy 4:10), and strenuous effort against challenge (2 Corinthians 6:3–10; 11:23–33).

The phrase *in vain* describes something as being fruitless, empty, or lacking in substance (1 Corinthians 15: 58; Galatians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). If the Philippians dissolved as a faithful community, then Paul would have seen his ministry among them as without a point or purpose—it would have borne no lasting fruit. Instead, he hopes that when he looks back at the present from the perspective of the day of Christ, he will see the goal achieved, the Philippians holding tightly to the good news of Jesus.

What Do You Think?

In what specific ways are you "holding forth the word of life"?

Digging Deeper

What Bible study practices will you adopt to ensure that you "have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain"?

C. Seeking Sacrificially (vv. 17–18)

17. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.

The verb translated as *offered* here refers specifically to a drink offering. This kind of offering is mentioned about two dozen times in the Old Testament (examples: Exodus 25:29; 29:40–41; Leviticus 23:13, 18). When Paul uses this phrase again, it will be as a description of his imminent death (2 Timothy 4:6). Scholars believe that the usual procedure for drink offerings might have been to pour the offering over a meat offering. They derive this concept from the prohibition of pouring a drink offering on the altar of incense (Exodus 30:9). If the usual procedure is what Paul has in mind, he may be creating a metaphor: Paul, the drink offering, is poured over the figurative *sacrifice* of the Philippian believers.

The Philippians' *faith* is the source of their sacrificial *service*. This concept encompasses their obedient living amidst suffering (Philippians 1:29–30; 3:17), it is a way they align with Christ (3:10–11).

Previous references to Paul's *joy* in this letter show that its foundation is the gospel and the God it proclaims—Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:4–5, 18–19, 25–26; 2:1–2).

18. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). After expressing his own joy, Paul indicates that he expects others to join him in it. The same source elicits their *joy*: the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6). This is about cultivating a cheerful disposition in submission to the Spirit.

Paul's instruction is not about pretending to feel a certain way, nor is it about acting like we have no troubles. Instead, it is about cultivating perspective. We have hope because of the gospel. We have hope because of the Spirit who is the guarantee of our future with the Lord (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14).

What Do You Think?

For whom do you sacrifice so that their faith is strengthened?

Digging Deeper

How can you devote yourself to this service with joy?

II. Joyful Children

(Philippians 3:1a; 4:4–7)

Twelve verses stand between the last Scripture and the next in today's study. Those verses reveal Paul's thoughts on the status of Timothy and Epaphroditus, as well as how to use them most effectively in ministry (see Lesson 12).

A. Rejoicing Always (3:1a)

1a. Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.

This instruction parallels Paul's command in 4:1, where he adds that the Philippians are to "stand fast in the Lord" (see Lesson 12). Both phrases identify *the Lord* as the one who shapes and defines believers' lives. The community is to act with exceeding gladness.

Paul has known sorrow, and yet he has rejoiced through it (Philippians 1:4, 18; 2:1–2; 2 Corinthians 6:10). Until the day when God wipes every tear from our eyes (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4), some mixture of joy and sorrow will characterize human lives. Paul asks the Philippians to focus on the joy.

What Do You Think?

In what way does rejoicing safeguard our faith (see Philippians 3:1b)?

Digging Deeper

How does Romans 5:3–5 affect your answer?

More Than a Catchphrase?

As a student in Bible college, I studied under a variety of professors with differing personalities and perspectives. One of them was very convicted by Philippians 3:1. When someone asked him how he was doing, he always answered, "Rejoicing in the Lord!" He said this so often that it became what he was known for, his personal catchphrase.

One day, a student asked him directly about his unusual response. The professor replied, "I take Paul's command in Philippians seriously—we are to rejoice in the Lord regardless of our circumstances. When I say it, the words remind me that in every situation, my hope is in Jesus."

This teacher's practice and perspective stuck with me, and I've thought about it many times over the thirty years since my graduation. Am I rejoicing, even on hard days? Am I adopting a naïve view of joy that minimizes the reality of suffering? Is it possible to rejoice even when I do not feel joyful? Perhaps you have asked yourself the same questions.

—LMW

B. Showing Gentleness (vv. 4:4–5)

4. Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

Paul reinforces the imperative found in Philippians 3:1 by repeating it here. He builds on his instruction by adding a directive to rejoice *alway*. Joy *in the Lord* is something to strive for in all circumstances, especially when our emotional state is at odds with it. Joy often involves emotional control and a reframing of our perspective; it does not involve manufacturing emotions out of nothing.



Visual for Lesson 11. *Point to this visual and ask, "In what ways are you rejoicing today? Where do you need your joy to increase?"*

When we remember all that God has done for us, we can lean into truth, contentment, and satisfaction in greater measure. It is a special perspective that Christians possess, a mindset and heart posture that is far different than that of the secular world. Paul's repetition of the concept indicates its importance and the necessity of practice to make it a habit.

5. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

Paul shifts from sustained argumentation to short, pithy directives in this verse. His use of the word *moderation* may seem incomplete at first glance—moderation in what? But discovering how the underlying Greek is translated elsewhere reveals Paul's intent. He uses the same word in 1 Timothy 3:3, translated as "patient," and in Titus 3:2, where it is rendered "gentle." The word "gentle" is also used in translation of the underlying Greek word in non-Pauline passages like James 3:17 and 1 Peter 2:18. Gentleness is the opposite of harshness. It is a character trait that holds an equitable middle ground, stays level-headed, and extends patience.

The phrase *the Lord is at hand* poses interpretive challenges. The sub-phrase *at hand* conveys the concept of the adverb "near," often expressed as "nigh" (Matthew 24:32; Mark 13:29; Luke 19:11; etc.). Nearness can be expressed in at least three ways:

- physical proximity (example: Acts 9:38)
- chronological proximity (example: Mark 13:28)
- relational proximity (example: Hebrews 10:22)

The references to "the day of Christ" in this letter (Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16; see above) may suggest that chronological proximity is the most directly connected to Paul's meaning here (compare 1 Corinthians 7:29–40; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12; 2 Peter 3:3–10; 1 John 2:18).

C. Praying Petitions (vv. 6–7)

6. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

The word translated as *careful* here is also translated "take no thought" in several other passages (examples: Matthew 6:31; 10:19). Paul gives believers another way to stand out from non-believers—anxiety does not have to rule us. We have a blessed way to address our worries and cares; we may take them to the Lord in prayer (compare 1 Peter 5:7).

The meanings of the words *prayer* and *supplication* overlap substantially. We may conclude that "prayer" is the broader category of which "supplication" is a subset. Paul doesn't seem to have a favorite of these two words since each occurs fourteen times across his letters. Supplication includes petitions or requests. We may approach God with our concerns, asking for what we need because God wants to know. But Paul does suggest doing so *with thanksgiving*—another serious tactic for repositioning our perspective!

Two Ways to Think About Worry

As a therapist, I see the effect of anxiety on people's lives every day: difficulty sleeping, painful relationships, and physical ailments. The professional part of me balks at sermons in which ministers encourage people to "just turn their worries over to God," promising that He will take away their anxiety quickly.

On the other hand, I'm also a chaplain, and in that capacity, I sometimes witness families who cope brilliantly with tragic loss because of their faith. They know that someone bigger than themselves is in control, and their belief in God brings peace. They use prayer to approach the only one

who can heal their loved ones, comfort their aching hearts, and remain present through it all.

Anxiety presents in big and little ways—sometimes it is temporary, and other times it is chronic. Paul's instructions give us hope that God can help with our fears, worries, and cares. And yet, we must be careful not to diminish the real disorders, traumas, and biological components that make anxiety complicated. Some types of anxiety are pervasive and debilitating, and they require healing that goes beyond a single prayer.

Faith and anxiety have a complicated relationship (compare Mark 9:24). How do you settle this in your life? Are you committed to taking your requests to God for the long haul? How are you supporting others in prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving for the sake of their well-being?

—LMW

7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The outcome of our prayer and supplication is not the guarantee that God will grant our every request. Paul himself prayed multiple times for his "thorn" to be removed, and it was not (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). What *is* promised is *the peace of God*. On the one hand, that peace enables us to face whatever circumstances come our way, guarding our internal emotions and thoughts. On the other hand, that peace is a communal benefit, as it results in wholeness, harmony, restoration, stability, and security. God wants us to share the peace we have in Christ with one another (Philippians 2:1–5; 4:2–3). Paul wants to reassure his readers that joy and peace bookend life *through Christ Jesus*.

The statement that God's peace *passeth all understanding* has several possible meanings. It may mean that God's peace exceeds human comprehension. Or it may mean that His peace surpasses human intellect and reasoning in addressing the problems in question. Both interpretations work in this context. The best possibility, however, is that Paul is reminding the Philippians that believers enjoy eternal peace with God through Jesus—He is our means of reconciliation with the Father (compare Romans 5:11).

What Do You Think?

When have you experienced God's peace "which passeth all understanding"?

Digging Deeper

Considering Jesus' words and actions in John 20:21, 26, what does it mean that God's peace is ours in Christ Jesus?

Conclusion

A. Commitment to Joy

Like the apostle Paul and Terry Waite, many Christians face persecution and abuse. Some of us have less severe troubles, but our struggles still lead to varying levels of anxiety. Whatever our situation, humans need practices that help us focus, regroup, and remember truth amidst life's most disorienting experiences. Throughout Philippians, Paul exemplifies what it looks like to stay focused and joyful amid troubles.

A commitment to joy does not mean dismissing or ignoring the problems that plague us, but it does mean putting them into appropriate perspective. God's story is to shape our viewpoint. Paul models a peaceful and contented way of life—one that is close to God, the source of our joy.

When we commit to joy, we must also commit to gratitude. Healthy thanksgiving acknowledges that what is good in our lives comes to us from the "Father of lights" (James 1:17). It is a recognition of our dependence on Him. It recalls the faithful love that God has already shown us and pairs it with celebration. Joy orients us to the one who transcends our circumstances. It grounds us in God's favor and love. Knowing the God who cares for us enhances our view of the transcendent Creator, Ruler, and Redeemer. May it ever be so!

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, cultivate the fruit of joy in us by the power of Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Choose joy in the Lord.

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Ask your class to pull out their phones and find two pictures that represent times of personal joy. Then divide students into small groups and ask them to share their photos. If participants are struggling to find examples, suggest events such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, births, or family reunions—any time they've celebrated. Encourage students to share *how* they celebrated, not just *what* they celebrated.

Alternative. Write the word *REJOICE* vertically on the board. Ask, "When you think of rejoicing, what first comes to mind?" Challenge students to think of a word for each letter in *rejoice* that typifies their occasions for joy.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Joy is a blessing of the Christian life. Today, we'll look at what caused the apostle Paul to rejoice and how he asked the Philippian church to practice joy."

Into the Word

Use background information from the Lesson Context to explain what was happening in Paul's life when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. Include the following passages from Philippians, asking a student to read each aloud: Philippians 1:21–25 and 2:17.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "He Faced Suffering" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask students to complete this brief Bible study in groups of two or three. Compare their findings with the whole group.

Distribute paper and pencils. Ask students to create two headings under which they will make two lists: *Encouragement from Paul* and *Blessings from God*. Divide the class into two groups: the **Directives Group** and the **Results Group**. Ask for volunteers to read Philippians 2:14–18; 3:1a; and 4:4–7 out loud. Then invite students to work in their groups to survey the texts and make a list of the directives Paul gives. Beside each instruction, ask students to write the results (or blessings) that Paul says will follow.

Option. Distribute copies of the "He Encouraged Joy" exercise from the activity page. Invite students to complete it with a partner as indicated.

As a whole class, review Philippians 2:14–18 and 4:4–7, then discuss: 1–Why does Paul ask the Philippians to act without complaint? (2:14–15) 2–What is the "word of life"? (2:16) 3–How do we hold the word of life "forth"? (2:16) 4–Why does Paul hope to rejoice on the day of Christ? (2:16) 5–Why does Paul rejoice? (2:17) 6–Why does Paul desire for the Philippians to rejoice? (2:18) 7–Why does Paul mention moderation? (4:5) 8–How does Paul recommend handling our cares (the things that worry us)? (4:6) 9–How do you think the peace of God preserves hearts and minds? (4:7) Do you have an example to share?

Into Life

Distribute blank index cards to every participant. Ask students to think of an anxiety with which they are currently struggling. Instruct them to write it at the top of their card. Then give students one minute to write as many fears as they can think of that stem from that first anxiety.

Instruct students to flip over their cards. Then pray together, "Father God, Paul tells us to bring our needs to You with thanksgiving. So, we do this now. Help us name our gratitude. Amen." Give students one minute to write any thanksgiving that comes to mind.

Then, inform students that you are going to physically demonstrate casting your cares on God (compare 1 Peter 5:7). Challenge class members to tear their index cards into pieces and bring the scraps to a basket or bucket you've placed in the center of the room. Consider playing a worship song or hymn while giving students time to pray, tear, and throw away their cards.

Standing Firm

Devotional Reading: Mark 13:9–13
Background Scripture: Philippians 2:19–30; 3:17–4:1; Colossians 1:15–23

Philippians 2:27–30

27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

28 I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.

29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:

30 Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

Philippians 3:20–4:1

20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

1 Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

Colossians 1:21–23

21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled

22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight:

23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.



Key Text

Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. **—Philippians 4:1**

Image © Getty Images

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 3: Serving the World

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize how God has reconciled believers to Himself.
2. Explain the meaning of heavenly citizenship and its implications for life on earth.
3. Compose a one-sentence exhortation to steadfastness that they may use to embolden faith in challenging situations.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Suffering for the Gospel
- B. Lesson Context: Roman Citizenship
- C. Lesson Context: Paul's Purpose

I. Gospel Hospitality (Philippians 2:27–30)
- A. Sickness and Sorrow (v. 27)
  Joyful Recovery
- B. Sent and Seen (vv. 28–30)

II. Gospel Promises (Philippians 3:20–4:1)
- A. Splendor of the Savior (vv. 20–21)
- B. Strength to Stand (v. 4:1)
  Superficial or Comprehensive?

III. Gospel Hope (Colossians 1:21–23)
- A. Sacred in His Sight (vv. 21–22)
- B. Steadfast in Faith (v. 23)

Conclusion
- A. Reconciled for Service
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Suffering for the Gospel

Michael's church sent him to the US to pursue theological training. In his home country, Christianity was illegal, and few seminaries provided opportunities for pastoral equipping. Michael dedicated himself to his studies, knowing that he bore a heavy responsibility. His home church counted on him to prepare well and then return to share the wealth of his training. While in school, he continued to serve his home church by recording video sermons, writing devotionals, and preparing discipleship training materials.

Michael became quite comfortable in the US, especially in comparison with the persecution Christians faced back home. When he reached the end of his studies, he had an important decision to make—would he return, knowing that he would face harassment and hardship? Was he willing to accept the possibility of incarceration for his beliefs? After weighing his options, seeking counsel, and praying, Michael decided to return. A couple of years later, the local police arrested him for his ministry efforts. Michael did not regret his decision; instead, he celebrated, acknowledging that God sometimes works through persecution to strengthen His church. Faithful gospel service may result in suffering, and yet, extending the hope of the gospel is worth it!

B. Lesson Context: Roman Citizenship

Tradition tells us that the city of Rome was established in 753 BC. Isaiah's prophetic ministry was underway at that point, although there is no stated connection between the two. In 509 BC, the Romans overthrew the local power and became the self-determining Roman Republic. Over the next five centuries, Rome grew from a city-state into an international superpower. By the first century AD, Rome controlled everything around the Mediterranean Sea.

Initially, only those who lived in and around Rome were counted as citizens. As in many cultures, citizenship united the people, fostering a common identity. As Rome's territory expanded, governmental leadership used citizenship to

integrate new regions into the empire. People earned citizenship through birth, military service, emancipation from slavery, or grants for exceptional service or courageous acts. The apostle Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37–38; 22:25–28).

While local rulers wielded significant authority, Roman law limited their power over Roman citizens. Roman citizens could not be beaten or tortured and had the right to demand a trial. In court, they retained the right to appeal. They were exempt from the worst and most shameful of public executions: crucifixion. While Jews retained hostility toward the Romans, non-Roman Gentiles often pursued the benefits of Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28).

C. Lesson Context: Paul's Purpose

Today's lesson texts come from two letters that Paul wrote during a Roman imprisonment. His purpose in writing to the Philippians was to thank them for their support and to encourage their continued faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Philippi was a wealthy Roman colony, situated at about the mid-point of the *Via Egnatia*, a seven-hundred-mile trade route between the Adriatic Sea and Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul).

Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians to combat false teachings and call them to unwavering commitment to the gospel. Colossae was a trade town in Asia Minor, located near the southern cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea. It was destroyed by earthquakes between AD 60 and 69, probably not long after Paul wrote his letter.

I. Gospel Hospitality

(Philippians 2:27–30)

As Paul and Timothy write to the church at Philippi, a man named Epaphroditus is also with them. The Philippian church sent Epaphroditus as a messenger to Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (Philippians 2:25). They tasked Epaphroditus with bringing a gift and caring for Paul's needs (2:25; 4:10, 14, 18). If Paul and Epaphroditus did not previously have a relationship, they became exceedingly close during this time. In the letter, Paul calls him "my brother, and companion



Visual for Lesson 12. *Place this visual in a prominent place in your classroom. Refer to it while teaching on Philippians 4:1.*

in labour, and fellowsoldier," (2:25). These terms of endearment stem from their status as siblings in the family of God and partnership in gospel ministry. Paul has decided, however, that the time has arrived for Epaphroditus to return to the Philippians.

Since Epaphroditus arrived in Rome, a messenger must have traveled back to Philippi, carrying news that Epaphroditus was ill (Philippians 2:26). In a time when there were no quick means of communication over long distances, this news left the Philippians unsure of Epaphroditus's condition. Had he recovered?

A. Sickness and Sorrow (v. 27)

27. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Paul addresses the community's concern directly, clarifying that *indeed* Epaphroditus *was sick*—the news they had received was accurate. In fact, the illness was serious. Epaphroditus's life hung in the balance; he had been close to *death*!

But Paul shifts to the good news—Epaphroditus has recovered. Paul describes the healing in terms of God's action: *God* extended His *mercy* toward him. Paul is grateful for God's compassion and kindness not only to Epaphroditus but *also* to himself. While Paul recognizes that death can be a positive outcome for the Christian (Philippians 1:21), he admits that Epaphroditus's death would have

been difficult to bear. Even though Christians retain hope beyond the grave, death continues to be an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26). It causes pain, sadness, and grief—even for the spiritually mature.

Paul lives in a state of persistent unease, holding concern for the many churches he planted (2 Corinthians 11:28), unable to visit physically because of his incarceration.

What Do You Think?

Have you witnessed God's mercy in a time of sickness (for yourself or others)?

Digging Deeper

How can we live as a merciful fellowship when a fellow Christian grieves?

Joyful Recovery

My grandmother grew up in the 1920s in a remote area of Appalachia. When she was twelve years old, she suffered a snake bite. Her father found the copperhead that bit her and killed it. He hung the snake from the limb of an apple tree near the site of her accident as a warning to other snakes and people. His revenge did nothing to cure her, however, and without a doctor or antivenom, she suffered for weeks before finally recovering.

Imagine the joy my grandmother's friends and family felt when she recovered and returned to everyday life! Paul describes this kind of relief over Epaphroditus's recovery. Paul says that his friend's healing spared him "sorrow upon sorrow."

When you or a family member recovered from something severe, did you give God the credit? Why, or why not? —LMW

B. Sent and Seen (vv. 28–30)

28. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.

Epaphroditus did not decide on his own to return to Philippi. Instead, Paul decides to send him back. Epaphroditus likely carried this letter from Paul and read it to the Philippians when he arrived.

Paul's use of the word, *therefore*, implies that Epaphroditus's recovery sparked Paul's decision. Paul desires that when the Christians in Philippi *see him again*, there will be jubilant rejoicing; they will enjoy firsthand knowledge of Epaphroditus's health and vitality.

Throughout this letter, Paul speaks of his own joy (Philippians 1:4, 18; 2:2, 17; 4:10) and encourages his readers to rejoice as well (1:25; 2:18; 3:1; 4:4). He does so in a way that does not minimize pain and suffering; he does not call for detachment from the ups and downs of life. Instead, Paul recognizes that life on earth includes difficult circumstances that cause distress and sorrow, and yet he still calls believers to be characterized by joy.

29. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation.

Paul encourages the Philippian church to *receive* Epaphroditus back in a specific way: They are to welcome him *in the Lord*. Paul gives similar instructions to the church in Rome regarding Phoebe, the "servant" who most likely carried his letter to their congregation (Romans 16:1–2).

Furthermore, Paul exhorts the Philippians to honor Epaphroditus and others like him. In Greco-Roman society, messengers and servants did not occupy distinguished roles. Therefore, they received little respect. Paul wants the Christian church in Philippi to see Epaphroditus with a much higher regard. The reason why is given next.

What Do You Think?

Considering 1 Thessalonians 5:12, how does one uphold the reputation of those who ""labour" among us?

Digging Deeper

What action might you take this week to show honor and appreciation to someone who ministers to you?

30. Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

The Philippians should honor Epaphroditus because of his death-defying dedication. Paul wants the church to understand that Epaphroditus's commitment to the cause of Christ supersedes concern for his own well-being.

During Paul's imprisonment, he has physical

and emotional needs. Under house arrest, he is unable to work and, therefore, cannot provide for himself. Additionally, those associated with him in ministry come and go. Because of the distance, the Philippian church cannot help Paul with his daily necessities. Yet, as brothers and sisters in Christ, they have a responsibility to care for Paul (compare Romans 12:13; 1 Corinthians 9:1–18). Until Epaphroditus arrived in Rome on their behalf, they could not fulfill this responsibility.

The word translated as *service* here is also translated as "ministry" in Hebrews 8:6, and this connection aligns with the concept of a priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4–5).

II. Gospel Promises

(Philippians 3:20–4:1)

In the intervening verses, Paul urges the Philippian believers to "rejoice in the Lord" (Philippians 3:1), reach toward their heavenly callings in Christ (3:13–14), and aim for maturity (3:15–16). He issues a warning against "evil workers" and holding confidence in ourselves (3:2–4). He also mentions positive models of faith—himself, and those such as Timothy and Epaphroditus who faithfully serve alongside him (3:17).

A. Splendor of the Savior (vv. 20–21)

20. For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word *for* indicates that what follows is the explanation for Paul's warnings and commands. Instead of a focus on "earthly things" (Philippians 3:19), Paul points believers toward *heaven*.

At first, we may be confused by the word *conversation.* Words change meaning over time, and that is certainly true of this word. Today, we use it to indicate an informal discussion. But in the 1611 King James Version, the meaning of "conversation" is wider and deeper, referring to the place of one's citizenship.

Caesar Augustus made Philippi a Roman colony after a decisive battle there in 42 BC, thereby bringing it into the Roman commonwealth. Citizens of Philippi enjoyed the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of the empire. However, Paul wants the Philippians to claim an even stronger identity and allegiance with God's kingdom. The only way that's going to happen is with a constant reminder to "look up" (mentally if not physically) to anticipate the return of Jesus.

Paul purposefully selects familiar, politically charged terms. Within the Roman Empire, the emperor was called both "Savior" and "Lord." The former term refers to military rescue. The latter term refers to a political sovereign. Paul wants the believers in Philippi to recognize their new sovereign: *the Lord Jesus Christ*.

What Do You Think?

How do we live as those whose "conversation is in heaven" while being citizens of an earthly nation?

Digging Deeper

Remembering 1 Peter 1:13, how will you set your hope firmly on heaven despite the allurements of the world?

21. Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Paul expands on the benefits of following the true sovereign: Believers will experience *change*. The term *vile* does not mean morally inferior or negative here, but rather something of low or humble status. Paul uses the verb form of this same word to speak of Jesus becoming human earlier in the letter: "he humbled himself" (Philippians 2:8). Human bodies break down and ultimately die. But in Jesus, believers have a certain expectation of something more, something *glorious.* That expectation is the transformation of our bodies to be *like unto his glorious body*—the body that Jesus received at His resurrection. Paul has much more to say about this in 1 Corinthians 15.

B. Strength to Stand (v. 4:1)

1. Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

Paul uses familiar language to appeal to the

Philippians: they are his brothers and sisters, his *dearly beloved*. He is pained to be separated from them (compare Philippians 1:8). He wants them to know that he cares deeply for them and values them highly—he considers them a prize, like the one worn by the winner of an athletic contest (*my joy and my crown*). Roman culture used crowns to mark victorious athletes, military leaders, and civic heroes. Traditionally, these crowns were made from laurel, bay, or oak leaves. By the first-century AD, however, they were often cast from precious metals.

Paul urges the Philippians to maintain their identity in Christ, which requires being loyal, unwavering, and immovable. Steadfastness in believers reflects the very nature of God: "He is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end" (Daniel 6:26).

What Do You Think?

Where are you most susceptible to being shaken from your firm position in Christ (consider situations in your home, workplace, or community)?

Digging Deeper

How will you proactively address that area so that you may remain steadfast in the hope of the resurrection?

Superficial or Comprehensive?

Think back to high school for a moment—did your teacher ever duck out of the classroom for a few minutes? How did the class react? I remember a student standing guard at the door, watching for the teacher's return so the rest of the class could talk, move around the room, and otherwise generally misbehave.

With evidence of the teacher's approach, the watchman sounded the alarm, and everyone ran back to their seats. When the teacher came back into the room, we all sat in silence, the image of perfect students. Everyone knew the expectations, and they wanted to appear to be upholding the standard when the teacher returned.

Paul encourages the Philippian church to maintain high standards. He wants them to follow Christ obediently. He wants Jesus to find them faithful when He returns, not because they will avoid punishment, but because adhering to Christ's ways brings transformation. Jesus doesn't want us to pretend to be good, like a group of unruly teenagers, but to submit to Christ's control fully. In what ways will you remain faithful to Jesus this week? —LMW

III. Gospel Hope

(Colossians 1:21–23)

We now jump to a different letter of Paul's, also written during his imprisonment in Rome. Here, Paul addresses the church at Colossae. Although written to a different audience, this passage connects thematically to the previous Scripture studied today. Paul has just declared the supremacy of Jesus as God's Son (Colossians 1:15–17). He emphasizes that the fullness of God dwells in the Son and that "all things" are reconciled to Him (1:19–20).

A. Sacred in His Sight (vv. 21–22)

21. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.

You refers to the Colossians. Paul begins by describing their past: before reconciliation to Christ, they were estranged from God, even *enemies* of Him (compare Romans 5:10; 11:28). Paul explains their estrangement in two ways: It occurs in their minds and plays out in *wicked works*. Paul's reference to the *mind* here refers to the center of human thought and action. He likely means that the Colossians' natural disposition and perspective stand in opposition to God. Out of this pagan mindset comes *wicked* behavior. However, Paul speaks of this situation as a past reality; now they enjoy reconciliation with God.

22. In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight.

Now Paul summarizes how God won this reconciliation: It came by way of Christ's *body*,

through His *death* (compare Romans 7:4). By becoming human and sacrificing Himself on the cross, Christ made a way for believers to stand before the Father. In Christ, we are presented as *holy* and pure.

B. Steadfast in Faith (v. 23)

23a. If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel.

The beginning word *if* makes this reconciliation conditional, however. Believers must *continue in the faith*. We must persevere toward steadfast living in accordance with the good news of *the gospel*—like a building that is *grounded and settled*, firmly established and structurally sound. There is an active vigilance needed to remain centered on gospel *hope*. Paul does not shy away from the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility; God offers the gift of reconciliation, and humans must claim it and then persist in faith and hope to retain it.

23b. Which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.

Paul mentioned at the start of his letter that the Colossians came to faith through the teaching of a man named Epaphras (Colossians 1:7–8). Paul emphasizes here that the readers know the gospel; they *have heard* it. Paul is thus reminding them that they know the truth. Paul himself is *a minister* or servant of that same gospel—it is his job to spread the message of hope and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. The gospel message has universal validity and has gone out all over the known world.

What Do You Think?

What attitudes and habits make a believer "grounded and settled" in faith?

Digging Deeper

How will you pursue steadfastness this week?

Conclusion

A. Reconciled for Service

Christ has reconciled humans through His sacrificial death to present them holy and blameless before God in the final judgment. This gospel message is the foundational reality of all believers. We are to stand on it, ground ourselves within it, and refuse to move away from it. The gospel message is worth everything, even risking our lives, as Paul and Epaphroditus so boldly model. How will you serve those who faithfully continue to spread the gospel message? Are you willing to face imprisonment, sickness, and the possibility of death for the sake of the gospel?

Just like the Philippians, modern-day believers must remember where our true citizenship and allegiance lie. We are ultimately citizens of heaven! Jesus is our Lord and Savior, the one who governs with truth and justice. Therefore, we are to live in accordance with His commands—His rule and reign.

Adherence to the ways of God will result in glory, transformation, and the celebration of eternal victory. It is a way of life that is worth pursuing with vigilance and tenacity. With the psalmist, Paul, and all those determined to stand firm in faith, we declare: "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8).

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for making a way for us to be reconciled to You. Empower us to sacrificially serve one another in love, stand firmly in faith, and hold tightly to hope. Embolden us to share the gospel message with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Continue in hope and faith.

How to Say It

Colossae	Ko-*lahss*-ee
Epaphroditus	Ee-*paf*-ro-***dye***-tus
Epaphras	*Ep*-uh-frass
Hierapolis	Hi-er-*op*-o-lis
Laodicea	Lay-*oh*-duh-***see***-uh
Philippi	Fih-*lip*-pie or *Fil*-ih-pie

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

As participants arrive, write *BELIEF* on the board or a large piece of butcher paper. Explain that in English, there are two basic definitions of the word belief—we may talk about it (1) as a conviction of truth or (2) as an opinion. Then write *conviction* and *opinion* as the headings of two columns under the word *belief* on your board. Lead a brainstorming session where students (1) offer synonyms for the words *conviction* and *opinion*, and (2) offer examples of each. Then ask, "Where does the word *faith* fit in this conversation?"

Lead a whole-class discussion about beliefs: 1–Do beliefs change over time? 2–What things influence our beliefs? 3–How does belief impact action? 4–Are belief and faith interchangeable terms? Why or why not?

Lead into Bible study by saying, "The apostle Paul served tirelessly to bring Jews and non-Jews to belief in Jesus. In today's texts, he urges believers to stand firm in faith, regardless of the risk. We are to respect those who work diligently for the gospel of Christ."

Into the Word

Divide your class into three groups: the **Stand Firm Group**, the **Reconciliation Group**, and the **Citizenship Group**. Ask volunteers to read each of the following Scriptures out loud: Philippians 2:27–30; 3:20–4:1; and Colossians 1:21–23. Then give each group a handout (you create) with the questions and/or prompts that correspond to their title, as presented below.

The **Stand Firm Group**: 1–Do you think Epaphroditus is an example of a believer who stands firm? Why or why not? 2–In whom are believers to stand fast? 3–How does one continue in "grounded and settled" faith? The **Reconciliation Group**: Use Bible-study resources to find definitions and explanations for each of the following terms: 1–*reconciliation*; 2–*gospel*; 3–*Epaphroditus*. Be ready to share your research with the whole class. The **Citizenship Group**: Research the significance of citizenship in the Roman Empire. Then answer the following questions: 1–Of which realm are we citizens, heaven or earth? 2–How should our status as citizens of heaven influence our perspective on earthly citizenship?

Call groups back together and ask representatives to report their answers. If you have time, discuss as a whole class: 1–What does Paul mean by "sorrow upon sorrow"? 2–What does it mean that we have "vile" bodies? 3–In comparison, what does it mean that these bodies will become "glorious"? 4–What does it mean to be "alienated" from God? 5–In what sense had the Colossians been "enemies" of God? 6–What reconciles us to God?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Imagine His Situation" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Invite participants to find a partner with whom to complete the activity as indicated.

Into Life

Ask students to think of specific situations that might cause modern Christians to struggle in faith. 1–What situations cause us to feel shaky? 2–On the flip side, what increases and solidifies faith?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Steadfast Everywhere" exercise from the activity page. Encourage students to complete the exercise as indicated, with a partner. Then allow partners to share with the whole class as desired.

Distribute strips of colored paper, one to each student. Ask participants to write on their slip a one-sentence exhortation (a recommendation or statement strongly urging someone to do something) to steadfastness. Then challenge them to keep their slip in their pocket or mount it in a visible place for the week, as a reminder to strengthen their faith. Close with prayer.

Being Content

Devotional Reading: Psalm 34:1–10
Background Scripture: Philippians 4:10–20

Philippians 4:10–20

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

14 Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

20 Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.



Key Text

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. **—Philippians 4:13**

Image © Getty Images

Just a
Closer Walk

Unit 3: Serving the World

Lessons 9–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify which churches supported Paul through generous financial giving.
2. Explain the source of Paul's contentment.
3. Make a plan to practice contentment and generosity as an expression of trust in God's provision.

Lesson Outline

Introduction
- A. Contentment as Inoculation
- B. Lesson Context

I. Strength Through Christ (4:10–13)
- A. Renewed Concern (v. 10)
- B. Learned Contentment (vv. 11–13)

II. Partnership with Others (4:14–19)
- A. Shared Troubles (vv. 14–17)
  Remembering the Helpers
- B. Supplied Needs (vv. 18–19)

III. Glory to God (4:20)
Bach to the Future

Conclusion
- A. Learning Contentment
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Contentment as Inoculation

The storyline of Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* is a study in contrasts. The main plot focuses on the title character and her affair with Count Vronsky. Parallel to this narrative is the story of Konstantin "Kostya" Levin and his wife Kitty, Anna's sister-in-law. Discontent drives the tale of Anna and Vronsky's affair, infiltrating the initiation of their relationship, her decision to leave her husband, and their opulent but miserable life together. In contrast, through all the struggles that Kostya and Kitty face, their contentment keeps them from going astray; they are happy with their unembellished lives. Problems and temptations still arise, but their contentment helps them avoid tragedy, remain committed to one another, and find fulfillment.

For Kostya and Kitty, the virtue of contentment served as a partial inoculation to the temptations of aristocratic life. In the same way, Paul found contentment in God to be a stabilizing force when facing either abundance or need.

B. Lesson Context

Paul was not reticent to talk about generosity as a means through which God meets needs. He wrote to various congregations regarding collecting contributions for impoverished believers in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25–28; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; etc.). This collection facilitated an equity between Christians of Jewish background and those of Gentile background. It was the basis for Paul's famous teaching on generosity in 2 Corinthians 8–9.

However, there were pitfalls associated with asking for financial assistance. Although it was certainly permissible for Christian teachers to receive financial support (1 Corinthians 9:1–14; 1 Timothy 5:17–18), doing so raised questions of motive (2 Corinthians 2:17). Traveling sages and teachers of the first century were often mistrusted as being motivated by money. Wealthy benefactors in Greco-Roman society expected that financially dependent teachers would become their clients. As such, the patrons anticipated acquiescence to their wishes regarding the teacher's services.

Paul sought to avoid such complications, particularly concerning the wealthy among the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:12, 15–18; 2 Corinthians 11:7–9; 12:14–15). With awareness and wisdom, he supported himself by working with his hands while he stayed in Corinth (Acts 18:1–3). Therefore, he could appeal to himself as an example (1 Corinthians 4:12), and he taught others to do the same (1 Thessalonians 2:5–12; 4:11–12; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–10). Even so, Paul accepted some outside assistance (2 Corinthians 11:8).

I. Strength Through Christ

(Philippians 4:10–13)

A. Renewed Concern (v. 10)

10. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

As Paul nears the end of his letter to the Philippians, he offers a last declaration of joy, a prominent theme throughout the epistle. Specifically, he reemphasizes that his joy is *in the Lord*; Jesus is his ground for rejoicing. However, the immediate cause of Paul's delight is that the Philippians' *care* for him has *flourished again*, which means that they have recently sent support—their aid had waned and is now reinstated. We know that the Philippians' support came in the form of sending Epaphroditus to minister to Paul because this is expressed earlier in the letter (Philippians 1:3–5; 2:25–30).

Each element of this verse revisits points Paul previously communicated. For example, the words translated as *care* and *careful* are the final two instances of that verb's ten occurrences in the letter. (The other eight are in Philippians 1:7; 2:2 [twice]; 2:5; 3:15 [twice]; 3:19; and 4:2.) The overarching meaning of this verb is that of "thoughtful planning" as it relates to attitude; it is a concept closely linked with being "like-minded." The word is obviously important to Paul because its ten occurrences in this letter are more than one-third of the New Testament's twenty-six total uses of it. Here, Paul is communicating that the Philippians' support conveys a realignment with himself and his ministry.

What is unclear is precisely which *opportunity* the Philippians lacked. It may have been a lack of resources. Paul indicates elsewhere that the Macedonian Christians were not as wealthy as those in Corinth and the rest of Achaia (2 Corinthians 8:1–5; 11:8–9). Or they may have lacked available personnel to make the journey—until Epaphroditus became available (Philippians 2:25–30). It also may have been due to Paul's unwillingness to accept a gift from them until now.

What Do You Think?

Is God calling you to renew your support of a ministry or mission?

Digging Deeper

What is your discernment process regarding the financial support of a ministry?

B. Learned Contentment (vv. 11–13)

11. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

Paul now voices a back-and-forth dynamic regarding need and his reaction to it. On the one hand, he's cautious about asking for money lest his motives come into question. On the other hand, if his lack motivates someone to give without his asking, he won't refuse. Paul is unwilling to reject this fruit of their generosity; otherwise, he would undermine his own teaching (Romans



Visual for Lesson 13. *With this visual displayed, ask students to spend a moment in silence, considering their level of contentment. Close in prayer.*

12:8; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9; 9:6–15) and the teaching of Jesus (Acts 20:35).

The word translated here as *content* relates to a significant concept in first-century Stoicism. Stoic philosophers used the term to refer to the value of being self-sufficient. For them, this meant independence from obligation to others, as well as the ability to face all circumstances with tranquility and equanimity. In contrast, Paul uses the term to signal that his composure and acceptance of sufficiency come from his dependence on God. Paul does not pretend that this lesson came easily or instantaneously. Instead, he phrases his knowledge in the present perfect tense: *I have learned*. Godly contentment takes time and practice.

What Do You Think?

How does modern culture disrupt contentment in Christ?

Digging Deeper

How might you develop your contentment "muscles"?

12. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Paul has experienced *both need* and abundance, and he has learned how to remain steady through either (compare 1 Timothy 6:6–8). He knows that God's grace is sufficient, as it has been in his enduring struggle with the thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7–9). Paul has lost all things for Christ's sake, and yet he trusts in God's grace to achieve the aim of his life (Philippians 3:8–10).

What Do You Think?

What are the unique challenges of remaining faithful in prosperous times?

Digging Deeper

How does Proverbs 16:18 influence your answer?

13. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Alongside texts like John 3:16 and Romans 8:28, this is one of the most famous verses in the New Testament. It is especially common to see it referenced in athletic contexts, although Paul does not use athletic imagery here as he does elsewhere (1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Galatians 2:2; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7). Without its context, readers and interpreters typically treat this verse as a broad statement about one's capability with divine assistance.

In context, however, this statement is about divine sufficiency. God has taught Paul true contentment; Paul understands that God provides out of His infinite abundance, enabling Paul to live in a space of peaceful satisfaction regardless of outward circumstances. In times of plenty, Paul is content in God's sufficiency—and blessedly, this knowledge protects him from temptation related to the love of money, the search for security, or illusions of self-sufficiency. In times of want, Paul is also content in God's sufficiency, which is the antidote to covetousness, envy, and despair.

Paul is consistently poised to give *Christ* credit for the strength he possesses. In his first letter to Timothy, he expresses gratitude that Christ Jesus has empowered and appointed him to ministerial service (compare 1 Timothy 1:12). He will acknowledge this again as he nears the end of his life (2 Timothy 4:17).

II. Partnership with Others

(Philippians 4:14–19)

A. Shared Troubles (vv. 14–17)

14. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

The word *notwithstanding* serves as a transitional statement. Paul shifts away from sharing his rationale regarding the receipt of generous gifts and returns to the central theme of the section: sharing in each other's troubles. While Paul did not ask for the Philippians' gift and insists that he did not require it, he still expresses appreciation for their generosity. Thus, he praises them, identifying their actions as good.

The phrase *ye did communicate with my affliction* refers to joint partnership and participation. Paul used the noun equivalent of this saying in Philippians 1:7 to describe how the Philippians were "partakers" in God's grace with him in proclaiming

the gospel. The verb Paul uses here in this verse refers to taking a sympathetic interest in someone or something, and thus it may appear in contexts of either economics or friendship. Therefore, Paul may intend a double meaning: the Philippians' gift aligns them with Paul and his mission, and, as believers, the Philippians share in suffering for the sake of the gospel (Philippians 1:29–30).

What Do You Think?

How does one "communicate with" another's affliction?

Digging Deeper

When was the last time you purposefully connected with someone in need?

15. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.

Macedonia—a region consisting of much of modern Greece, North Macedonia, and southeastern Albania—was the seat of power during Alexander the Great's empire. Philippi was named after Alexander's father, Philip II of Macedon (382–336 BC). In Paul's day, Philippi was a prosperous Roman colony.

About ten years have passed since Paul brought *the gospel* to the city of Philippi (Acts 16:6–40). Paul subsequently planted churches elsewhere, but he states that only the church in Philippi *communicated* with him concerning *giving and receiving* in support of his missionary journey. Paul says elsewhere that the Christians of Macedonia supplied what he lacked (2 Corinthians 11:8–9). This verse appears to refer to the same activity.

The vocabulary of "giving and receiving" is the language of commerce. The Greek terms refer respectively to debits and credits in a ledger. Such commercial language will reappear in verses 17 and 18. Lest the phrase appear to be cold, calculating, or merely transactional, it is important to remember the context of friendship and fellowship that Paul emphasizes. Friendship is characterized by mutual benefit. Paul may not have asked for their gift, but he does acknowledge that he has a history of receiving benefits from them, as they have benefited from him.

Remembering the Helpers

Our daughter was born with severe cerebral palsy, and during the first few years of her life, my wife and I felt isolated. Her diagnosis turned our whole world upside-down. We had to leave our home and our team on the mission field and return to living in the US. Not least, we had to learn how to care for a medically fragile child.

Our daughter required feedings through a stomach tube, and no matter what we tried, she would vomit multiple times a day. She experienced seizures, and every time we couldn't stop them, we'd have to make another traumatic trip to the emergency room. Somehow, during those years, we developed a belief that we were alone and that no one helped us much. This belief tainted our hearts with bitterness.

But now, a decade later, we keep coming across reminders of people we had forgotten. A variety of people came to babysit our son when we had to take our daughter to the hospital. Others sat with my wife, offering companionship and comfort, and still others brought meals. Several people visited us during hospital stays, and a whole army of nurses, doctors, and therapists served us with kindness and compassion. *How had we forgotten them?*

At one point, the Philippians were the only church that supported Paul, and he remembered them. Even if just one person helped you in a time of need, they are worth remembering! —DG

16. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia. It was situated about one hundred miles southwest of Philippi. Like Philippi, Thessalonica was a significant target for Paul's evangelization (Acts 17:1–9). An excellent stone-paved highway, known as the *Via Egnatia*, connected the two cities. It was one of ancient Rome's most outstanding engineering achievements. Even so, a one-hundred-mile trip in pre-industrial times would have required considerable resolve!

17. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

Paul shifts back to his earlier emphasis to prevent another misunderstanding. He wants to make it clear that his statement in the previous verse is not to be interpreted as seeking *a gift* or any other kind of support from the Philippian church. Instead, he desires for their generosity to count as *fruit*. Fruit, when spoken of in a spiritual context, indicates proof of spiritual health and vitality or the positive result of active faith. The word "fruit" can be used not only literally (as in apples or grapes) but also in commercial contexts to refer to a "benefit" or a "profit" (Philippians 1:22; compare Romans 6:21–22). Paul desires for the generosity of the Philippians to be counted as a net gain.

The language in this verse recalls what Paul mentioned earlier as his specific prayer for the Philippians (1:9–11). As he anticipates the day of Christ, Paul wants the church to be filled with the fruit of righteousness. Their gift in support of his mission is one such positive outcome (compare 1 Thessalonians 2:19–20).

B. Supplied Needs (vv. 18–19)

18. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

Paul further emphasizes that he is now more than adequately supplied. He does not dismiss the Philippians' sense of indebtedness to him as their teacher, but he makes clear that what they sent through Epaphroditus is more than enough.

Earlier in the letter, Paul used sacrificial language (Philippians 2:17), and he returns to it here to express his gratitude in yet another way. The description of an *odour of a sweet smell* comes from the frequent description of acceptable burnt offerings in the Old Testament (Exodus 29:41; Leviticus 17:6; 23:13; Numbers 28–29). It is a description that Paul also applies to the sacrifice of Christ (Ephesians 5:2). The terms *wellpleasing* and *acceptable* arise in other New Testament texts depicting the service, actions, and character of believers (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:16; see also Romans 14:18; Hebrews 13:21). Therefore, the gift the Philippians gave is ultimately for God's glory and pleasure, and Paul considers it a holy *sacrifice*.

19. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Paul now directs his readers' attention to *God*, who surpasses all others in the provision of benefits. God is the ultimate source of *all* gifts (2 Corinthians 9:8–11), and Paul wants the Philippians to know that just as He has provided for Paul, He will provide for them.

God's provision goes beyond the resources of His faithful people, but it does include them. Christians serve as God's hands and feet in this regard (compare Deuteronomy 15:10; Proverbs 19:17; contrast Ezekiel 22:30) as each member of the body of Christ contributes to the well-being of the others. This interconnected embodiment is one reason Paul emphasizes the need for unity and harmony within the church. The Philippians are instruments of God's blessing for Paul, and they should also be blessings to one another—and ultimately, the world.

What Do You Think?

How does believers' praise give glory to God?

Digging Deeper

In what purposeful ways will you give glory to God this week?

III. Glory to God

(Philippians 4:20)

20. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Unlike the *glory* of the previous verse, which refers to God's splendor and infinite greatness, Paul's use here refers to the honor that we owe to God. It comes from recognizing who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing. It is a glory given in praise, a response to His glory.

Paul's use of the possessive determiner *our* reminds the Philippians of a shared, unified relationship with God as *Father*. Paul's grammar accentuates the connection and inclusion present in the family of God. Through Paul's declaration,

believers join together in worship, giving praise to our one God and heavenly Father.

To close, we collectively affirm this praise with the word loaned from Hebrew that has marked the worship of our God for thousands of years: *Amen*.

Bach to the Future

German composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750) left a legacy written at the top of many of his musical compositions. To begin his manuscripts, he would write the initials "JJ." This inscription represents the Latin words *Jesu Juva*, which translate as "Jesus, help!" Even as a prolific composer, he asked for Jesus' assistance before every new undertaking. He knew he needed divine assistance, inspiration, and guidance in his work, especially as he wrote sacred music for German Protestant worship.

At the end of his scores, Bach often signed "SDG," which stands for *Soli Deo Gloria*. It means "Glory to God alone."

Where do you need God's divine assistance? And how will you purposefully give Him glory in association with your skills, talents, and resources?

—DG

Conclusion

A. Learning Contentment

Trusting God to provide when we need something isn't easy, but it typically feels straightforward. Most believers are good at asking God for help when we are in need. The flip side, however—when we are living a life of abundance—is harder to navigate. It's easy to see ourselves as self-sufficient, forgetting the truth that God is our provider. The apostle Paul's witness, that he learned contentment in all seasons and situations, may inspire us to live with holy contentment as well. Do you scramble for the next great item, opportunity, or position—always pursuing *more*? Or are you steady in God regardless of your circumstances?

Paul's contentment was not something he woke up and discovered one day. It was a habit he learned and grew through the natural fluctuations of life. Paul's reflections on contentment show us how to cultivate it within our own lives. First and foremost, we learn contentment by developing true dependence on God. This development might include nurturing a healthy prayer life or regularly studying the story of Scripture. It might include reflecting on God's grace, work, and presence in our lives by making a running record of God's provisions and practicing purposeful gratitude. It might mean reaching out to those who have loved and supported us through tough times.

We can also learn contentment from cultivating generosity. In this regard, we can learn from Paul's kindness as a teacher in partnering with his students, and we can learn from the Philippians who became a blessing to Paul. Contentment comes from sharing God's benefits with one another. Gift-giving, such as the financial support of a missions trip or benevolence to meet a need, can be painful (compare 2 Corinthians 8:3). But whatever the gift, we may rest assured that the Lord is able to compensate. He will meet our needs. After all, "the earth is the LORD's" and everything within it (Exodus 9:29; Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26). He is the Creator of everything and the sustainer from whom all resources come (John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:16–17).

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for the support of fellow believers. Thank You for all the ways we may share in mission and ministry. Help us to learn true contentment in You, regardless of our circumstances. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our sufficiency is in God,
who gives out of His infinite abundance.

How to Say It

Achaia	Uh-*kay*-uh
Epaphroditus	Ee-*paf*-ro-***dye***-tus
Macedonia	Mass-eh-*doe*-nee-uh
Philippi	Fih-*lip*-pie or *Fil*-ih-pie
Philippians	Fih-*lip*-ee-unz
Thessalonica	*Thess*-uh-lo-***nye***-kuh (*th* as in *thin*)

Involvement Learning

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

Into the Lesson

Welcome students to class and invite them to find a partner while you distribute handouts (you create) and pens. Inform learners that they will be making two lists. First, they will brainstorm a list of things they have in abundance. Then, they will brainstorm a list of things they lack. Create your handout with two columns labeled *I have enough* and *I need more*. Set a timer for three minutes and encourage partners to fill out their lists together. After calling time, give the class a few minutes to compare their lists. Then discuss how needs and wants tie to the concept of contentment.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "My Perception of Contentment" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Give learners one minute to complete the exercise as indicated. Then ask them to compare their answers with a partner.

Transition into Bible study by saying, "Humans find it easy to be dissatisfied. We often want *more* or *something different*. The apostle Paul has much to teach us about contentment. Let's explore how trusting God as our provider allows us to live peaceful, generous lives."

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Philippians 4:10–20 out loud. Then, ask learners to answer the following questions. Encourage broad participation by asking a different learner to give the initial answer to each question. (Answers may vary widely depending on the insights and experiences of your class.) 1–What does Paul's statement in verse 10 tell us about his attitude? 2–What does Paul say he's learned in verse 11? 3–In verse 12, Paul alludes to times when he had nothing and times when he had more than enough. Can you name a story or instance found elsewhere in the New Testament that illustrates one of these extremes in Paul's life? 4–Reread verse 13. Using the context of the entire passage, what do you think Paul means by "all things"? 5–According to verses 15–17, how does generosity connect believers? 6–What does Paul consider the Philippians' gift? (v. 18) 7–Compare Paul's words in verse 19 with Jesus' words in Matthew 6:28–34. How are believers to approach their needs?

Divide learners into four groups. Assign each group a name and Scripture passage, as follows: **Helpers**–Philippians 2:19–30; **Philippians**–Acts 16:6–15; **Thessalonians**–Acts 17:1–9; and **Macedonians**–Acts 19:21–41. Ask groups to read their secondary passage silently, then discuss any connections they see between its details and Philippians 4:10–20. As time allows, ask a representative of each group to summarize one or more of their insights for the class.

Option. Focus on Philippians 4:14. Reread it out loud. Ask your class to share how they think "communicating with [someone's] affliction" brings glory to God. Why does Paul say the Philippians have done well? Allow several minutes for discussion.

Into Life

To close today's session, distribute index cards or half-sheets of paper. Instruct students to use one side to write three things or people they will thank God for in the coming week. Then invite them to flip over the card or paper and list three things, resources, or blocks of time they could generously give to help others in the coming week. Encourage learners to take their cards home and post them in a place where they will see them daily, as a reminder. Inform learners that you will follow up with this activity when class meets again. Close the lesson in prayer, asking the Lord to help learners grow in contentment and generosity.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Prayer for Growth" exercise from the activity page. After learners complete the task, direct them to read their prayers aloud with a partner.

THE WORLD'S MOST POPULAR ANNUAL BIBLE COMMENTARY—TRUSTED FOR OVER 60 YEARS.

Standard Lesson Commentary® provides 52 weeks of in-depth study in a single volume.



DEEPEN YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE

This year, learn from the generations of Israelites who inhabited the promised land, explore the power of the Christian life, consider Jesus through the Gospel of John, and view discipleship through the lens of Paul's prison epistles.

KEY FEATURES

- Printed Scripture text from the King James Version
- Verse-by-verse commentary to interpret the Scripture
- Contextualized literary and historical lesson introductions
- A review quiz for each quarter
- Pronunciation guide for difficult words
- Discussion questions to prompt conversation and reflection
- Group learning activities to encourage life application

UNLOCK TOOLS FOR DEEPER STUDY WITH THE DELUXE EDITION!

Scan for Free Lesson Helps & Tips

Explore Free Lesson Extras at StandardLesson.com

Whether you're looking for curriculum for adult Bible study classes, resources to enhance your lessons, or help with sermon preparation, you'll find what you need with the *Standard Lesson Commentary.* Following the ***International Sunday School Lessons (ISSL)/Uniform Series,*** Standard Lesson explores new topics every year.

DAVID C COOK
transforming lives together
A Standard Resource

US $27.99

RELIGION
Christian Ministry
Adult

Printed in USA