

Journeys

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Journeys

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About the Quarter

Judson Press is excited to launch this new revision of *JOURNEYS Judson Bible Lessons*, having incorporated many of the features readers requested through our marketing survey. You will find this new improved version easy to engage with the biblical scholarship and life application you have come to expect. The lessons are designed to be comprehensive in teaching and succinct in length, making it adaptable for different settings including personal devotion, small group studies, Sunday, and weekday Bible classes. Whether you are a teacher or student, you can choose from the accompanying instructional resources to tailor the learning experience you desire to achieve. We hope that you will enjoy this new JOURNEYS and consider additional opportunities to use it within your ministry setting and home. Please visit the Judson Press website to access additional information about how to maximize the features of this new format, including a JOURNEYS Fact Sheet, a flipbook PDF which highlights and explains all components of the lesson, and FAQs. You can find those resources and more at <https://www.judsonpress.com/Products/CategoryCenter/JPCURR!JPJOUR/Judson-Bible-Journeys-for-Adults.aspx>

About the Writers

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FAITH

faith in action

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

—JAMES 2:17

Introduction

Faith is meaningless if it does not result in lives changed. However, one of the mistakes we Christians make is interpreting faith to mean inner transformation only and not tangibly changing lives for the better. Faith alone does not pay debts or put food on the table. Faith alone does not stop injustice. Those who are rich or those with privilege may not have to worry about poverty or injustice for themselves; but if religion is not concerned about the well-being of others, what good is it? Faith cannot simply be about inner transformation. If it is, it has no good news for the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. The gospel cannot be credible if it does not change people's lives for the better in tangible ways.

Lesson Objectives

- To understand what James means by “faith without works is dead.”
- To understand how social location influences how we understand Scripture and Christian teaching.
- To learn how our biases come into play when we live out our faith with others, and to challenge assumptions of what it means to truly welcome others, resist judging, and avoid playing favorites.

James 2:1-17 NRSV

1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here, please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? 8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor

as yourself.” 9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. 14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Into the Scripture

Some scholars believe that the author and namesake of the Letter of James is the brother of Jesus who became the head of the church in Jerusalem. James is a general epistle (letter), for there are no specific greetings to a community and no named recipients except the “twelve tribes in the Dispersion” (James 1:1), which is a general reference to the Jewish people scattered in the Roman Empire. Most likely James is referring to the churches outside of Jerusalem. There is no specific controversy or argument that James appears to be addressing, no counterpoints to

other leaders. Rather, this is a universal letter to all the followers of Jesus.

The church in Jerusalem faced oppression in a city heavily dominated by the Roman Empire. Jerusalem may have been where it all began, with the resurrection of Jesus and the arrival of the Holy Spirit among the disciples on the day of

Pentecost, but Jerusalem was also where the early believers struggled the most. The followers of Jesus sometimes came into conflict with their neighbors and religious leaders in Jerusalem, and they lived under the fear of Rome, which would crush any movement toward rebellion.

The churches outside of Jerusalem did not face the same challenges with neighboring Jewish communities or the same sense of an occupying government. In Greek cities like Corinth or Thessalonica, the Roman Empire had adopted the Greek culture, practices, and language. But James, writing to these churches, perhaps felt a pastoral obligation to remind the followers of Jesus the core commandment Jesus taught: to love God with one’s whole being, and to love one’s neighbor as one’s self (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:27; Galatians 5:14). Emphasizing the second half of the greatest commandment is central to James’ entire letter, but specifically this selection.

James gets right to the point, with clear instructions on how faith is to be lived out. In the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), Wisdom literature such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are books that give instructions for life. The Letter of James, along with the sayings of Jesus found in the Gospels, is the continuation of the Wisdom literature genre into the New Testament. Wisdom literature contains both practical instruction for the faithful and the reminder that the beginning of wisdom is the fear, or awe, of God. To truly believe in God is to ground oneself in the teachings of God as found in Scripture and, through prayer and meditation, to live it out in our daily lives. While much of James is about practical matters, the final





chapter of his letter ties prayer into the way of life for the Christian.

Historically, the Letter of James has sometimes been misunderstood in contrast to Paul's teachings on faith as opposed to works. Martin Luther famously took this position during the Reformation and called for the Letter of James, along with the Book of Revelation, to be omitted from the Bible. Most scholars, however, believe that James' letter came before Paul's writings and that the two are not opposed to each other. Paul was addressing specific circumstances in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians in regard to Christians enforcing Jewish cultural practices upon Gentile believers. The context of James, meanwhile, is simply a general reminder for Christians to love their neighbor as themselves and to not put themselves first. If faith is only about one's own salvation and addresses none of the struggles that those who are marginalized and oppressed face, then what good news is it?

Into the Lesson

James writes in a straightforward way, using examples that are fairly universal across time and cultures. The first seven verses of Chapter 2 use an image of playing favorites among rich and poor. An example that might be used today is the middle school lunchroom: Who do you invite to sit with you at the table? From whom do you push your tray away? And if you are playing the popularity game, you know that one day, if you try to impress

the popular leader and put down others, at some point you yourself will be put down. This game is older than the letter of James. In James' example, he lifts up the poor—the ones put down and left out—because God has chosen them to be rich in faith, to be heirs of the reign of God, reflecting the words of Jesus: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20).

James' critique, however, is even stronger than worrying about who you may leave out and who you are trying to impress. James questions whether or not we actually believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Are not those you are trying to impress living contrary to Christ's ways? Are not the ones you aspire to be like utterly unlike Christ? James invites his readers to critique the ways we live: do we adhere to God's ways, or to the ways of the world we have created?

Even if we were not followers of Christ who were commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves, playing favorites does not make sense. In the long run, playing favorites causes more harm than good. It is short-sighted. If you play favorites, you will get burned in the end. You will not necessarily be someone else's favorite. You would do better to just follow the commandments and not try to play the games of this world.



If faith is only about one's own salvation and addresses none of the struggles that those who are marginalized and oppressed face, then what good news is it?

This is why James continues in verses 8-13 to speak about the law of God, what has been commanded by Christ: to love our neighbor as ourselves. If someone shows favoritism based on wealth or status, they are breaking the commandment of Jesus. There is no way around it, as James argues. You cannot uphold one commandment and not another. You cannot get technical about who is your neighbor and who is not. If you do not love your neighbor as yourself, you do not follow Jesus.

The counter to showing favoritism is to show mercy, to extend kindness, and to offer compassion. James writes that one should “speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty” (vs. 12). If the greatest commandment of Jesus is to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor as ourselves, this law of liberty is the freedom to love, because this is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:9-10).¹ Therefore, we ought to love our neighbors without judging why they might be on unemployment, or without making assumptions as to why they might not have the same social status that we do. We cannot claim to love Jesus and not love those who are poor, marginalized, and disenfranchised. Indeed, we cannot claim to love others without seeing that their needs are met.

The final four verses of this selection speak to inaction. If, by our actions, we show favoritism to those with wealth, status, and power, then our inaction is just as harmful. If we do nothing for those in need around us, even if we do not judge them, we have not truly shown mercy.

We have also not shown faith. James, in speaking of a brother or sister who is naked and has no food, alludes to the story of the final judgment that Jesus taught in Matthew 25:31-46. When we do not help the least among us with their basic needs, it is as if we have failed to help Christ. Faith without works is dead. It is meaningless. It is as if we have no relationship with Christ at all if we do not show mercy, if our hearts are not open to our neighbor’s needs—no matter who our neighbors are.

Into Discipleship

The Jerusalem contained both the temple of God, where the Jewish people worshiped, and the palace of the king, who was Herod in the time of Jesus. James understood poverty and oppression in a different way than Christians in cities of the Roman Empire that were not primarily

Jewish. In the time of James, Christians were still seen as Jewish and not as belonging to a separate religion, just a different sect of Judaism. The early churches had to live with layers of culture, ethnicity, and religion, as well as economic status. Being a Christian in Jerusalem was different than being a Christian in Corinth, yet some privilege was afforded those in Jerusalem because they were in their homeland and not in the Diaspora.

Take a moment to consider your current social location: your economic status, your culture, your language, your race and ethnicity, where you live. In what ways does your social location shape your understanding of this text?

Have you ever lived in a place where Christianity was not the majority religion, or do you know someone who has? What was your/their experience like? How did you/they practice loving your neighbor as yourself as a Christian in the minority?

Even though Jesus taught, “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” (Matthew 7:1), we all still do it. We make assumptions based on appearance, finances, someone’s occupation or education level. Even though we may have been taught to treat everyone equally, racial and cultural stereotypes still permeate our judgment of others. To become more like Jesus, we must become



The counter to
showing favoritism is
to show mercy,
to extend kindness,
and to offer
compassion.



aware of our biases and how they impact our relationships with others. We must learn how our judgments can, intentionally or unintentionally, exclude others.

Many churches have signs or notices stating, “All Are Welcome.” However, that statement is often made as to attempt to diffuse any discomfort about who might not be welcome, rather than stating more explicitly who is included in the welcome: everyone of every age, race, ethnic and cultural background, spoken language, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, nationality, and so on. Even congregations that believe they understand the meaning of welcoming everyone might struggle if someone who had slept outside and not had access to clean water for several days entered the sanctuary.

James concluded this section with “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (vs. 17). If faith does not result in the changing of other’s lives for the better and is only about personal salvation, there is no good news to share with those who are marginalized and disenfranchised. What might need to change in our churches—how we worship, who leads, how we fellowship, who teaches, how we reach out to others, etc.—so that the kind of transformation that James, and Jesus, taught can be brought to others and to the world? What might we need to do to love our neighbors as ourselves?

Note:

1. *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 193.

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Reflection Questions

Rising to the Challenge

Given James' concern about showing favoritism to the rich, it seems that early Christians struggled with many of the same things we do. We end up growing churches who look more like us and think like us. We desire members who can give to help contribute to the funding of our ministries. James' challenge is the same as Jesus': how can we fulfill the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, especially when it does not seem to benefit us?

Discerning Right Motives

In many communities there are laws regarding giving directly to those who are asking for monetary assistance (often called "panhandlers"). Look up the laws in your own community. List the organizations that directly provide for people's needs. List your concerns with giving directly to those in need. Are they based on judgments

of how those funds are used, or assumptions on the motivations of those asking for help?

Welcoming Your Neighbor

Craft a welcome statement for your church or your group/organization. Who would you assume feels welcome? How would you explicitly state who was welcome? How would you live out that statement and practice welcome and hospitality to others? How would you work to avoid showing favoritism?

Living the Lesson

For Young Adults

In the 2004 movie *Mean Girls*, the main character is Cady, a white girl who grew up in Africa (the movie does not say in which country). Upon moving to the United States, Cady faces the pressures of fitting in at high school with a clique of mean girls and confronts the challenges of high school popularity games while trying to stay authentic to herself and her friendships. *Mean Girls* addresses the issues of showing favoritism, as well as practicing mercy.

This clip, called "The Rules," addresses the rules the clique called The Plastics have made about who can sit with them at lunch, what they wear, etc.

(2 minutes 28 seconds): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEWsqLKIEr4&ab_channel=MOVIECLIPS

What "rules," spoken or unspoken, do you and your friends follow? What is one thing you can do to help change those "rules"?

For longer discussion, a study guide for the movie can be found here: https://media.broadway.com/media/spot/Mean_Girls_Study_Guide_FINAL.PDF

For Young Adults through Adults

The 2017 book *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, which is also a 2018 movie of the same name, is narrated by Starr Carter. Starr is a Black student attending a predominantly white, affluent private school. Starr witnesses the murder of her friend Khalil by a police officer. The book touches on the intersections of race, class, high school popularity, police violence, and white privilege. Starr also expresses her faith in Christ, which was formed in the Black church she was raised in, and articulates how "Black Jesus," in her view, addresses inequity and injustice, unlike the Jesus found in the churches of her white friends.



This clip, called “The Talk,” shows a Black father telling his children about what they need to do to survive a police encounter because they are Black (stop at 2:30). For a longer clip, keep watching until 8:30 to hear from the main character’s point of view about fitting in as a Black student in a mostly white school. (The remainder of the clip is the movie trailer). Warning for some profanity. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONQT4WT44YE&ab_channel=EntertainmentAccess What rules have you had to learn to survive in society that your parents taught you? What are some rules you have had to learn based on your social location?

In the longer clip, Starr speaks about how she has to hide who she really is in school because of how people will judge her. Have you ever felt like Starr? How can we begin to change the rules, both laws that are discriminatory as well as the unspoken biases, to live into the reign of God?

For a longer discussion, a study guide for the book can be found here: <https://bookriot.com/the-hate-u-give-book-club-questions/>

Devotional Scriptures Year B Proper 18 (23) Week of 09/05/21

Monday 09/06/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 73:1-20; Proverbs 8:32-9:6;

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Complementary: Isaiah 38:10-20; Joshua 6:1-21;

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Tuesday 09/07/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 73:1-20; Proverbs 11:1-31;

Hebrews 12:3-13

Complementary: Isaiah 38:10-20; Joshua 8:1-23;

Hebrews 12:3-13

Wednesday 09/08/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 73:1-20; Proverbs 14:1-9;

Matthew 17:14-21

Complementary: Isaiah 38:10-20; Judges 15:9-20;

Matthew 17:14-21

Thursday 09/09/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 19; Proverbs 15:1-17;

Hebrews 11:17-22

Complementary: Psalm 116:1-9; Joshua 2:1-14;

Hebrews 11:17-22

Friday 09/10/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 19; Proverbs 19:24-29;

James 2:17-26

Complementary: Psalm 116:1-9; Joshua 2:15-24;

James 2:17-26

Saturday 09/11/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 19; Proverbs 21:1-17;

Matthew 21:23-32

Complementary: Psalm 116:1-9; Joshua 6:22-27;

Matthew 21:23.



To become more like Jesus, we must become aware of our biases and how they impact our relationships with others.

COMMITMENT

following Jesus

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them,
'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves
and take up their cross and follow me.'

—MARK 8:34

Introduction

What does it mean to follow Jesus Christ? The disciples—including Peter, who, along with his brother Andrew, was the first to follow Jesus—thought they knew. But when they were challenged by Jesus' declaration of what must happen to the Messiah, Peter could not believe it and he argued with Jesus about it. Jesus taught that those who want to be his disciples must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. But what does that mean?

Lesson Objectives

- To wrestle with the question of what it means to deny one's self and take up one's cross.
- To understand the fullness of Jesus' life: his healing and teaching ministry, as well as the necessity of going to Jerusalem and death on the cross.
- To be assured that it is okay to have more questions than answers as a faithful follower of Jesus.

Mark 8:27-38 NRSV

27 Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" 28 And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." 30 And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. 31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." 34 He called the crowd

with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Into the Scripture

Mark is considered the earliest Gospel, possibly written around the time of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. Mark’s Gospel account is the shortest, with only sixteen chapters, and Mark does not contain many of the details that are fleshed out in Matthew and Luke. Most scholars believe Matthew and Luke based the structure of their Gospels’ narratives on Mark’s Gospel, with some supplemental collections of Jesus’ sayings that are not contained in Mark.

Not much is known about the writer of this Gospel. Mark was a common name at that time, though ancient tradition has suggested the author might be John Mark, a



companion of Paul in the Book of Acts. The Greek text is simplistic, suggesting that the writer of Mark was a Jewish follower of Jesus and that Greek was not his primary language. There are a few explanations of Jewish customs, so Mark’s community must have also had Gentile believers as well as Jewish followers of Jesus, but scholars differ on exactly the makeup of Mark’s audience and who Mark was.¹

Even though it may be the earliest Gospel account, Mark still was written a generation after Jesus’ death and resurrection, when the eyewitnesses to the events were dying of old age. The Gospel writers sought to preserve

“

Straightforward and to the point, Mark is writing about Jesus Christ, who he proclaims is the Son of God, the Messiah.

the story of the life of Jesus that they knew from their community of witnesses and storytellers. The Gospel of Mark begins with the words “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). Straightforward and to the point, Mark is writing about Jesus Christ, whom he proclaims is the Son of God, the Messiah.

The book can be divided into two halves, the first half ending right before our selection begins. From 1:1-8:26, the Gospel according to Mark shares the accounts

of Jesus in his ministry: preaching, teaching, and healing. All of the actions of Jesus have outcomes that are “immediately” (a favorite word of Mark’s) witnessed and understood and shared with others as the word spread about Jesus’ ministry. From 8:27 on, the Gospel focuses on Jesus and his journey toward Jerusalem and his death, fulfilling what he came to do as the Messiah. This shift in the narrative helps us to understand the disciples’ confusion as to who Jesus really was. Until this moment, the disciples may have understood Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God who would establish a new kingdom. They may not have understood that the kingdom was not of this world, and they did not know the Messiah would suffer and die. In Jesus’ preparation for what he must do, the disciples were confused and frightened.

Jesus knew that this shift in his ministry would cause them to be afraid, to do rash things. When things are out of control, we often want to do what we can to regain control in that moment without thinking of the consequences. While Jesus knew one of them would betray him, there were others who would doubt him, who would argue over who was to be greatest—and one of his closest disciples would even deny that he ever knew him. Jesus prepared the disciples for what was to come, but they still did not understand, not until after his resurrection.

Into the Lesson

Jesus begins with a question for the disciples: “Who do people say that I am?” The disciples answered that some said he was “John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others, one of the prophets” (vs. 28). John the Baptist was called the “prophet of the Most High” (Luke 1:76). Elijah was also a prophet, though taken up by God, and Malachi stated that Elijah would return before the day of the Lord (Malachi 4:5-6). Even though Jesus’ ministry was well known by this point, the disciples thought of him as another prophet, sent by God, but they did not quite understand who he was.

When he further questioned the disciples on who they said Jesus was, Peter quickly responded, “You are the Messiah.” Peter tended to be bold in his responses, like the student who raises their hand first before everyone else. Later, at the Last Supper, Jesus told the disciples how they all would become deserters, and once again, bold Peter declared, “Even though all become deserters, I will not” (vs. 29). When Jesus told him that he would deny him three times before the cock crows twice, Peter

vehemently stated he would not (vs. 31). Peter’s boldness in words often did not match his actions, at least prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

It is clear from the conversation that Peter did not understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah, even though he *thought* he did in that moment. Perhaps Peter understood the Messiah to be an earthly king, one who would restore the kingdom of Israel and overthrow the Roman empire. Perhaps he thought the Messiah would bring a revolution of the heart, turning everyone to God. Or perhaps Peter thought this meant that God was bringing about the “day of the LORD” as spoken about by the prophets (Isaiah 13:6; Jeremiah 46:10; Joel 1:15, and elsewhere) and the end of the world as they knew it.

Whatever Peter thought, he was not ready when Jesus began to speak about the Son undergoing great suffering and rejection by the religious leaders, and that he would be killed and rise again after three days (vs. 31). Instead, Peter’s boldness caused him to act in the opposite way of faithfulness to Jesus. He took Jesus aside to rebuke him, to argue with him. Peter boldly believed he knew better than Jesus in that moment! To be fair to Peter, Jesus did not explain why this had to happen; he only told the disciples that this must happen.



You cannot follow
Jesus unless you are
willing to live the way
Jesus did and to see
Jesus as your example for
your whole life . . .

who do you say

I AM?

Jesus then turned his attention from the disciples to the crowd, teaching them that if they wanted to follow him, they must deny themselves and take up their cross (vs. 34). While this is a continuation of the same conversation, Jesus moved to include others, for it was not just Peter that struggled in following Jesus. The Messiah stated what the cost was to follow him (and some Bibles title this section “The Cost of Discipleship”). Jesus did not give another option. You cannot follow Jesus simply by being a good person. You cannot follow Jesus by only keeping the law. You cannot follow Jesus unless you are willing to live the way Jesus did and to see Jesus as your example for your whole life: willing to lose it for the sake of others. If we cannot be faithful to Jesus in this life, we will not be faithful when the Son of Man comes (vs. 28).

There is good news, however: we know Peter’s story. We know that even though Peter was not always faithful—he ended up deserting Jesus and denying he knew him after his arrest, and he was not present at the crucifixion—he was one of the first to know of Jesus’ resurrection. The women who discovered Jesus’ empty tomb and received the message from the angel that Jesus had risen were told to go and tell the disciples and Peter the good news (Mark 16:7). We also know that Peter witnessed the Holy Spirit’s arrival on the day of Pentecost and boldly declared the good news to those who had gathered (Acts 2).

The good news is that even when we fall short, even when we fail and shirk from following Jesus publicly, we are given ample opportunities to turn back and declare boldly that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. If you

have ever failed to speak up for Jesus’ ways, if you have ever felt that you did not do enough, you are not alone. If you have later learned you were wrong and changed your mind and your ways, you are also not alone. Peter shows us that even the disciples messed up but received grace and forgiveness, becoming leaders in the Christian life.

Into Discipleship

How many of us, when we were asked the question at our baptism, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior,” fully understood what we were being asked? It is comforting to find we are in good company: the disciples did not fully understand it at the time, either. Take a moment and reflect on what you were taught it means to believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, whether in church, in Sunday School, in a youth group, at church camp, or elsewhere. What does it mean to you when you sing the hymn, “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus?” If you came to faith at a younger age, reflect on how your faith has changed over time.

The name Israel means “one who wrestles with God,” for Jacob literally wrestled the angel of the LORD and was given the name Israel (Genesis 32:24-30). The name was passed down to his descendants, becoming



When things are out of control, we often want to do what we can to regain control in that moment without thinking of the consequences.



the name for an entire nation. The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) contain story after story of the Israelites in their relationship with God. Sometimes we wrestle with God in our understanding of Scriptures that are challenging, in our understanding of who God is in our lives, and in what it means to be faithful. Our Christian confession that “Jesus is Lord,” is not the end of our faith journey; it is the beginning.

If you have ever hiked a trail up a mountain, you discover that trails often double-back on themselves as you climb higher—these sections are called “switch-backs.” Sometimes it seems like you are traveling further away from your destination, but it is all part of the journey. For Peter and the other disciples, this shift in Jesus’ discourse was unsettling, and felt like moving away from the destination they perhaps hoped for.

When Jesus began to speak of his suffering, rejection, and death, Peter’s reaction seems understandable and Jesus’ response seems harsh. However, Jesus understood that Peter did not want to lose his friend. Peter and the disciples had a relationship with Jesus that was different from others because they lived and walked together with him. That relationship shifted when he began to speak about himself as the Messiah. We know from the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-9) that Peter tried to understand who Jesus was, but still did not fully comprehend.

Jesus turned to the crowd along with the disciples and spoke of taking up one’s cross. The cross was the method of Roman execution, similar to gallows or to

today’s electric chair or lethal injection bed. The crosses seen on the side of the roads were to remind the people that Rome was in charge and to instill fear in the people. Jesus uses the image of the cross—knowing he will die on one—as a symbol of putting to death what holds us back from following him. To the crowd and the disciples, Jesus was telling them to put to death their fear of what Rome would do, because not even death would hold him back.

In Peter’s case, his friendship was holding him back, because he could not set his mind on divine things (vs. 33). Jesus spoke to others who wanted to follow him but could not let go of human understandings and traditions in order to do so (Luke 9:57-62). Even though Peter had left his fishing boat behind, there were many other things he could not let go of in his life in order to fully know who Jesus was.

However, Peter did not give up. We know his story, and it becomes our own: we do not give up, even when we fall short and fail to understand. Throughout his life, Peter continued to be astounded by new revelations from God that countered everything he knew (Acts 10 is a good example). Jesus’ call, “Follow me,” is a call that we live into, every moment, as we continue to learn and change in our faith throughout our whole life.

Note:

1. *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 515.

Reflection Questions

Considering Perspectives

Take a moment and put yourselves in the shoes of the different parties of this passage. Start with the disciples (not including Peter). Why do you think they answered the way they did when Jesus asked who they thought he was? Remember, until now, the ministry of Jesus had been healing, casting out demons, preaching, and teaching. But when Jesus asked them who they thought he was, he spoke about his death.

■ What do you think was going through the disciple's

minds as they witnessed this conversation between Peter and Jesus? What would your reaction be to hearing these words from Peter? From Jesus?

- Now put yourselves in the shoes of Peter. Why would you answer Jesus the way he did? Why would you try to stop Jesus?
- Now put yourselves in the shoes of Jesus. How would you respond to the disciples? To Peter?
- Have you ever been afraid to be known as a Christian? Have you ever shied away from sharing your identity as a Christian? Why?



Our Christian confession that “Jesus is Lord”
is not the end of our faith journey;
it is the beginning.

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Living the Lesson

Faith Mapping

Create a “faith map.” Determine where and when your starting point is; it might be a young age or even birth, or it might be a point in your life where you felt your current faith journey began.

- What are your “mountaintop” experiences?
- Where did you experience switchbacks on the journey?
- What have been your “valleys of the shadow” (Psalm 23:4)?
- Where have you experienced hazardous road conditions, or potholes, or long journeys?
- Where have you crossed bridges? In what ways has your faith changed throughout your life?
- Are there things you once believed that you no longer believe? What have you lost?
- What have you gained?

Be creative as you map out your faith journey. It may also be easier to start from where you are now and work your way backwards.

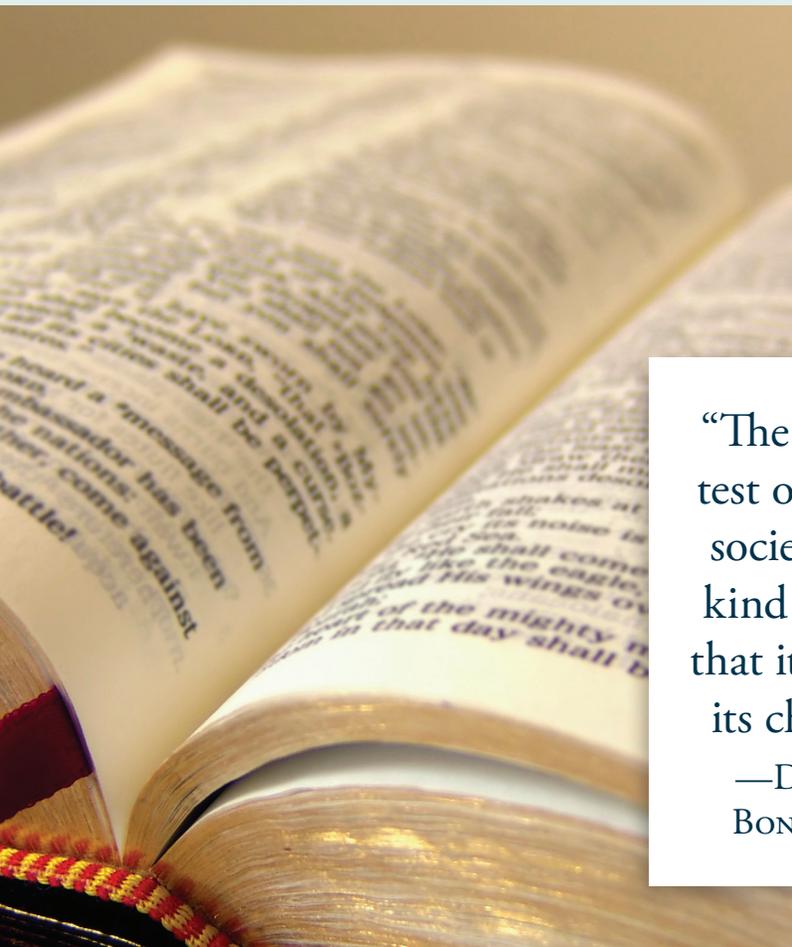
still have something of your journey to share. Feel free to dream of what lies ahead and what hopes you have and add that to your faith map.

Read these accounts of Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks about the death threats they received during the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56 (warning for racial epithets and harsh language). <https://www.beaconbroadside.com/broadside/2016/01/martin-luther-king-jr-and-rosa-parks-on-the-dangers-they-faced-in-the-civil-rights-movement.html>

- How did they live out their call to justice despite the real danger they faced?

Oscar Romero was a Franciscan priest serving in El Salvador, preaching against the human rights violations caused by the government, and he was assassinated in 1980. Watch this 2 minute video about Oscar Romero and read his biography: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-03/oscar-romero-forty-years-assassination-anniversary0.html>

- Why do you think he became known as “The Voice for Those without Voice?”
- What do you think compelled him to live out his faith in this way?
- What inspires you about the martyrs you have heard/read about? What scares you?
- What can you learn from their lives and witness? What other martyrs can you name?
- Who are some of your heroes who have lived faithfully in Christ?



“The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children.”

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER



What is Your Cost of Discipleship?

Radical times sometimes call for radical action. How do we as Christians determine when to stand up and speak out against social movements that are antithetical to the values and mores of the teachings of Jesus? How can the Church stand against evil and not be co-opted by those who use the name of Christianity to condone malevolence and ill intent against their fellow neighbor?

Read about Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his effort to encourage the Christian Church to stand against Nazism during the rise of Hitler. What does it mean to be the Confessing Church today?

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/martyrs/dietrich-bonhoeffer.html>

Devotional Scriptures

Year B Proper 19 (24) Week of 09/12/21

Monday 09/13/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 73:21-28; Proverbs 22:1-21;
Romans 3:9-20

Complementary: Psalm 119:169-176; 1 Kings 13:1-10;
Romans 3:9-20

Tuesday 09/14/21, Holy Cross

Semi-continuous: Psalm 73:21-28; Proverbs 25:1-28;
Colossians 3:1-11

Complementary: Psalm 119:169-176; 1 Kings 13:11-25;
Colossians 3:1-11

Wednesday 09/15/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 73:21-28; Proverbs 29:1-27;
John 7:25-36

Complementary: Psalm 119:169-176; Isaiah 10:12-20;
John 7:25-36

Thursday 09/16/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 1; Proverbs 30:1-10;
1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Complementary: Psalm 54; Judges 6:1-10;
1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Friday 09/17/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 1; Proverbs 30:18-33;
Romans 11:25-32

Complementary: Psalm 54; 1 Kings 22:24-40;
Romans 11:25-32

Saturday 09/18/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 1; Ecclesiastes 1:1-18;
Matthew 23:29-39

Complementary: Psalm 54; 2 Kings 17:5-18;
Matthew 23:29-39



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PRAYER

authentic lament

Surely, God is my helper.

—PSALM 54:4a

Introduction

This psalm, attributed to David, speaks from the heart. The psalmist calls upon God to hear his prayer and save him, because he has remained faithful even when troubled and tested. The author writes with an assurance that God is with him, that God will provide for him, and that God will deliver him from his enemies even though he is pursued by those with evil intentions who do not look to God. This prayer displays an authentic faith, raw emotion, and deep trust in God.

Lesson Objectives

- To understand what a lament is and how laments are structured.
- To know how Psalm 54 relates to other psalms in the Bible.
- To learn how practicing lament can help release our feelings so we can heal.

Psalm 54 NRSV

1 Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me by your might. 2 Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. 3 For the insolent have risen against me, the ruthless seek my life; they do not set God before them. Selah 4 But surely, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. 5 He will repay my enemies for their evil. In your faithfulness, put an end to them. 6 With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good. 7 For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.

Into the Scripture

The Book of Psalms is the hymn and prayer book of the Bible. Before the books of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) were compiled to form the Bible as we know it, the psalms were collected together in five groups. These five groups were then compiled to form the Book of Psalms. Some scholars believe these five groups of psalms mirror the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Psalm 54 is contained in the second book, or group.

Many of the psalms have descriptions from an early editor as to what kind of hymns or prayers they are. Scholars do not know who that editor was, but they do know that the psalms were grouped together on purpose and editorial notes were given before many of the psalms, along with musical notations. The superscription for this psalm gives instructions to the leader, the musical setting, and the context of the psalm. Some of the understandings of these musical terms have been lost, such as the term *maskil* and *selah*. Scholars are unclear as to what exactly these terms referred to, except perhaps as a note for the musician or leader.

While the ancient editor who collected the psalms attributed this psalm to David with the superscription, it was most likely written by a poet or musician in a different context. However, David was known to have been a musician, and David became a folk hero to the Hebrew people. Connecting a psalm to David raised its authenticity—not in terms of authorship, but in terms

of portraying a real experience of need for God's intervention in one's life.

One of the most common types of psalms is the lament, a plea for God's intervention in a time of crisis. There are both individual and collective laments. Psalm 54 is an individual lament, and it follows a similar pattern as

other individual laments: an opening address to God, a laying out of the problem, a plea for God's intervention, an assurance of God's aid, and a promise of commitment to God, though the order of those components may vary.



“

The psalms remind us
that even in our rage,
our sorrow, our absolute
dejection with the
world, God does not
abandon us.

Even though there may be a superscription to connect the psalm to specific events, such as this psalm connecting the story of David when he was hiding from King Saul when Saul wanted to kill him, the psalms generally have a universal tone. Just as we may know the context for some of our favorite hymns, and the context may enhance a song or poem's meaning, the song or poem speaks to us beyond that context and into our own lived experience. We resonate with the songs of lament because we, too, have at times felt attacked, alone, forgotten, and desperate for God to do something. The psalms give us permission to speak to God in ways that we might not normally feel is prudent. The psalms use raw, human emotion to express anger, frustration, and desperation to God. However, the psalms also remind us that even in our rage, our sorrow, our absolute dejection with the world, God does not abandon us. The direction of the psalms is always to God, even if its pleading for God to answer. The psalmist does not give up, and neither do we.



Into the Lesson

Psalm 54 follows the pattern for psalms of lament, with the psalmist calling upon God to save him in the first verse and to hear his prayer in the second. The problem is clearly stated in verse 3, “The insolent have risen against me, the ruthless seek my life.” With the additional context of David hiding from King Saul, one can assume that these might be people the psalmist knew, although other translations such as the NIV use the word “strangers.” The psalmist is pleading with God for his very life.

The psalm turns in verse 4, for the writer knows that God is his helper. This assurance that God will assist him leads to the confident statement that God will “repay my enemies for their evil” put an end to them (vs. 5). The author states he will offer a sacrifice for God and know that God is the one who will deliver him.

This psalm is a universal prayer across time and place. Whether pleading with God to deliver us from enemies who threaten our lives or dealing with those in our workplace or school or neighbors who make our lives miserable, we can easily relate to this feeling of wanting to be vindicated before God. The stress that the psalmist feels in dealing with his enemies is palpable. While it may be ambiguous whether the psalmist knew his enemies or not, in today’s world the likelihood is the people in our lives who antagonize us the most are people we know: coworkers, former friends, neighbors, even family members. From our view, they “do

not set God before them” (vs. 3b). They are not following God’s ways.

Psalms convey real human emotions: what we feel in that moment when we are wronged. They are reminders of our basic desire of punishment for our enemies. The words in this psalm may sound harsh to our ears. We may recognize that conflicts take at least two participants. We may hear these words and want to step back to see the psalmist’s part in the conflict and the possibility of reconciliation. The psalms do not go that far. They simply respond to feelings, providing an acknowledgment that they exist. This is good news, because sometimes we are taught to hold our emotions in, to hide how we really feel about a situation or a person, or to try to smooth things over. God gives us not only permission but also the safe space to put our emotions on the table without exploding onto those whom we may call enemies. The psalms in this manner act like a personal diary through which we can pour out our true thoughts.

We know God is our helper. God is the one who holds our lives and delivers us from our times of struggle. The psalmist speaks with this bold confidence in God’s deliverance, while at the same time conveying the anguish felt from the actions of others. Never once



We are not alone, and no matter how big or small the problem may seem, the victory is with God who will see us through.

does the psalmist suggest his own actions or words will help; instead, he turns the problem entirely over to God. He knows God's faithfulness and that God does not allow evil to prevail forever. The psalmist does not call for revenge. It is left up to the perpetrators to repent and seek forgiveness for what they have done wrong. If the offenders do not seek to right what they have done, they live with the results of evil in their lives.

The offering promised to God (vs. 6) is not a bribe. It is not offered only if God follows through. It is a commitment to offer a sacrifice in the temple as appropriate for thanksgiving because the psalmist knows God is faithful. Our commitments today might be to offer prayers of gratitude, to continue to worship and praise God in thanksgiving, because we know God is with us at all times and in all circumstances.

The Psalms remind us that in all areas of life, God remains faithful. Whether things are going well—such as when we feel close to God or when we contemplate the mysteries of God, or whether things are terrible—such as when our lives are threatened, when we are ill, or when we feel death closing in (and that death might be literal or figurative), God remains faithful. Nowhere in the Psalms do the writers give up on God. Nowhere do they determine that it is pointless to worship God or to put their trust in God, even though they have experienced such terrible things as war, famine, disease, and death of loved ones. They continue to seek God, even in their heartache and despair. Psalm 54 reminds us that we are not alone, and no matter how big or small the problem may seem, the victory is with God who will see us through.

Into Discipleship

Karma is a concept in Hinduism and Buddhism that is often used in broad terms. As defined by Dictionary.com, karma is “the cosmic principle according to which each person is rewarded or punished in one incarnation according to that person's deeds in the previous incarnation.” As Christians, it is important for us not to appropriate terms from another religion, because we often do not understand the full religious and cultural context. The psalmist is not speaking of karma in 54:5, but rather for God to end the perpetrator's evil ways.

Revenge is a very human desire, one that the psalmists do not shy away from. Psalm 137 famously calls for the murder of Babylon's children in verse 9, something

that horrifies us so much today that often the verse is left off the reading of Psalm 137 in churches. But in the context of the whole psalm, we understand the anguish of the people who have been taken into exile in Babylon.

However, our desire for revenge is appropriately expressed in prayer to God, leaving the actions up to the God we know is just and good. God will not repay the evil of enemies by our own evil actions. Instead, through lament, we are able to release these feelings of anger and vengeance and be moved into actions of gratitude toward God. Reconciliation with the perpetrator is not the purpose of the psalms of lament, but lament may allow us to move in that direction once we have released the pain that is in our heart.

We have no idea of knowing if the psalmist's desire was fulfilled in the end, or if his enemies stopped their pursuit. If we take this as a psalm of David, we know that Saul came to his demise and David became king. Nonetheless, like the psalmist, we can claim the victory in God, the assurance that God has heard our prayer and will answer. God can take our anger, hurt, and



Trusting in God's
faithfulness eliminates
the need for pride;
we do not need to
do anything to prove
ourselves, for it is
in God's hands.



bitterness. We can respond to God with gratitude for listening and being there for us, for God has remained faithful to us throughout generations. The Psalms testify to God's faithfulness enduring forever.

In biblical times, this gratitude was practiced with a sacrificial offering of thanksgiving in the temple. A sacrifice today might be giving financially in response to God's faithfulness or giving of our time or other gifts. However, our offering of sacrifice might be taking the next step—to address the conflict in a safe, healthy way and to sacrifice our pride. The psalmist never takes

pride in his own actions; he puts his trust in God. To remain humble even when we have been wronged is a difficult task. Trusting in God's faithfulness eliminates the need for pride; we do not need to do anything to prove ourselves, for it is in God's hands. Instead, we may move forward with conflict resolution for the possibility of healing and reconciliation, all while knowing we have the assurance of God's presence and help.

1. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 659.

2. *Ibid.*, 644.

“

Whether pleading with God to deliver us from enemies who threaten our lives or dealing with those in our workplace or school or neighbors who make our lives miserable, we can easily relate to this feeling of wanting to be vindicated.

Reflections

Expressive Praying

Writing a lament can be a healing process or a way to work through a problem. Remember, God can take our anger and pain. The important thing to remember is to follow the pattern, even if not in the same order: address God, state the problem and seek God's help, give assurance of God's aid, and commitment to remaining faithful to God. Write a lament about a current struggle you are facing. (This can be a take-home assignment and sharing your lament should remain optional).

Living the Lesson

For Young Adults

Listen to one of these songs and/or read the lyrics. These songs convey a desire for revenge after a romantic partner cheated, but they come from a place of real hurt. How might you turn these songs, addressed to the person who has wronged the singer, into a lament

to God? These laments should not end with the other person being forgiven or reconciled at this point. Be sure to follow the pattern of addressing God, stating what the other person has done, seeking God's help, giving assurance of God's help, and stating your commitment in faithfulness to God.

"I Hope" by Gabby Barrett. Link to music video and lyrics: <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/lyrics/8549839/gabby-barrett-i-hope-lyrics>

"Before He Cheats" by Carrie Underwood. Music Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaSy8yy-mr8&ab_channel=carrieunderwoodVEVO

Lyrics: <https://genius.com/Carrie-underwood-before-he-cheats-lyrics>

Learning from the Psalms

The Book of Psalms is the hymnbook of the Bible. Is there a favorite hymn or song that speaks to an experience you have had? Take a few minutes to think of how songs can convey emotions and thoughts to God in ways that written cannot. Look up the hymns on www.hymnary.org to find further background information about the writer/composer or the song's meaning.

Watch this interview with Bono (lead singer of U2) and Eugene Peterson, who wrote *The Message*, a paraphrased version of the Bible: (22 minutes long; for a shorter time, start at 5:35 in the video): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-l40S5e90KY&ab_channel=FULLERstudio



What do you think about Bono's comments about the honesty in the psalms and the dishonesty expressed by many Christians? What might be healthy about sharing honestly about how we feel? How might that be hard?

At 16:13, Peterson and Bono are asked about the problem of violence in the psalms. How do you feel about the violence in the psalms, especially Psalm 54? How can we healthily express our anger and rage in the world without resorting to physical violence?

For Futher Reading

Ann Weems, *Psalms of Lament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). A collection of contemporary laments to God.

Devotional Scriptures Year B Proper 20 (25) Week of 09/19/21

Monday 09/20/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 128; Proverbs 27:1-27;
James 4:8-17
Complementary: Psalm 139:1-18; 2 Kings 5:1-14;
James 4:8-17

Tuesday 09/21/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 128; Ecclesiastes 4:9-16;
James 5:1-6
Complementary: Psalm 139:1-18; 2 Kings 11:21-12:16;
James 5:1-6

Wednesday 09/22/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 128; Ecclesiastes 5:1-20;
John 8:21-38
Complementary: Psalm 139:1-18; Jeremiah 1:4-10;
John 8:21-38

Thursday 09/23/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 124; Esther 1:1-21; Acts 4:13-31
Complementary: Psalm 19:7-14; Exodus 18:13-27;
Acts 4:13-31

Friday 09/24/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 124; Esther 2:1-23;
Acts 12:20-25
Complementary: Psalm 19:7-14; Deuteronomy 1:1-18;
Acts 12:20-25

Saturday 09/25/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 124; Esther 3:1-15;
Matthew 5:13-20
Complementary: Psalm 19:7-14; Deuteronomy 27:1-10;
Matthew 5:13-20



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LEADERSHIP

carrying the burden together

Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!

—NUMBERS 11:29b

Introduction

It is hard to be a leader. So much responsibility is placed upon one person, and they often bear the brunt of all complaints. This is true even in religious communities where people are taught God's ways to love and care for each other. When things are not going well, it is easy to point the finger to the person in charge instead of assuming responsibility as God's people to help carry the load. Moses was chosen by God to lead the people out of their captivity in Egypt and into freedom, but any time something went wrong, he was also blamed for it. God showed him there is another way to lead and be community.

Lesson Objectives

- To learn from Moses' example the need to delegate and ask for help.
- To recognize patterns of how complaining and conflict can arise in groups.
- To recognize the diverse gifts of the body of Christ needed to share in ministry together.

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29 NRSV

4 The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

10 Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and Moses was displeased. 11 So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? 12 Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,' to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me

and say, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ 14 I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. 15 If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once--if I have found favor in your sight--and do not let me see my misery.” 16 So the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you.

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. 26 Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. 27 And a young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.” 28 And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, “My lord Moses, stop them!” 29 But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!”

Into the Scripture

Numbers is an interesting book in that it is a mishmash of genres. It is called Numbers because the first chapter is the census of the tribes of Israel before they leave Mount Sinai. From there, Numbers covers the description of how the people of Israel will camp, military style, while traveling in the wilderness and instructions about certain

duties of certain groups within the camp. There are also stories of incidents that happen in the Israelite camp that serve as teaching moments for what happens when people do not follow God’s instructions. The book also describes the dedication of the tabernacle, the dwelling for the ark of the covenant that

the Israelites carried with them. The Israelites finally set out toward the land promised to them by God, but the

generation that left Egypt will not see the fulfillment of their journey because of their disobedience to God.

Numbers 11 is the continuation of the story that began in Exodus 15-19 as the people arrived at Sinai and Moses received God’s instructions for the community: the commandments, ordinances, and statutes. They are ready to leave Sinai to complete their journey through the wilderness. And the first thing that happens when the people of Israel begin to move again is, they complain. This is nothing new. The Israelites complained when they were fleeing from Egypt (Exodus 14:11-12), and after they crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 15:22-25), and later in the journey when they were concerned about what they would eat and drink in the wilderness (Exodus 16 and 17). In Exodus 18:14-23, Moses’ father-in-law noticed how worn out Moses was from dealing with all the people’s complaining and quarrels. He advised Moses to appoint people to act as judges, to relieve some of the burden from Moses. It seemed that no matter how long they were at Sinai, no matter how many times they were





instructed by God through Moses, all those instructions “went in one ear and out the other,” as my mother used to say. The Israelites kept remembering the past through rose-colored glasses and wanting to go back to Egypt where they were oppressed rather than toward an uncertain future, even though they had the promise of God with them.

The Torah, or the Law (the first five books of the Old Testament), has historically been attributed to Moses, but most scholars believe it was compiled over centuries. During the reign of King Josiah (around 625 BCE), a copy of the Law was rediscovered in the temple. Josiah initiated reforms during his reign, and parts of the Law were edited to reflect these reforms and the need to turn back to God. These edits are often called the Deuteronomic Writings. They were made at different times to remind the people of the importance of following God’s ways and the leaders that God appoints.

Forty years after Josiah’s reign, the people of Judah were taken into exile in Babylon. (The northern kingdom of Israel faced its own exile one hundred years before Josiah.) After the people returned from exile and began to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, reforms were instituted once again, and many other edits were made to the Torah to remind the people of the ritual worship of God. These edits are often called the Priestly Writings, reminding the people of how they are to worship. These editions created the redacted book of Numbers that has been passed down to us, teaching us the importance of following God’s instructions, the leaders that God has called forth, and

the importance of worshiping God. This selection, however, from Numbers 11 is most likely part of the historical record from before these edits. We need to understand the history of how the Scriptures were compiled and edited to understand the importance of this section in the book of Numbers as a whole.

Into the Lesson

In Numbers 11, a small group of people, referred to as a “rabble,” are tired of eating manna, the food God has provided for them since crossing the Red Sea. They are craving the food they used to eat back in Egypt and complaining to the point of crying (vss. 4-6). They have completely forgotten how they were oppressed and forced to do hard labor, and they only remember the good food they ate. All they can see in front of them is a long journey, with nothing but the food God has provided for them.

Moses has heard enough, and he has had enough (vss. 10-16). The entire people of Israel were not complaining, but the rabble’s complaints spread throughout the camp to every single family (vs. 10). When God became angry with the people’s complaints, Moses took it personally and lashed out at God. Just as the people’s complaining



Moses showed all the signs of leadership burnout,
and the people show an unhealthy pattern of
magnifying a small group’s complaint.

was childish, Moses' complaint to God was childish, exaggerating his frustrations to God. The behavior of the people became mirrored in Moses' response as he sarcastically asked God if he gave birth to the people or nursed and cared for them (vs. 12). Moses shows all the signs of leadership burnout, and the people show an unhealthy pattern of magnifying a small group's complaint until it spreads throughout the entire people.

The good news is that God understood Moses' feelings. God recognized the problem right away: Moses had been taking on too much of the burden himself. Moses was warned by his own father-in-law before to make sure to delegate some of the work, to find others who could serve as judges and resolve disputes. Now, God told Moses that it was time to delegate the burden again. God instructed Moses to find seventy elders of the people to serve alongside Moses.

God was still angry with the people for their complaining. However, God provided help for Moses through the spirit that rested on him, providing the same spirit for the seventy elders. God heard Moses' authentic cry of burnout even through his childish complaints. Though the people would continue to complain, and at times Moses would still turn and complain to God, God continued to hear Moses and answer his prayers. God called Moses to be the prophet and leader of the people, and no amount of complaining, anger, or burnout would change the call of God.

Moses, for his part, recognized he cannot do it all and welcomed the help. When two others who were not part of the seventy also began to prophesy in the camp, a young man ran to tell Moses. Joshua, one of Moses' assistants, believed Moses should stop them. However, Moses saw what the men were doing—they were doing the same work God called the seventy to do. They were doing nothing that took away from what God had instructed the people, but instead, were helping to do God's work and to alleviate the burden from Moses. Moses was less concerned about procedure and more concerned about the ministry being done, wishing that all of God's people could be prophets full of God's spirit.

The Torah, especially Numbers, contains basic instructions for the people of Israel while they were in the wilderness: how to worship, how to relate to others, how to set up their camp while they traveled. It was a hard life, one that perhaps the people did not anticipate. Knowing how far they still had to travel, it was easier to look back

to what once was. Even the evil of their forced labor was at least a known evil, compared to the unknown that lay in front of them. It was easier to look back on the past and to see what was good than it was to remember what was bad. It was easier to see only the misfortune that has befallen in their present situation, rather than to acknowledge the fact that God was with them.

It is hard to follow God and live into God's ways when others around us put their burdens on us and complain about their dissatisfaction and unhappiness, especially when their solution involves the impossible: going back to a former time. However, leaders have a choice in how they respond. Moses' response was not the most helpful. Moses reflected the anxiety of the people in his sarcastic exchange with God. But God's response through Moses was to provide the help he, and the people of Israel, needed. God provided assistance for Moses to alleviate his burden and, later in the chapter, God also provided quail for the people in addition to the manna.

With Moses' burdens relieved, he was able to lead more effectively, and his response was also more measured. When people complained that two men were



Moses was warned by his own father-in-law before to make sure to delegate some of the work, to find others who could serve as judges and resolve disputes.



prophesying who were not part of the group, Moses did not allow anxiety to respond. He also did not allow the complaint to spread beyond the young man and Joshua, who reported it to Moses. Instead, Moses understood this as a good sign; those two were doing the will of God. They were not hindering his ministry, they were helping.

Into Discipleship

We all have times when we do not react well to the complaints of others. Sometimes, our first reaction is to ignore the problem and hope it will go away. This story all started with a small group, a “rabble,” who did not like their situation and began reminiscing of how good things used to be. However, this rabble managed to spread their complaining until it reached everyone.

Because Moses was shouldering the leadership with only his brother Aaron, he did not have the energy or the time to deal with the rabble until everyone was upset, and he reacted poorly to God. Once he had in the help of seventy elders, however, he was able to handle the issues in the camp and he recognized the gifts of others who pitched in to help.

This was the second time Moses was told to delegate and seek help from others while at Mount Sinai. Delegating and allowing others to help with the leadership tasks made Moses’ life a bit easier, and it also might have diffused the small group complaining in the first place. Everyone is not always happy with a leader, and there may be legitimate concerns to be addressed.

However, a leader should not have to bear the brunt of those complaints alone. In work life, the Human Resources (HR) department is there to help with workplace concerns. In church life, a Pastoral Relations Committee is designed to listen to leadership concerns and help the people work through those concerns. Moses was acting like a single-person Human Resources department or Pastoral Relations Committee, which was not a good situation to be in.

Nonetheless, this time Moses seemed to understand the lesson. Not only did he follow God’s instructions to delegate to the seventy elders, he also recognized the gift of the spirit in the two other people also doing the work. Sometimes others want to help in ways that are not helpful, but this was not the case. Too often, in our churches and other volunteer organizations, we may turn down volunteers because we perceive they lack the necessary skills, instead of helping them to learn those skills.

A healthy organization has the right number of leaders to help its pastor, director, or president, a process for dealing with complaints or conflicts so that the party with a concern is heard, and a process for coming to an agreement on how to move forward. A healthy organization also knows functions with the knowledge that time moves in one direction only, and that the nostalgia for the past often highlights the positives while ignoring failures or injustices.

Note:

1. *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 9.

Reflection Questions

Acknowledging Your Limits

When and how have you experienced burnout? Describe what it feels like. Have you ever been given a job to do that was too much to handle? How did you respond? Is it difficult to ask for help when tasks are overwhelming? Why or why not?

Where have you seen caring, committed colleagues in your life burning out in roles of leadership? What can you learn from other's mistakes? What can you do to prevent burnout in your life?

Knowing Your Gifts

Where have you seen the gifts of others not recognized or utilized? Have you experienced "gatekeepers" who have not allowed you or others to help? What was that experience like?

Have you ever considered what spiritual gifts you have? Take a Spiritual Gifts inventory assessment here

(through the United Methodist Discipleship ministries): <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/spiritual-gifts-inventory/en> What did you learn about yourself? How can your gifts be used to help others?

This collage of clips from Disney's "The Incredibles" shows the superheroes using their skills together, even in times of conflict. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIKmGCgpJvA&ab_channel=JDub What gifts did each of them bring? When did they need help from others?

Living the Lesson

Intergenerational Sharing

This requires trust on the part of older adults to be willing to listen and learn from younger generations. With permission, have adults simply listen to young adults as they describe burnout they have experienced, having each person speak one at a time. Older adults take notes on what they have heard from the younger generations and report back—not their interpretation, but simply what they are hearing. How might the church respond to the very real concerns of burnout in our young adults? Allow the groups to share encouragement and suggestions from personal lessons learned with each other.

A Balanced Life

Self-care is an obligation we all have to ourselves to maintain a healthy, balanced in life.

Consider resources listed at the sites below to help you structure a reasonable plan of being attentive to your own needs. After reviewing the resources below, complete the following actions as a step in the right direction.

- Schedule into your day and week a reasonable amount of time for exercise, from short walks to things like gardening that keep you moving.
- Develop a routine for caring for and pampering your body. What products do you need (soaps, scrubs, masks, lotions, etc.). How can you prep the atmosphere for your private party of one--music, aroma therapy, lighting, etc.
- When do you observe a sabbath within your week? What are spiritual and recreational activities that can renew your energy and give your heart and mind a reset for the coming week. Along with consistent church attendance, what makes sense for you?



Online Resources

- https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/338
- Tap into the wealth of spiritual and mental selfcare resources and literature on the website of the C. S. Lewis Institute. Use the information at this link to read about what it means to have a *rule of life*. Then consider working with other classmates or friends in helping each other develop your own. https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/338
- Kaiser Permanente offers free resources concerning stress management, mood, sleep, eating and exercise. They also have free self-assessments for depression, alcohol use, and stress. <https://healthy.kaiserpermanente.org/health-wellness/mental-health/tools-resources>
- The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families provides self-care tips and advice that can be used by everyone and are also tailored to meet the needs of young people. <https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

Devotional Scriptures

Year B Proper 21 (26) Week of 09/26/21

Monday 09/27/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 140; Esther 4:1-17;
1 Peter 1:3-9
Complementary: Psalm 5; Zechariah 6:9-15;
1 Peter 1:3-9

Tuesday 09/28/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 140; Esther 5:1-14;
1 John 2:18-25
Complementary: Psalm 5; Zechariah 8:18-23;
1 John 2:18-25

Wednesday 09/29/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 140; Esther 8:1-17;
Matthew 18:6-9
Complementary: Psalm 5; Zechariah 10:1-12;
Matthew 18:6-9

Thursday 09/30/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 26; Job 2:11-3:26;
Galatians 3:23-29
Complementary: Psalm 8; Genesis 20:1-18;
Galatians 3:23-29

Friday 10/01/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 26; Job 4:1-21;
Romans 8:1-11
Complementary: Psalm 8; Genesis 21:22-34;
Romans 8:1-11

Saturday 10/02/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 26; Job 7:1-21;
Luke 16:14-18
Complementary: Psalm 8; Genesis 23:1-20;
Luke 16:14-18



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INTEGRITY

actions that match our words

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity,
and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

—PSALM 26:1

Introduction

When was the last time you used the word “integrity” in everyday conversation? It is not a word we use very often. Simply put, integrity means honesty. Integrity is a big deal! As believers, we should strive to make integrity our hallmark. But do we? By incorporating our heart’s values into our daily actions, we make integrity part of our foundational operating system. It is no longer an add-on. Being a person of integrity becomes a way of life. And that is the way it should be. So, take the plunge and spend some time focusing on the psalmist’s self-assessment. Then evaluate your own spiritual walk to determine where you need to upgrade your integrity as you seek to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

Lesson Objectives

- To unpack the word “integrity.”
- To examine David’s examples of personal integrity.
- To discover ways to enhance our own personal integrity.

Psalm 26:1-12 NRSV

1 Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering. 2 Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and mind. 3 For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to you. 4 I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; 5 I hate the company of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked. 6 I wash my hands in innocence, and go around your altar, O LORD, 7 singing aloud a song of thanksgiving, and telling all your wondrous deeds. 8 O LORD, I love the house in which you dwell, and the place where your glory abides. 9 Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty, 10 those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. 11 But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me, and be gracious to me. 12 My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the LORD.

Into the Scripture

Psalms 26 is often attributed to David, and it was likely composed at a time of crisis. If the writer was indeed David (and as we move forward, we will assume that it was), the crisis may have been caused by Saul and his cohorts. Or as other scholars suggest that the crisis may have been Absalom's rebellion or some generic political predicament. Regardless of the details surrounding the psalm, the psalmist evidently was facing charges brought against him by people who, in his eyes, were dishonest. Whatever the situation, the verdict of guilt or innocence ultimately lay with God. Because David's relationship with the Divine Judge was secure, he boldly asked to be vindicated (vs. 1a). Then he confidently proceeded to build his case.

David began by highlighting his personal integrity and his unwavering trust in God (vss. 1b-3). The word "integrity" derives from the same word root as "integer," meaning whole or complete. In other words, there was

no discrepancy between David's private life and his public life. His faith in God was demonstrated by a visibly faithful life; he had nothing to hide and nothing to fear. David followed his opening statement about his integrity and trust in God with some examples:

- He did not associate with the wrong crowd—namely, the worthless and wicked, the hypocrites and evil doers (vss. 4-5). He walked with God and would not even sit down with people who did not exhibit moral or religious integrity.
- He washed his hands in innocence (vs. 6a). Hand washing was a symbolic act, usually associated with priests (Exodus 30:17-21) and elders (Deuteronomy 21:6-8), by which a person declared guiltlessness.
- He processed around the altar as he sang a song of thanksgiving and recited the good things God had done (vss. 6b-7).
- He affirmed his love for the place of public and solemn worship (vs. 8). David was likely referring to the tabernacle, as the temple had not yet been built.



By incorporating our heart's values into our daily actions, we make integrity part of our foundational operating system.

For the ancient Hebrews, the tabernacle was the house of God, the dwelling place of God's glory (Exodus 25:8-9).

Because David had been ceremonially clean and morally righteous, he confidently prayed that God would spare his life (vss. 9-10). He had not associated with unrepentant sinners in life; he did not wish to be linked with them in death.

In his closing statement (vss. 11-12), David buttressed his case by highlighting his integrity once again. In essence, he said, "I am not like those shameless people who are giving me so much trouble. I am a person of integrity, so redeem me and extend your grace to me. I know I am standing on solid ground here. I want to continue to lead a holy life in the company of others who exalt your name. Yes, vindicate me!"

The biblical record shows that David did not live a perfect life, nor did he claim perfection in this psalm. Rather, he illustrated ways by which his deep inner dedication to God found expression in a godly way of life. In his appeal for vindication, he was willing to have



God examine his life and search both his inner disposition and his outward actions for evidence of the integrity he so boldly claimed.

Into the Lesson

Integrity is commended often in the Bible. Here are just a few examples from Proverbs:

- “Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but whoever follows perverse ways will be found out” (Proverbs 10:9).
- “The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them” (Proverbs 11:3).
- “Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked in one’s ways even though rich” (Proverbs 28:6).
- “One who walks in integrity will be safe, but whoever follows crooked ways will fall into the Pit” (Proverbs 28:18).

Even these few references make it clear that integrity matters to God and should matter to us, too.

Contractors and engineers talk about structural integrity. Structural integrity is the ability of an item to hold together when it is placed under stress. Whether or not the item holds up depends on its mechanical properties. Two steel beams, for example, might look identical, but one buckles when weight is applied. Why? Because of its composition.

Similarly, integrity is a matter of the heart. It is about what is inside. We might go so far as to say that integrity is the steel of resolve within a person’s soul: the unwavering determination to do what is right. If integrity is not deeply rooted in one’s heart, the mind begins to rationalize and find another way. Or someone else talks us out of doing what is right. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, God empowers us to say, “I cannot do this because I will not be able to live with myself if I do.” Or conversely, “I will do this because I will not be able to live with myself if I do not.”

How, then, does integrity play out in real life?

- Blogger Mark Merrill relates an example from the golf course: “In the 1925 U.S. Open, famed golfer Bobby Jones pulled a one iron out of his bag and addressed the ball. As he set up to hit out of the rough grass, his

ball moved ever so slightly, a motion that calls for a stroke penalty. He was the only one who saw it, and yet, he called the penalty on himself. The penalty eventually cost him the championship. When people tried to congratulate him on his sportsmanship, Jones replied, “That’s like congratulating someone for not robbing a bank.’ He was truly a man of integrity.”¹

- Human Resources and management consultant Susan Heathfield cites the example of John, a software developer, who was attempting to improve the efficiency of a software process but kept having problems because of the code he had written. He could have continued with the problematic code. “But instead, he chose to go to his team. He described the dead ends he had run into and explained that he thought that pushing forward could create problems down the line for the product, preventing the development of advanced features for the software. The team discussed the problem and worked through a solution. John scrapped all of his code and started from scratch with the team’s input. Thanks to his honesty, his new solution gave the team the ability to expand the product’s capabilities easily in the future.”²



The choice to align
your walk and your talk,
your beliefs and your
behavior, your character
and your confession
is yours.



■ Radio talk show host Kirby Anderson passes along this example of a pastor in London who boarded the trolley on Monday morning to go to his office. He paid his fare but when he sat down, he realized the trolley driver had given him too much change. The pastor counted the money in his hand and began to rationalize, “It’s wonderful how God provides.” His funds were running short that week and the extra money would be a big help. But when he got to his stop, he found that his conscience would not allow him to keep the extra money. So “he walked up to the driver, and said, ‘Here. You gave me too much change. You made a mistake.’ The driver said, ‘No, it was no mistake. You see, I was in your church last night when you spoke on honesty, and I thought I would put you to the test.’”³

As with David, these people’s lives were open books. They said to a watching world, “Go ahead and look. My behavior matches my beliefs. My walk matches my talk; my character matches my confession. Who I am on Sunday is the same person I am on Monday and every other day of the week.”

Into Discipleship

Psalm 26 is a prayer that can be prayed by anyone at any time. Speak the words aloud in preparation for worship; whisper the lyrics in the workplace. Whenever and wherever they are recited, the words of this psalm portray the state of mind that should ideally character-

ize every child of God. As believers, we are responsible for our moral integrity and, like the psalmist, we are encouraged to confidently—yet humbly—invite God to test that integrity. David asked God to look at his life and pronounce a verdict. Can we do the same? It is a daunting assignment, isn’t it?

Let us start by asking ourselves some key questions:

- What would I do if I knew nobody would ever find out?
- If no bill collector would come after me, would I still pay my bills?
- If the boss (or teacher) were not around, would I work at the same pace?
- Do I take responsibility for my actions?
- Am I the same person wherever I am?
- When I look in the mirror, do I see a Christian whose personal integrity is intact?

If, in your self-assessment, you find that there is room for improvement, first take comfort in knowing that becoming a person of integrity is not a one-time decision that you make. Rather, it is a series of decisions that you make day by day and moment by moment.



If integrity is not deeply rooted in one’s heart,
the mind begins to rationalize and find
another way.



Start with prayer and Bible reading, if you are not already in the habit of doing so. Ask God to help you align your faith with your actions. Study biblical examples of integrity and its kindred character traits, such as righteousness and honesty. Keep a journal with insights God provides.

Here are some other steps you can begin to incorporate into your improvement plan:

- Resolve to do what is right and not necessarily what is easy.
- Fulfill your promises (and your appointments!).
- Before you make a commitment, make sure you can deliver.
- Associate with and learn from people who demonstrate integrity.
- Ask for feedback from someone you trust.

If you find you are confident about your current level of integrity, keep in mind that one's integrity is put to the test daily. Others are always watching you to see how you respond in various situations. The choice to align your walk and your talk, your beliefs and your behavior, your character and your confession is yours.

What can you do to maintain and continue to pursue integrity? Realize that being a person of integrity does not imply sinless perfection. God extends grace and nurtures integrity within you as you spend time in the company of the Divine Nurturer. Allow God's Holy Spirit to work in you through prayer, Bible reading,

meditation, and the practice of other spiritual disciplines. Open your heart and mind to be nurtured and to grow in your quest to be a person of integrity.

Maybe you are feeling burdened like David was when he wrote Psalm 26. Or maybe life is moving along smoothly for you right now. Revisit today's psalm and write your own paraphrase, incorporating personal details. Do not worry about rhyme or meter (unless you want to!). Keep in mind that what you write is addressed to God. Offer the result as a prayer.

Maybe you prefer music. Browse through a hymnal. Perhaps lyrics from "Cleanse Me" (words by J. Edwin Orr/Maori melody) speak to you today. The hymn "I Would Be True" (words by Howard A. Walter, music by Joseph Yates Peek) certainly highlights the theme of integrity. There are many others. Find one that is right for you. Sing it, hum it, breathe it. Make it your prayer and let it be the song that runs through your head every day in the week ahead as you continue to focus on integrity.

Notes:

1. Mark W. Merrill, "10 Ways to Be a Man of Integrity," *All Pro Dad*, accessed January 1, 2021, <https://www.allprodad.com/10-ways-to-be-a-man-of-integrity/>.
2. Susan Heathfield, "What Is Integrity?" *The Balanced Careers*, updated February 19, 2021, <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-is-integrity-really-1917676>.
3. Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (McDonald, TN: Assurance Publishers, 1990), quoted in Kerby Anderson, "Integrity, A Christian Virtue," accessed January 1, 2021, <https://www.probe.org/integrity/?print=pdf>.

Living the Lesson

Exploring Integrity in the Bible

Explore the accounts of four biblical characters who are described as having had integrity: Abimelech (Genesis 20:5-6), David (1 Kings 9:14), Job (Job 2:3, 9; 4:6; 27:5; 31:6), and Levi (Malachi 2:6).

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Exploring Integrity in the Workplace

If class members are employed, do an internet search for information on integrity in the workplace. Enhance your presentation with your discoveries. If class members are retired, an internet search for traits of persons with

integrity will uncover a plethora of material. Ask class members to share stories from their own experiences that fit the various categories.

Discuss some challenges inherent in being a person of integrity. What if . . .

- your desire to be totally honest causes friction with a family member?
- standing for what is right puts your job at risk?
- giving someone the benefit of the doubt does not turn out as you had hoped?

Online Resources

Denominational Integrity

The ABCUSA *Case Statement on the Gospel in a Rapidly Changing Society* is in essence an exposé concerning the challenge of the denomination's approach and effort in living out the Great Commission. Use the download link at <https://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resources-for-churches-and-leaders/mission-summit-conversations/mission-table-2015-case-statement-on-the-gospel-in-a-rapidly-changing-society/> to print out copies of the article for your group to read and discuss. Why are the issues raised in the article integral to the witness of the Church? If the Church has lost ground in being a proactive leader in society, what are things that we can do as individual churches and as a denomination to increase our integrity?



Strengthening Your Grip Through Study

Make daily bible reading, devotion and prayer a habit. Review and discuss bible study plans and devotional options, and ways to approach the scriptures, along with the many other resources at <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/>. Afterwards, have each group members write a suggested weekly plan for themselves and share it with the group.

Devotional Scriptures

Year B Proper 22 (27) Week of 10/03/21

Monday 10/04/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 55:1-15; Job 8:1-22;
1 Corinthians 7:1-9
Complementary: Psalm 112; Deuteronomy 22:13-30;
1 Corinthians 7:1-9

Tuesday 10/05/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 55:1-15; Job 11:1-20;
1 Corinthians 7:10-16
Complementary: Psalm 112; Deuteronomy 24:1-5;
1 Corinthians 7:10-16

Wednesday 10/06/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 55:1-15; Job 15:1-35;
Matthew 5:27-36
Complementary: Psalm 112; Jeremiah 3:6-14;
Matthew 5:27-36

Thursday 10/07/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 22:1-15; Job 17:1-16;
Hebrews 3:7-19
Complementary: Psalm 90:12-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21;
Hebrews 3:7-19

Friday 10/08/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 22:1-15; Job 18:1-21;
Hebrews 4:1-11
Complementary: Psalm 90:12-17; Deuteronomy 5:22-33;
Hebrews 4:1-11

Saturday 10/09/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 22:1-15; Job 20:1-29;
Matthew 15:1-9
Complementary: Psalm 90:12-17; Amos 3:13-4:5;
Matthew 15:1-9



My behavior matches my beliefs.



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DISCERNMENT

approach God with confidence

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

—HEBREWS 4:16

Introduction

You have heard it before: words matter. They are a powerful means of communication. We do well to pay attention to words. Likewise, the words of God matter. This time, we are not referring to the Word of God—the Bible—but simply to the words God speaks. When God speaks, the holy words probe otherwise unreachable places within our spirits. We do well to pay attention to God’s words.

In sending Jesus, God effectively brought the voice of God to earth. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). Jesus is pictured in Hebrews as the perfect high priest. Through him, we are privileged to approach God with confidence. Your words matter to God!

Lesson Objectives

- To define ways the words of God convict us of our spiritual condition.
- To highlight the value of having Jesus as our high priest to help us with our spiritual condition.
- To consider ways we can deepen our listening to God’s voice in our lives.

Hebrews 4:12-16 NRSV

12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. 14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Into the Scripture

The Letter to the Hebrews is a sermon or treatise that was sent to a Jewish Christian community, perhaps in Rome. Authorship initially was attributed to Paul, but now some believe Hebrews to be the work of another Jewish Christian, maybe one of Paul's contemporaries. The first readers are believed to have been Jewish Christians who were struggling under Nero's rule and were considering turning back to the Mosaic law. The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews intended to show those believers that, even amid persecution, they were indeed following a better way and should persevere.

We begin our study in chapter 4 with the declaration that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword” (vs. 12). Here, “word” does not point to Scripture, the Word of God, but rather to the living voice of God—the words that God speaks. The first readers of Hebrews would have understood this verse in specific way. “The Jews always had a very special idea about words. To the Jews once a word was spoken it had an independent existence. A word was not only a sound with a certain meaning; a word was a power, a force which went forth and did things.”¹

The writer of Hebrews piled phrase upon phrase to describe the power that lies in the words God speaks. Not only are they “living and active,” they are also

“sharper than any two-edged sword.” Continuing with the sword imagery, the writer said the words God speaks penetrate the very being of the hearer and lay bare the intents of the heart (vss. 12b-13). Words are effective; they get things done.

Nothing remains hidden from God. But what did

the writer of Hebrews believe needed to be uncovered? To answer that question, we must examine the context. Earlier in his extensive warning against unbelief, the writer quoted from Psalm 95 (see Hebrews 3:7-11). Just as the psalmist used the example of the Israelites' painful wilderness experience to warn his generation, so, too, the writer of Hebrews used the passage to warn his generation. In his subsequent argument (see 3:12–4:11), he pled

“

When God speaks
and we listen, we are
not the same
afterward. At least,
we should not be.

with his readers not to harden their hearts and disobey, but rather to listen to all of God's spoken revelation. He challenged them to remain faithful. He declared that the powerful words uttered by the Almighty had the ability to strip away all pretense and reveal any lack of integrity. The writer made it clear that sinful actions and sinful thoughts would be uncovered. The believer would have to look into the eyes of God and give an account. In the end, nothing would remain hidden from the eyes of God.

In the next section of the letter, we find the author softening his approach and reiterating an earlier point, the introduction of Jesus as high priest (vss. 14-16). Let's look at some of the fine print.

- The portrayal of “a great high priest who has passed through the heavens” (vs. 14) is likely a reference to Jesus' ascension into the very presence of Almighty God.
- The summons to “hold fast to our confession” (vs. 14) is a straightforward plea for the readers to remain committed to Christ.



- The reference to a sympathetic high priest (vs. 15) emphasizes Jesus' full identification with human kind, though he remained sinless.
- The invitation to “approach the throne of grace with boldness” (v. 16), a privilege formerly restricted to a select few, is now extended to all the people of God.

Broadly stated, this high priest's job was to bring the words of God to humankind and to usher humankind into the presence of God. With the help of Jesus, the readers could remain true to their Christian faith.

Into the Lesson

We have already noted that our passage harkens back to the Israelites' wilderness experience (see 3:15-19). Throughout that wilderness journey, God communicated with the Israelites through chosen intermediaries, but the people did not listen and obey. Instead, they hardened their hearts and turned from the God who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Now, all these years later, the readers were struggling with their Christian faith, torn between whether they were free from the Law through Christ or whether they had a moral obligation to observe Torah. They needed to stop and listen to what God had to say. The writer strengthened his appeal to them by offering a graphic example: the two-edged sword. Not only are the words of God living and active, but they pierce all the layers of one's being. When God speaks and we listen, we are not the same afterward. At least, we should not be.



Theologian and pastor John Piper tells of a time when God spoke to him, and the words were indeed piercing. Piper was attending a staff retreat and found himself awake very early one morning. Instead of trying to go back to sleep, he got up, dressed, and went to the meeting room to pray. As he prayed and meditated, he heard the words, “Come and see what I have done.” There was no doubt in his mind that God was speaking to him, but he was curious about what the words meant.

Then God said, “I am awesome in my deeds among mortals.” Piper heartily agreed and wondered what God would show him next. “I turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the river on foot. There they rejoiced in me—who rules by my might forever,” proclaimed God. Piper realized that God *was* taking him somewhere—thousands of years back in time to the occasions when God turned the Red Sea and the Jordan River into dry land.

As Piper marveled at those awesome deeds, God spoke once again: “I keep watch over the nations—let not the rebellious exalt themselves.” Piper writes, “This was breathtaking. It was very serious. It was almost a



Jesus, who is both the Son of God and completely human, cleared the way for humankind to approach God.

rebuke. At least a warning. [God] may as well have taken me by the collar of my shirt, lifted me off the ground with one hand, and said, with an incomparable mixture of fierceness and love, ‘Never, never, never exalt yourself. Never rebel against me.’”²

Notably softer images pervade the second section of Scripture in today’s lesson (vss. 14-16). Earlier in the treatise when the writer introduced the image of the merciful and faithful high priest, he closed the section with these encouraging words: “Because [Jesus] himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested” (Hebrews 2:18).

Hebrews clearly delineates Jesus’ priestly ministry in the life of the believer. Jesus, who is both the Son of God and completely human, cleared the way for humankind to approach God. Thus, his priesthood is far superior to the priesthood of mere mortals like Aaron (see 5:1-4). In the Jewish system, priests mediated between God and the people. They also had countless specific tasks to carry out on behalf of the people in addition to offering sacrifices for their own sins. Jesus, on the other hand, offered himself as the permanent and perfect sinless sacrifice on behalf of human beings (see 7:23-27). The old rituals were no longer necessary. Jesus completed the sacrificial work, and as a result, believers are free to approach God with confidence. That was good news for the readers of the Letter to the Hebrews and that is good news for us, as well.

Richard De Haan of Our Daily Bread Ministries told the story of a pilot who frequently flew his small private plane in and out of a large, international airport. An acquaintance asked the pilot if he ever had problems piloting his small aircraft at an airport that primarily served much larger planes. The pilot responded, “My plane may be small, but I have the same rights, the same privileges, and the same access to that airport as anyone else—even the jumbo jets!” There’s a pertinent spiritual application here, De Haan said. Regardless of who we are, every believer has equal access to God through Jesus, our high priest. With that assurance, we can “approach the throne of grace with boldness” (vs. 16) knowing that God will never turn us away.³

Into Discipleship

God speaks! Are we listening? Or maybe the question should be “How can we hear God’s voice?” Discerning

the voice of God amid the plethora of voices seeking our attention sometimes seems impossible. Some of us would desire the direct style of communication from God that we find recorded often in the Bible. For example:

- God gave clear direction to Abram (Genesis 12:1-3).
- God spoke to Moses from a burning bush (Exodus 3:4-5).
- God called Samuel by name (1 Samuel 3:10).
- The voice of God came to Elijah—not in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12).
- God had an interesting conversation with Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37: 1-14).
- God got Saul’s attention on the road to Damascus with a bright light and a scathing question (Acts 9:3-6).
- God spoke to Peter in a dream (Acts 10:9-16).

And the list goes on.

We long to have a connection like one of those. We speak *to* God often, making requests and asking questions, but we rarely hear God “speak.” That’s because our communication with God usually ends when we run out of words. Discerning God’s words requires that we patiently listen with our hearts and obey. But the question remains: “How can we discern God’s voice?”

Although the word of God referred to in verse 12 is the spoken word, God speaks in numerous ways and



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uses a variety of approaches. How can we tune in to God's voice? Here are some of the media God uses:

- **The Bible.** In the written Word we may find words of encouragement, significant lessons for life, and warnings.
 - **The Holy Spirit.** The nudging and coaxing we feel inside of us is the work of God through the indwelling gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - **Jesus Christ.** Since he is the Word who “became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14), through him, we hear God's voice.
 - **Nature and God's Creation.** God's voice plays loudly in the intricate details and magnificent beauty of everything our Creator has made.
 - **Other believers.** God may choose to use a friend, a teacher, a parent, a preacher, or a mentor to convey a message to us.
 - **Prayer.** In the neglected side of prayer—listening—God speaks.
 - **Circumstances.** When circumstances change, we can ask God, “Is there something you want me to learn from this?”
- **The arts.** God inspires artists, poets, writers, musicians, and others to create works that move the human spirit.
 - **The actual voice.** What we perceive to be a clear, audible voice can be the voice of God.

What types of media seem to work the best for you? When have you heard God's voice? What did you hear? Did you listen and obey? Have you been disturbed by something God said? Have the words pierced your soul? If so, now is the time to move on with confidence. Go to God and kneel at the throne of grace. Pour out your heart. Speak freely. God wants to hear your words. And then, stop talking . . . God will speak again!

Notes:

1. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), 34.
2. John Piper, “The Morning I Heard the Voice of God,” *Desiring God*, March 7, 2007, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-morning-i-heard-the-voice-of-god>. Note: The words God spoke in the story are also found in Psalm 66:5-7.
3. Richard De Haan, “Hebrews 4:16: Equal Access,” Hebrews 1-4 Sermon Illustrations, *Precept Austin*, accessed January 7, 2021, https://www.preceptaustin.org/hebrews_1-4_sermon_illustrations.

Living the Lesson

Explore the Baptist concept of the priesthood of believers. American Baptists' affirmation of the priesthood of all believers arises from a conviction that all who truly seek God are competent to approach God directly. Here's a website that explains this particular Baptist distinctive: The Priesthood of The Believer or of Believers | Beliefs, polity, ministries, practices, organizations, and heritage of Baptists (baptistdistinctives.org). How does this Baptist affirmation connect to the Hebrews passage that we are studying this week?

Research the priestly duties in the Old Testament. There are many Scripture passages describing the duties of OT priests. Numbers 18 is only the beginning. Leviticus 1-9 gives a detailed picture. This online chart, Old Testament Priests & Priesthood.pmd (biblecharts.org), gives a helpful overview.

Or use a concordance to help you with your research. Compare and contrast what you learn about the Old

Testament priests and Jesus, the perfect high priest. Can you think of any reasons the readers of Hebrews have wanted to return to Judaism and the Mosaic law?

Listen to or view a video presentation of the song. "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say." Search online music files for a version of the song that appeals to you. The song is available as a printed hymn by Horatius Bonar on I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say | Hymnary.org. A wonderful African American rendition is available by the Edwin Hawkins Singers, but the visual is motionless, showing only title and name of the group.

It is also presented as a gospel song here: Bill & Gloria Gaither - I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say (Live) - Bing video and in many other places. Some YouTube versions stream the lyrics; some provide iconic art and scenery; others show the singers. Make it a time of prayerful listening and reflection.

Building a Spiritual Foundation

Several books are listed here that have been beloved classics in different aspects of spiritual formation that undergirds discernment. Consider these options--some of which have several versions in print and/or are available as e-books or on audible.com.

- *Living in the Presence* by Tilden Edwards
- *The Holy Longing: The Search for A Christian Spirituality* by Ronald Rolheiser
- *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard Foster
- *Soul Feast* by Marjorie J. Thompson



Online Resources

Deep Listening

Develop your “spiritual ear” by practicing Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina. Refer to the resources under Practices and other discernment offerings at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/practice/>. Consider using a portion of this lesson’s scripture to practice Lectio Divina with your group.

The Benefits of Spiritual Direction

Consider the advantages of having someone walk along side of you in your discernment. Many Christians use Spiritual Directors to help guide them along their journey. There are many resources online that explain Spiritual Direction. Start your understanding at <https://transformingcenter.org/spiritual-direction-4/>. Also, consider having a local Spiritual Director talk to your group about Spiritual Direction in person or on Zoom.

Devotional Scriptures Year B Proper 23 (28) Week of 10/10/21

Monday 10/11/21, Canadian Thanksgiving Day

Semi-continuous: Psalm 39; Job 26:1-14;
Revelation 7:9-17
Complementary: Psalm 26; Obadiah 1:1-9;
Revelation 7:9-17

Tuesday 10/12/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 39; Job 28:12-29:10;
Revelation 8:1-5
Complementary: Psalm 26; Obadiah 1:10-16;
Revelation 8:1-5

Wednesday 10/13/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 39; Job 32:1-22; Luke 16:19-31
Complementary: Psalm 26; Obadiah 1:17-21;
Luke 16:19-31

Thursday 10/14/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35b; Job 36:1-16;
Romans 15:7-13
Complementary: Psalm 91:9-16; Genesis 14:17-24;
Romans 15:7-13

Friday 10/15/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35b; Job 37:1-24;
Revelation 17:1-18
Complementary: Psalm 91:9-16; Isaiah 47:1-9;
Revelation 17:1-18

Saturday 10/16/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35b; Job 39:1-30;
Luke 22:24-30
Complementary: Psalm 91:9-16; Isaiah 47:10-15;
Luke 22:24-30



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SERVANTHOOD

answer Jesus' call to greatness

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life a ransom for many.

—MARK 10:45

Introduction

In this week's study, we will see the brothers James and John positioning themselves to be influential figures in the kingdom they believed Jesus was about to establish. It is very possible that we will find out that they were more like us than we want to admit. They longed for power and privilege. They scrambled to be at the top of ladder. But they overlooked the fact that the path to greatness involved service.

Do you find it hard to think of someone else's needs before your own? Would you rather be served than be the server? Might God be calling you to serve someone in your family, a friend at school, a colleague at work, or a neighbor down the street? If so, would you view it as a call to greatness? It is!

Lesson Objectives

- To critique the request of James and John to flank Jesus when he reigns.
- To delineate some ways to avoid power struggles.
- To commit to taking at least one personal step to further develop one's spirit of service.

Mark 10:35-45 NRSV

35 James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." 36 And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" 37 And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." 38 But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" 39 They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus

called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Into the Scripture

The ministry of Jesus according to the Gospel of Mark was healing the blind, sick, and lame; debating with religious leaders who opposed his work and feared his popularity; and teaching his disciples. In this week’s Scripture, we find him teaching his disciples a monumental lesson: servanthood.

The narrative begins with two ambitious brothers, James and John, approaching Jesus with an inappropriate request (vs. 35). They, along with Peter, were part of Jesus’ inner circle (see Mark 5:37, 9:2). But Peter was not anywhere in this picture. It appears to have been a family attempt to gain an advantage over their associates.

The style of their appeal demonstrates that they treated Jesus as a potentate who was able to grant any request without knowing what it might be. (See the example of Herod in Mark 6:22.) But Jesus did not assume that royal role, nor did he allow himself to be bound in advance. Rather, he asked them what they wanted him to do for them (vs. 36). Their reply was straightforward: they wanted the second-best seats in the earthly kingdom that they were expecting Jesus to establish (vs. 37). In their minds they saw a great throne room with a king

sitting in state and all the royal court assembled in his honor. On his right hand and on his left would be the chief ministers of state. James and John wanted those seats of honor.

“

Jesus embodied his own ethic: his purpose was to serve humankind and give his life for all people.

But Jesus gently told them that they did not know what they were asking (vs. 38). They did not understand what Jesus had revealed to them about his impending death and resurrection (see 8:31, 9:30-32, 10:32-34). Their focus was on the wrong kind of kingdom.

When Jesus asked them if they could “drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with” (vs. 38), he used two Jewish metaphors. In Scripture, as well as in secular writing of the time, the cup is a metaphor for the life and experience God hands out to humankind. For example, in Psalm 23:5, when the psalmist noted that his cup was overflowing,

he was describing his life and his experience of happiness given to him by God. The baptism of which Jesus spoke had nothing to do with the ordinance of baptism as we understand it today. The Greek verb *baptizein* means to dip; its past participle, *bebaptismenos*, means submerged. Jesus was asking them if they could bear to be submerged in the horrible experience he would soon face. After James' and John's blindly positive reply (vs. 39), Jesus told them that they would, indeed, drink the cup he was about to drink and be baptized with the baptism with which he was going to be baptized. However, it was not up to him to say who would be at his right or left hand in the kingdom (v. 40). That was up to God alone.

When the rest of the disciples heard what James and John had done, they were angry (vs. 41). To calm the potentially serious situation, Jesus took immediate action. He called them together and began to teach them once again (vss. 42-45). To help them understand, Jesus clarified the difference between greatness in his kingdom and in the kingdoms of the Greco-Roman world. Those in high places in secular kingdoms, he said, "lord it over" (vs. 42) their subjects. However, the greatest in his kingdom stand in stark contrast: they are servants (vss. 43-44). Indeed, Jesus embodied his own ethic. His purpose was to serve humankind and give his life for all people.

Into the Lesson

We do not have to look very far or very deep to find that the standard for greatness in much of our world is based on how much power we have, how many people we control, and/or how much money we make. In God's kingdom, however, the criterion is how much service we can give. It sounds simple, but it is not exactly easy.

The appeal James and John made to Jesus has been light-heartedly described as the first ecclesiastical plot to gain power in the church. Plain and simple, it was a power struggle. Two of the Twelve wanted to elevate their positions; the remaining ten were indignant because James and John had tried to outflank them. We have all been involved in a tug of war in an attempt to gain or retain power. That metaphoric rope may have found its way into our personal, professional, or public lives. And certainly, it has haunted the church. How can we keep from picking up the rope in the first place?

Remember, it takes two to have a power struggle, so when someone threatens our authority or somehow pushes our personal buttons, we can decide not to participate. Determine not to take the bait, period. Another approach is to choose a positive perspective. Rather than assuming a defensive stance, we can accept the situation as a teaching moment. Engage the other person and offer an appropriate, low-key verbal response. Perhaps we will have an opportunity to give the other person choices that may, in turn, motivate positive behavioral changes. Another effective strategy for avoiding and engaging in a power struggle is to stay calm. Let the other person know we are listening and pair it with body language that mirrors our concern. But it is not simple at all. None of these behaviors come naturally unless we have answered Jesus' call to greatness and have committed to being servants in his name.

During his work with American Baptist International Ministries as a medical missionary in northern Haiti, Dr. Steve James experienced firsthand the positive impact of practicing servanthood. After he saw many



Within our hearts are both humility and arrogance, respect for others and a desire to outshine them—a desire to serve and a craving to be served.



good people in the healthcare organizations with which he was affiliated either “quitting their jobs or burning out due to an inability of good leaders and staff to work out their differences,” he took an online course in organizational leadership at Azusa Pacific University. This then led him to write a manual on how “reorganize work environments into a more inclusive and collaborative format that invites everybody to follow the way of Jesus by being servants of one another.” Dr. James said, “Jesus was calling us to have a completely different mindset where we freely chose to become servants of each other. When that happened, we changed our environment and organizations and how we made decisions together.”

However, Dr. James noted that creating this model for Haitian institutions was a challenge because of the country’s history of slavery. He shared the following reflection: “Haitians tend to equate servanthood with slavery. But Jesus is saying, ‘I’m going to take your slave history and I’m going to give you an agenda that takes you right to the cross, where we’ll take up our cross of servanthood and sacrifice our own egos to love our neighbors and God.’ That’s where we need to go.” In summary, he said, “Ultimately, we hope to build organizations and help bring value where people feel like Jesus is actually in this place because of how people are [serving] together. It’s that type of exciting possibility we see for Haiti’s future!”

Think of it: Jesus knew he was about to suffer a horrible death. He was not focused on the pain and suffering in which he would soon be submerged. Instead, he calmed the situation and seized a teaching moment. He called his disciples to himself instead of letting them draw further apart from each other. And then he talked to them about servanthood.

Into Discipleship

Consider this Cherokee legend: A boy went to talk to his grandfather because he was upset over an injustice he had experienced. In response, the grandfather told the boy a story about the two wolves who live inside him. One wolf is not harmful; he lives peacefully with others and, if he must fight, he will do so fairly and for the right reason. The other wolf is much different; he is angry, quick-tempered, full of hate, and always seeking a fight. The grandfather admitted it was difficult to live with the two wolves because each vies for dominance. “The boy looked intently into his grandfather’s eyes and



The standard for greatness in much of our world is based on how much power we have, how many people we control, and how much money we make.



asked, ‘Which one wins, Grandfather?’ The Grandfather smiled and quietly said, ‘The one I feed.’”

Within our hearts are both humility and arrogance, respect for others and a desire to outshine them—a desire to serve and a craving to be served. The one we feed, wins. How do we feed humility and a spirit of service? Here are some suggestions:

- Understand that servanthood is not simply a trait that can be taught. Rather, it is a product of divine empowerment of the heart and mind as we are being transformed into the image of Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, we can develop the spirit of service that Jesus wants his followers to have.
- Make a list of the areas in your life where you find it hard to exhibit a spirit of service. Serving is not a task but is instead an attitude that permeates the mind of the servant of God. So, pray for an attitude change. Begin right away to pay special attention to at least one area where you experience such difficulty. Let the Holy Spirit teach you.
- Read the Bible; it is your training manual for servanthood. Use a concordance or do an internet search on servanthood in the Bible. How is Jesus portrayed as a servant?
- Envision your hands and feet as being the hands and feet of Jesus. What would Jesus be doing right now?
- Expect (and allow) Jesus to turn your world upside down. The natural world runs on a top-down approach, but the kingdom of God is built on bottom-up principles.
- Keep your schedule open for “divine appointments” with people whom God places in your path.
- Remind yourself that no one is beneath you, and no one is unworthy of your time.
- Open your eyes to see Jesus in others.
- Take time to show love.
- Cross the threshold from a passive recipient of God’s grace to an active carrier of it. Because you have been called, saved, and loved (passive), you can serve (active).
- Look for opportunities to serve every day!

Do not try to do everything on this list all at once. But once you start, be prepared for changes in your life. One of the fascinating results of answering Jesus’ call to greatness is that the things we once thought were of primary importance move down on the list. We begin to see the newest iPhone, the upgraded finishes in the kitchen, the vehicle with the coveted extras, and all those other things that revolve around self in a different light. Life becomes less about us and more about others. We become sensitized to other people. And the more we give of ourselves, the more sensitized we become. Believers become doers.

Living the Lesson

- **A parallel account of today’s narrative** is found in Matthew 20:20-28. Read it and discuss the additional details. What new insights did you gain from this reading?
- **Inquire about volunteer service opportunities** in your local church and community. Search the ABHMS website for volunteer opportunities (<https://abhms.org>).
- **Prayer of Confession**
One: For choosing power over service and seeking glory rather than humility,
All: Forgive us, gracious God.
One: For pushing ourselves to the front, when our presence is needed on the sidelines,
All: Forgive us, gracious God.
One: Show us, Holy One, where we are needed and how to serve you and your people.
All: Guide us that we might be your hands of healing and compassion for a world in need. Amen.
- **Sing or listen** to “Servant of All” by Michael Ryan. (WorshipSong - Servant Of All - Media by Calvary Chapel Music & Maranatha Singers, Accessed

January 14, 2021.) This worship song can be accessed on many other internet sites.

- **Share this devotional** below, which is applicable to this week’s lesson and is an example of a “divine appointment” mentioned earlier. (Writer: Zach Schaar, Sugarcreek, Ohio. Published in Fall 2021 issue of *The Secret Place*.)

God is on Time, Every Time!

Mark 1:40-42

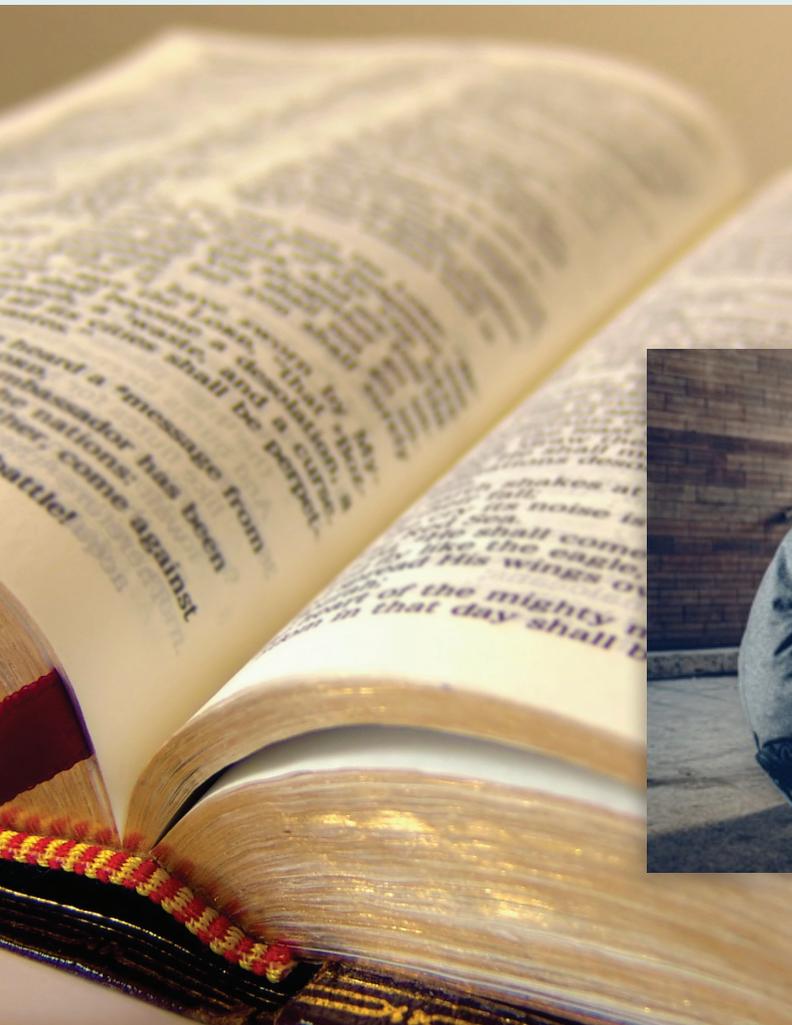
THOUGHT FOR TODAY: Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” —Mark 1:41

Years ago, my wife and I lived in Columbus, Ohio, where one of our ministries was to help feed folks without homes. One day we had a surplus of food and didn’t see anyone else to feed, so we decided to head home. As we were cutting through a parking lot to get to an adjacent street, we noticed a man walking toward our vehicle. He was haggard in appearance and had a small bag of possessions with him. We stopped our car and gave him some food and talked a while. As we were leaving, he said to us, “I was so hungry and wondering what I was going to eat next. God is on time, every time!”

As Christians, we are to be moved with compassion. How many people could be blessed today if we allow our hearts to be softened by God’s goodness?

PRAYER: God, we love you! Soften our hearts, fill us with compassion, and let it overflow to all of those we meet. Amen.

Zach Schaar—Sugarcreek, Ohio



Devotional Scriptures

Year B Proper 24 (29) Week of 10/17/21

Monday 10/18/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 75; Job 40:1-24; Hebrews 6:1-12
 Complementary: Psalm 37:23-40; 1 Samuel 8:1-18;
 Hebrews 6:1-12

Tuesday 10/19/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 75; Job 41:1-11;
 Hebrews 6:13-20
 Complementary: Psalm 37:23-40; 1 Samuel 10:17-25;
 Hebrews 6:13-20

Wednesday 10/20/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 75; Job 41:12-34; John 13:1-17
 Complementary: Psalm 37:23-40; 1 Samuel 12:1-25;
 John 13:1-17

Thursday 10/21/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 34:1-8; 2 Kings 20:12-19;
 Hebrews 7:1-10
 Complementary: Psalm 126; Jeremiah 23:9-15;
 Hebrews 7:1-10

Friday 10/22/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 34:1-8; Nehemiah 1:1-11;
 Hebrews 7:11-22
 Complementary: Psalm 126; Jeremiah 26:12-24;
 Hebrews 7:11-22

Saturday 10/23/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 34:1-8; Job 42:7-9;
 Mark 8:22-26
 Complementary: Psalm 126; Jeremiah 29:24-32;
 Mark 8:22-26



The more we give of ourselves, the more sensitized we become. Believers become doers.



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SUPPLICATION

ask for help

Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’
The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’

—MARK 10:51

Introduction

There are some things we are incapable of doing alone. We need help! Think back over the past several days: How many times did you ask for help? Maybe it was something simple like moving a heavy object. Maybe it was a task that was more complex, like preparing a meal or completing a project. Perhaps you asked a friend or family member to help you solve a personal dilemma. Or perhaps you sought help from someone in the medical field or from a spiritual advisor. We all need help sometimes.

Asking for help does not come easily for everyone, but *not* asking for help makes life more problematic. In this week’s lesson, Bartimaeus dared to ask Jesus for help. Will you follow his example?

Lesson Objectives

- To analyze the story of the healing of Bartimaeus from his perspective.
- To apply Jesus’ question to our individual situations today.
- To prayerfully formulate an authentic response to Jesus’ question.

Mark 10:46-52 NRSV

46 They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. 47 When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” 48 Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” 49 Jesus stood still and said, “Call him here.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” 50 So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. 51 Then Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man said to him, “My teacher, let me see again.” 52 Jesus said to him, “Go; your faith has made you well.” Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Into the Scripture

The account of Bartimaeus' recovery of sight is the last healing story recorded in Mark's Gospel. Bartimaeus' name is a linguistic hybrid composed of *bar*, from the Aramaic meaning "son," and the Greek *timaïos*, meaning "honorable." He is only mentioned once in the Bible. Unlike the majority of those whom Jesus healed, Bartimaeus' name is recorded. Somehow, the very fact that Mark bothered to record his name (vs. 46) seems to lend special significance to this story.

We know very little about Bartimaeus. At some point in his life, he had lost his sight. Unable to fish or farm, incapable of working as a carpenter or a potter, he was forced to beg for alms. In a religious culture that believed defects were the result of sin, being blind must have been a terrible thing indeed. Nevertheless, Bartimaeus did not let his unfortunate situation stifle his voice (vs. 47).

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the Passover. When a distinguished teacher was on such a journey, it was customary for interested followers to travel with him and listen to what he had to say. The group had reached

Jericho and had only about fifteen miles remaining before they would reach Jerusalem. Bartimaeus heard footsteps and asked what was happening. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was passing by, he was determined to get the teacher's attention. "Jesus, Son of David," have mercy on me!" he yelled (vs. 47).

People traveling with Jesus were offended by the noisy uproar and tried to silence the blind man (vs. 48). Nevertheless, Bartimaeus kept up the clamor and repeated his desperate request even louder. The frantic cries got Jesus' attention, so he stopped and asked that the blind man be brought to him (vs. 49). Even though the crowd had tried to silence Bartimaeus, no one among them would have gone so far as to deprive him of the opportunity to escape his sightless world. So, some went to him and spoke a few encouraging words: "Take heart,

“

Realizing that certain things only happen once in a lifetime, Bartimaeus responded immediately.

get up, he is calling you" (vs. 49). Realizing that certain things only happen once in a lifetime, Bartimaeus responded immediately. For fear that his long, loose robe might slow him down, he threw it aside and, in a leap of faith and hope, somehow quickly made his way to Jesus (v. 50).

Then Jesus asked the essential question, "What do you want me to do for you?" (vs. 51). To some of us, this might sound like an odd question to ask of a person who was blind. But it was a sincere question. Jesus never forced his healing ministry on anyone. Out of respect, he enabled, or compelled, Bartimaeus to express his deepest desire. To Bartimaeus' credit, he knew exactly what he wanted. The one who was blind asked in faith, believing that Jesus would restore his sight.

His request may seem obvious to us, but making it took courage coupled with faith. His life as a beggar had been quite secure because almsgiving was a sacred duty for Jews. He would not have gone hungry, neither would he have been without shelter. The possibility of a blind person being mistreated was forbidden by God. The Law prohibited the giving of misleading directions (see





Deuteronomy 27:18) or doing anything to cause a blind person to stumble (see Leviticus 19:14). If Bartimaeus regained his sight, he could no longer depend on charity; instead, he would be forced to work and find his own way in the world. When he said, “My teacher, let me see again,” he signaled his willingness to leave behind all that had become familiar to him and set out on a new journey. The text tells us that Jesus did, in fact, restore his sight (vs. 52). Bartimaeus, in turn, became a grateful follower of Jesus.

Into the Lesson

Although there are several ways to approach the healing story of Bartimaeus, we will focus on Jesus’ question: “What do you want me to do for you?” What is exceptional about this question?

- First, it is intensely personal. Note the use of the pronouns “you” and “me.” Jesus did not send one of his disciples to find out what Bartimaeus wanted. Instead, he asked some unnamed individuals in the crowd to bring Bartimaeus to him so he could address the blind man directly. In effect, he put himself at the blind man’s disposal. Try to put yourself in Bartimaeus’ sandals. You have been a beggar at the city gate and now, because you dared to call for help, Jesus is asking you this amazing question.
- Second, it is a highly practical question. Note the use of the active verb “do.” Action is at the center of

Jesus’ question. Great teacher that he was, he could have philosophized about Bartimaeus’ condition and then launched into a discourse about spiritual blindness. Since many people of the time readily correlated suffering and sin, Jesus could have used the situation to dispel that fallacy. But he did not. He just asked Bartimaeus what he could do for him. Try to put yourself in Bartimaeus’ sandals again. Because you dared to ask for Jesus’ help, he is asking you to define your need.

- Third, it is a powerful question. Note the one who is asking it. Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth (vs. 47) was passing by. This delineation distinguished Jesus from others with the same name, and there were many in that era. Then Bartimaeus addressed him as the “Son of David,” the standard title used by the Jews when they referred to the Messiah. Finally, he directed his request to “My teacher,” a more intimate form of address. Try to put yourself in Bartimaeus’ sandals once again. You have heard about the Healer, Jesus of Nazareth. The widespread rumor that this same Jesus is the promised Messiah has even reached your small corner of the world. When Jesus stops and



Imagine the miracles we are missing out on because we are not telling Jesus exactly what we need!

asks you what he can do for you, you embrace him as your Teacher and make your personal appeal.

Many of us have a difficult time seeing through the fog of life's daily challenges. We have questions, fears, doubts, and dilemmas that we would like to have resolved. We face our own health issues or those of our loved ones. We are entangled in stressful relationships. We are troubled by national political turmoil. We worry about our finances. We despair when we see acts of cruelty and hatred committed against our brothers and sisters around the world. If only love could conquer loneliness, if only joy could overcome sorrow, if only peace could calm conflict. If only, we say. But God "is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of—ininitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes" (Ephesians 3:20 TLB). Imagine the miracles we are missing out on because we are not telling Jesus exactly what we need! God welcomes our honest pleas and wants to do great things in and through us. Ann Clemmer, American Baptist missionary in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, reports the following miracle:

Amani . . . is one of our Sunday School teachers. He shared recently during a time of prayer that he wanted his mother to be able to walk again. "What happened?" I asked. "At Christmas", he said, "my mother was walking along the side of the road to visit a friend when she was struck from behind by a motorcyclist, who fled the scene, leaving her on the ground".

As they had no money for her to be seen, he carried her home where she has been bedridden for four months, unable to even stand...and praying for a miracle. Amani humbly asked if we could help them with the money needed for an x-ray. "Of course!" I said. Sadly, the x-ray revealed a broken hip (neck of the femur, Bill [a medical doctor and Ann's husband] tells me) and all her doctors could offer was pain relief unless they could afford a wheelchair: she would never walk again they told her. Not so, I thought!

We brought her to Heal Africa, which specializes in orthopedic surgery. With donations from those of you in the US, we were able to provide \$1,500 to buy an artificial hip. On Good Friday, the doctors

replaced her hip. Easter morning, I found Venancie up and walking with the aid of a walker. Two days later, she returned home.

To Amani's mother who is now walking, this was a true miracle. To Bill and me, the daily miracles in this part of the world are prayers lifted and prayers answered. We are so blessed to be in the middle, and thankful for every day we can be here!

Into Discipleship

Jesus encouraged Bartimaeus to be vulnerable in front of all those people and share his greatest need. Jesus wanted him to set aside any extraneous issues and get right to the heart of the matter. And so it is with us. Jesus asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" Use your voice and tell him what you need. Maybe you need strength to do your work today. Or perhaps you need a new perspective on a grim situation. You might be sensing a need for an opportunity to serve God in a new way. Maybe you are searching for insight into a troublesome issue. Do you have a blind spot that Jesus could eradicate? Ask for help. It is as simple as that. Or is it?



Rather than equating vulnerability with weakness, we would do well to realize asking for help takes self-awareness and courage.



Perhaps you have a hard time asking for help. If so, you are not alone. From an early age, we are hardwired to be self-reliant, so asking for help seems difficult and foreign to us. We think that if we have to ask for help, we must be weak or somehow incapable. As a result, we tough it out rather than reach out to ask for help.

But asking for help does not devalue us in any way. In fact, “asking for help means caring enough about ourselves to get the support we deserve.”² Rather than equating vulnerability with weakness, we would do well to realize that asking for help takes self-awareness and courage. What might we gain by asking for help?

- We gain the ability to move forward. Rather than staying “stuck,” we have a way to proceed. Bartimaeus moved from a life as a beggar to being a follower of Jesus because he asked for help.
- We gain the opportunity to collaborate. Working with others is not a bad thing. When Bartimaeus bravely asked for help, part of the answer came from the people in the crowd who assisted him.
- We gain the chance to learn. Open your mind, pay attention, listen carefully. Bartimaeus considered Jesus to be not only his healer but also his teacher.

So like Bartimaeus, throw aside any encumbrances, take the leap of faith and hope, embrace the Teacher, and hear his question once again.

An Exercise in Meditation

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks.
Allow the question to enter your mind and reside there for a moment.

What’s your reply?

“Help me find a job?”

“Take away my illness?”

“Keep my kids safe?”

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks.

Allow the question to sink down and spread out over your shoulders.

What’s your reply?

“Teach me how to forgive?”

“Send someone to love me?”

“Remove my painful memories?”

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks.

Allow the question to sink deep into your chest and penetrate your heart.

What’s your reply?

“Help me, help me, help me!”

Notes:

1. Ann Clemer, “Joy and Miracles in Our Midst,” Journals, International Ministries, posted April 27, 2020, <https://www.internationalministries.org/joy-and-miracles-in-our-midst/>.

2. Galina Singer, “Why It’s So Hard for Strong Women to Ask for Help,” Elephant Journal, June 15, 2018, <https://www.elephantjournal.com/2018/06/why-its-so-hard-for-strong-women-to-ask-for-help/>.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

If Bartimaeus had listened to those around him and kept quiet, he would have missed his blessing.

Have you ever been in a situation at work or in a social setting or meeting where you felt the need to speak out about some issue, but was encouraged not to rock the boat? Describe how you responded and the outcome of the situation. In reflection, do you feel you made the right decision--why or why not?

Into the Lesson

There are many ways to pray. When is it important to pray with specificity concerning our requests?

How do we balance asking for something specific over simply praying for God's will to be done?

Into Discipleship

What are ways that a church can establish a culture of caring so much so that all its members feel comfortable honestly sharing what their needs are without feeling embarrassed or judged? Consider if there any particular populations within your congregation who are marginalized and isolated from the main social stream of your church. How can you draw them in and help them to know that they are seen, welcomed, and embraced? Examples might include veterans, the mentally ill, persons fighting addictions, etc.

Living the Lesson

Read other Gospel stories of blind men being healed.

- Matthew 9:27-31
- Matthew 20:29-34
- Mark 8:22-26
- Luke 18:35-43
- John 9:1-7

Compare and contrast the narratives. What details stand out for you? Do you see yourself in any of these narratives?

Art Speaks

Use the internet to look up paintings and pictures representing Bartimaeus' healing story. If possible, display the picture on a screen throughout the session. At some point, discuss the details and subtle nuances displayed in each piece. What do you see?

- How do the images square with the image you conceived of Bartimaeus?
- What have the artists included that surprise you?



- What don't you see represented that is included in Mark's narrative?

Your first image can be found at <https://i.swncdn.com/media/1200w/cms/BST/46886-36193-Jesushealsblindman-wikimediacommons.1200w.tn.800w.tn.webp>

Sing, listen to, or read the lyrics of hymns about asking Jesus for help.

Point out where your theology and faith beliefs intersect with the lyrics. Hymn lyrics are available on the internet, some with videos on YouTube. Here so examples to get you started.

- "I Must Tell Jesus" (words and music by Elisha A. Hoffman)
- "Tell It to Jesus" (words by Jeremiah Eames Rankin and music by Edmund S. Lorenz)
- "Just a Little Talk with Jesus" (words and music by Cleavant Derricks)
- "I Need Thee Every Hour" (words by Anne S. Hawks and Robert Lowry and music by Robert Lowry).
- "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior" (words by Fanny Crosby and music by William H. Doane)

Devotional Scriptures

Year B Proper 25 (30) Week of 10/24/21

Monday 10/25/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 28; Isaiah 59:9-19;

1 Peter 2:1-10

Complementary: Psalm 119:17-24; Exodus 4:1-17;

1 Peter 2:1-10

Tuesday 10/26/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 28; Ezekiel 18:1-32;

Acts 9:32-35

Complementary: Psalm 119:17-24; 2 Kings 6:8-23;

Acts 9:32-35

Wednesday 10/27/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 28; Ezekiel 14:12-23;

Matthew 20:29-34

Complementary: Psalm 119:17-24; Jeremiah 33:1-11;

Matthew 20:29-34

Thursday 10/28/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 146; Ruth 1:18-22;

Hebrews 9:1-12

Complementary: Psalm 119:1-8; Exodus 22:1-15;

Hebrews 9:1-12

Friday 10/29/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 146; Ruth 2:1-9;

Romans 3:21-31

Complementary: Psalm 119:1-8; Leviticus 19:32-37;

Romans 3:21-31

Saturday 10/30/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 146; Ruth 2:10-14;

Luke 10:25-37

Complementary: Psalm 119:1-8; Numbers 9:9-14;

Luke 10:25-37



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COMPANIONSHIP

being present for one another

Ruth said, ‘Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.’

—RUTH 1:16

Introduction

The Book of Ruth is a compelling story of how God uses an ordinary person to turn around a desperate situation. There are several layers to the short story, but redemption is the key concept. The Hebrew words for “redeem” (*ga'al*) and “redeemer” (*go'el*) appear more than twenty times in the eighty-five verses of the book. In this context, redemption is the process by which people, property, and prestige are restored to a family that has lost them through poverty, violence, or some other cause. The Book of Ruth is about the redemption of Naomi, Ruth’s mother-in-law. Ruth’s extraordinary faithfulness aided significantly in the process.

Lesson Objectives

- To review the beginning of the story of Ruth.
- To identify what Ruth did to help Naomi heal.
- To generate suggestions for ways to help others to heal.

Ruth 1:1-18 NRSV

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.
2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. 3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.
6 Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for

she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. 10 They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, 13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.” 14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 16 But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” 18 When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Into the Scripture

“The days when the judges ruled” (vs. 1) were dark days marked by spiritual, moral, and social decline. To top it off, there was a famine in the land of Canaan, so Elimelech and his family (vs. 2) decided to leave Bethlehem hoping that life would be better in Moab.

The names of places and protagonists revealed in the story’s introduction (vss. 1-6) have intriguing symbolic meanings:

- **Bethlehem** means “house of bread/food,” possibly referring to the fertile fields surrounding the city. It was an ironic location for a famine.
- **Elimelech** means “God is King” or “my God is King,” another ironic contrast, because the last verse

of the Book of Judges, which immediately precedes the Book of Ruth, bemoans the fact that there was no king in Israel.

- **Mahlon and Chilion** have their roots in Hebrew words similar to “weak” or “sick” and “failing” or “pining,” respectively. These names foreshadow disaster, so hearers of the story were likely not surprised when Mahlon and Chilion died young.
- **Naomi** means “sweet” or “pleasant.” These words stand in stark contrast to the bitterness she experienced in life and to which she alluded in conversation with acquaintances later in the story (see Ruth 1:20).



- **Ephrathites** were people from Ephrath (or Ephrathah). Ephrath was the ancient Canaanite name for the city later known as Bethlehem. Ephrath means “fruitful” so once again, the irony is clear.
- **Moab**, a country located on the east side of the Dead Sea, had a negative reputation. There was deep-seated animosity between Israelites and Moabites. In fact, Moabites and their descendants to the tenth generation were banned from entering “the assembly of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 23:3).
- **Orpah** means “stiff-necked” or “the back of the neck”—an appropriate name for the woman who turned her back on Naomi.
- **Ruth** is derived from the root of the word for “friend” or “companion.”

We do not know how long the family lived in Moab. Nothing is recorded of their lives before Elimelech died (vs. 3), leaving Naomi with her two sons. As the drama progresses, we learn that the two sons married Moabite women (vs. 4). But after a decade or so, both young men also died (vs. 5). Without a husband or any sons, a woman was destitute. Having heard that food was available again back home in Bethlehem, Naomi decided to return to her previous residence (vs. 6). Her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, set out on the trip with her (vs. 7).

This story portrays three childless widows trying to survive. Who would care for them? And what would become of their deceased husbands’ name and property in the absence of direct heirs? In some situations, levirate marriage, described in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, offered a solution to both questions. The dead man’s brother could marry the widow, thereby providing for

her care, and the first child resulting from the marriage was considered to be the deceased man’s heir, thereby securing continuation of his name and inheritance of his property. However, a levirate marriage was not possible in this situation, as both of Naomi’s sons were dead. Naomi alluded to this in the dialogue that took place between her and her daughters-in-law along the road to Bethlehem (vss. 8-13).

Naomi told the young women that, rather than staying with her, their best plan would be to go to their family homes (vss. 8-9). They refused (vs. 10). She continued to make her case by posing rhetorical questions that assume the answer “no” (vss. 11-13). Orpah changed her mind and parted company (vs. 14). Naomi tried to convince Ruth to follow her sister-in-law’s lead (vs. 15). Then Ruth gave her famous speech (vss. 16-17). Naomi was convinced and said no more (vs. 18). The drama continued but our study ends here.

Into the Lesson

Let us take a closer look at Ruth, our heroine. First of all, she was not an Israelite; she was a Moabite. For the Jews listening to the telling of this story, the mention of Moab would have brought adverse reactions. Moabites had shameful origins (see Genesis 19:30-38) and the encounters that ensued between Israelites and Moabites were



Insulating ourselves from those who are different
from us limits the ways God is with us.

mostly hostile. Despite the strained relations between the two peoples, the Law did not prohibit marriage between Israelites and Moabites. Nevertheless, a person from Moab would always be considered a Moabite regardless of where they lived or to whom they were married. Ruth was also an immigrant, an alien in Israel. In the story of Ruth, we see God at work through people whom we may consider “other.” Insulating ourselves from those who are different from us limits the ways God is with us.

Secondly, Ruth was a friend. In the ancient culture of their day, Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah were not a family in the customary sense, nor did they have any legal obligation to one another. Basically destitute, these women were unable to offer each other mutual protection or financial support. There was no reason for them to stay together. Ruth’s extraordinary pledge of love and loyalty bound her to Naomi. Evidently, she saw the need in Naomi’s life and felt she could help fill it.

Thirdly, Ruth was a healer. It could even be said she was Naomi’s redeemer; in the full context of the story, the case can be made for that terminology. However, for the first part of the story, we will be content to use the word healer. Even through her own tears, sorrow, and sadness, Ruth saw Naomi’s brokenness. We do not know what she was thinking when she decided to cling to her mother-in-law instead of returning to her own mother’s house, but we do know the result. She helped Naomi to heal. When grief overwhelmed Naomi, Ruth wept with her. When Naomi’s bitterness surfaced (vss. 11-13), Ruth pledged her loyalty (vss. 16-17). When Naomi became silent and sullen (vs. 18), Ruth simply walked with her. Ruth’s respect, love, and friendship transcended their differences and helped to birth the new Naomi whom we see at the end of the Book of Ruth.

There are many avenues down which we might travel to help someone to heal:

- **Consider Pretty Shield.** In the Judson Press book *Devotions from HERstory*, author Lynn Domina writes about a traditional Crow Indian medicine woman from Montana. Like the women in the Book of Ruth, Pretty Shield was well acquainted with tragedy. Her father died of smallpox when she was sixteen. Pretty Shield married Goes Ahead, a Crow warrior with whom she had seven children, but two of them died in infancy. While grieving their deaths, she had a vision that led her to become a healer. In her new role,

she healed members of her tribe with medicinal plants and often served as a counselor to her people.¹

- **Consider American Baptist volunteerism.** Twenty-three volunteers from churches in Oregon and California went to Puerto Rico in February 2020 on a mission trip sponsored by American Baptist Home Mission Societies (ABHMS) and American Baptist Churches of the Central Pacific Coast. The group repaired churches and homes damaged by Hurricane Maria, distributed food to hospital workers and people experiencing homelessness, and set up two of the eleven ABHMS disaster-response centers in Puerto Rico.

Even months later, the group has remained connected to those they served via e-mail and ministrElife, ABHMS’ social media platform. Several of the women have formed an American Baptist Women’s Ministries “Beloved Community” group to work at building multicultural relationships within their churches. . . .

“Part of the reason we have stayed connected is our deep concern for those we had the privilege of working with while there,” says Christine Roush, national coordinator of ABHMS’ Discipleship Ministries. “As we built friendships with them, it



Investing time and effort
to strengthen the bond
between yourself and your
friends can yield benefits
for years to come.



changed us by putting dozens of human faces on a natural disaster. It is no longer just ‘Hurricane Maria’—it’s the storm that wrecked the lives and livelihoods of people we know and care about.”²

- **Consider nurturing healthy friendships.** Most of us are aware of the benefits of having a good friend—and also the benefits of being a good friend. Good friends support one another through triumphs and tribulations. A positive friendship helps sustain life, boost happiness, and improve self-confidence, whereas the ongoing drama and stress of an unhealthy friendship can drain us of our vitality. To nurture a healthy friendship, be kind, be a good listener, be available, and be open, honest, and trustworthy. Investing time and effort to strengthen the bond between yourself and your friends can yield benefits for years to come.

Into Discipleship

The complexities and conflicts in the story of Ruth mirror those of life itself.

Everyone experiences hard times. We all know sorrow and sadness, hurt and heartbreak. They cannot be avoided. When our pathway looks dark, we tend to be like Naomi—unable to see beyond ourselves. We all need the “stand by me” sort of support that Ruth provided. As we move on, we then eventually find that we are able to see the needs of others. What can we do to

help others to heal? The list is endless:

- **Volunteer.** Check with your church leaders to see how you might serve. Or reach out to community leaders, the school district, or a local hospital to find out what volunteer positions are available.
- **Research the ways you could help immigrants assimilate into your community.** Empowering people to succeed across cultures and languages is a vital service. How might you help brighten the future for some of your community’s newest residents?
- **Become a mentor.** One in three young people grows up without a mentor. Having a mentor assures young people that someone cares about them and that they are not alone in facing day-to-day challenges.
- **Learn what you can do to help your elderly neighbors.** Maybe it will mean doing some shopping for them or driving them to an appointment. Whatever the task, you will begin to establish a caring relationship.
- **If you have a special skill, find out who might benefit from your expertise.** The people in charge of your church’s caring ministry can probably point you in the right direction.
- **Offer to teach someone to read.** Many churches host adult literacy classes. Does yours? If not, is there a need for such a service in your community? What could you do to bring it into reality?
- **Explore Stephen Ministries** (www.stephenministries.org). The program equips church members to provide care for people who are going through difficult times.

If this is a program that appeals to you, check to see whether your church is engaged in Stephen Ministries. If it is not, speak with your pastor about the possibility of beginning a Stephen Ministry in your church.

- Add your own suggestions to this list.

When we approach life with an attitude of service, we develop empathy. Life becomes less about us and more about what someone else needs. Most of the suggestions listed above help us “get one foot in the door,” so to speak. They are ways for us to begin forming relationships.

It is important to remember that we do not heal people—God does. But we can help! In many instances, our very presence in someone else’s life is a blessing to them. Just “being there” can begin to foster the healing

process. Allow hurting people to feel their pain; do not attempt to rescue them or find a way to explain it away. Just be quiet and listen. As they pour out their heart to you, do not tell them you understand (unless you have gone through the very same thing they are going through). Instead, remind them of who and whose they are: beloved children of the Divine Healer. In general, be present, be quiet, and be a gentle reminder of God’s love.

Notes:

1. Lynn Domina, “Day 16,” *Devotions from HERstory* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2019), 61-63.
2. “American Baptist Volunteer Group Remains Connected to Those They Served in Puerto Rico,” accessed February 6, 2021, <https://abhms.org/about-us/mission-stories/american-baptist-volunteer-group-remains-connected-to-those-they-served-in-puerto-rico-2/>.
3. Brad Berglund, *Reinventing Worship* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2006), 79.



When we approach life with an attitude of service, we develop empathy.

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Reflection Questions

- Have you ever felt that the world was crumbling around you? Who helped you regain a positive attitude? What did they do to help you heal?
- What do you think stimulated Ruth's pledge of loyalty?
- What are the qualities of friendship that Ruth displayed?
- How might you emulate Ruth's love and loyalty within your family? Among your friends?

Living the Lesson

A Prayerful Litany:

We All Have Disabilities

by John Pipe

Leader: We are all disabled by sin and sickness, by despair and sadness, by hate and prejudice.

All: Heal us of those disabilities, O God.

Leader: Some of us have physical and mental challenges that limit us: we are blind, deaf, and unable to talk, to walk, to enjoy simple pleasures.

All: Give us comfort, patience, and strength, O God.

Leader: Most of us have limitations that make us blind to hurting people, whom we fail to see or understand or whom we just ignore.

All: Heal us of the blindness that keeps us from seeing poverty, racism, and sexism.

Leader: We are all disabled by sins that keep us from seeing our own mistakes, shortcomings, anger, biases, and weaknesses.

All: God, we come before you acknowledging our limitations and asking for your grace and mercy. Help us to be open and aware of others and to see ourselves for who we are and can be through the power of your Holy Spirit.

Close the session by playing "The Servant Song" by Richard Gillard, © 1977 Scripture in Song, administered by Maranatha! Music, Will You Let Me Be Your Servant (SERVANT SONG) - YouTube. Many other renditions are available on the internet. This song is not in the Public Domain, so if you want to print the words, you will need to use your church's CCLI#.

Learn more about American Baptist healing ministries at these websites:

- Ministries of Healing – ABCUSA (abc-usa.org) and/or go to www.abc-usa.org and enter the search word "healing."
- Healing communities – American Baptist Home Mission Societies (abhms.org) and/or go to www.abhms.org and enter the search word "healing."
- Go to <https://www.InternationalMinistries.org>, scroll to the bottom of the page to find the search option, and enter the word "healing."

Devotional Scriptures

Year B Proper 26 (31) Week of 10/31/21

Monday 11/01/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 18:20-30; Ruth 2:15-23;
Romans 12:17-21; 13:8-10

Complementary: Psalm 51; Deuteronomy 6:10-25;
Romans 12:17-21; 13:8-10

Tuesday 11/02/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 18:20-30; Ruth 3:1-7;
Acts 7:17-29

Complementary: Psalm 51; Deuteronomy 28:58-29:1;
Acts 7:17-29

Wednesday 11/03/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 18:20-30; Ruth 3:8-18;
John 13:31-35

Complementary: Psalm 51; Micah 6:1-8; John 13:31-35

Thursday 11/04/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 127; Ruth 4:1-10;
Romans 5:6-11

Complementary: Psalm 146; Numbers 36:1-13;
Romans 5:6-11

Friday 11/05/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 127; Ruth 4:11-17;
Hebrews 9:15-24

Complementary: Psalm 146; Deuteronomy 15:1-11;
Hebrews 9:15-24

Saturday 11/06/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 127; Ruth 4:18-22;
Mark 11:12-14, 20-24

Complementary: Psalm 146; Deuteronomy 24:17-22;
Mark 11:12-14, 20-24

STEWARDSHIP

christian giving

Then [Jesus] called his disciples and said to them,
‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than
all those who are contributing to the treasury.’

—MARK 12:43

Introduction

In this capitalistic society, we often hear at church that Christian giving is about our donations: how much weekly donation and tithing we give to the church. Mark 12:38-44 teaches Christian giving from a very different perspective. This is not about donations of money. It is about caring for our neighbors, standing up for the vulnerable, and acting for social justice. By doing so, we can live out our stewardship at the service of those in need.

Lesson Objectives

- To explore the socioeconomic status mentioned in the text.
- To share ways that we can authentically live out our discipleship through our actions.
- To consider how we can be part of God’s ministry with our Christian giving.

Mark 12:38-44 NRSV

38 As he taught, he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets! 40 They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.”

41 He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. 42 A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. 43 Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. 44 For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

Into the Scripture

Mark 12:38-44 has two parts: verses 38-40 and 41-44. The passage focuses on two different behaviors of two different types of people—scribes and widows. The Scripture teaches us to avoid the behavior of the scribes, but it mentions that a poor widow is noticed by Jesus. Both parts consist of widows and are stitched together by the concept of widowhood. The scribes' practices made them popular for their piety, but Jesus condemned them. Instead, Jesus recognized the widows in verse 40, and the poor widow's donation in verses 42-44. In clarifying the values demonstrated by the contrasting behaviors, Jesus condemned what needs to be condemned and pointed out what needs to be recognized.

Misuse of Piety

Mark 12:38-40 focuses on the behavior of scribes, who like to (1) walk around in long robes, (2) be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, (3) have the best seats in the synagogue, (4) have places of honor at banquets, and (5) say long prayers for the sake of appearance. Jesus taught his disciples to avoid these behaviors.

The long robes criticized in the scribes' first behavior indicates that they had professional jobs in Jesus's time (like a white-collar job today). People who worked as

manual laborers (a blue-collar job) usually wore tunics—one-piece, slip-on garments secured by a belt around the waist that extended down to just above knee level. Wealthier people wore longer garments called togas that extended all the way down to the ankle. The scribes, who liked to walk around

in long robes, were showing off their professional identity and separating themselves from manual laborers. It is easy to see how Jesus might have taken offense at that behavior, since Jesus himself performed manual labor as a carpenter. Later, three behaviors of scribes: “they like to be greeted with respect, to have the best seats, and to have places of honor,” indicate that these scribes like to hold onto their power and authority. To show off their piety, the scribes could say long prayers in public. Jesus



Having a guardian could sometimes threaten a widow's economic situation if the guardian did not have her best interests at heart.

condemned these behaviors of scribes, which gained them attention because of their displays of piety.

The last behavior mentioned of scribes is that they “devour” widows' houses. The word “devour” is used as a metaphor. In Jesus's days, levels of literacy were low, and scribes knew how to navigate the legal system, so scribes were frequently employed to write legal documents for them. After their husbands died, widows might receive support from their sons or their brothers-in-law. Wives could also directly inherit property from their husbands in Jesus's day, but they needed an adult male to act as a legal guardian. Having a guardian could sometimes threaten a widow's economic situation if the guardian did not have her best interests at heart. When Jesus accused scribes of “devouring” widows' houses, he seems to indicate that scribes used the legal system to enrich themselves at widows' expense. Many times, widows are mentioned in the bible as poor and insecure in their daily lives. Jesus condemned this behavior of scribes as well. On the other hand, the widows, whose houses were



devoured by the scribes, become the focus in this scripture as it continues in the next part (vss. 41-44).

Jesus' Recognition

In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus recognized the social and economic differences between two types of people—rich people and a poor widow. Jesus recognized that many rich people were making large donations by putting money into containers in the courtyard of the Jerusalem temple. The rich men donated out of their surplus—extra money that, when they gave it away, they would not miss.

When we think about widows, we consider that widows are the ones who should have received the beneficence of others (Deuteronomy 26:12). In contrast, this Scripture reverses the narrative. The poor widow put two small copper coins worth only about a penny into the temple's treasury, which was all that she had to live on, not from her surplus. Jesus gave her his full recognition in the words in Mark 12:43. The poor widow's offering is a model for Christian giving.

Into the Lesson

Sometimes we are satisfied with being Christians in name only. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31), but we often do not see our



neighbors. The Protestant doctrine of “justification by faith alone” is taken into our heart; then we believe that we are saved from our sins by just believing in Jesus Christ as our Savior. With such a view, living with love toward our neighbors becomes inessential. Just like the scribes, we become too proud, and we walk around with the garment of salvation by Jesus Christ. We pray with long prayers in public to show off our Christian piety, and we enjoy being noticed as Christians by strangers. However, we do not see the poor, the vulnerable, and all the injustice around us.

The gospel teaches us two things concerning the scribes. (1) We need to be aware of the behaviors that were to benefit themselves, but not others; and (2) we should not do what the scribes did (Matthew 23:1-36). When we put these two things in our minds, we will avoid becoming only popular Christians, parading our piety in the public square. Instead, we must “walk the walk” as Jesus did.

The Gospel of Mark, on the other hand, teaches us that Jesus sees the widows, who are bullied by these



Throughout time, God has been on the side of the vulnerable, the poor and the widow, and recognized the portions of their giving,—equal to that which they had to live on.

scribes, and the poor widow, who comes to give all she has to the temple's treasury. Seeing them is the very first step, but recognizing, caring, and standing up for the poor and vulnerable are essential to building the kingdom of God on earth.

Speak Up for the Vulnerable!

In Mark's narrative, Jesus sees the widows who are bullied by the scribes and the poor widow who gives all she has to the temple's treasury, and he reckons that "truly . . . this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury." Even though the widow contributed a smaller amount of money than the rich people, Jesus says that she contributed "more" because she gave more in proportion to all she owned than they did. Jesus also sees many rich people who donated their money from their abundance; however, Jesus speaks up in favor of this widow. From her little money, which her whole life must depend on, the widow put it all into the treasury. The text does not mention what happened in the life of this poor widow after she donated all she had; however, this narrative recalls another widow story from the Old Testament.

In 1 Kings 17:7-16, the word of the LORD came to Elijah during the drought in Jordan, saying, "go to Zarephath, in the region which belongs to Sidon, and live there," where the LORD had directed a widow to supply him with food (vs. 9). Elijah listened to the LORD, and saw a widow there gathering sticks. Elijah asked the widow to bring him a little water and a piece of bread. The widow did bring water, but she had no bread to share with him. All she had was enough flour and oil to make a small portion for herself and her son. That meal might have been the last meal of their lives, then they might die of hunger. However, the widow did what Elijah said. She made a small loaf of bread for Elijah from what she had, then made some for herself and her son. Elijah gave the promise of the LORD that she would have more than enough flour and oil until the drought was over in the land. The text does not give any hint that this widow had any doubt about the promise of the LORD brought by the prophet. The food was enough for all of them and was still a lot left—a jar of flour and a jug of oil. As in the passage from Mark, this story also expresses the widow's faith, which is counted by the LORD; therefore, she and her son were blessed with abundance until the rain came to

the land. Throughout time, God has been on the side of vulnerable, the poor and the widow, and recognized the portions of their giving, which they had to live on.

Into Discipleship

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some religious communities have found it very difficult to follow science and to practice social distancing. Some churches did not stop gathering at their church building. Unfortunately, meeting together in closed spaces without masks during the pandemic caused "superspreader events" that resulted in many people contracting the coronavirus. Sometimes, we Christians believe that the resurrection of Jesus will bring a miracle down to the earth and heal COVID-19. Instead, we need to work together to make this miracle happen and to overcome the virus. We do not need to practice our piety as the scribes did. Practicing Christian stewardship is not always about being together and worshiping together in the same room; it is also about protecting one another during the pandemic.

Stewardship in Social Justice

Racism and police brutality are happening not only in the United States but also across the globe. In 2020 alone, we faced so many unjust killings of African



Practicing Christian stewardship means that we must speak up for justice and welcome the stranger at our door.



Americans by racist police in the US. Likewise, in January 2021, the Myanmar Military (MM) set fire to villages inhabited by the Karen people in Myanmar. The Karen villages have been targeted by the MM for years based on their racial identity. In a well-known case, Rohingya in Myanmar were also killed and raped by the MM for years based on their religious and ethnic identities. In 2018, the Triangle region of Central America—El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala—experienced war violence just as my home country of Myanmar did. Because of the armed leaders' attack on the public, people fled their home countries and became refugees and asylum seekers at the border between the US and Mexico. In such a time like this, Christians must live out our faith in social justice. As Jesus condemns the scribe's misuse of piety, Christians must denounce the ones who commit violence against people. Practicing Christian stewardship means that we must speak up for justice and welcome the stranger at our door.

Christian Giving

The poor widow's offering teaches us that Jesus does not evaluate based on how much we give, but rather the portion of what we have that is given to God. All that we have is from God and meant to be shared with each other. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become obvious that giving includes more than money. People

who serve as essential workers, including healthcare workers, police officers, caregivers, and people who work in grocery stores, have been giving generously of their time and capabilities in order to save other people's lives, which God has created.

We have heard a lot about wearing masks, washing our hands, avoiding crowds, and maintaining physical and social distance during the pandemic. Some people believe that they are free to follow these guidelines or not, and some religious leaders have avoided these scientific guidelines that help us protect ourselves and our neighbors. But love of God and neighbor is more important than our own personal freedom (Mark 13:30-31). Observation of these guidelines to protect our neighbors is much like the widow contributing generously. As Jesus said in the Scripture, you have "put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury" (Mark 12:43).

The Christian life is more than worshipping God through Jesus Christ as our Savior; it is also acting as Jesus did. Walter Brueggemann, the Old Testament theologian, said, "The prophetic tasks of the Church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair." We Christians must act by telling the truth, standing up for justice, and bringing love and hope into the world.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- Mark 12:38-44 has three characters: the scribes, the widows, and the rich. From top down in a socioeconomic hierarchy, we see the rich, the scribes, and the widows.
- Do you see similar hierarchies in society? In your community?

Into the Lesson

- Are we authentic disciples of Jesus Christ? What kinds of social practices do we engage in every week?
- Among all your social practices in a week, which of those can be considered as standing up for the vulnerable?

Into Discipleship

- What are the things that we give back to God; for example, time, talent, profession, and money? What portion of each are we giving back to God?

Living the Lessons

There are three things that we can give back to God. Some people spend their time in devotion and worship. Some focus on giving respect to God's creation, nature, and humanity. Some are enthusiastic in giving out their money to the church and to religious institutions. Relying on everyone's interests and capabilities, we must live out our Christian stewardship to build the kingdom of God on earth.

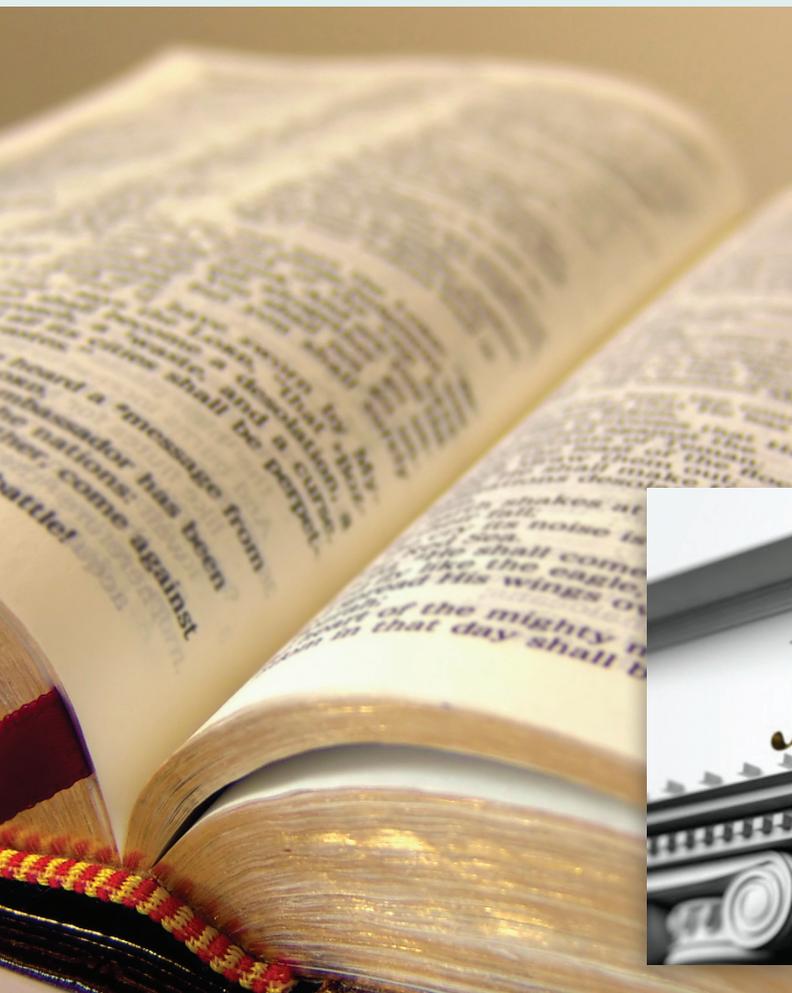
What are the primary ways you give back to God? What are new ways you might consider in an effort to increase your giving?

Stewardship Reflection

The stewardship of our financial resources says a lot about our priorities. Consider reflecting on how you have managed your resources and ways in which you can better align your choices around money with a holistic approach to stewardship. Consider downloading and completing the *Money Autobiography* at <https://faithandmoneynetwork.org/resources/download-the-money-autobiography/>

Online Resources

- "Dress and Fashion in the Greco-Roman World (James 2)," *larshaukeland.com* (blog), <https://larshaukeland.com/bits-pieces/archeology/james/dress-and-fashion-in-the-greco-roman-world-james-2/>
- Seong Hee Kim, "Rupturing the Empire: Reading the Poor Widow as a Postcolonial Female Subject (Mark 12:41-44)," *Lectio Difficilior* (January 2006). http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/06_1/PDF/kim_rupturing.pdf



Additional Resources at The Faith and Money Network:

<https://faithandmoneynetwork.org/what-we-offer/>

- **Online Study Groups:** Faith and Money Network's six-week online study groups are a place to explore your habits and history with money. <https://faithandmoneynetwork.org/what-we-offer/online-study-groups/>
- **Money Mentoring:** For spiritual direction and/or change in habits and practices. <https://faithandmoneynetwork.org/what-we-offer/money-mentoring/>
- **Trips of Perspective:** To see parts of the world through the lens of God's economic vision. <https://faithandmoneynetwork.org/what-we-offer/trips-perspective/>
- **Workshops:** Offering the space and freedom to ask questions and find one's own answers. <https://faithandmoneynetwork.org/what-we-offer/workshops/>
- **The Faith and Money Podcast:** Personal interviews exploring the connections between faith and money. <https://faithandmoneynetwork.org/resources/faith-and-money-podcast/>

Devotional Scriptures Year B Proper 27 (32) Week of 11/07/21

Monday 11/08/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 113; Genesis 24:1-10;
1 Timothy 5:1-8
Complementary: Psalm 94; Ruth 1:1-22;
1 Timothy 5:1-8

Tuesday 11/08/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 113; Genesis 24:11-27;
1 Timothy 5:9-16
Complementary: Psalm 94; Ruth 3:14-4:6;
1 Timothy 5:9-16

Wednesday 11/10/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 113; Genesis 24:28-42;
Luke 4:16-30
Complementary: Psalm 94; Ruth 4:7-22; Luke 4:16-30

Thursday 11/11/2021

Semi-continuous: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; 1 Samuel 1:21-28;
1 Timothy 6:11-21
Complementary: Psalm 16; Daniel 4:4-18;
1 Timothy 6:11-21

Friday 11/12/2021

Semi-continuous: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; 1 Samuel 2:18-21;
Colossians 2:6-15
Complementary: Psalm 16; Daniel 4:19-27;
Colossians 2:6-15

Saturday 11/13/2021

Semi-continuous: 1 Samuel 2:1-10; 1 Samuel 3:1-18;
Mark 12:1-12
Complementary: Psalm 16; Daniel 4:28-37;
Mark 12:1-12



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PERSEVERANCE

faithful in worship

Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

—RUTH 1:16

Introduction

First Samuel 1:4-2:10 has two types of prayers by Hannah. In chapter 1, Hannah came to God with the extreme sadness, but in chapter 2, she prayed to God with a victory song in a poetic form. The change between these two prayers occurred after a dialogue with Eli the priest and a blessing that transformed Hannah's life completely from sadness to happiness, from not eating to eating and drinking. Hannah recovered from her sadness and despair; ultimately, she conceived, gave birth to a son, named him Samuel, and sang a victory song.

Lesson Objectives

- To recognize the benefits of faithful devotion.
- To learn how important it is to dialogue with others in pursuit of clear understanding.
- To know that self-care is essential in all circumstances.

1 Samuel 1:4-20 and 1 Samuel 2:1-10 NRSV

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.
2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.
3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.
4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years,
5 both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.
6 Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for

she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. 10 They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, 13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.” 14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 16 But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” 18 When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Into the Scripture

In ancient Israel, Israelites worshipped together annually at the place where the ark of God was on the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur in Hebrew. This holy day is commanded and described in Leviticus 16. 1 Samuel mentions that Shiloh is the place where an annual gathering of worship was held and an offering to God was made. This indicates that Israelites remembered the liberation act of God by having the ark with them throughout the wilderness journey. This rite of gathering by the shrine continued when the temple was built in Jerusalem.

When the first temple was built by King Solomon in Jerusalem, Israelites gathered in the temple to celebrate

the holy days, offering sacrifice during the times of King Josiah (2 Kings 23:21-23) and King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 30-33). Luke 2:22-24 mentions that Jesus’ parents took him to the temple and made a sacrifice there. The religious practice of ancient Israelites worshipping together continues today. Jewish people go to temple to observe Shabbat (Sabbath) on Friday and Saturday, and Christians go to church on Sunday for their worship. Church becomes a sanctuary for Christian religious practices.

In Romans 12:1, Paul implores us to present our bodies to God as living sacrifices, which are our spiritual acts of worship. This New Testament passage can also

harken back to Hannah literally performing a living sacrifice. After Samuel was born and when he was weaned, Hannah offered him to God as a Nazarite for his life (1 Samuel 1:22). There is similar imagery of parents ceremoniously dedicating their children to God. When Samuel was offered to God in Shiloh, Hannah made a burnt offering as a sacrifice; likewise, Mary and Joseph offered a sacrifice when they presented Jesus to the Lord in the temple. The practice of sacrificing animals when presenting a child to God was a faith-filled Jewish practice into New Testament times. (Animal sacrifices were suspended with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE). Thus, Paul mentions in Romans 12 that we, our bodies, are the living sacrifice to God. Living our Christian virtue out in daily life becomes important in this regard.

Into the Lesson

The first part of 1 Samuel 1:4-20 includes an unhappy monologue by Elkanah, in which he said that he loved Hannah more than Peninnah, who has children with him. Elkanah showed his love to Hannah by giving her more food and saying kind words to her. Because of her infertility, Hannah was sad and her mood caused her to eat less. Elkanah's action and words did not seem to have helped Hannah to overcome her sadness.

The text does clarify that Peninnah is the second wife of Elkanah; therefore, this narrative might not exactly be the same as what we see in the Sarah and Hagar story. However, Peninnah had many children while Hannah had none. For a married woman in antiquity, having a child or children was honorable; infertility, on the other hand, was considered shameful in some ancient cultures. Hannah was continually bothered by her infertility and received maltreatment from her rival Peninnah, who agonized Hannah. Her distress was heavy. The Hebrew root word used in Elkanah's monologue for Hannah is *ra'a'*, which means that Hannah could have had a "bad angry heart or broken heart," due to her infertility and despair that impacted her actions such as her eating. The literal translation of 1 Samuel 1:8 from Hebrew is "Why are you so angry in your heart?"

Although she was not satisfied with her predicament, and even with such anger in her heart, Hannah did not give up on her situation. She did what she had been doing for years. Unhappy Hannah was a faithful servant

of God; she went up to the house of the LORD to pray at Shiloh.

Faithful Hannan in a Dialogue

According to the text, Elkanah made the yearly family pilgrimage to Shiloh to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts. The text does not mention how many years Elkanah's family had made this pilgrimage. For Hannah, this might have been her yearly opportunity to pray in the presence of the LORD of hosts. When the priest Eli saw her praying, Eli and Hannah had the dialogue that is recorded in 1 Samuel 1:14-18.

Eli: "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine."

Hannah: "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time."

Eli: "Go in peace; may the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him."

Hannah: "Let your servant find favor in your sight."



Both women confronted the questions, spoke the truth about themselves fearlessly, and heard words from their counterparts.



Eli initiated this dialogue, but he accused her of being drunk. Hannah did not mention her infertility directly, but she said that she was not worthless; moreover, she had been speaking out of her anxiety. After listening to Hannah, Eli continued the dialogue with the promise that God would grant Hannah's petition. According to the Scripture, although Hannah admitted later that the LORD is a "God of knowledge," the dialogue had transformed Hannah's life, and she continued her faithfulness to God. Hannah had been sad, but now was happy and returned to a good state of mind indicated by her eating and drinking. Finally, Hannah and Elkanah conceived and she gave birth to a son. Hannah named him Samuel and gave him to God's service--and prayed to God with her victory song.

God of Knowledge

In her victory song, Hannah said, "for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed" (1 Samuel 2:3). This statement expresses that God acknowledged what Hannah did. Hannah faithfully worshipped God in Shiloh, and while having a dialogue with Eli, Hannah spoke truthfully to the priest. These actions of Hannah were weighed by the God of knowledge. The binary structure of the song in verses 4-8 indicates that the God of knowledge, who established the world, judges the actions of people. Therefore, God liberates those who are poor and forgotten in their desperate situations. The song concludes with the judgment of God, who

rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. This is called "retribution theory," the biblical concept that God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked (Ecclesiastes 3:17). We can assert that the God of knowledge responded to Hannah because of her faithful praying and the dialogue she had with Eli the priest. Hannah persevered for years petitioning God, who heard her cry and opened her womb.

Dialogue, the Turning Point

We have already learned that the dialogue between Eli and Hannah changed the life of Hannah completely. Dialogue is a turning point in Hannah's story, and it is a civil communication tool to solve problems. The ecumenical movement has used dialogue for Church unity, Christian union, and interfaith religious relations. In the Gospel of John chapter 4, Jesus has a dialogue with a Samaritan woman that breaks through their ethnic, gender, and social differences. Moreover, just like Hannah's story, the Samaritan woman reached her turning point, so that she went out to the town to deliver the good news of Jesus the Messiah. The Samaritan woman became an evangelist in Jesus' ministry.



Although she was not satisfied with her predicament, and even with such anger in her heart, Hannah did not give up on her situation.



These two women, Hannah in the Old Testament and Samaritan woman in the New Testament, are examples of having a dialogue. Hannah had a dialogue with Eli, and the Samaritan woman had a dialogue with Jesus. In both accounts, the male figures, Eli the priest and Jesus the Messiah initiated the conversation, which shows that Eli and Jesus crossed boundaries of gender, status (priest and laity), and ethnicity (Jesus the Galilean and the Samaritan). Their initiative to ask questions engaged both women in a dialogue. Both women confronted the questions, spoke the truth about themselves fearlessly, and heard words from their counterparts. In these stories, the action of these women is breaking the silence, which includes facing the situation calmly and having a peaceful dialogue.

Their actions were weighed by the God of knowledge. Both Hannah and the Samaritan woman left the dialogue with happiness. The sad Hannah, who could not eat, went out from the temple, ate, drank, and finally bore a child, Samuel. Likewise, the Samaritan woman, who generally avoided people and came to the well to fetch water in the hottest time in the day, went out from there to the people in the town and brought people back to Jesus, the Messiah. The final consequences of the dialogue are that Hannah gave her son, Samuel, to God as a living sacrifice to serve God all his life, and that the Samaritan woman was recorded as the first woman evangelist in Jesus' ministry. Just as the dialogue is the turning point for these women, it is also

the best method to solve any problems in a civil manner or come to a clearer understanding with those with whom you differ.

Into Discipleship

As you know, there are two types of worship: individual devotional worship and collective worship. Individual devotional worship does not mean to promote the individualistic idea of salvation, nor does it mean religious individualism. It is about our self-devotion to God and is a primary principle in many religions. For example, Islam also exercises individual devotion by praying five times in a day: Fajr (sunrise prayer), Dhuhr (noon prayer), Asr (afternoon prayer), Maghrib (sunset prayer), and Isha (night prayer). Praying is a fundamental act of Islamic faith. In Judaism, Jews practice individual devotional worship by reciting prayers three times daily, in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Reciting prayers in each devotion reminds individuals to give gratitude to God for divine involvement in every aspect of one's daily life.

Christians also must be faithful in individual devotional practices. American Baptist Churches USA (ABCUSA) has ten facts of who we are as American Baptists, in which one states, "American Baptists believe that the committed individual Christian can and should approach God directly, and that individual gifts of ministry should be shared." This statement encourages

each American Baptist to seek God individually, so that each can develop their own relationship with God. This is a call to us to have a faithful individual devotion to God, which is also our spiritual formation and development. Even with an annual family pilgrimage in Shiloh, Hannah went to pray by herself in the Temple. The faithfulness of Hannah's individual devotion should be an example for each Christian's daily life.

Collective Worship

The collective way of worship creates many contingencies. In Romans 12, Paul talked about the corporate body of the people of God, which is the Church, by using a metaphor of the human body--which has many parts, each with a different capability. Christians usually go to church to worship collectively at least once a week. Worshipping together in a congregation can create the space for having dialogue. People can share their uniquely diverse gifts with others. For many immigrants, worshipping together becomes necessary for them to have not only spiritual development, but also a social network. Therefore, the collective way of worship at church includes spiritual and social activities, which is also called practical Christian living in the world (Romans 12). Finally, the collective way of worship also gives health benefits, such as fellowship with one another and having dialogue with each other, which reduces loneliness, depression, and cognitive

diseases. Science even indicates that regular church attendance is associated with a reduction in the risk of having a stroke.

Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2 is not just her private words, but a song to be shared. She used collective words to praise God, such as: "there is no Rock like our God" (vs. 2). The text does not mention whether she sang the song alone or in front of people. However, Bruce Birch mentions that the language of Hannah song is like other praise songs in the book of Psalms; therefore, the song has been known to Israel in its worship traditions.¹ Finally, this song takes Hannah into another level so that she sings this not only as the mother of Samuel, but as a mother of Israel. Imagine that Hannah is singing to us in our collective worship; the God of knowledge will reverse all impossible things into possible by recognizing our actions.

The collective way of worship moves us outside the church and into the world. One of the statements from ABCUSA mentions that American Baptists acknowledge that "God's family extends beyond our local churches and . . . God calls us to cooperative ministries." Both individual and collective ways of worship must be exercised in our Christian lives.

Note:

1. Bruce Birch, *Numbers, Deuteronomy, Introduction to Narrative Literature, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel*, vol. 2 of *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).



Worshipping together in a congregation can create the space for having dialogue. People can share their uniquely diverse gifts with others.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- This lesson on perseverance spotlights faithfulness in worship, dialogue, and self-care. How important is it for us to be faithful attendees in worship?
- How can we use worship gatherings as a way to have stimulating dialogue that helps us grow as disciples?
- Why is such participation in worship and interaction with other Christians essential to our self-care?

Into the Lesson

- In light of our Christian witness, what is significant about a “living sacrifice”?
- Does “living sacrifice” apply only to some people who serve as ministers, pastors, and religious teachers? If not, what are ways we can apply the idea of the “living sacrifice” to ourselves, and to people in the social world, businesses, and politics?

Into Discipleship

- How does a commitment to individual devotions impact your daily life? Share with one another what one does to spend time with God alone.
- The church is the body of Christ, which belongs to God. If we consider that collective worship should take place at church (which does not necessarily indicate worship at the church building), how important is it for each Christian to participate in corporate worship?
- What are ways that we can provide the church as a safe space for having dialogue with each other on tough social issues that often divide us? Why is it important that the church be a place where people with very different views can come together socially?

Living the Lessons

Faithful in Worship

Discuss ways that we can exercise our faithfulness in our Christian worship. How did the isolation of avoiding large gatherings during Covid impact your worship practices? How can we incentivize persons to return to collective worship who have become comfortable with being home on Sunday morning?

Dialogue Mission

Consider forming a reading group and discuss the book *Real Connections: Ministries to Strengthen Church and Community Relationships* by Joy Skjogstad and Heidi Rolland Unruh. This Judson Press resource invites churches to move toward authentic diverse relationships. Read more about it at <https://www.abc-usa.org/2021/06/book-invites-churches-to-move-toward-authentic-diverse-relationships/>

Self-care

Each person needs to have the self-care of eating, sleeping, and having exercise, before serving others or serving the Lord with gladness. Take advantage of the Avenues of Wholeness webinars by American Baptist Women’s Ministries at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLOWufQALvcIOB6k58gE6OmsPGdTGUdadw>

Living Sacrifice

Some people serve as pastors, ministers, and workers in religious institutions, but some in social, economic,



and political settings. Wherever your profession leads you, you serve, work for others, create opportunities for others, and most importantly share your resources with others. One of my offerings as a Christian is my service to the Burmese community in Wisconsin. Listen to my story of volunteering: “ABHMS volunteer May May Latt shares her passion and calling from God for the ABC of Wisconsin region” at <https://abhms.org/resources/podcasts/>

Online Resources

- Five Benefits of Corporate Worship: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-benefits-of-corporate-worship>
- The Effect of Worship on the Brain and General Health: <https://www.joydigitalmag.com/voice-post/the-effect-of-worship-on-the-brain-and-general-health/>
- Ten Facts You Should Know About American Baptists: <https://www.abc-usa.org/10facts/>

Devotional Scriptures Year B Proper 28 (33) Week of 11/14/21

Monday 11/15/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 3; 1 Samuel 3:19-4:2;
Hebrews 10:26-31
Complementary: Psalm 13; Daniel 8:1-14;
Hebrews 10:26-31

Tuesday 11/16/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 3; Deuteronomy 26:5-10;
Hebrews 10:32-39
Complementary: Psalm 13; Daniel 8:15-27;
Hebrews 10:32-39

Wednesday 11/17/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 3; 1 Kings 8:22-30;
Mark 13:9-23
Complementary: Psalm 13; Zechariah 12:1-13:1;
Mark 13:9-23

Thursday 11/18/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 132:1-12; 2 Kings 22:1-10;
Acts 7:54-8:1a
Complementary: Psalm 93; Ezekiel 28:1-10;
Acts 7:54-8:1a

Friday 11/19/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 132:1-12; 2 Kings 22:11-20;
1 Corinthians 15:20-28
Complementary: Psalm 93; Ezekiel 28:20-26;
1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Saturday 11/20/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 132:1-12; 2 Kings 23:1-14;
John 3:31-36
Complementary: Psalm 93; Daniel 7:1-8, 15-18;
John 3:31-36



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order out of chaos

More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters,
more majestic than the waves of the sea,
majestic on high is the LORD.

—PSALM 93:4

Introduction

Psalm 93 has three parts. Verses 1-2 describe God's royal rule; verses 3-4 mention God's victory over chaos; and verse 5 concludes with the establishment of the orderly world. The psalm has a poetic structure. The heart of the psalm is the flood, which symbolizes the chaotic times of our lives, but God will reestablish order in a systematic way. God created the world, controlled the chaos, and reestablished order, which indicates that God would never destroy the world.

Lesson Objectives

- To explore the ancient cultural mythology behind the text.
- To learn about God's creation and His dominant power.
- To know that God would never destroy the world.

Psalm 93 NRSV

1 The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved; 2 your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. 3 The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. 4 More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD! 5 Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.

Into the Scripture

Psalm 93 opens with God's royal rule. The LORD is the one who establishes the world; God is represented as a king robed in majesty and girded with strength in verse 1. The floods in verse 3 are on the opposite side of God, and they lift up their roaring. This passage recalls the creation stories in and behind Genesis. An ancient story akin to Genesis is called the Enuma elish, the Babylonian creation story.

In the Enuma Elish, there are two divine parents at the beginning: Apsu, the freshwater god, and Tiamat, the saltwater goddess. The descendants of this couple are many; among them is Marduk, the son of Ea and the wisest god of all. Apsu, Tiamat's husband, is killed by Ea, the father of Marduk. Then Tiamat becomes angry and calls upon Marduk to face her in single combat. While at war, Tiamat, the saltwater goddess, opens her mouth to devour Marduk. Marduk uses winds as a weapon to hold her mouth open wide, then shoots an arrow into her mouth and splits her body into two pieces. From the two pieces, Marduk forms the sky and the earth. In this creation story, the saltwater goddess is defeated by the wisest male god. This story was in the background when Genesis 1 was written in Babylonia in 6th century BCE. In Genesis 1:1-2, when the heavens and earth are created, a wind from God sweeps over the face of the waters. The wisest god in the Enuma Elish defeats the water goddess and the mighty God in Genesis defeats the "mighty waters" she represents.

Many Old Testament passages portray the water or the seas as chaotic and the opposite side of God, which can be also called God's adversary (Genesis 6-9; Exodus 15; Joshua 3; Jonah 1; Psalm 98:7-9; Psalm 74:12-17; and so on). God reveals God's royal rule by defeating the adversary. In other words, the royal rule of God can command the chaotic water into order and establish the world (Psalm 93:1). Moreover, the psalm says, the world that God established shall never be moved, which means God will never destroy the world that God has created. God's royal rule is to overthrow God's adversary, which is presented as the water/floods in Psalm 93, not to destroy the world.

Chaotic Water

The heart of this Psalm is in verse 3, in which the floods or the river (in Hebrew *neharoth*) is mentioned.



God created the world,
controlled the chaos,
and reestablished order,
which indicates that
God would never
destroy the world.

The floods lift up their voice and their roaring. The noise of the floods is enormous, and it indicates hostility. However, God's majesty is mightier than the water's hostility. In the passing of the Red Sea in the Exodus story, God commanded the mighty water to cover all the enemies of Israel (Exodus 15:10). In Joshua 3, when the Israelites crossed the Jordan, the ark of the covenant is with them and the water is chaotic: "The waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off from Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then people crossed over opposite Jericho" (Joshua 3:16). God controls this chaotic water for an act of salvation, which is to save the Israelites to reach to the land of Canaan.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus calms the storm in Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25, and Matthew 8:23-27. When Jesus and his disciples were crossing the lake by boat, Jesus fell asleep. A storm arose; there were winds and waves in the lake. In that chaotic water, Jesus and



the disciples in the boat were in danger. The disciples woke Jesus up. Then Jesus got up and “rebuked the wind and the raging waters; they ceased, and there was a calm” (Luke 8:24). There is another parallel story of Jesus’ walk on the water in Mark 6:45-56, Matthew 14:22-36, and John 6:16-24, in which Jesus was along after he came down from praying on the mountain. Jesus sent the disciples away in a boat, and it was already distant from the land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. Jesus started walking on the water, and his disciples thought that they were seeing a ghost. “Immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’ Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased” (Mark 6:50b-51a). The Gospels portray that Jesus also has the power to calm the chaotic water. Both God in the Old Testament, and Jesus, the Son, in the New Testament have majestic power over the chaotic water.

The World Continues

Psalms 93:5 describes the affirmation of God’s instruction, which is the faithfulness of God. Because of God’s faithfulness, God’s house, which is the Jerusalem temple, will be full of God’s holiness. Instruction in the Old Testament is also understood as God’s Torah; thus, Psalm 93 concludes with Torah and the temple of God; both stand forever. Psalm 93 has an envelope structure with the promise of God that the world shall never be moved. The world will not be destroyed; it will continue.

In this continuation of the world, God’s Torah and temple are orderly and established with God’s glory.

Into the Lesson

God, the king, is portrayed by earthly king’s language in Psalm 93:1-2. The LORD, the king, is robed in majesty, and his throne is established as everlasting. While the Israelites were in exile in Babylonia in the 6th century BCE, the Jerusalem temple was destroyed; the Davidic king in Jerusalem was dethroned; and the Zion theology that God dwelled in Mount Zion ceased. During their stay in exile, the Israelites could have fantasized to have hope for divine dominion in Jerusalem, and that God’s throne would be restored there forever.

Another exilic text, Isaiah 45:7-9, portrays the royal rule of God over God’s creation. Isaiah 45 is the calling of Cyrus, the Persian king, by the God of all nations; however, verses 7-8 describe that God is the one who brings righteousness down from the heavens and salvation to the earth. During the time of exile, believing God and God’s royal rule was the hope for Israelites in Babylonia to return to their home and to restore Jerusalem and its temple.



Both God in the Old Testament and Jesus, the Son, in the New Testament have majestic power over the chaotic water.

God's Faithfulness

Before a human being has faith in God, God's movement toward the human being is primary. The initiative is from God. From the beginning, the God who creates is the God who blesses. In the blessing, God said, "be fruitful and multiply" in Genesis 1:28. Even human beings in the beginning did not listen to God's word, but God did not destroy them. God is faithful to his creation with the blessing in Genesis 9, in which Noah's family was saved from God's punishment. God's creation does not stop in the flood story in Genesis 6-9; it continues through Noah's family. From the son of Noah, named Shem, the descendant leads to Abraham (Genesis 11:27).

When God punished Sodom and Gomorrah, God saved Lot's family from the destruction (Genesis 19:12-290). God's faithfulness is always to save the world so that it will continue.

Christians believe that God loves the world and saves it by sending God's only son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). It is clear that God's desire is not to destroy the world that God created in the beginning; the Scripture describes that God has ways to save the world from God's punishment and judgement. The coming day of judgment, which recalls Noah's story, is mentioned in Matthew and Luke. In Matthew 24:36-44, Jesus says, the coming of the Son of Man, which is the second coming of Jesus, is like the day of Noah that no one notices till the flood comes and sweeps them away. There are two people working in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. The one who will be left will continue in the world, just as Noah did. God is faithful to save the world with the ones who are left in the world.

This concept is so clear in Luke 17:20-37, which recalls not only Noah's story but also Lot's narrative in Genesis. Luke mentions clearly that nobody knows when the Son of Man is coming, but the day will be like Noah's days, and the day of Lot and his wife, who left from Sodom. Luke continues: on that day, one will be taken, and one will be left. So, the disciples ask where they will be taken. Jesus answers, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather" (Luke 17:37). The ones which are left in the day of the second coming of Jesus will continue with the world. The faithfulness of God to the world that he created will continue eternally.

The psalmist in Psalm 93 describes not only God's royal rule, but also God's faithfulness. Even in exile, the

psalmist believed and recalled that God has established the world, which will never be moved. Moreover, among all the disasters that the psalmist faced in exile, God's decrees are sure, and God's holiness befits the Jerusalem temple. God's faithfulness is that the world will never be destroyed.

Into Discipleship

Life is a journey. We are travelers passing through this life day after day. There are days that pass with no difficulties and troubles, but there are days full of hardship. The psalmist mentioned that his life was not smooth at the time that he wrote this psalm. Therefore, he called to God that "the floods have lifted up, O Lord..." (vs. 3). Symbolically, the floods represented the trouble that the psalmist was in. In other words, the psalmist was in a chaotic world.

On January 6, 2021, a riot and violence against the United States Congress broke out at the US Capitol due to the claim of voter fraud in the election on November 3, 2020. The United States has a long-term history of democracy for over two hundred years. However, that democracy became fragile because of the mob. The assault on the Capitol shocked every citizen; it was



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is from God.



if we were in a chaotic storm. But we knew that this storm was temporary, as democracy would prevail in the country. The chaotic storm would be stopped by the people who protected the United States Constitution. We, the people of the United States, faced and overcame the chaotic world in January 2021.

The majority people of Burma have faced another chaotic political circumstance since February 2021. Like in the US, the losing party in Burma, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), had accused the winning party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), of voter fraud. But unlike in the US, the Myanmar Military, who led the USDP, seized the democratically elected leaders of the NLD and a military coup d'état began on February 1, 2021. Myanmar previously had faced chaotic military governance for around sixty years. Only in the last five years had democracy systematically been practiced in the country. In response to the Myanmar Military action, the majority of the citizens came out to protest to restore democracy in Burma. We believe that the chaotic situation created by the Myanmar Military is temporary. But in this short period of revolt against the military regime, a lot of young people's lives have been sacrificed. In order to overcome this chaotic event, the people of Myanmar have had an ecumenical service every evening in Myanmar, joined by Myanmar people from all over the world. We believe that, as the psalmist describes, our Lord is majestic on high, and God's majestic power is above all the chaotic mighty waters.

Orderly World

From the chaotic water, God created an orderly world. Psalm 93 mentions that over the chaotic floods, the orderly world and the throne of God are established by God's majestic power. Moreover, the Torah and the temple of Jerusalem are filled with God's holiness. The chaotic world is temporary, but God's majesty is eternal. The faithfulness of God will eventually make the world continue in an orderly way. We should remind ourselves by singing the song "Great is Thy Faithfulness," written by Thomas O. Chisholm:

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not,
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Chorus: Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy
faithfulness, Morning by morning new mercies
I see,

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.
Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.
Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- During times of difficulty, how do you approach God? Do we fully trust and pray that God has sovereign power to control our difficulties?
- When you are not able to concentrate on your thoughts and prayers, what kind of alternative ways do you have to focus on your worship and prayers daily?

Into the Lesson

- Our God is faithful to the promise that God will never destroy the world. How do we respond to this statement?

- As God is faithful to us, what ways we shall be faithful to the service to God and God's creation?

Into Discipleship

- Can we be a faithful servants of God when facing a difficult time in our life?
- The world is full of injustice. When justice is delayed, how shall we worship God? How shall we sing?

Living the Lesson

Live out this lesson by writing three things in a journal:

1. The majesty of God is ready for the battle with God's adversary, which is in the form of floods. However, God has power to control this adversary. Whenever

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The chaotic world is temporary, but God's majesty is eternal.



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we have a doubt about whether God can help us to fight against our unjust adversary, the psalmist reminds us that the majestic power of God is over the thunders of mighty waters. You can write in your journal expressing how the power of God has saved you from troubles, in at least one event from the past.

2. We must live out our faith in the promise of God, that God established the world; it shall never be moved. Thus, we must follow the instruction/decrees/Torah of God, and the temple of our heart should give place to invite the holiness of God. Please write a Bible passage, which is in your heart, in your journal.
3. When we face difficult times or some hardships in our lives, we must remember that there is no end of the world by God. God will never destroy the world. We can write what difficulties we face in a day or a week and write prayers in the journal.

Devotional Scriptures Year B Proper 29 (34) Week of 11/21/21

Monday 11/22/21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 63; 2 Kings 23:15-25;
Revelation 11:1-14
Complementary: Psalm 76; Daniel 7:19-27;
Revelation 11:1-14

Tuesday 11/23/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 63; 1 Samuel 17:55-18:5;
Revelation 11:15-19
Complementary: Psalm 76; Ezekiel 29:1-12;
Revelation 11:15-19

Wednesday 11/24/2021

Semi-continuous: Psalm 63; 2 Samuel 2:1-7;
John 16:25-33
Complementary: Psalm 76; Ezekiel 30:20-26;
John 16:25-33

Thursday 11/25/2021, Thanksgiving Day

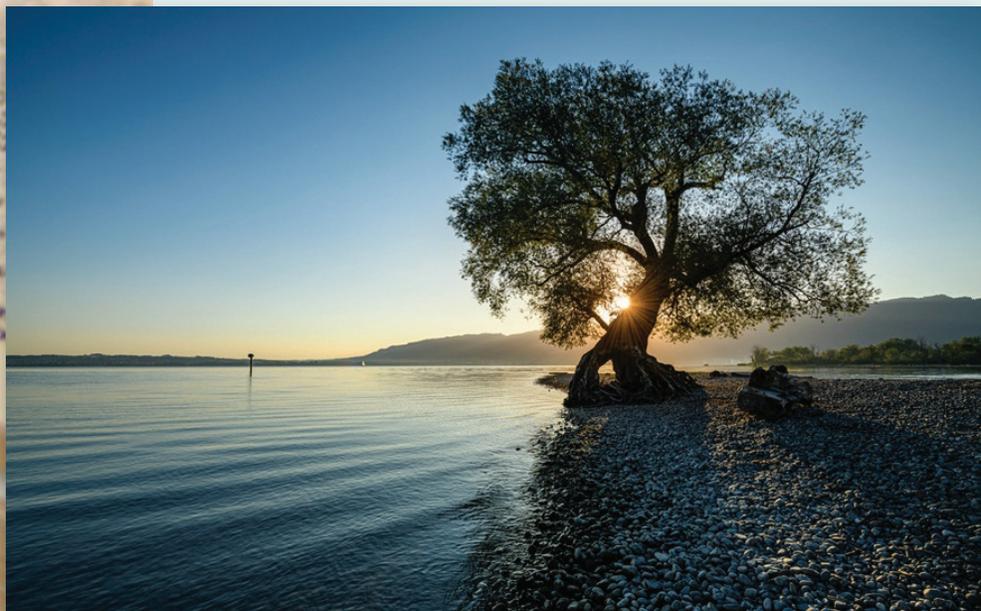
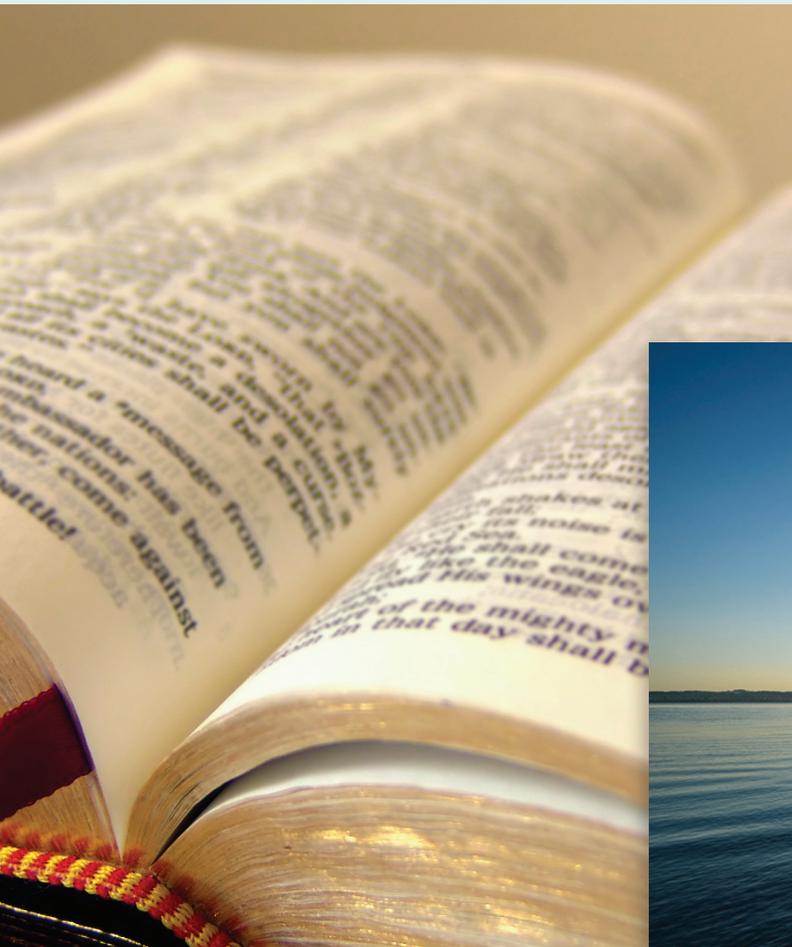
Psalm 25:1-10; Nehemiah 9:6-15; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Friday 11/26/2021

Psalm 25:1-10; Nehemiah 9:16-25;
1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

Saturday 11/27/2021

Psalm 25:1-10; Nehemiah 9:26-31; Luke 21:20-24



THANKSGIVING

absent but present

May [our God] so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints

— 1 THESSALONIANS 3:13

Introduction

First Thessalonians 3:9-13 is a thanksgiving letter from Paul to the community in Thessalonica. Paul is full of joy at Timothy's report that the community practices two things: faith and love. The Scripture juxtaposes two characters, Paul and the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus' return is compared with Paul, who expresses the wish to come back to Thessalonica. Just as Paul is physically absent from the church in Thessalonica but his teaching of faith and love are practiced there, the Christian community must practice moral holiness by the Spirit of the Lord before the Lord Jesus' second coming, or Parousia.

Lesson Objectives

- To learn how Paul the apostle imitates Jesus.
- To recognize the community without physical leaders, but with faith and love.
- To thank God for the community of faith.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 NRSV

9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. 11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Into the Scripture

First Thessalonians is the oldest letter in Christian literature. It was written about 50 CE, when Thessalonica was a cosmopolitan city with a large Jewish community. Paul the apostle had visited there in the first century CE. According to Acts 17:1-8, Paul and Silas went to Thessalonica and preached in a Jewish synagogue. Some Jews and Gentiles became Christians. Paul boldly preached that Jesus was the Messiah in the Jewish community; therefore, Paul and Silas had to leave the town. Since then, Paul was physically absent from Thessalonica although he had a strong desire to visit there again: “night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face . . .” (vs. 10).

“Restore whatever is lacking in your faith.”

The above statement in Paul’s letter portrays that Paul is worried for the converted Christian community in Thessalonica for the following two reasons:

1. Thessalonica was a Roman province. People in the city gave honor to and worshipped the Roman emperor, Caesar, in what was known as the “imperial cult.”

According to Acts 17:1-4, Paul proclaimed in the Jewish synagogue that Jesus was the Messiah during three sabbath days. When people followed Paul and started rejecting worship of the emperor, persecution began in Thessalonica. Thus, Paul desired to visit the community again to observe

who were still being loyal in their commitment to Jesus by proclaiming him “Lord,” rather than the emperor.

2. Paul knows that--although he has the desire--he cannot come back to Thessalonica, so he urges people to strengthen their hearts in holiness and be blameless at the time of Jesus’ second coming. He also gives the instructions in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 in which he focuses on sanctification from fornication—that is, sexual immorality. While boasting of the “faith and love” the community has practiced, Paul is still worried that the converted community will practice



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Thessalonica was a Roman province.

People in the city gave honor to and worshipped the Roman emperor, Caesar, in what was known as the “imperial cult.”

fornication. Thus, he said, do not do as “the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Thessalonians 4:5).
Apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus

Paul’s imitation of the Lord Jesus is obvious in this letter. He even uses the word “imitators” for the community of Thessalonica. He is not only imitating Christ himself, but he also calls for the whole community to become “imitators. As relayed in 1 Thessalonians 1:6, the community of faith suffered persecution just as Paul and Christ did (see 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). Paul says, “in spite of persecution, [the Thessalonians] received the word with joy;” therefore, “they have become an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia” (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7). Thomas R. Blanton, a scholar of Paul’s letters, states, “a general pattern may be discerned: God



and/or Christ are portrayed as exemplifying some trait, which in turn is exemplified by Paul; in their imitation of Paul, God, or Christ, the members of local assemblies may be depicted as exemplary models themselves.” In other words, in his actions Paul copies God and Christ; the Thessalonian community copies Paul; other communities could then copy the Thessalonians.

Paul goes on to write about the concept of “coming back to the community.” There are three “wish prayers” in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13. (1) While he is addressing that the Lord Jesus is coming back to the community of Thessalonica, Paul and his company, Silvanus and Timothy, are praying that God and Christ will direct their way to them as well (vs. 11). (2) Although Paul is longing to come back to the community, he knows that his teaching of faith and love is practiced among the Thessalonians. Thus, Paul wishes that the Lord will increase the love for one another and for all, just as Paul and his company love the community (vs. 12). (3) When faith and love are practiced and increased in the community without Paul’s physical presence in the community, Paul wishes that God will strengthen their hearts in holiness, so that they may be blameless when the Lord Jesus comes back (vs. 13).

Into the Lesson

Being Asian, a beautiful thing I have seen in Western culture is that people appreciate any little thing that someone has done for them. For example, when we take

public transportation from one place to another, before getting off the bus, we say, “thank you” to give gratitude to the bus driver. At the restaurant, when a server comes to serve us, we usually say, “thank you” to the server. Many Eastern countries do not practice verbally saying “thank you” for little things. Instead of just using words to thank each other for little, everyday things, we celebrate thanksgiving services many times in the year, sometimes in the family but most of the time with community.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul gives thanks to God four times regarding the community of Thessalonica (vss. 1:2, 2:13, 3:9, and 5:18). However, the text does not mention that Paul gives thanks directly to Timothy, whom he sent to Thessalonica; nor to the Thessalonians, who practice the faith and love that Paul has taught. First Thessalonians 3:9 focuses on Paul repeatedly giving thanks to God. First, Paul thanks God with a rhetorical question, “How can I possibly pay God back for my present joy about you?” This means that gratitude is overflowing within Paul. Second, he is thankful to God for all the joy that he and his company experience saying, “all the joy that we feel.” Third, Paul thanks God for the community of Thessalonica saying, “for you”



When people followed Paul and started rejecting worship of the emperor, persecution began in Thessalonica.

and “because of you.” Although thanking God for the joy that Paul has received from the community through Timothy, it is obvious that Paul has deep concern for the Thessalonians.

Not giving thanks directly to Timothy and to the people of Thessalonica might reflect a cultural practice. It seems that Paul expresses thanksgiving only to his superior, which in this case is God, but not to his company, Silvanus and Timothy, who are subordinate to Paul. Reading this text with an Asian perspective in the Western culture, I can observe the lack of Paul’s thanksgiving to the people; however, as with every culture’s practice of giving thanks to God, Paul has done that well in 1 Thessalonians. For every joy that he receives because of the Thessalonians, Paul gives thanks to God.

Affirmation of Faith

Since the Reformation started by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, Protestants have believed that faith alone can save. However, the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 3 expresses that faith and love are correlated. Paul considers that faith and love, which the Thessalonians have been practicing, are the good news. Thus, for Paul, faith alone does not save a human being, but faith combined with love as an action practiced in the community saves. At the same time, Paul was saying to the community that, if he had a chance to see them face to face, he would have restored whatever was lacking in their faith (vs. 10).

Augustine of Hippo interpreted this verse as Paul being troubled by the community’s spiritual immaturity. Whenever Paul was physically absent from the communities, such as Thessalonica, Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:1-2), and Colossae (Colossians 2:5), he was afraid that they were not ready for “solid food,” meaning more advanced teaching. Therefore, Paul wishes that the Lord Jesus either would direct him to go back to Thessalonica physically or would make the community to be strong in love to each other, which is the outcome of their faith in the Lord Jesus.

Paul did not stop his teaching with only faith and love in 1 Thessalonians 3. He continued to affirm the Thessalonians faith in the Lord Jesus and encouraged them to follow instructions for their morality. Based on the love that the community practiced, Paul taught them to control their bodies and not to engage in any sexual immorality in the community. By doing so, at the time of the Lord Jesus’s second coming, their affirmation of

faith by practice and action will make them blameless and holy before God.

Into Discipleship

Thanksgiving is a verbal response to a gift, while gratitude is an emotional response. In a religious context, gratitude to God is a common theme and a universal religious sentiment. In Judaism, gratitude is extremely important to believers. In Psalms 9:1 and 30:12, the psalmist expresses his thanksgiving to God saying, “I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart,” and “Oh Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.” In Judaism, every act of the human being is part of their



When we as
American Baptists
observe the ordinance
of the Lord’s Supper
or Holy Communion,
we are giving thanks
for the sacrifice
Christ made
for all of us.



religious life; therefore, there is major gratitude for acts of human kindness and goodness.

Martin Luther mentions that thankfulness is a special Christian virtue. Christians are encouraged to praise and give thanks to God as our creator in worship services. Jonathan Edwards, in his 1746 book *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, writes that thankfulness toward God is one of the essential signs of true religion. When we as American Baptists observe the *ordinance* of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, we are giving thanks for the sacrifice Christ made for all of us. As well as other Christian traditions, such as Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, and Anglican, practice the rite of Eucharist, which derives from Greek word, εὐχαρίζω (eucharizō), meaning "to give thanks." Many of these traditions view the Eucharist as a *sacrament*—meaning they believe the prayer actually transforms the bread and cup into the body of Christ.

For us, the bread and cup in the Lord's Supper *symbolize* Jesus's broken body and shed blood, which call to mind God's great love for us. We give thanks for this community meal while also reminding ourselves about Jesus Christ's love and his crucifixion. In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, although Paul does not give thanks to Timothy and the people of Thessalonica directly, he does give thanks to God that the community is faithful to God and its members love each other, even in the absence of its leaders. Thanking God in all circumstances is the right religious attitude.

Imitation

Human beings often look up to someone to be their model. In the family, we look to our parents to be our models; at church, pastors; and in school, teachers. According to this lesson, we can imitate two characters: 1) the apostle Paul, and 2) the community of Thessalonica. The apostle Paul imitates the Lord Jesus by not only his teachings of faith and love, but also his connection with the community. Paul is eager to come back to the community, just as the Lord Jesus is coming back at the Parousia. Karl Barth interpreted the Parousia beyond the traditional belief that Jesus Christ's second coming will take place at the "end time." Since the Greek word *parousia* means "being present," Barth said that the Parousia refers to Jesus Christ's spiritual presence in and through the church.

Although Paul is physically absent from the community, Paul's teaching of faith and love is there, just as Jesus Christ's Spirit is in the community of Thessalonica. This concept is appropriate for immigrant and diaspora Christians. We are far away from our home congregation but joined to the community where we are currently located. Although we long to go back to our home congregation, we give thanks to God for the new community that we have; and we pray for the growth of love in our home congregation, though we are physically absent there.

When we imitate the community of Thessalonica, first we must imagine ourselves as part of a community in which we have faith in the Lord Jesus and love for our

current community. Although the community did not have their main leader, the apostle Paul, Timothy was with them. Moreover, the community seems well accepting of Timothy, the young leader. Today, our communities must open the way for the younger generation, accept them, and give them leadership positions. Moreover, faith and love within each other can make our community a model among the larger community. This is called practical theology, indicating

that every congregation must act so that the world can see it and imitate our practice of love and faith. Karl Barth's theology of the Parousia calls us to move from the congregation and into the world: the Spirit of the Lord Jesus presents itself in the love of the community.

Note:

1. Thomas R Blanton IV, "Paul, Exemplification, and Imitation," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook*, 2nd ed., Vol. 1, ed. J. Paul Sampley (London: T & T Clark, 2016), 189.

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Although Paul is physically absent from the community, Paul's teaching of faith and love is there, just as Jesus Christ's Spirit is in the community of Thessalonica.

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Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- What traits do you believe made Jesus an exemplary leader?
- In what ways did Paul imitate the Lord Jesus?
- What are the qualifications for being a good leader of the community of faith?
- Does a good leader always have to be present in the community?
- Although the leader is absent, if his or her teachings are alive and practiced in the community, can we call him or her a good leader?

Into the Lesson

- Have you ever given thanks demonstratively to the community where your Christian spiritual foundation was formed? If so, how did you express your thankfulness to the community: orally, by giving service, by giving donations to it, or other ways?

- What is a way you can reiterate your thankfulness to that community today as a way of encouraging them in their continual witness?
- What are ways you and your family can express what you are thankful for at your home daily?
- What impact would doing so on a regular basis have on your home environment? On your prayer life? On your mood?

Into Discipleship

- Has the advent of Zoom worship, changed how you view the importance of attending regular worship services in person, and if so, how?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to having so many churches now offering their worship services via Zoom?
- Are Communion Sundays viewed as being more important than other Sundays in your context, and if so, why?
- What does the attitude your congregation displays during Communion--solemnity or joyfulness--say about your theological interpretation of observing the Lord's Supper?



Living the Lesson

- Pick a certain moment in your evening to write down blessings received and the things that you have accomplished each day for a week. Seeing the list in writing can help us realize how much God is accomplishing through us and how we are receiving blessings nonstop each day.

As you reflect back on your day, focus your energy on what went right, not what went wrong. Act on what you know to do as you wait for answers from God on other aspects or issues for which you need direction. Go ahead and do what you can do, and when you complete that you will be able to see what you need to do next. Keep it moving.

- Paul and the Lord Jesus are not with us in person, but their teachings are with us, and the Spirit of God is with us. Thus, our faith, love, and morality live out in our community and the church. Revisit your commitment to reading the Bible as a way of keeping fresh in your mind Jesus' teachings and example. Incorporate the Beatitudes and Jesus' lessons in the Sermon on the Mount as the foundation of your discipleship and how you engage others.

Devotional Scriptures

Year B Proper 30 (35) Week of 11/28/21

Sunday 11/28/21, First Sunday of Advent

Monday 11/29/21

Psalm 90; Numbers 17:1-11; 2 Peter 3:1-18

Tuesday 11/30/21

Psalm 90; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; Revelation 22:12-16

Wednesday 12/01/21

Psalm 90; Isaiah 1:24-31; Luke 11:29-32

Thursday 12/02/21

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:5-12; Philippians 1:12-18a

Friday 12/03/21

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 3:13-18; Philippians 1:18b-26

Saturday 12/04/21

Luke 1:68-79; Malachi 4:1-6; Luke 9:1-6

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