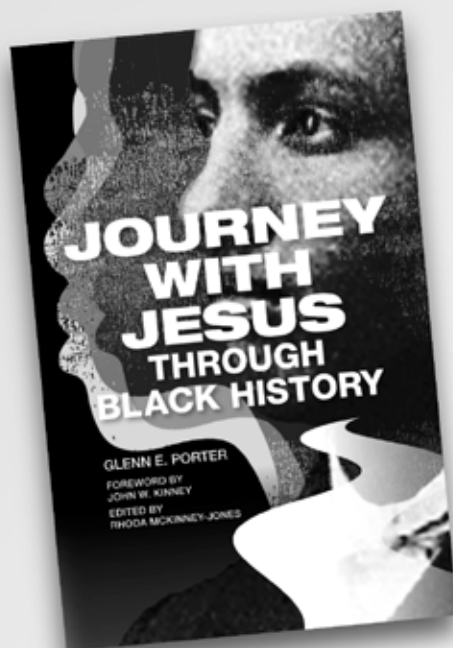


Journeys

A full-page background image showing a sunset over a vast, dark blue ocean. The sun is a large, bright yellow-orange sphere sitting exactly on the horizon line. The sky above is a gradient of orange and yellow, with some wispy clouds near the top.

JUDSON BIBLE LESSONS | Summer 2025 | Vol. 4.4



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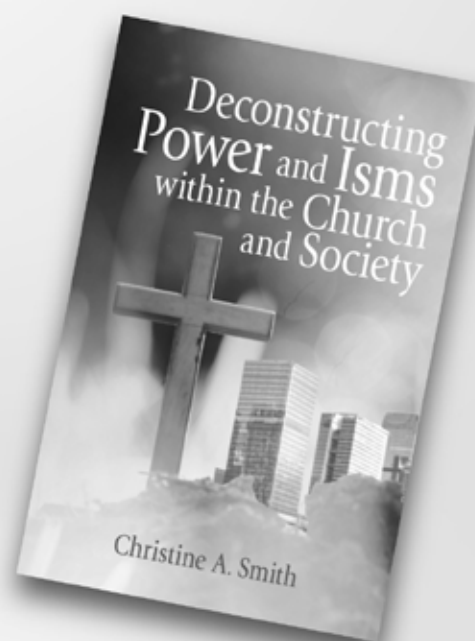
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Journeys

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About the Quarter

The concepts of the Summer quarter lessons range from restoration to unfaithfulness to responsibility. Each speaks to the relationship between God and God's people in powerful and transformative ways. How does restoration and liberation from brokenness or making poor decisions create an environment for reuniting with the Lord? The answer or a good response to this question is available as we embrace God's justice, empathy, and the blessings we receive because of who God is. As Christians, focusing our thoughts, actions, and feelings on who we are through Christ gives us directions and breath to move in ways others may not. We are kingdom builders on the earth as it is in heaven. Our lives should imitate Christ so that others will want to know why we are the way we are. Explore opportunities to enrich and share your relationship with Christ. God's Word is true and will give us peace to restore and connect with our joy and strength in the Lord. There is a bonus lesson this quarter (there are fourteen lessons instead of just thirteen). This is a wonderful opportunity to share and study God's Word with others or have personal Bible study time. The more we study and apply God's Word in our daily lives, the better equipped we are to endure difficult times and strengthen our relationship with Christ.

About the Writers

Yolonda Sanders returns to *Journeys* as our newest writer. Yolonda earned a Ph.D. in organizational leadership from Indiana Wesleyan University. She is CEO of Yo Productions, LLC, and the co-founder of the Faith & Fellowship Book Festival. Her writing portfolio includes academic papers, novels, short stories, poems, and other creative works. In addition to writing, she enjoys teaching and, most importantly, spending time with her husband and other loved ones. Learn more about Yolonda and her works at www.yoproductions.net. This quarter, Yolonda contributed lessons 6–9.

Meriah Tigner is the Pastor at Liberty Baptist Church in Tipton, Indiana. She has a passion for Scripture and for helping others engage with God's Word. Her goal is to invite others to wrestle with the biblical text while interacting with God's Spirit. She believes that no question is out of bounds—when we are genuinely engaging, God will meet us there. Meriah, her husband, Josh, and daughter, Stevie Louise, live in Indiana. Meriah wrote lessons 10–14.

Michael Wolff is Senior Minister of Lake Street Church of Evanston, Illinois, and Co-Associate Regional Minister for White and Multicultural Churches at the ABC of Metro Chicago. He holds a Doctor of Theology (ThD) degree from Harvard University, and his first book, *Sanctuary and Subjectivity: Thinking Theologically About Whiteness in Sanctuary Movements*, is available now from T&T Clark. Michael wrote lessons 1–5.

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD

images of God

The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!

—PSALM 97:1

Introduction

Psalm 97 invites us to imagine God as king, an image that has been used to bolster justice and create hierarchies throughout time. Whether the image works for us or does not, we are invited to experience what Martin Luther called “the freedom of a Christian,” looking for the images that suit us and setting aside those that do not. That is inherently a creative endeavor, and God has given us the intellect to pursue it.

Lesson Objectives

- To develop an understanding of what the Kingdom of God is and how it functions.
- To better understand the rich resource and pitfalls of kingly language around God.
- To consider what images of God work for us, and which don't.

Psalm 97 NRSVUE

1 The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad! 2 Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. 3 Fire goes before him and consumes his adversaries on every side. 4 His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles. 5 The mountains melt like wax before the LORD, before the Lord of all the earth. 6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples behold his glory. 7 All servants of images are put to shame, those who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him. 8 Zion hears and is glad, and the towns of Judah rejoice because of your judgments, O God. 9 For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. 10 You who love the LORD, hate evil; he guards the lives of his faithful; he rescues them from the hand of the wicked. 11 Light dawns for the righteous and joy for the upright in heart. 12 Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!

Into the Scripture

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs, often including the names of composers and instructions on how they might be set to music. The tradition of engaging with the Psalms musically continues to the present day in Christian communities that follow the Psalter, while many worship services contain sung psalms. Psalm 97 has been set to music by many renowned composers, including Johann Sebastian Bach, continuing the importance of Psalms to the musical traditions of the world. In addition, Psalm 97 appears in Jewish services and liturgies around Shabbat and Yom Kippur.

Psalm 97 offers an eschatological vision of what God's direct rule would look like at the end of time, using such images as a "light dawns" (verse 11), "mountains melt" (verse 5), and "fire goes before him" (verse 3) to demonstrate the way that God strikes a salvific and terrifying figure. God here appears as a great King who possesses the power to strike against God's enemies and liberate the people of Israel. Most of all, this psalm is a joyful one, even if the images are fearful. Written during a time of great turmoil, military defeats, and the Babylonian and Assyrian captivities, the text offers hope that God will strike against Israel's enemies and restore them to peace, security, and joy. That peace finds its expression in a practical application of the psalm—the

Shulchan Aruch, a sixteenth-century Jewish legal code still widely consulted, mentions that those who have problems sleeping should recite the eleventh verse to dispel any anxiety: "Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart."

Interestingly, the text does not offer a strictly monotheistic cosmology. Instead, God is supreme over all the other gods, but the text clearly does not consider those other gods to be nonexistent . . . merely lesser and not worthy of worship: "For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods" (verse 9). This worldview, called henotheism or monolatry, which encourages the exclusive worship of one God over and above others, is the primary spiritual worldview of much of the Hebrew Bible, with what we know as monotheism only coming to the forefront in later texts as Jewish understanding of God developed. Modern translations often make subtle changes to texts, rendering words like *Elohim* as "angels," when a perfectly suitable translation would be "gods," somewhat obscuring the ways that worship of God shifted within the Hebrew Bible.

Indeed, much of the imagery of God as a conquering king has strong similarities with another near-eastern deity that also appears in the Bible as a foil to Yahweh, Baal. The image of God sitting amid "clouds and thick darkness" (verse 2a) are some of the same images that

Canaanites used to depict Baal, who was most famously described as a cloud rider.

Into the Lesson

Power is a notoriously difficult thing to depict, but one of the standbys that human beings have used is to connect power with kingship. The monarch rules directly over their subjects, and their word in absolute monarchies is law. They speak and things happen. In the Bible, kingship is not an unalloyed good. There are certainly paeans sang to the kingship of David, but before that readers find that God gives a chilling view of kingship:

[God] said, “These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots, and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have

chosen for yourselves; but the LORD will not answer you in that day.” (1 Samuel 8:11-18)

Why would the Bible use kingship as an image from God, when God is such a critic of the institution? A simple answer might be that it is a useful shorthand for power more generally and human beings are drawn to the raw power exuded by absolute monarchies, especially in the ancient world before the turn to democracy that the Enlightenment effected. However, kingship can also be used in warm and affectionate ways. A king is responsible for the welfare of his subjects and is generally perceived as being a parent of the entire realm.

There are, of course, good and bad kings. When Jesus uses the image of the Kingdom of God, he is inviting us to consider what the world would be like if it was ruled by a truly good king that has no self-interest and only acts for the well-being of the king’s subjects. According to Jesus’ ministry, the result is such a world where the meek are uplifted, the sad learn to laugh again, the last are first, the rich are sent away empty, and the poor are filled with good things (see Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 1:46-55). The analogy is a quick way to encourage a bit of imagination. We know the way the world looks when Caesar—or whatever ruler of the day—has such power, but what would change if God were king? The answer is likely everything, and that is precisely the point of the use of God-as-King images.

Into Discipleship

There are plenty of images for God in the Bible, and king is only one of them. Having considered kingship,



“Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.” (Psalm 97:11)

we know that it has many positive and negative attributes. For one, Psalm 97 depicts God in ways that I find, frankly, terrifying. For another, it is those depictions that unlock the door to one of the most important ethical teachings in the Bible and the cornerstone of Jesus' teaching ministry—the Kingdom of God. No image works in only one way, and this one is no different.

For the people of the Bible, kingship was such a natural metaphor because kings ruled their world. Everyone instantly understood kingship, in the same way that everyone understood the images of sowing, reaping, baking, and vineyards that appear in Jesus' parables. That ought to lead us to wonder, How would we describe God if we were to use language from our own world that would be instantly understandable? Walter Rauschenbusch, writing in the early twentieth century, famously democratized God because he argued that “the social relations in which [people] lived, affected their conceptions about God and [God's] relations to [people].”¹ God

does not change, but people do, and we must update our conceptions of God to make God relevant and understandable to a new generation. For Rauschenbusch, that means democratizing God. For us, it might mean something else entirely.

Martin Luther, the great sixteenth-century reformer, wrote compellingly about the “Freedom of a Christian” in a book by the same name. I would argue that the true freedom of a Christian lies in our ability to be honest about what images for God work for us and which do not. For me, kingship is too bound up with the kinds of domination and political power that make me queasy, especially in an age of rising power of dictators, for me to use it productively in my spiritual life. For others, a divine king might be precisely what the doctor ordered.

Note

1. Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1922), 174.

Closing Prayer

O God of great kings and lowly fishermen, help us to know true freedom by embracing the myriad images that are present in scripture. Grant us the creativity and discernment to dive into deeper relationship with you, through image and story. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- Does it matter that early scripture was not strictly monotheistic to you? What does it mean to say that the ancient Israelites' understanding of God evolved?
- When is a time that you have found joy amid fear?

Into the Lesson

- Why do you think Jesus uses the image of the “Kingdom of God”?
- Why do you think scripture was so ambivalent about kings in general?

Into Discipleship

- To what images of God are you drawn?
- Are there ways that you can think of interpreting scripture creatively like Rauschenbusch did?

Resources

Song to Consider

“Thy Kingdom Come, O God,” sung by The Choirs of St. Mary's Collegiates Church; written by Lewis Hensley: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3863412560356699>

Media Option

Poem: You may access “Imago Dei: A Poem about God and Humanity” at <https://livingtable.org/pastoral-notes/imago-dei-a-poem-about-god-and-humanity/>. Part of it is found below.

On midsummer's eve, when the world is wrapped in magic,
all the children of the earth gather in the dreaming place.

Mysteries call louder on this night than on all other nights.

Whispers carried on ocean and mountain breezes lead children to gather in the dreaming place.

They laugh and dance and splash in the magic surrounding them.

The moon rises higher, children quiet in the whispering winds
and ask the questions of their hearts.

One small girl stands and says,
My daddy doesn't look like my mommy and
I don't look like either of them.
So who does God look like?

The answers are quick and from all around.
Some of us together.
All of us.
None of us because maybe there is no God.

Silence.*

*(*For the rest of the poem, refer to the work Barefoot Theology, Wipf & Stock, 2013, pg. 64–66.)*

Activity Idea

Take out a sheet of paper and write down some images of God that you know in scripture. They may be things like the mother hen, a loving parent, a king, a warrior, the Prince of Peace. Ask your group to decide what they have in common and pick amongst yourself the images to which you are most drawn. Why? What about these images helps you understand who God is?

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Seventh Sunday of Easter

Week of June 1, 2025

Sunday, June 1

Acts 16:16-34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

Monday, June 2

Psalm 29; Exodus 40:16-38; Acts 16:35-40

Tuesday, June 3

Psalm 29; 2 Chronicles 5:2-14; Acts 26:19-29

Wednesday, June 4

Psalm 29; Ezekiel 3:12-21; Luke 9:18-27

Thursday, June 5

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Isaiah 32:11-17; Galatians 5:16-25

Friday, June 6

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Isaiah 44:1-4; Galatians 6:7-10

Saturday, June 7

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; 2 Kings 2:1-15a; Luke 1:5-17

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GOD-BREATHED

the church's birthday

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

—ACTS 2:2

Introduction

Welcome to the church's birthday. That's what Pentecost is, and it is also much more than that. In Pentecost, God undoes the damage of separation from each other that we experience in our world, making us able to communicate. I don't know about you, but I think we could use some of that Pentecost Spirit these days, as we face more division and polarization than I have ever experienced in my lifetime.

Lesson Objectives

- To understand the importance of Pentecost as “the church's birthday.”
- To appreciate the way that Pentecost undoes Babel.
- To develop hope that the boundaries that separate us can be crossed through the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1-21 NRSV

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. 5 Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6 And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7 Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” 12 All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.” 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Fellow Jews and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15 Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16 No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18 Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20 The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. 21 Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

Into the Scripture

The books of Luke and Acts of the Apostles were originally one book, often called Luke–Acts by scholars, which sought to tell the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and the nascent Christian community that began to develop after his death. While traditionally ascribed to Luke the physician, the author is unnamed in the text. However, the text does begin with a dedication

to Theophilus: “so that you [Theophilus] may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed” (Luke 1:4, NRSVUE). The identity of Theophilus is similarly unknown, but we do know from that introduction that the author wanted to write a “well-ordered account” (NRSVUE) using eyewitness testimony, meaning that the text attempts to be historical and factual wherever it can be (see Luke 1:3).

Our text this week details the coming of the Holy Spirit—the paraclete or helper promised by Jesus in John 14:15-31—in an event we now refer to as Pentecost, a Greek term which refers to the Jewish holiday that Pentecost falls on and the reason that the disciples were in Jerusalem in the first place—Shavuot. It literally means “fiftieth,” and Shavuot falls on the fiftieth day after Passover. The disciples received the gift of speaking different languages so that they might share the Gospel with all the people of the world, shifting the narrative from Jesus to his disciples and their subsequent acts. Because it represents the moment when the church is fully empowered to share the Good News, many have dubbed it the church’s birthday.

Pentecost has been one of the most important feast days in the Christian calendar for millennia, and it was a preferred day for baptisms in some parts of Europe. It is traditional to wear red on Pentecost, symbolizing the “tongues, as of fire” that descend upon the apostles, as well as the joy of receiving the Holy Spirit, and it truly is a joyful day. At my church, we have been known to host Pentecost parties—with fire eaters—to attempt to make the day special. In those traditions that utilize music in worship services, instruments like trumpets and flutes are often used to recall the “sound like the rush of a violent wind” (verse 2) mentioned in the text.

As a point of interest, the celebration of Pentecost has given rise to a peculiar facet of architecture that can be seen in some churches built during the Middle Ages in Europe—the Holy Ghost hole. A hole in the

ceiling from which a wooden dove would be lowered during the feast day during the singing of specific hymns. One prominent Holy Ghost hole can be seen in Canterbury Cathedral in England. Likewise, Pentecost has inspired numerous musical pieces, including Martin Luther’s “Come, Holy Spirit, God and Lord” and an ancient hymn believed to have been written by Rabanus Maurus, a ninth-century German monk: “Veni Creator Spiritus.”

Into the Lesson

One of the most interesting interpretations of this text is that it undoes the damage of the Tower of Babel, the origin story of language differences that appears in Genesis. In that story, it is human beings’ hubris that leads them to construct a tower to God, and then God confounds them so that they cannot work together through the introduction of languages:

And the LORD said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.



Because it [Pentecost] represents the moment when the church is fully empowered to share the Good News, many have dubbed it the church’s birthday.

Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:6-9)

Here, God instead sends the Holy Spirit so that all might be a part of the great thing that God is doing in the world through Jesus. Instead of being separated by language, God bridges that gap and heals us so that we can all participate in the Gospel. That is a truly inspiring story, not the least because it took so long to heal. While the Tower of Babel story takes place in mythic time, it would have at least been several thousand years by the time of Pentecost since God's punishment. Now, through Jesus, even ancient wounds are being healed. Through this text, we are invited to consider the ways that God is moving us, even now towards healing of wounds that we have carried for so long.

One of the interesting facets of dealing with a text in a different language is that translators must make decisions about what to render a word in English. The Greek word that appears here—*ruach*—can be rendered as either breath or wind. The translators, here, chose wind, but breath is an interesting consideration as well. The text has several instances in both accounts of God breathing, of wind blowing, of spirits being received. In every instance, this gordian knot of meanings remains tightly wound around itself—the breath of God and the spirit of God, together.

This seems an important point to dwell on because we have all recently lived through a pandemic in which our very breath is said to be powerful. It can cause disease, and we have had to restrict it through wearing masks to keep others and ourselves safer. That sort of destructive power serves as an illustration of the flip side of what the breath of God does. Where our breath can spread germs and sickness, God's breath restores bodies and flesh, makes dry bones walk, and gives the ability to speak in tongues. God's breath undid the foundational trauma of disconnectedness in Babel, and God's breath brings healing even today.

I was all about wearing a mask, so now navigating a world in which I don't have to wear it quite so much is difficult. I've come to see other people's breath and my own as dangerous, rather than the ordinary thing that it is. Breath is so foundational to our experience that we don't think about it . . . we just do it. In doing so, we

receive oxygen to power our bodies. But we share our breath with others, in the long view, the molecular view, whether we like it or not—hopefully germ free. And that sharing of breath is something that is moving to me.

Into Discipleship

In 2018, I had the privilege of going on a pilgrimage to Palestine and Israel. It was a transformative experience for me, getting to walk where Jesus and the disciples walked. One of the most important places that I visited was the Upper Room, the place where tradition says Pentecost occurred. One of the first things that strikes you when you visit such a place is just how ordinary it is, especially when you consider the fact that it is the birthplace of the church. There's a medieval carving of a pelican up on one of the columns. The pelican was a popular Christian icon in the Middle Ages because they were believed to feed their young their blood by wounding themselves during times of famine, even if it cost the mother pelican her own life. It was inconspicuous, but it was in looking at this carving that I felt the breath of God.

Someone had been here long ago looking for that same breath. They had breathed here. If you go down a couple of flight of steps, you will find yourself in the tomb of King David, where religious Jews often visit the ancient monarch's final resting place. At some point in the past, the Upper Room had been converted into a mosque, and a window preserves some Arabic script. Surely people breathed here in search of a similar but different holy. All these things for one place, all united by breath, and I couldn't help but feel some sense of wonder at the discovery. When you feel that connection with the world and people around you, you can only do one thing—you let in the wonder.

Pentecost is that invitation to let the wonder in at the diversity of language, the diversity of religious experience, and to let it transform you. The Spirit moves in and through us, our languages, our places, and our wants and needs, working always to bring about more flourishing. I didn't hear or feel the rush of a wind that day in the Upper Room, but I breathed in the same place as so many others—and that's enough for me. We are all more tightly bound together than we often realize. Instead of recognizing our interconnectedness, we tend to craft a sort of optical illusion of our own

independence. Pentecost is about the weaving back together of connections, especially those that have frayed or never existed.

How are you weaving those connections in your daily life? There are so many barriers between us these days—political polarization, race, class, and religion . . . just to name a few. I personally have never felt as pessimistic about the potential of connection between

different people as I do right now. And yet, if Pentecost is anything, it is the promise that through the Holy Spirit, these barriers can be traversed, and we can actually speak to one another. Crucially, this gift of speaking across boundaries is not restricted to a certain type of Christian—it is the gift freely given to all believers. One thing is certain: we need the wind of Pentecost to blow once more.

Closing Prayer

God—who breathed the breath of life into our bodies—breathe the fresh air of Pentecost into our lives and minds. Strengthen us to reach across that which divides us to see that you are in every person. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- What importance do you place on Pentecost?

Into the Lesson

- Does reading the story of Pentecost with that of Babble change how you interpret it? Why or why not?
- Do you prefer to interpret the word *ruach* as breath or wind in the passage?

Into Discipleship

- What are some ways that we can work to overcome the things that divide us? What practical steps can you take?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- “Come, O Creator, Spirit Blest,” lyrics by Edward Caswall (1814–1878): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dnmLLDClnA>
- “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” by Sufjan Stevens: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1bSIS6OWTs>

Media Option

Poem: You may access “Away with Our Fears” by Charles Wesley at https://hymnary.org/text/away_with_our_fears_our_troubles_and_tea. Refer to the text below.

1 Away with our fears,
Our troubles and tears.
The Spirit is come,
The witness of Jesus
Returned to His home;
2 Our advocate there
by his death and his prayer
the gift has obtained,
for us he has prayed, and the Comforter gained.
3 Our glorified Lord
has given his word
that his Spirit will stay,
and never again will be taken away.
4 Our heavenly guide
with us shall abide,
His comforts impart,
and set up his kingdom of love in our heart.
5 The heart that believes
his kingdom receives,
his power and his peace,
his life, and his joy’s everlasting increase.

Activity Idea

Draw a line with tape, or place something between your group. Ask the folks on the other side whether you can cross and what they would need from you to be able to cross. Make it something that is doable but perhaps a little uncomfortable, which will be different for every group. What did you learn from crossing that line?

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Day of Pentecost

Week of June 8, 2025

Sunday, June 8

Acts 2:1-21 or Genesis 11:1-9; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b;
Romans 8:14-17 or Acts 2:1-21; John 14:8-17, (25-27)

Monday, June 9

Psalm 48; Joel 2:18-29; 1 Corinthians 2:1-11

Tuesday, June 10

Psalm 48; Ezekiel 11:14-25; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16

Wednesday, June 11

Psalm 48; Numbers 24:1-14; Luke 1:26-38

Thursday, June 12

Psalm 8; Proverbs 3:13-18; Ephesians 1:17-19

Friday, June 13

Psalm 8; Proverbs 3:19-26; Ephesians 4:1-6

Saturday, June 14

Psalm 8; Proverbs 4:1-9; Luke 2:41-52



Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:9)

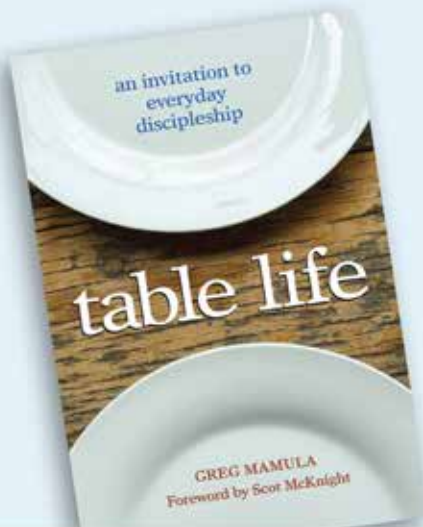


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BEING WISE

learning from Lady Wisdom

Does not wisdom call and understanding raise her voice?

—PROVERBS 8:1

Introduction

Wisdom is a little-known and even less understood part of God's ordering of the cosmos, and yet the figure of Lady Wisdom appears in scripture as an image in much of the Bible's wisdom literature. The feminine counterpart to God and as close as the Bible gets to Greek philosophy, she offers us a way of living that is both wise and healthy, and we would do well to listen to what she has to say.

Lesson Objectives

- To learn more about the depiction of "capital W" Wisdom in the Bible.
- To see how Wisdom's participation in creation orders our present lives.
- To reflect on the wise way of life that God offer us.

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 NRSVUE

1 Does not wisdom call and understanding raise her voice? 2 On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; 3 beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: 4 “To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all who live.” . . .
22 “The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.
23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, 26 when he had not yet made earth and fields or the world’s first bits of soil. 27 When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30 then I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, playing before him always, 31 playing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”

Into the Scripture

Proverbs is a collection of wisdom sayings often ascribed to King Solomon, as the beginning of the text (Proverbs 1:1) makes clear: “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel.” However, scholars posit that it is an anthology, written by several different authors and compiled over centuries, as a treasury of received wisdom. The book is concerned with influencing the reader to pursue the path of wisdom, which is personified in the text this week as Wisdom, a personification that you might find referred to by the names Sophia, Lady Wisdom, Woman Wisdom, or just Wisdom.

The figure Wisdom has many interesting connections to Jesus. Since Jesus was not a created being, it stands to reason that he was present for creation, along with Sophia. Gnostics, an early Christian movement interested in secret, revealed meanings in the Bible, saw Sophia as being the feminine part of Christ or God, and have said that Sophia is Christ’s bride. The late Marcus Borg makes perhaps the most interesting connection between the two, calling Jesus the “wisdom of God: Sophia become flesh.”¹

Sophia has two speeches in Proverbs. Our text is the second of these speeches and sheds light on the book’s

argument about why the well-lived life is spent in pursuit of wisdom. God created the world in wisdom, creating her as the “first of [God’s] acts of long ago” (verse 22). Because God’s creation is imbued with wisdom, and we are creatures of this God, it is our calling to seek after wisdom, and in so doing conform ourselves to the will of God. This can be summed up in Lady Wisdom’s first speech at the beginning of the book: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7a).

Proverbs, along with Ecclesiastes and Job, forms a part of the Bible often referred to as “wisdom literature,” a genre common in the ancient Near East. While the theological suppositions of Proverbs make it clearly a biblical work, you can find similar writings in many Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources. One of the best-known examples that likely had some influence on the much-later *Proverbs* is *The Instructions of Shuruppak*, a Sumerian source written around 2500 BCE as advice from a father to a son about a range of issues. That source was widely circulated long after it was originally put on clay tablets, serving as a sort of classic that would go on to influence the genre.

Wisdom Literature is the closest that the Bible comes to philosophy, seeking earnestly after truth and placing

that truth within a metaphysical context to generate meaning. If Socrates says that truth matters because the well-lived life with dignity is impossible without it, for the author of Proverbs an orientation towards truth is required for us to live out our calling as creatures of God to be in union with God's will.

Into the Lesson

One of the main ways that God seeks to inspire awe in the Bible is with a narrative recounting of creation. To be frank, there is nothing quite as impressive as creating something from nothing, so I understand the impulse. Here, Sophia plays that role, as a “master worker” alongside God:

When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above, when he
established the fountains of the deep, when he
assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters
might not transgress his command, when he
marked out the foundations of the earth, . . .
(Proverbs 8:27-29)

Compare that telling of God's creative power with Job 38:4-11:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of
the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements—surely you
know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On
what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cor-
nerstone when the morning stars sang together

and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Or
who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out
from the womb?—when I made the clouds its
garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and
doors, and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and
no farther, and here shall your proud waves be
stopped?’”

It is striking and important that both passages occur in the Wisdom Literature of the Bible. What could these accounts of God be telling us about the nature of wisdom? In Job's case, the answer seems to be that while awful things may happen in life, there exists a divine order that is in place, even when it doesn't feel that way. In the case of Sophia's speech in *Proverbs*, the meaning seems to be that Sophia is important in the story of creation. Indeed, wisdom is the first creation of God and is therefore senior to all other creations. Whether we like it or not, we are going to have to listen to what Lady Wisdom has to say. Just as God created the world with order and wisdom—wherein every living thing has its place—it is wisdom to know our place in the song of creation.

But following what Wisdom teaches is easier said than done. Her work might be foundational to the ordering of the cosmos, but in our daily lives wisdom often eludes us. We have myriad choices before us and do not always pick the one that most aligns with wisdom and God's will for our lives. There are competing ideas about what the well-lived life means, but the good news is that almost all these competitors to the way of truth existed in antiquity just as surely as they do now. People were just as likely back then to order their lives around



Does not wisdom call and understanding
raise her voice? (Proverbs 8:1)

luxury, beauty, vanity, self-interest, and money as they are now. We oftentimes fall prey to the idea that the people of the past were not like us—that they could not understand us, nor we them—but the truth is that very little about human nature has changed over the last several thousand years. It is this central fact that allows scripture like Wisdom’s speech to speak to us so clearly in the present day.

Into Discipleship

At the start of my ministry, I probably knew more than I do right now. By that I mean that the books that I had read were still fresh in my memory and I could read some Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. And yet, when I started pastoring my first church, I continually made mistakes and misjudged situations, much to my laughter a decade later. I had plenty of knowledge, but I lacked wisdom. The traditional formulation says that knowledge and experience are necessary for wisdom. That makes sense. If you were to close your eyes and imagine someone who is wise, you would probably imagine a grandparental figure. The truth is that wisdom is not just about experience, either . . . it is about compassion as well, and compassion is something we can develop and use no matter what age we are. Young people can be wise, too!

But cultivating wisdom and empathy requires a conscious decision to pursue those virtues in a world where there are plenty of distractions and even other worthy things to chase. If anything, our passage demands that we answer one basic question: Are we heeding Wisdom’s call in our daily lives? The only way to do so is to choose to love others and demonstrate compassion towards

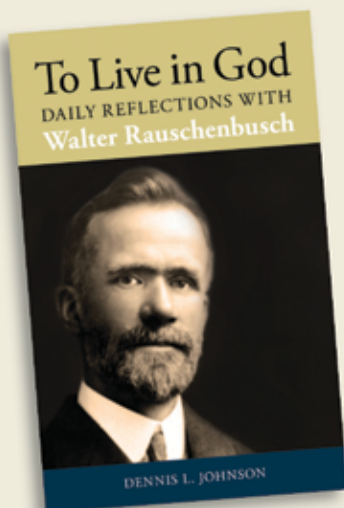
them. Just like in antiquity, there is a lot of suffering in our world, but how we respond to that suffering makes a great deal of difference. Do we acknowledge it, learn from it (if possible—not all suffering is a learning event), and recognize the pain in others and come alongside them to help bear it? If so, we are developing wisdom—a true understanding that we are linked together by a great thread of being that is connected to God.

Borg, in his writing about Sophia and Christ, argues that there are two kinds of wisdom represented in literature: conventional and subversive. Jesus and Sophia, he argues, embody subversive wisdom. They are countercultural in the best way possible, striving to make us see the flaws inherent in our society and our personal lives to move us closer to what God would have for us—flourishing. In that way, Wisdom is in direct opposition to two ways of being that seem to dominate our current emotional and political landscape: rashness and anger.

Flourishing lies on the other side of anger, a powerful emotion that our society is placing a great deal of emphasis on at the present time. But I would argue that there is conventional wisdom embodied in this passage from Proverbs as well. It is not only good for our souls to forego rashness and anger; it is also good for us from a health perspective. A 2024 report from the National Institutes of Health demonstrates that anger is bad for your heart, something that Wisdom already knew. Let us move beyond anger and towards the wisdom that God has for us.

Note

1. Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (HarperCollins Publishers e-books, 1994), 96.



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Closing Prayer

Oh God who granted us wisdom, help us to order our lives according to your perfect wisdom. Let us be slow to anger, quick to forgiveness, and ever willing to search for knowledge and wisdom in our lives. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- Have you ever noticed the appearance of Lady wisdom in scripture?

Into the Lesson

- What does it mean to you that Wisdom was with God when God created the universe?

Into Discipleship

- What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? When have you experienced this difference?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- “Christ the Wisdom of God,” lyrics by Isaac Watts: https://hymnary.org/text/shall_wisdom_cry_aloud
- “Keep Silence, All Ye Sons of Men,” lyrics by Francis Vincent Novello: https://hymnary.org/text/keep_silence_all_ye_sons_of_men

Media Option

Poem: You may access “My Wisdom” by Naomi Shihab Nye at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/149740/my-wisdom>. Refer to the text below.

Babies want to help us
They laugh
for no reason

*

Pay close attention to
a drop of water
on the kitchen table

Activity Idea

Make a list of things that you have learned in your life. They can be profound, or they can be silly, like “never use balloons in kids’ activities, someone will always end up crying.” Ask each other how you learned that wisdom? How did you gain that experience?

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Trinity Sunday (First Sunday After Pentecost)

Week of June 15, 2025

Sunday, June 15

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 and Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

Monday, June 16

Psalm 124; Proverbs 7:1-4; Ephesians 4:7-16

Tuesday, June 17

Psalm 124; Proverbs 8:4-21; Ephesians 5:15-20

Wednesday, June 18

Psalm 124; Daniel 1:1-21; Luke 1:46b-55

Thursday, June 19

Semi-continuous: Psalms 42 and 43; Genesis 24:1-21; Romans 2:17-29

Complementary: Psalm 22:19-28; Isaiah 56:9-12; Romans 2:17-29

Friday, June 20

Semi-continuous: Psalms 42 and 43; Job 6:14-30; Galatians 3:15-22

Complementary: Psalm 22:19-28; Isaiah 57:1-13; Galatians 3:15-22

Saturday, June 21

Semi-continuous: Psalms 42 and 43; Proverbs 11:3-13; Matthew 9:27-34

Complementary: Psalm 22:19-28; Isaiah 59:1-8; Matthew 9:27-34



BLESSED?

one person's miracle is another's disaster

Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region
of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them,
for they were seized with great fear.

—LUKE 8:37a

Introduction

Jesus' healing of the demoniac is a powerful story of Jesus' capacity to heal, not just spiritually but socially. The demon-possessed man was kept in chains and cut off from his community, but by the end of the story he was able to be included. The story tells us much about how God sees the world. Where we value the lives of the many over the few, God is continually reaching out to the least of these.

Lesson Objectives

- To learn more about Luke's intention in writing the Gospel.
- To understand how the demoniac's healing offers inclusion to Gentiles.
- To see how God's logic is not like our own—and that's a good thing.

Luke 8:26-39 NRSV

26 Then they arrived at the region of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. 27 As he stepped out on shore, a man from the city who had demons met him. For a long time he had not worn any clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him, shouting, at the top of his voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me,” 29 for Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many times it had seized him; he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the wilds.) 30 Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” He said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. 31 They begged him not to order them to go back into the abyss. 32 Now there on the hillside a large herd of swine was feeding, and the demons begged Jesus to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. 33 Then the demons came out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd stampeded down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. 34 When the swineherds saw what had happened, they ran off and told it in the city and in the country. 35 Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they became frightened. 36 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been possessed by demons had been healed. 37 Then the whole throng of people of the surrounding region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged that he might be with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you.” So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.

Into the Scripture

Luke forms part of what scholars call the Synoptic Gospels, a term that refers to the fact that they all draw from some of the same sources and are similar. Both Matthew and Luke use Mark as a source, as well as a sayings Gospel that has not been found yet called Q. In addition, they add some of their own unique sources. In Luke’s case, that means an increased focus on both women and the poor, both of whom receive more attention in this gospel than in any other. Luke was written around 80 CE, about twenty years after Mark.

Originally, it was paired with Acts of the Apostles, more commonly referred to as Acts, to make a book called Luke–Acts; but later, Christians decided to separate the narrative of Jesus’ life from the history of the early church that is found in Acts.

The author is unknown, though it is commonly ascribed to Luke, a physician who is mentioned as a companion of Paul’s in Philemon 24, Colossians 4:14, and 2 Timothy 4:11. As such, Luke freely admits that he was not present for the events that he relayed in the gospel, instead endeavoring to produce an almost

historical account from eyewitnesses. Consider the author's introduction to the text, which is unlike any other found in the New Testament:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4, NIV)

Luke was writing to Theophilus, either a well-placed intellectual or bureaucrat with the capacity to positively influence the spread of the Gospel—or the name may simply be a title or a stand-in for other audiences, as *Theophilus* literally means “lover of God.”

What is clear is that more than any other work in the New Testament, the author was at pains to make the text both approachable and respectable in terms of the standards of Greco-Roman biography. Here, we see the nascent Jesus movement striving for respectability, attempting to be taken seriously in the discussions of the day.

The scene depicted in our reading is one of the most iconic in scripture. Jesus cast out demons, which entered a herd of pigs and dove headfirst off the cliff. The imagery is vivid and identifies Jesus as both a skilled wonderworker and someone whom demons fear. However, the text is clear that demons are not the only beings that fear Jesus—the villagers that had known this man for a long time also came to fear him for different reasons, and it is that fear that is some of the most interesting in the text.

Into the Lesson

The text is rich in meaning. Many have written extensively about the meaning of the demon's cryptic naming of itself as legion—“for many demons had entered him” (verse 30c). It is likely not an accident that the demoniac used a Roman military term to name his affliction. He was dominated by demons in much the same way that the Roman Empire dominated Palestine at the time . . . an unwanted presence that extracted resources and placed burdens upon the populace, especially the peasantry.

Demonic possession was a somewhat common affliction in the ancient Near East, and scholars think that it is perhaps analogous to concepts of mental illness in our culture, representing a different cultural understanding of many of the same conditions. Demons could attach themselves to persons, and the results were often dire. In this case, the man had become an outcast from his community: “For a long time he had not worn any clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs. . . . he was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles” (verses 27b, 29b, NRSVUE). Considered a danger, he was kept as a prisoner with outer chains, but the real jailor was inside of him.

Thus, the casting out of demons ought not be considered only a mental or physical healing miracle but a social one as well. This is symbolized by Luke's portrayal of the possessed man as being naked at the start of the story, and “sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind” (verse 35) after Jesus' healing miracle. He had been restored to his full faculties and could be recognized as a social being again. Oftentimes, we can forget that we are not just physical and spiritual beings, but social ones as well—and sometimes our communities and societies need healing just as much, if not more, than our bodies.



The text is clear that demons are not the only beings that fear Jesus.

Another important part of this story is that it took place in a Gentile region—the region of the Gerasenes. It is one of the only portions of the Bible that deals with ministry to Gentiles in an explicit way, and it appears in all the Synoptic Gospels. The clues to this are not just geographical. The villagers kept a herd of swine, unclean animals for Jews, marking them as outside of the Jewish world. The keeping of pigs was likely the village's primary source of income, a labor-intensive activity with substantial initial investment.

That makes the ending of the story even more important. Jesus told the demoniac, “Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you” (verse 39a). And he did so, “proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him” (verse 39b). In effect, we have a story about how the Gospel came to the Gentiles, making the demoniac one of the first missionaries in a new field. This is a substantial rebuke to the idea that Jesus came only to the Jews, an argument that was common in the early church, with Paul being the primary proponent of a perspective that sees Jesus as being for everyone.

In essence, we have much for which to thank the demoniac. In his story we find our own, as most of us would be considered Gentiles from the perspective of the authors of the New Testament. His healing and subsequent proclamation show that Jesus crossed boundaries, widening the reach of the early church and making a space for us to glorify the works of God.

Into Discipleship

While the demoniac gained much through Jesus' action, there is little wonder at the villagers' reactions. Jesus, an outsider and a Jew, had entered their town and immediately set about destroying their main source of income in dramatic fashion. While the narrative immediately pushed our attention towards the healed man, who was now not only empowered to live a normal life but was a preacher of the Gospel, the fact is that many of the villagers have lost everything and likely wished that their lives could go back to the way that they were before Jesus' intervention.

What seems clear is that God's logic does not work the way ours would. Most of us likely have some sort of utilitarian sense that the needs of the many must outweigh the needs of the few. But in God's kingdom,

it is the lost, the lowly, the sinners, and the outcasts that have primacy. There is one parable that helps us to make sense of this passage:

Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost. (Matthew 18:10-14, NRSVUE)

The demoniac is a “little one,” and for Jesus that means that his life is worth everything, even the discomfort and financial ruin of a whole community. We see time and time again that God acts to reverse our logics and invites us to see things differently.

The demon-possessed man had little value to his society. He was dangerous, even. Yet, when Jesus arrived on the scene his perception of the situation was different. He saw with new eyes, eyes of compassion. Our task as believers is to amend our ways of seeing the world to match God's. We suffer under myriad optical illusions and delusions about our world, erecting walls between those who have and have not, ascribing worth to some and withholding it from others. Yet, God does no such thing. God sees beyond all the things we think are so important to view their true essence as beloved. Learning to see in this way, we not only change our actions but also our hearts.

This ought to make us pause. When we consider what a miracle is, we oftentimes think of that as an unalloyed good. Who doesn't want a miracle? But for the pig farmers in the region of the Gerasenes, Jesus' visit was an unmitigated disaster. We may not be as good at spotting miracles as we think we are. For me, this story changes my perspective. Instead of dwelling on the fact that I am going through a difficult moment, the reality might be that I am witnessing a miracle—just not the one I was prepared for, and not for me. That doesn't make it any less beautiful or meaningful, if I am willing to change my vision to be more like God's.

Closing Prayer

Living God, you break down every barrier through your wonderful love for us. Help us to be a part of healing this world—physically, socially, and spiritually. Let us be instruments of your peace. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- Do you have confidence in the Gospel-author's method in writing the Gospel?

Into the Lesson

- How do you understand stories about demons in scripture?

Into Discipleship

- Does reframing what a miracle looks and feels like help you feel more a part of God's great actions in the world?

Resources

Song to Consider

"Silence! Frenzied, Unclean Spirit," sung by the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church Virtual Choir (lyrics found in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, #264): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH1_fvg3Y1k&t=21s

Media Option

Poem: You may access "Miracles" by Walt Whitman (read by Tom O'Bedlam) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qh_Q2oC9cMQ. Refer to the text below.

Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the
edge of the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with anyone I love, or sleep in the bed at
night with anyone I love,
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,

Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer
forenoon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining
so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in
spring;
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.

To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread
with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.

To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the
waves—the ships with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?

Activity Idea

Make a list of something that your group would consider miraculous—perhaps everyone in your community is housed and has enough to eat. Now, what would you personally be willing to give up to effect that miracle? What cost is too high to pay? How do you know what the limit is?

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Second Sunday After Pentecost Week of June 22, 2025

Sunday, June 22

Proper 7 (12): 1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a and Psalm 42 and 43; Isaiah 65:1-9 and Psalm 22:19-28;
Galatians 3:23-29; Luke 8:26-39

Monday, June 23

Semi-continuous: Psalm 59; 2 Kings 9:1-13;
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
Complementary: Psalm 64; Job 18:1-21;
1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Tuesday, June 24

Semi-continuous: Psalm 59; 2 Kings 9:14-26;
Ephesians 2:11-22
Complementary: Psalm 64; Job 19:1-22;
Ephesians 2:11-22

Wednesday, June 25

Semi-continuous: Psalm 59; 2 Kings 9:30-37;
Luke 9:37-43a
Complementary: Psalm 64; Ezekiel 32:1-10;
Luke 9:37-43a

Thursday, June 26

Semi-continuous: Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20; 1 Kings 22:29-40,
51-53; 2 Corinthians 13:5-10

Complementary: Psalm 16; Leviticus 9:22-10:11;
2 Corinthians 13:5-10

Friday, June 27

Semi-continuous: Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20; 2 Kings 1:1-12;
Galatians 4:8-20
Complementary: Psalm 16; 2 Kings 1:1-16;
Galatians 4:8-20

Saturday, June 28

Semi-continuous: Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20; 2 Kings 1:13-18;
2:3-5; Luke 9:21-27
Complementary: Psalm 16; Deuteronomy 32:15-27,
39-43; Luke 9:21-27



Where we value the lives of the many over the few,
God is continually reaching out to the least of these.

8 Questions Jesus Asked: Discipleship for Leaders

by Daniel M. Cash and William H. Griffith

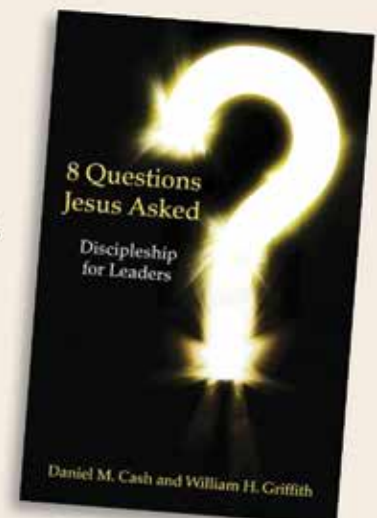
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JUST BEING THERE

the gift of presence

Fifty men of the company of prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan.

—2 KINGS 2:7

Introduction

Elijah is one of the great prophets of the Hebrew Bible, but being a great prophet must be a lonely proposition. Here, we find a touching story of accompaniment through life's greatest travails . . . for Elijah's student, Elisha, refuses to abandon him in his greatest hour of need. Too often we undersell the great power of simply being there for someone, and Elisha demonstrated great wisdom in his strong friendship. May we grow to do likewise.

Lesson Objectives

- To learn more about the ministry of Elijah and Elisha.
- To better understand the relationship between Elijah and Elisha.
- To foster a spirit of accompaniment.

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14 NRSVUE

1 Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. 2 Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. . . . 6 Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them went on. 7 Fifty men of the company of prophets also went and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. 8 Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and the two of them crossed on dry ground. 9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” 10 He responded, “You have asked a hard thing, yet if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” 11 As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. 12 Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. 13 He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. 14 He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water. He said, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah? Where is he?” He struck the water again, and the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha crossed over.

Into the Scripture

The entire book of Kings is split into two parts—1 and 2 Kings—but it was originally one book that focused on historical accounts of the reigns of the kings of, originally united Israel, and then Israel and Judah. As the accounts center on kingship, hence the name of the book, there is also considerable attention paid to the role of prophets, who played a role like court advisers, but could also be a thorn in the side of monarchs, especially if they were not inclined towards justice.

Two prophets made an especially big impact on the narrative of kingship presented in the book—Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was the greater prophet, although his apprentice, Elisha, also has a considerable number of

stories shared in the text. However, in the Jewish tradition it is Elijah that receives eschatological significance, as Malachi 4:6 promises that in the last days “he will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents.” As such, a place at the table is set for the prophet during the Jewish seder, a reminder of his eminent return each year.

Elijah burst onto the scene to announce a drought to the wicked King Ahab and remained a thorn in the side until the very end. After pronouncing ecological disaster and the famine that would result from it, he hid by a stream and was fed by ravens. When the stream dried up, God told him to move on—and it was there at Zarephath that Elijah performed his signature miracle:

encountering a widow who was starving and had only enough flour to prepare one loaf of bread for her and her son before they died. Elijah made it so that the flour would not run out until the famine was over and raised her son from the dead after he collapsed soon after the miracle. It is this miracle that Jesus cites as his rationale for refusing to do miracles in his hometown:

Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months and there was a severe famine over all the land, yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. (Luke 4:24-26, NRSVUE)

Elijah's ministry also foretold the end of the famine and drought in a dramatic clash with the priest of Baal. Here, the prophet proposed a challenge to his adversaries that whoever's deity could send fire to consume an offering would win, revealing that god to be real. Elijah did not hold back in mocking the priests of Baal when their patron did not consume the offering—saying, “Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened” (1 Kings 18:27).

At the end of the battle, Elijah sent a servant to spot a storm cloud far off in the distance and proclaimed an end to the drought, rushing ahead of the chariot that he sent to inform King Ahab in a feat of superhuman agility (see 1 Kings 18:41-46).

Into the Lesson

Our text this week finds Elijah at the end of his ministry. He had seen Israel through the crisis of drought, prophesied the end of King Ahab's line, and fought with Ahab's successors, sending fire to consume the soldiers that were sent to seize him (see 2 Kings 1:1-18). Elijah, Elisha, and indeed the entire prophetic community seemed to have foreknowledge that Elijah would soon be taken to be with God. A portion of the text that has been cut from the lectionary reading for this week reads, “The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, ‘Do you know that today the LORD will take your master away from you?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I know; keep silent’” (2 Kings 2:3).

Elisha has a special place in this story because he was specifically chosen by Elijah to succeed him. He had been training for years for this role, and the relationship between the two must have been quite strong. It is probably not exaggerating to say that the two were best friends, in quite the same way that after traveling three



Elijah's student, Elisha, refused to abandon him in his greatest hour of need. Too often we undersell the great power of simply being there for someone, and Elisha demonstrated great wisdom in his strong friendship. May we grow to do likewise.

years together, Jesus and the disciples must have been quite close with one another.

Understanding that dynamic is key to seeing the tension that is in this passage. Here, Elijah wanted to be alone and admonished his friend and student to stay behind, but Elisha refused. How often do we say what we need? When I was teaching abroad in China for a summer, I remember distinctly teaching that it is customary to respond that one is “well” or “fine” or “good” when asked “How are you doing?”—regardless of whether any of the above words accurately describe your present condition. So much of our society is built around not showing our pain or woundedness to others.

Elisha was headstrong and did not listen. Perhaps this is the first time that he disobeyed Elijah—we do not know. What we do know is that he was rewarded for it. I’m not sure what to make of that, except to say that how we respond to a situation is context-dependent and based on the relationship between the two parties. Elisha must have felt strongly that either he wanted to be there to see what was about to take place, or that Elijah should not have to go through this final chapter of his ministry alone.

What is clear is that his grief was palpable. Upon seeing his teacher taken up in the whirlwind to heaven, “Elisha kept watching and crying out, ‘Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!’ But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces” (2 Kings 2:12). “The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” is a traditional cry of anguish and lament that was repeated upon Elisha’s death by the king of Israel in 2 Kings 13:14b. Likewise, the tearing of clothes is repeatedly used to symbolize intense grief in the Bible and is a traditional marker of distress.

Into Discipleship

I’ve been a pastor for more than a decade and one of the key parts of the job is often invisible to others—accompaniment. Simply being there for someone and listening is a powerful spiritual force, reminding us that none of us must do it all alone. We can find succor and respite in one another, as God intended for us.

When I read Elijah’s story, I can’t help but think that this account is sanitized a bit. Sure, Elijah was a major prophet and had been through a lot, but surely even the strongest people struggle with the reality of death. In our text, we see Elijah determined to see out this last act of his

ministry alone. Perhaps that is because Elijah had shared another part of his story with Elisha: “But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: ‘It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors’” (1 Kings 19:4).

This description was shared directly before Elijah heard God’s voice in the “sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:12). Surely, that story in which God is revealed to be present (not in great fires or earthquakes but in silence) is something that Elijah would have passed on, but would he have also told his disciple of his despair and his wish to die? Would he have passed on the fact that, by all appearances, he contemplated suicide?

If so, then Elisha was truly worthy of the “double share of [Elijah’s] spirit” (2 Kings 2:9b) that he asked for, because his wisdom was profound. Indeed, the beginning of wisdom is truly listening, and if Elijah did share his battle within himself before hearing God’s voice, then Elisha’s refusal to leave the prophet alone at the end of his life makes perfect sense. Indeed, his stubbornness transcended pigheadedness and became something closer to deep, enduring love.

Elisha’s example teaches us that there is so much suffering in this world, but one of the things that compounds that suffering is loneliness. No one deserves to go through death or injury or any other difficult thing without a listening ear and a compassionate presence. Yet so many do. The Surgeon General has recently called loneliness an epidemic, and in recent years half of Americans say they have experienced loneliness.¹ As Christians, we must ask ourselves what we are doing to accompany people through their lives. Do we create spaces that are safe for sharing difficult experiences? Are we judgment-free and non-anxious when people share their suffering? Or do we rush to find solutions?

Accompaniment is one of the greatest things that we can offer another person. In simply being there for one another, we offer God’s love to each other, helping us to remember that no matter where we go or what we do, we don’t have to be alone. It can feel so easy to forget that in our journeys through life, but if we are lucky, we both have and can become tenacious people like Elisha to offer their steady presence, no matter what.

Note

1. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>.

Closing Prayer

God of accompaniment, you never leave us alone. We are in your world, and you speak to us in a still, small voice. Stir us to accompany others on their journey, a wind at their backs. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- What do you think it felt like to stand up to a king?

Into the Lesson

- How often do you say explicitly what you need?
How often do you hear others stating what they need clearly?

Into Discipleship

- What are some ways that you can practice accompaniment in your life?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- “You’ve Got a Friend in Me” by Randy Newman:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hG-2tQtdIE>
- “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” written by Thomas O. Christolm: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NQKHNP-CI&t=4s>

Media Option

Poem: You may access “Old Friends” by Freya Manfred (read by Kirk Lawrence-Howard) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcZeqljFS44>. Refer to the text below.

Old friends are a steady spring rain,
or late summer sunshine edging into fall,
or frosted leaves along a snowy path—
a voice for all seasons saying, “I know you.”
The older I grow, the more I fear I’ll lose my old friends,
as if too many years have scrolled by
since the day we sprang forth, seeking each other.

Old friend, I knew you before we met.
I saw you at the window of my soul—

I heard you in the steady millstone of my heart
grinding grain for our daily bread.
You are sedimentary, rock-solid cousin earth,
where I stand firmly, astonished by your grace and truth.
And gratitude comes to me and says:
“Tell me anything and I will listen.
Ask me anything, and I will answer you.”

Activity Idea

Appoint a leader to assign your group different tasks to accomplish. Some might be easy, some may be difficult, but make sure at least a few are impossible to complete alone. Ask those with a task that is best suited for two people how it felt trying to accomplish it with only one person. What can we learn about accompaniment from this lesson? Have you ever felt like you had a two-person task but were alone?

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Third Sunday After Pentecost Week of June 29, 2025

Sunday, June 29

Proper 8 (13): 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14 and Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20; 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21 and Psalm 16;
Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

Monday, June 30

Semi-continuous: Psalm 75; 2 Kings 2:15-22; 1 John 2:7-11
Complementary: Psalm 140; Genesis 24:34-41, 50-67;
1 John 2:7-11

Tuesday, July 1

Semi-continuous: Psalm 75; 2 Kings 3:4-20;
Ephesians 5:6-20
Complementary: Psalm 140; Jeremiah 3:15-18;
Ephesians 5:6-20

Wednesday, July 2

Semi-continuous: Psalm 75; 2 Kings 4:1-7;
Matthew 10:16-25
Complementary: Psalm 140; Jeremiah 23:16-22;
Matthew 10:16-25

Thursday, July 3

Semi-continuous: Psalm 30; 2 Kings 4:8-17;
Romans 7:14-25

Complementary: Psalm 66:1-9; 2 Kings 21:1-15;
Romans 7:14-25

Friday, July 4

Semi-continuous: Psalm 30; 2 Kings 4:18-31;
2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Complementary: Psalm 66:1-9; Jeremiah 51:47-58;
2 Corinthians 8:1-7

Saturday, July 5

Semi-continuous: Psalm 30; 2 Kings 4:32-37; Luke 9:1-6
Complementary: Psalm 66:1-9; Zechariah 14:10-21;
Luke 9:1-6

“

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. (Luke 9:1)



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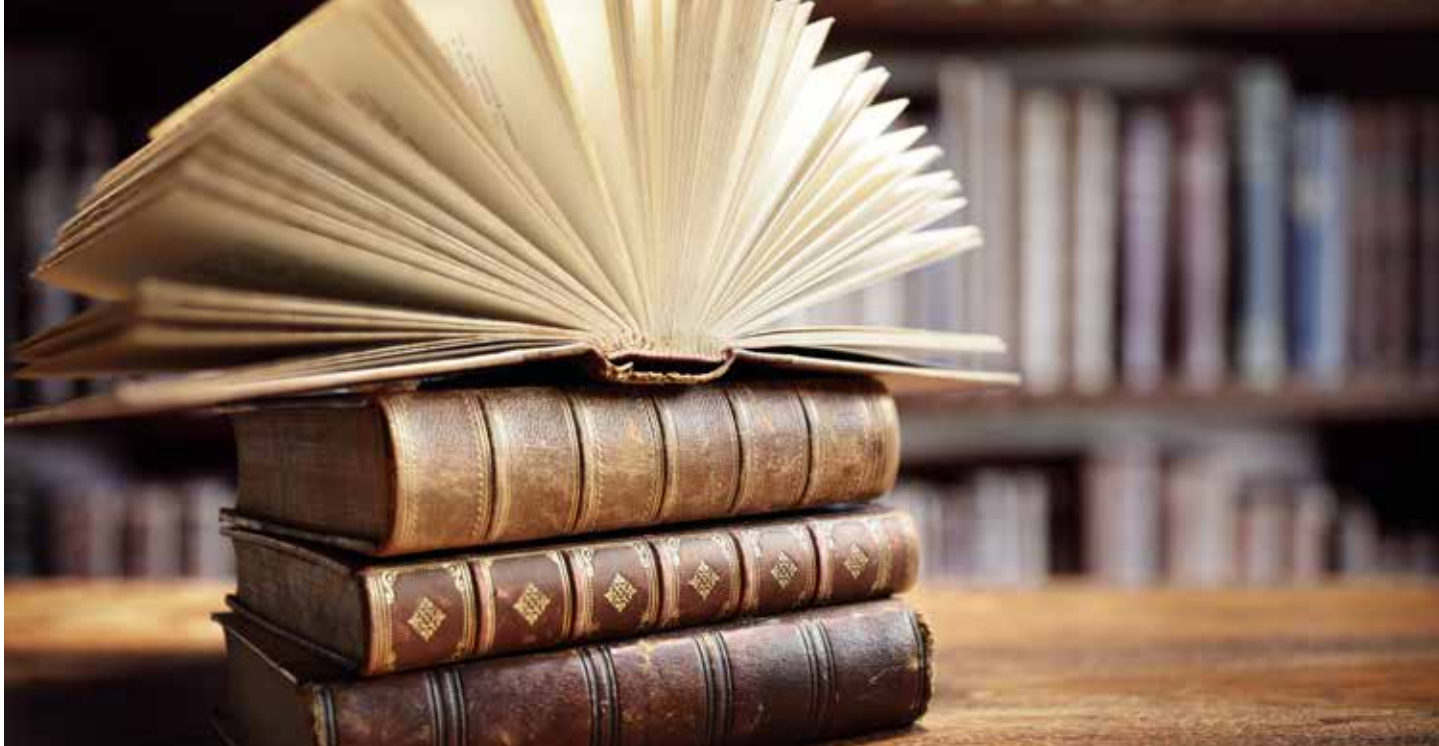
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RESPONSIBILITY

let us do life together

So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

—GALATIANS 6:10

Introduction

We are not meant to experience life in isolation. Whether we are in the valley or on the mountaintop, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we have an obligation to be there for one another. In our passage today, Paul emphasizes mutual support and personal accountability within the Christian community. Life is a journey meant to be shared with family. As God's children, we are all part of the Lord's family. Thus, when we see our spiritual siblings struggle, we should encourage and support them through their trials rather than look down on them. When we show love, compassion, and spiritual support to others, we are likely to receive the same when we need such from others. Life and its issues do not discriminate. One day, we will need others to be there for us.

Lesson Objectives

- To recognize the importance of gently restoring those caught in sin and the biblical approach to correction within the Christian community.
- To explore the necessity of humility and self-awareness to avoid self-deception and pride and commit to doing good, especially toward fellow believers.
- To base one's identity in Christ rather than external religious practices.

Galatians 6:1-16 NRSV

1 My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. 4 All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. 5 For all must carry their own loads. 6 Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. 7 Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. 8 If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 9 So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. 10 So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. 11 See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! 12 It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. 14 May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! 16 As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Into the Scripture

The book of Galatians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to those in the region of Galatia. The Galatians had been experiencing the false teachings of Judaizers, Jewish Christians who taught that Gentiles had to convert to Jewish laws to be saved. Salvation was not just a matter of faith for the Judaizers. To them, salvation also included adhering to the Mosaic Law.

The foundation of the Mosaic Law begins with the Ten Commandments that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. The complete Law is considered to comprise three parts: The Ten Commandments (the moral component), the ordinances (civic laws), and the rules for worship (the ceremonial law). Combined, there were 613 laws for the Israelites to follow. The Judaizers were particularly

concerned about the law of circumcision (see Leviticus 12:3). They believed that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised to confirm their salvation, but Paul opposed this teaching, stressing the importance of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Christians were free from the mandates of the Law.

Paul first addressed freedom of the Law in chapter 2 of Galatians. He wrote, "We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, . . . This was so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified" (Galatians 2:16, CSB). The main idea Paul tried to communicate was that salvation is a result of grace. "You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated

from Christ; you have fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4, CSB). Instead of focusing on works, Paul wanted the Galatians to focus on ways they should interact with one another as Christians. Chapter 6 outlines conduct for Christian living, including providing support to one another, having personal accountability, and remembering the significance of Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross.

Paul instructed the Galatians on how to address sin issues within their community. The goal was not punishment and isolation but healing and reconciliation. Such a loving and gentle approach invites transgressors to repentance while understanding that no one is above faltering into sin. The Galatians were encouraged to “fulfill the law of Christ” (6:2) by bearing one another’s burdens. The law of Christ can be found in Jesus’ recorded words by John: “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another” (John 13:34, CSB). This type of love ensures that no one faces their struggle alone.

In Galatians 6, Paul also invites believers to develop self-awareness by examining their behaviors and avoiding comparing themselves to one another. Personal accountability is a must, even when providing communal support. The personal accountability of Paul’s instructions helps maintain balance so that everyone contributes to the communal well-being rather than only withdrawing from the support that the community provides.

We get back what we give. Paul introduced the Galatians to the principle of sowing and reaping. He explained that individuals will reap what they sow. Those who sow to please their flesh will reap destruction—as nothing good lives in the flesh (see Romans 7:18). However, those who sow to please the Spirit will reap eternal life. In other words, there are long-term consequences for

one’s actions, and we should remain mindful of that fact and live according to the Spirit. Perseverance in our will to do good is essential in our daily lives.

Toward the end of the chapter, Paul reiterates his warning against the teaching of the Judaizers. Those who engage in religious practices for appearance purposes boast about the wrong thing. The only basis we have in which to boast is the Cross. It is through the Cross that the world and Christ were crucified. Paul’s instructions in Galatians 6 should bring peace and mercy to all who follow them.

Into the Lesson

Paul recognized that the Galatians, like us today, would not lead flawless lives. Wrapped in humanity, they would be subject to fall. In chapter 6, Paul instructed the Galatians on handling a fellow believer who has fallen into sin. The first instruction is to handle such persons with gentleness. Gentleness does not mean making excuses for or ignoring sinful behavior but, rather, helping restore that person with love. We must all remain mindful that if we are not careful, we, too, can find ourselves entangled in sin. Thus, helping to restore someone with gentleness means that we do so with compassion, love, and humility while upholding the Christian standard and encouraging repentance.

Offering help to others is also how we assist in carrying their burdens. When people know that they are not alone, they feel a sense of community, belonging, and solidarity. Humility keeps us from developing a prideful attitude. We should avoid having pride that leads to our puffing ourselves up when we help others and making them feel indebted to us—as well as looking down



Helping to restore someone with gentleness means that we do so with compassion, love, and humility.

on those who stumble. When we take a communal approach to sin and others' problems, we reduce the risk of division and discord within the body of Christ. Paul clarifies that communal support does not negate one's individual responsibility to participate in one's restoration (see Galatians 6:5).

Paul encourages believers to share all good things with their instructors. We should value investing in our spiritual growth and honoring those who teach us in the faith. Paul was not suggesting that we pay for blessings. Run from any teacher who claims that you must sow a seed to them for God to bless you. You are already blessed! Rather, be good to those who teach you. That goodness can be in the form of an occasional monetary gift (if you choose, and not out of obligation or coercion). However, that goodness can also be how you treat that person or other behaviors, such as refusing to listen to gossip or to talk badly about that person. The principle of sowing and reaping is that what you put out to others will return to you. Do not do good to others to please your flesh but to please the Spirit. Remember that only what you do for Christ will last.

Life gets hard sometimes. It is easy to want to give up and throw in the towel. Sometimes, we will approach people with love, compassion, and humility, and they will mistreat us or take us for granted. In such instances, it is tempting to become bitter and give up. However, Paul urges believers not to become weary in doing good. He says that when the time is right, believers will reap a harvest if they do not give up. It is not up to us to determine the harvest time—it is up to God. We have a responsibility to do good to everyone, especially our fellow believers. This commitment to doing good reflects the character of Christ and strengthens the Christian community.

Lastly, Paul contrasts external religious practices (e.g., circumcision) with the Cross of Christ. Paul rejected legalism. Our only foundation to boast is what Jesus did on the Cross. "For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation" (Galatians 6:15, CSB). We are to do good works, but it is not our good works that save us. Our good works are not even what identifies us as Christians. Everything points back to the Cross. Paul offers a blessing of peace and mercy to all who follow this rule of living as new creations.

This rule of living as a new creation differs from legalism. A legalistic mindset believes in work. A "grace"

mindset believes in the work of the Cross. Because of our gratitude for Jesus and acknowledgment and appreciation for what he did, we should have the desire to do good to others and live in harmony and community as his representatives. It is not the Law that changes hearts but the transformative power of the Gospel that can bring about lasting change.

In Galatians 6:1-6, 7-16, Paul provides valuable insights into Christian living, instructing believers to live in a way that reflects the love of Christ, supports one another, and remains persistent in doing good. Remembering the Cross is the key to living a Spirit-led life. Although written to the Galatians, this passage has a timeless message that applies to modern-day believers who desire to cultivate a strong, compassionate, responsible, and loving Christian community.

Into Discipleship

Most "churched" people have heard someone say a time or twenty that someone else would "reap what they sowed." Chances are, this statement was made in a self-righteous manner, and maybe with pleasure, about an impending punishment coming to someone who has done something wrong. The woman who slept with a married man . . . the person who stole something . . . the individual who hit a parked car and left without leaving a note—these are all examples of injustices, and it can be comforting to say, "They will reap what they sow" because the statement gives a sense of moral judgment that God will right a wrong! Instead of using the principle of reaping and sowing as a punitive remark, let us view the principle from an altruistic perspective, applying it to the entire chapter of Galatians 6, using verse 2 as the thesis: "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

The law of Christ asserts that we are to love one another (see John 13:34). Love is the foundation from which we can implement the instructions Paul gave to the Galatians. If we love others, we do not want to see them suffer alone, no matter the cause of the suffering (i.e., personal sin or life). We should have an attitude that when the devil messes with one of us, he messes with us all. We would not sit back and watch anyone attack our biological family or our close friends, regardless of their salvation. Saved or not, if our loved ones need us, we are there. Likewise, we should be there for our brothers and

sisters in Christ. Yet, we often approach our communal gatherings as a place of pretense. We do not want the “church folk” in our business, so we put on masks . . . pretending that we have it all together. When someone dares to be transparent, we are surprised that the person would be so open with the saints. Yet, Christians are the very people with whom we should feel comfortable exposing our flaws.

Sometimes, we see someone fall into sin and think that person should have known better. You are right . . . they should have! In fact, they did, but they faltered anyway. Now what?

Our response should not be to list the wouldas, shouldas, and couldas but, rather, to speak words of encouragement to invite restoration. No matter how well we know the Word or how long we have been walking with Jesus, we all fall short. There is no saved person without sin. The difference between the saved and unsaved is that salvation ensures that we do not experience the eternal penalty of sin because of Jesus’ death on the Cross. Having a loving and compassionate attitude toward those who fall and helping to bear their burdens require us to remember our own humanity.

This humanity is what should keep us humble as we help restore others.

Instead of thinking about reaping and sowing from a punitive standpoint, think about it from an eternal one. God showed love and compassion for us, which is why Jesus died for our sins. We have received what we should freely give to others. This level of reciprocity is our Christian responsibility. We should create safe spaces for others to share, and we should have a safe space to share. Let us never lower the standard to excuse or make room for sin. Rather, we should help lift others to the standard. Living in Christian community will not be easy, but it is possible with the Lord’s help. The first step is to surrender your will to God’s and ensure that you understand the Word correctly so that no Judaizer-like individuals can misguide you.

Resources Cited

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Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you for giving us your Word as a standard to guide our daily lives. Help us to apply the principles Paul shared in our interactions with others. When others fall, we want to be there to support them. When we fall, help others restore us. Most importantly, help us remember the sacrifice that Jesus made on the Cross for us. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- What are some false teachings that our modern-day churches face?
- What scriptures can you use to dispel these false teachings?

Into the Lesson

- How can believers avoid developing a prideful attitude when helping others?

- Compare a legalistic mindset with a “grace” mindset. What are some key differences, and how can we ensure that we maintain a proper perspective without making a mockery of God’s grace?

Into Discipleship

- Reflect on a time when you mishandled someone who shared a struggle. Without violating that person’s anonymity, what would you do differently if given the chance for a redo? Or think about a time when someone mishandled a struggle you shared. What do you wish you would have gotten from that person that you did not receive at that time?
- How do you discern between false and true teachings of the Word?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- “Lead Me to the Cross” by Hillsong United: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_24IdbJ0Tw

- “Lean on Me” by Bill Withers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOZ-MySzAac>
- “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love” by Jars of Clay: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CI4qefRAi4>

Media Options

- *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- **Movie:** *Pay It Forward* (2000), directed by Mimi Leder

Activity Ideas

- Provide each of the participants with a small card and ask them to write down a personal burden or challenge they face (anonymously, if preferred). Collect and redistribute the cards, ensuring that each participant receives someone else’s card. Then, in pairs or small groups, have them discuss ways to support one another in prayer, encouragement, and practical help.
- Create a support network within the class. The students are to list their strengths. Devise a document with each person’s strengths and preferred contact information and distribute it to the class. Explain that no one should share another person’s contact information or offer that person’s strengths to others without first getting permission.

Baptist Connection

Consider ABC-related websites for activity ideas and resources connected to your lesson—ABCUSA, ABHMS, IM, BJC, etc.

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

Week of July 6, 2025

Sunday, July 6

Proper 9 (14): 2 Kings 5:1-14 and Psalm 30; Isaiah 66:10-14 and Psalm 66:1-9; Galatians 6:(1-6), 7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Monday, July 7

Semi-continuous: Psalm 6; 2 Kings 5:15-19a; Acts 19:21-27
Complementary: Psalm 119:73-80; Jeremiah 6:10-19; Acts 19:21-27

Tuesday, July 8

Semi-continuous: Psalm 6; 2 Kings 5:19b-27; Acts 19:28-41
Complementary: Psalm 119:73-80; Jeremiah 8:4-13; Acts 19:28-41

Wednesday, July 9

Semi-continuous: Psalm 6; 2 Kings 6:1-7; Luke 10:13-16
Complementary: Psalm 119:73-80; Joshua 23:1-16; Luke 10:13-16

Thursday, July 10

Semi-continuous: Psalm 82; Amos 1:1-2:3; James 2:14-26
Complementary: Psalm 25:1-10; Genesis 41:14-36; James 2:14-26

Friday, July 11

Semi-continuous: Psalm 82; Amos 2:4-11; Acts 7:9-16
Complementary: Psalm 25:1-10; Genesis 41:37-49; Acts 7:9-16

Saturday, July 12

Semi-continuous: Psalm 82; Amos 2:12–3:8; John 3:16-21
Complementary: Psalm 25:1-10; Leviticus 19:1-4, 32-37; John 3:16-21



EMPATHY

be the good Samaritan

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”

—LUKE 10:27

Introduction

In Luke 10:25-37, a lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by asking him about the Law, and the lawyer correctly recited the commandment to love God and love our neighbors. When the lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor” (verse 29), Jesus shared the parable of the good Samaritan. In this parable, several people passed by a man who was beaten and left for dead, but one person stopped to help. Jesus asked the lawyer who was the man’s neighbor, and the lawyer indicated that it was the one who showed mercy. The parable shared by Jesus emphasizes that love and compassion are boundless and transcend social, ethnic, and cultural boundaries. We are to have compassion for our next-door neighbors as well as our neighbors in other countries. Compassion should undergird our interactions with one another.

Lesson Objectives

- To reflect on and challenge their own prejudices and biases.
- To recognize the importance of showing mercy and compassion to everyone, no matter a person’s background.
- To apply learning and create merciful and compassionate communities.

Luke 10:25-37 NRSV

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” 27 He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” 29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ 36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Into the Scripture

The “Good Samaritan” is a parable well known by believers and unbelievers alike. Samaritans were from the region of Samaria, north of Jerusalem. The Jews did not associate with Samaritans because of their mixed races and religious practices. According to *GotQuestions.Org* (<https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-a-Samaritan.html>),

The Samaritans saw themselves as the keepers of the Torah and the true descendants of Israel, from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. They had their own unique copy of the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, and believed they alone preserved the original Mosaic religion. Samaritans also had a unique religious system and established their primary worship site on

Mount Gerizim. They considered the Jerusalem temple and the Levitical priesthood illegitimate.

The tension between the Samaritans and Jews is what makes the parable Jesus shares in Luke 10 intriguing. Statistically, the Samaritan was the least likely of all to help the beaten man—but he was the one who showed mercy.

The man who approached Jesus was a Jewish lawyer, one knowledgeable about the Mosaic Law. He was responsible for interpreting the Law and ensuring that it was applied properly by others. His questions for Jesus were more challenging rather than to seek information. His knowledge of the Law was evident by the way he quickly answered Jesus’ questions correctly.

Luke wrote that the lawyer wanted to “justify himself” (verse 29), so he asked Jesus who was his neighbor.

In other words, the lawyer was being self-righteous, testing Jesus. His question did not derive from inquiry but from arrogance. The question “Who is my neighbor?” (verse 29) was asked irreverently. Like the lawyer’s response to a time when you may have heard someone make a statement and add the word “Duh” after it. At no time in our lifetimes has “Duh” had a pleasant connotation. In addition to being an arrogant question, it was also a rhetorical one. As noted, the lawyer answered all of Jesus’ previous questions, so he proved himself wise in his own mind.

Instead of giving an answer, Jesus told a story where the priest and the Levite passed by someone in need. The priest represented God’s representative. He had the opportunity to show the beaten man kindness. Imagine that the priest in the parable could not stop to help because he was on his way to do “God’s work.” Such would give credence to the saying of being so “heavenly minded that one is no earthly good.” The next person who could have helped the man was the Levite. Legitimate priests were from the tribe of Levi (see Deuteronomy 18:1-8). Both the priest and Levite were considered the spiritual elite. Considering the “royal” bloodline, since the priest did not help the man, surely the Levite should have. *Nope.*

The Samaritan did what God’s representative and the sacred tribe member would not do. The significance of the Samaritan’s behavior shows that he was more neighborly than the ones who knew the Law. There was no camaraderie between the Jews and the Samaritans. Samaritans were also Israelites (see 2 Kings 17), but their

practices differed from those of the Jews’. The willingness of the “Good Samaritan” to extend help to someone across cultural lines serves as an example of how we should treat one another.

The Samaritan went above and beyond to help the traveler, using his own resources to treat the man’s injuries. The Samaritan did not leave the man lying on the ground after bandaging his wounds. He paid for a room at an inn for the man. The Samaritan put aside any prejudices he had to do what was right. He acted out of love toward the traveler. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, NIV).

Into the Lesson

One thing we learn from today’s Scripture is not to be rigid in how we define our neighbor. Although we may also hear terms such as “neighboring street” or “neighboring countries,” for most of us, the word *neighbor* elicits ideas of people who live on the same street, near our homes. Even then, we may only use the term “neighbor” to describe those with whom we associate. Everyone else may be considered generically as someone who lives in the same neighborhood. Describing someone as living in the neighborhood instead of using the word *neighbor* may be a subconscious way of emotionally distancing ourselves from the inherent responsibilities that come with neighboring.

We all have social circles. Like the lawyer in today’s text, we might seek to define those for whom we care



The tension between the Samaritans and Jews
is what makes the parable Jesus shares in
Luke 10 intriguing.

most. Think of someone you love. If you saw that person beaten on the side of the road, no matter what was on your to-do list for the day, you would stop to help that person. If we saw a stranger beaten on the side of the road, most of us would likely be like the priest and the Levite and keep going. If we have time, we may call the police to get the person help and feel good about ourselves for our good deed—but would that be enough?

There are many reasons we can give ourselves for not getting more involved: *It could be a trick. That person might be pretending to be injured to rob us. For all we know, that person could have deserved what happened. We have too much going on in our own lives. We cannot get involved in someone else's drama.*

Most of us may not actually see someone beaten on the side of the road, but we will encounter people in need. Thus, our first point from today's Scripture is to redefine our idea of "neighbor."

Jesus' parable shared with the lawyer illustrates that a neighbor is anyone in need. A neighbor does not need to be related to us by blood or marriage, nor does that person need to live near us. Every person is our neighbor, no matter that individual's ethnicity, religion, or social status. Everyone has value, and when we recognize the inherent worth of all, we are likely to treat others humanely.

Another point that we learn from the lesson today is the insufficiency of legalism. The priest and the Levite were God's representatives. Many people mask their unloving hearts with "good" works. True obedience to God is demonstrated through our actions. We cannot say that we love God and mistreat our neighbors. God is love, and we should be, too.

Finally, we learn that in loving others, we may be called to sacrifice. The Good Samaritan did not give lip service when he acted compassionately toward the traveler. As the saying goes, he "put his money where his mouth was" by his willingness to use personal resources to help the injured man. The Samaritan's act was selfless, like Jesus' selfless sacrifice when He bore our sins on the Cross. As believers, we must sometimes step out of our comfort zones to help someone in need. This type of sacrifice might mean that you do not get the new shoes that went on sale but that, instead, you give to a worthy cause. Maybe you forgo watching your favorite television show one night to pray with someone.

We must remember that love and compassion are conjoined twins. You cannot truly love someone without

also having compassion for that person, nor can you have compassion without love. These conjoined twins have first cousins. One of them is called empathy. Empathy requires putting yourself in another person's place and asking how you would feel if you were in that situation. What would you want someone to do for you?

When speaking to the apostles and instructing them how to interact with their enemies, Jesus said, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). The Jews and Samaritans were not friends. Although the lawyer wanted to put boundaries on his compassion, Jesus' parable indicated the error of the lawyer's thinking. As we saw in today's scripture, sometimes it is your friends (i.e., the priest and the Levite) who will treat you worse than your enemies. To rephrase that line in a better context, sometimes it is the church folk who will treat you worse than the people on the streets. Imagine if the church was filled with people like the Good Samaritan, how much more effective our collective witness would be.

Into Discipleship

Some of you might feel that you already identify with the Good Samaritan. You are the person who will give money to the individual standing at the corner. Maybe you even pride yourself on being the go-to person on whom others call in time of need. Even if you fare on the love-compassion-empathy scale higher than the average person, you might want to reexamine your motives. Are you doing these things to make yourself feel good to build your heavenly résumé? Loving your neighbor as yourself is not a self-serving act but an act that symbolizes selflessness. Even the best of us will have someone whom we would disregard as a neighbor.

Think of a person whom you regard as an enemy. (Hopefully, it is not anyone in your current social setting.) Now, think of someone whom you love tremendously. Chances are, you would be more willing to help your loved one than you would your enemy. This is a natural human propensity. This is how the lawyer felt. He would help a fellow Jew but not a Samaritan.

While our flesh defaults to what is comfortable, the parable of the Good Samaritan encourages us to stretch beyond our comfort zones. Love without limits of whom you are willing to show love. This kind of mindset is not easy, but it is possible.

First, be honest with yourself and God. It is useless

to pretend to love someone whom you really do not love. You might fool that person and others sometimes, but you can never trick God. It is better to be transparent with God about how you feel and then pray for God to soften your heart—which can and will be done. That person may not change or become any easier to love, but another person’s heart change is not up to you. It is your responsibility to keep your heart open for God to transform. Just like with the softening of your heart, God can change another person if that individual is willing. Do not worry about whether the person loves you or others. Your concern should be that you are loving.

Second, you will need to identify the needs of others. Sometimes, people help others but with preconceived notions about the help that another needs. Showing up for our neighbors means letting them tell you their needs. Listen to people and observe their struggles to determine how to best serve. The parable does not indicate that the injured traveler communicated with the Samaritan. However, the Samaritan’s observation of the situation allowed him to give the traveler what he needed. People may not always be able to articulate their needs. This lack of communication underscores the importance of discernment. The Holy Spirit can help

you determine how you can best help others when they cannot share their needs.

Third, you can partner with others. As Christians, we are called to live in community. God did not design human dynamics so that you alone are to meet everyone’s needs. If you were God’s only agent, then God might have designed you to be omniscient and omnipresent like God is. Despite any Marvel movies, we do not have superpowers. Thus, when you work with other individuals in groups or organizations, your collaborative effort can lead to effective and long-term solutions.

Overall, understand that action goes beyond lip service. The Good Samaritan did not pass by the traveler and say something to the effect of “God bless you” or “I am praying for you.” He got involved. While your prayers for others are certainly needed, if you can put your feet and hands to work in addition to your prayers, that will be even better.

Resources Cited

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Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you for the examples you have outlined in your Word that teach me how to treat my neighbors. Give me a broader perspective of my neighbors, helping me to go beyond borders. If there are ways that I am neglecting service, open my eyes so that I may see how you want to use me to help meet others’ needs. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- How can one balance religious duty and compassion?
- What modern-day conflict between cultural and ethnic groups is like the Jews and Samaritans? Explain the root of this conflict.

Into the Lesson

- What reasons do we give ourselves for not helping others in need, and why do we feel justified by such?

- Share an example of a time when you stepped out of your comfort zone or someone you know stepped out of his or her comfort zone to help someone in need. What did you learn from that experience?

Into Discipleship

- How do you evaluate if an act is selfless or sacrificial? Explain.
- What are some potential barriers for you to showing love and compassion without ignoring your own personal needs, and how can you overcome those barriers?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- “Hello, My Name Is” by Matthew West: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GdVZ3JdthFM>
- “Love Them like Jesus” by Casting Crowns: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6OYmmMicsA>

- “Give Me Your Eyes” by Brandon Heath: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5AkNqLuVgY>

Media Options

- *Same Kind of Different as Me*, by Ron Hall and Denver Moore
- *The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers*, by Maxwell King
- *The Hole in Our Gospel*, by Richard Stearns

Activity Ideas

- Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a different scripture related to love and compassion (e.g., Matthew 25:35-40; James 2:14-17; 1 John 3:16-18). Have each group study and present how their passage complements and expands on the lessons from Luke 10.
- Organize a class project to help a local charity or community in need. This could involve volunteering at a soup kitchen, cleaning up a neighborhood, or collecting supplies for those in need.
- Encourage each participant to perform random acts of kindness during the week and reflect on how these acts impacted them and the recipients.

Baptist Connection

Consider ABC-related websites for activity ideas and resources connected to your lesson—ABCUSA, ABHMS, IM, BJC, etc.

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Week of July 13, 2025

Sunday, July 13

Proper 10 (15): Amos 7:7-17 and Psalm 82;
Deuteronomy 30:9-14 and Psalm 25:1-10;
Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

Monday, July 14

Semi-continuous: Psalm 7; Amos 3:9-4:5; James 2:1-7
Complementary: Psalm 25:11-20; Job 24:1-8; James 2:1-7

Tuesday, July 15

Semi-continuous: Psalm 7; Amos 4:6-13; 1 John 3:11-17
Complementary: Psalm 25:11-20; Proverbs 19:1-17;
1 John 3:11-17

Wednesday, July 16

Semi-continuous: Psalm 7; Amos 5:1-9;
Matthew 25:31-46
Complementary: Psalm 25:11-20; Ecclesiastes 9:13-18;
Matthew 25:31-46

Thursday, July 17

Semi-continuous: Psalm 52; Amos 5:10-17; Hebrews 5:1-6
Complementary: Psalm 15; Genesis 12:10-20;
Hebrews 5:1-6

Friday, July 18

Semi-continuous: Psalm 52; Amos 5:18-27;
Ephesians 3:14-21
Complementary: Psalm 15; Genesis 13:1-18;
Ephesians 3:14-21

Saturday, July 19

Semi-continuous: Psalm 52; Amos 6:1-14; Luke 8:4-10
Complementary: Psalm 15; Genesis 14:1-16; Luke 8:4-10



BALANCE

balancing work and worship

“Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”

—LUKE 10:42b

Introduction

In the events of today's scripture, Jesus visited the home of two sisters, Martha and Mary. Martha, the oldest of the two, got to work immediately, cooking and doing all the stuff a good host would do. However, Mary chose to sit and listen to Jesus teach. Mary's lack of involvement in the household duties infuriated Martha, who complained to Jesus. She was overwhelmed and wanted Mary's help. Instead of scolding Mary and instructing her to assist Martha, He told Martha that Mary had chosen to do what was best. Jesus' response to Martha reminds us of the importance of getting spiritual nourishment over being busy.

Lesson Objectives

- To acknowledge the importance of spiritual nourishment.
- To evaluate personal priorities.
- To cultivate habits that create a healthy balance between work and worship.

Luke 10:38-42 NRSVUE

38 Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet and listened to what he was saying. 40 But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her, then, to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things, 42 but few things are needed—indeed only one. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Into the Scripture

Jesus and his disciples were traveling when they entered the village and stopped at the home of Martha and Mary. The village, although unnamed in today's scripture, is Bethany, and Martha and Mary were the sisters of Lazarus (see John 11:1). Earlier in this book, Luke recalls the story of a sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair before kissing his feet and anointing them with expensive perfume (see Luke 7:37-38). As with not naming the village, Luke does not name this sinful woman. However, John identifies the sinful woman as Mary, the sister of Lazarus (see John 12:3). Note that there are some who disagree that the unnamed woman in Luke's account who anointed Jesus' feet and the Mary in John's narrative were the same person. However, the likelihood of two separate, similar, extraordinary incidents happening seems too uncanny and lends to the view that both accounts speak of the same person—Mary, the sister of Lazarus.

The Gospels are scarce of instances where Jesus stopped by to visit people. Jesus had a special relationship with this family. The fact that Martha so comfortably spoke her mind to Jesus indicates the familiarity of their relationship. Jesus loved this family. In fact, Lazarus' death is the only recorded time in the New Testament that Jesus cried (see John 11:35).

As a good host, Martha welcomed Jesus into her home. There is an assumption that she may be the oldest between her and Mary due to her name's being mentioned first. Scripture notes that she welcomed Jesus into "her home" (verse 38), suggesting singular ownership.

Because women were not necessarily known for property ownership due to the customs and laws of the time, some speculate that Martha could have inherited the house via the death of a spouse. How Martha acquired the home is never revealed to us through scripture, but the detail of her homeownership provides context about her behavior.

As the "head of the household," Martha surely felt like everything had to be in order, *especially* for Jesus. We can assume that Martha was not expecting his visit—otherwise, she would not have been working so hard when he arrived. Martha was not upset about Jesus' visit because she "welcomed him." She just wanted to make sure everything was right for him. Undoubtedly, Martha felt honored to have such an esteemed guest in her home. She had to get the house together for Jesus and the disciples, who traveled with him, increasing her meal count by 13! Since this was a time well before instant cleaning and pizza delivery services, someone had to get to work to accommodate the guests.

Mary, on the other hand, was eager to learn from Jesus rather than do for him. She sat at his feet, taking in all the spiritual nuggets he had to share. Recall a great sermon you have previously heard that had you yearning for more exegesis and understanding of the Word. Sometimes, individuals preach in such a way that causes others to hang on to their every word. That is how Mary was with Jesus—sitting at his feet, learning. Knowing her sister, Mary could probably surmise that Martha was upset with her. However, Mary prioritized her time with Jesus over work.

When Martha complained to Jesus that she was doing the work alone, he did not ask Mary to join her. Instead, Jesus shared with Martha that Mary was doing the better work that should not be taken from her. Scripture does not share with us how Martha responded after that. We may wonder if she was convicted to join Mary at Jesus' feet or if she begrudgingly continued the household duties, resenting the rebuke by Jesus.

Into the Lesson

"If the devil cannot make us bad, he will make us busy."—Corrie ten Boom

The above quote summarizes a common issue with many Christians. People have become so busy with service that they miss the importance of spending time with the Lord. Martha illustrates the truth of Corrie ten Boom's quote in today's scripture.

When Jesus and his disciples arrived at her home in Bethany, Martha got right to work. It is safe to assume that her heart was in the right place—she wanted to be a good hostess for her friend and his disciples. How rude would it be to welcome guests but not be hospitable? Her home was obviously a safe place for Jesus, or he would not have gone there. We all have people whom we welcome into our homes and whom we want to feel comfortable. Our homes accurately represent our standards of living, as the regular upkeep (or lack thereof) indicates how organized we are, our cleanliness habits, our preferred food choices, and our decorating proclivities, among other things. The writer made a point to note that the home was Martha's, so it is understandable

that she assumed responsibility for great hospitality. On the surface, Martha's desire to make Jesus and the disciples welcome was not wrong. Martha messed up when she expected Mary to emulate her and then got upset when Mary did not.

To serve was Martha's choice, not Mary's. Martha started feeling some kind of way when Mary did not join her. However, it should not have mattered if Mary joined her or not. When serving, we cannot expect others to be carbon copies of us. Martha arrogantly believed that her service was a badge of honor and that her behavior should be modeled. Mary had her own mind and needs. She chose to sit at Jesus' feet and take in all the wisdom he willingly shared.

Martha was livid! How dare Mary sit around chilling while she did all the work! Martha was not going to hold her tongue. She stomped in to share her woes with Jesus, whose response was not at all what she expected. If she had thought Jesus would rebuke her, she would not have wasted her time complaining to him. She expected Jesus to have her back, but he did not. Instead, he supported Mary's decision to not work and to sit with him. This point brings us to another lesson: we can and should always be honest with the Lord. However, we must always understand that God may have a different perspective on matters. His perspective will always supersede ours.

In rebuking Martha, Jesus told her that Mary had chosen the "better part." Notice that Jesus did not say that Mary had chosen the good part. From this, we can assume that Jesus did not consider Martha's work evil. No doubt, it was a good thing that she was



"If the devil cannot make us bad, he will make us busy."—Corrie ten Boom

serving. Her service was not the *best*, especially given the alternative.

A third point we learn from the lesson is to differentiate between what is good for us and what might be best for us. It is good to aspire to serve but not at the expense of our spiritual development. Sometimes, people can be so focused on *doing* for the Lord that they forget to be present with God. This issue can seem worse the more visible a person is in ministry . . . as individuals become concerned with appearances.

From Mary, we learn the importance of self-awareness and being still. Mary likely helped Martha with household chores in the past, which may explain the expectation Martha automatically had of her. However, Mary had intrinsic needs that serving could not meet. Instead of using work to mask her needs, she chose to bask in the Lord's presence. As we do Kingdom work, we must remember the importance of recharging with the Lord. We are not made to constantly give without being replenished. Just as our physical bodies need consistent rest to avoid burnout, our spirits must also be replenished. Martha could likely hear Jesus speaking while she was working—but unlike Mary, Martha had divided attention. If you find that your time with the Lord is always being multitasked with other activities, it is time to reevaluate your priorities. Ask yourself what you can take off your plate to ensure that you spend time in God's presence. Being with the Lord is the "better part."

Into Discipleship

We have all had times in life when we have identified with Martha. Think of a situation in your service where you may have felt taken advantage of or even a bit resentful because others were not holding their own. Admitting these feelings aloud may not feel good, so do not do it! Rather, silently and internally evaluate the circumstances that evoked these feelings. Likely, you felt justified at the time. So did Martha.

As you evaluate your situation, you may still feel validated. Unlike Mary, those who slacked off with you were not sitting at Jesus' feet. They may not have even been in any time of worship. Whatever the case, they decided to do something different, whether their actions were perceived as right or wrong. So did Mary.

Life requires times when we must work as Martha did and be in the Lord's presence like Mary. Knowing when to work and when to rest is something that each of us must decide. Optimizing our spiritual health requires discipline and balance. We must be careful that we do not overdo Martha mode while neglecting to adopt the methods of Mary.

One suggestion is to evaluate personal priorities. Mary likely knew that there were household chores to complete, but she prioritized her spiritual needs over her need to produce. There is nothing wrong with completing tasks. However, we must be careful not to allow tasks to overshadow our spiritual growth. When we do so, we risk losing intimacy with the Lord.

Building spiritual intimacy requires nourishing our souls through activities such as praying, studying the Word, and worshiping (collectively or individually). Our ministering to others takes a lot out of us. We need to be refilled. One way to ensure that we are being replenished spiritually is for us to create a routine. We have routines regarding our other activities—brushing our teeth, showering, getting dressed; we may even have an evening routine, such as washing our faces before bed or watching the evening news or a special television show. Why not incorporate time with the Lord in your daily routine? For those who struggle with implementing such a routine, try setting a reminder on your phone. Lack of time should not be an excuse. No matter our work or caregiving responsibilities, we all have places where we can shave off time from other activities (if we desire to do so).

Sometimes, we can have good intentions to spend time in the Lord's presence, but then distractions interrupt our plans. Distractions are a part of life. If you can, choose a quiet place in your home and devote that space to your spiritual practices. If a designated space is not feasible, you could try noise-canceling headphones or calming music to block out external distractions. Maybe your life is so hectic that the bathroom is the only place where you can get quiet time. If so, instead of reading a book or scrolling on social media, use that time with the Lord.

You may also need to set clear boundaries to avoid distractions. Make your time with the Lord non-negotiable, especially for those who live in your home who may struggle to understand the significance and

value of the time you take for yourself. Setting self-boundaries is just as important as setting boundaries with others. To help avoid distractions, try putting your phone on mute during the time you set aside to be with the Lord.

Distractions are sure to come. One word summarizes all categories of distractions—life! Like Mary, we must prioritize our activities and ignore distractions. Scripture does not record any rebuttals that Mary gave Martha. Instead, we see that Jesus spoke up for Mary.

When you put the Lord first, trust that God has your back!

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Closing Prayer

Lord, give us the willingness to work and the wisdom to rest. Help us never to prioritize work over being in your presence. We depend on you to help us keep a proper perspective on all matters. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- How do the different reactions of Martha and Mary to Jesus' visit reflect the balance between service and spiritual devotion?
- If you were in Martha's position, how would you have responded to Jesus' rebuke, and what might that reveal about your approach to service and spirituality?

Into the Lesson

- How can we differentiate between what is good for us and what is best for us, especially in the context of our spiritual lives?
- In what ways might we find ourselves multitasking during our time with the Lord, and how can we address this to ensure that we are fully present with God?

Into Discipleship

- What are some personal priorities that might need reevaluation to ensure that your spiritual growth is not overshadowed by daily tasks?
- What strategies do you find effective in minimizing distractions during your time with the Lord?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- "Breathe" by Marie Barnett: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZhUesUaM98>
- "The More I See You" by Kari Jobe: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4crRPqoW4>
- "Draw Me Close" by Michael W. Smith: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7d_oYr-P16M

Media Options

- *Having a Mary Heart in a Martha World: Finding Intimacy with God in the Busyness of Life*, by Joanna Weaver
- *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence
- *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, by Ruth Haley Barton

Activity Ideas

- Ask students to list their daily activities and then rank them in order of priority. Have them reflect on where their spiritual practices fall on the list and discuss ways to ensure that they prioritize time with God.
- Pair students to become prayer partners for a week. Encourage them to pray for each other's needs and support each other in prioritizing time with the Lord.
- Have the participants write a journal entry reflecting on times when they have been like Martha (busy with tasks), and times when they have been like Mary (sitting at Jesus' feet). Encourage them to consider how they can find a better balance between the two.

Baptist Connection

Consider ABC-related websites for activity ideas and resources connected to your lesson—ABCUSA, ABHMS, IM, BJC, etc.

Devotional Scriptures Year C Sixth Sunday After Pentecost Week of July 20, 2025

Sunday, July 20

Proper 11 (16): Amos 8:1-12 and Psalm 52;
Genesis 18:1-10a and Psalm 15; Colossians 1:15-28;
Luke 10:38-42

Monday, July 21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 119:17-32; Amos 7:1-6;
Colossians 1:27-2:7
Complementary: Psalm 119:97-104; Exodus 18:1-12;
Colossians 1:27-2:7

Tuesday, July 22

Semi-continuous: Psalm 119:17-32; Amos 8:13-9:4;
1 John 2:1-6

Complementary: Psalm 119:97-104; Proverbs 9:1-18;
1 John 2:1-6

Wednesday, July 23

Semi-continuous: Psalm 119:17-32; Amos 9:5-15;
John 6:41-51
Complementary: Psalm 119:97-104; Deuteronomy 12:1-12;
John 6:41-51

Thursday, July 24

Semi-continuous: Psalm 85; Hosea 4:1-19; Acts 1:15-20
Complementary: Psalm 138; Esther 2:19-3:6; Acts 1:15-20

Friday, July 25

Semi-continuous: Psalm 85; Hosea 5:1-15; Acts 2:22-36
Complementary: Psalm 138; Esther 3:7-15; Acts 2:22-36

Saturday, July 26

Semi-continuous: Psalm 85; Hosea 1:11-2:15;
Luke 8:22-25
Complementary: Psalm 138; Esther 4:1-17; Luke 8:22-25

COME JOIN US! Judson Press Book Club

Judson Press is excited to invite you to join our monthly book club from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Unless otherwise noted, the Book Club will meet every fourth Monday of the month.

Monthly Highlights

Each month, we will spotlight a Judson Press book and its author, featuring a live discussion in which you can engage directly with the author. The Book Club gatherings will be recorded.

Features of the Judson Press Book Club

- **Author Insights:** Listen to the author's journey and inspirations behind their writing.
- **Interactive Q&A:** Ask questions and share your thoughts with the author.
- **Book Club Showcase:** Highlight your book club during our sessions.
- **Monthly Newsletter:** Receive updates on upcoming events and featured books.
- **Community Engagement:** Discuss ideas and feedback with fellow members.

Book Club Selection

For more information on the book club selection of the month, enrolling, receiving the live stream videos, and purchasing copies, visit judsonpress.com.





UNFAITHFULNESS

divine judgment and future hope

It shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”

—HOSEA 1:10c

Introduction

Hosea was a prophet to whom God gave a difficult assignment. Hosea was instructed to marry Gomer, a prostitute, knowing fully well that she would be unfaithful to him. The marriage of Hosea and Gomer symbolizes the dynamics between Israel and God. Just as Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea by being with other men, Israel had been unfaithful to God by giving themselves over to other gods. They had abandoned their worship of God for false gods. Both Gomer and Israel violated covenants. Despite their unfaithfulness, God still loved Israel. God would judge them but retain a great promise for their future.

Lesson Objectives

- To examine the specific covenant violations committed by Israel that led to God’s judgment as depicted in today’s scripture.
- To analyze the significance of the names given to Hosea’s children and how each reflects God’s message to Israel.
- To apply the lessons learned from Hosea’s story to their own lives, considering how obedience and suffering relate to contemporary contexts.

Hosea 1:2-10 NRSVUE

2 When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, “Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and have children of prostitution, for the land commits great prostitution by forsaking the LORD.” 3 So he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4 And the LORD said to him, “Name him Jezreel, for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.” 6 She conceived again and bore a daughter. Then the LORD said to him, “Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them. 7 But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God; I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.” 8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and bore a son. 9 Then the LORD said, “Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.” 10 Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor numbered, and in the place where it was said to them, “You are not my people,” it shall be said to them, “Children of the living God.”

Into the Scripture

There are several people who stand out in the Bible for their suffering. At the top of the list would be Jesus, of course, for the horrific death he died in our place. Some others who might come to mind are Job (for losing everything), Jonah (for being trapped inside the whale as he tried to escape going to Nineveh), Stephen (who was stoned for his belief in Jesus), and Paul (who spent time in prison). Many others can be added to this list, including Hosea.

Hosea was a prophet whose first recorded encounter with God in the Bible began with a strange request: “Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution” (verse 2, NRSVUE). Hosea was literally told to go marry a whore. Even without knowing what would happen, Hosea could not have thought this was the beginning of marital bliss. God sought to get Israel’s attention via Hosea, and to do this, Hosea needed to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him, as Israel had been unfaithful to God.

Hosea and Gomer consummated their marriage, and she became pregnant. God instructed Hosea to name the first child of their union Jezreel. The name was meant

to illustrate a warning of upcoming punishment for the house of Jehu. Jehu was a former Israelite king who had all the descendants of Ahab killed (see 2 Kings 10). God’s statement in Hosea about punishing the house of Jehu may be confusing on the surface because Elisha prophesied that God would use Jehu to carry out God’s judgment on Ahab (see 2 Kings 9:6-7). Furthermore, the Lord commended Jehu for his actions, stating, “Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation” (2 Kings 10:30, NIV). Thus, it is natural to wonder how God can say one thing after Ahab’s family is killed and another when Hosea’s first child is born. To reconcile Hosea 1:4 and 2 Kings 10:20, theological scholar Peter Goeman noted that the punishment on Jehu’s family was because of their own iniquity. Jehu did carry out God’s judgment, but he also did not turn away from the sin of Jeroboam (see 2 Kings 10:31).

Jeroboam was the first king of Israel after God set apart Jerusalem, a consequence of Solomon’s following after other gods (see 1 Kings 11:11-13). Jeroboam was

an idolater. Before he was used to bring justice to Ahab, the prophet Ahijah prophesied to Jeroboam's wife that Jeroboam would be eviler than anyone who lived before him (see 1 Kings 14:9). Thus, while the passages in 2 Kings 10 and Hosea 1:4 seem contradictory, they are complementary. Hosea's first child, Jezreel, received his name to represent God's judgment.

Hosea's second child, Lo-ruhamah, represented Israel's fall from God's grace. The name means "not pitied." God had withdrawn grace from Israel due to their sins. However, God promised to have pity on the house of Judah, whom the Lord would save (see Hosea 1:7). Hosea's third child with Gomer was a son named Lo-ammi, meaning "not my people." Lo-ammi's name signified God's rejection of Israel.

The first chapter of Hosea ends with a restorative message. In the end, God declared that the Israelites would grow so prominent that they would be unmeasurable and unable to be numbered. The Lord affirmed that although it was once said of Israel that they were not God's people, they would eventually be called "children of the living God" (Hosea 1:10). This declaration gives hope and points to God's unconditional love for His people. As David wrote in Psalm 30:5, "His anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime."

Into the Lesson

Imagine telling your loved ones that you are getting married. They may ask about the person's name and what that person does for a living. You give the name and add that your future spouse is a prostitute. That answer would certainly make for interesting dinner talk . . . *and* gossip!

Yet, this was the reality for Hosea. Since his wife was "a lady of the hour," depending on Hosea's social circle, it is possible that he knew people who knew her *biblically*. What makes the situation even more peculiar is that he married Gomer out of love for and obedience to God. Actor Woody Allen once said, "There are three rings involved with marriage: the engagement ring, the wedding ring, and the suffering." Hosea skipped the first two, experiencing suffering from the moment he said, "I do."

Hosea teaches us that our suffering is not always for us. Hosea did nothing to deserve an unfaithful wife or the embarrassment and pain that she caused him. In Hosea 3, he bought his wife back from her lover. This act was a direct order from God, who instructed Hosea to love Gomer as God loved Israel. When people hurt us, we tend to go into self-protection mode. Gomer had multiple affairs. We may even question if Hosea was the biological father of her children. Lo-ammi's name literally means "not my people." Given the parallelism and symbolism of Hosea and Gomer's marriage to God's relationship with Israel, it is not unreasonable to wonder what a DNA test would have revealed about Hosea's paternity of Lo-ammi and his two older siblings. *Mom's baby . . . Daddy's, maybe?*

Since Hosea and Gomer's relationship happened long before the days of the TV drama *Paternity Court*, we will never know for sure. The point is that Hosea experienced much heartache in his marriage to Gomer, and it was all because God wanted to use him to convey a message to Israel.

When we experience hurtful situations, there is a temptation to turn inward and wonder why God allowed such pain into our lives. We may even inquire about



Both Gomer and Israel violated covenants. Despite their unfaithfulness, God still loved Israel.

God's purpose for such. Hosea teaches us that our pain is not about us. God can certainly use our pain to bring us closer to the Lord or work out some unsavory aspects of our character—but we should look beyond ourselves and ask how God may be using us to help other people. Mother Teresa has been quoted as saying, “I know God will not give me anything I can’t handle. I just wish that He didn’t trust me so much.” Surely, she cannot be the only one who has felt this way!

Hosea also teaches us the importance of obedience to God. Do not worry—the days of God’s instructing someone to marry a prostitute are in the past, so exhale a sigh of relief. God’s message to Israel has been thoroughly documented in the Bible, so God does not have to use you in that way. However, God may use you to show love to someone else who is “unlovable.”

Gomer had been known by many men! Yet, no one liked her well enough to make her his wife. It is realistic and understandable to believe that Hosea did not love Gomer when they first married. He did not know her. However, over time, and the more he began to understand how God was using him, he grew to love her in direct response to God’s command (see Hosea 3:1). Hosea’s love for Gomer stemmed from obedience. Likewise, we are instructed to love one another as the Lord loves us (see John 15:12). There are some people whom we may deem unlovable, but that is not the case in God’s eyes. Hosea’s love for Gomer was not possible without God’s help. Likewise, when we are called to love the “unlovable,” we do not do so in our own strength. We will need the Lord to help us.

Through Hosea, we also learn that there is hope, even when we face God’s judgment. God’s judgment for Israel was pronounced via the names of Hosea’s children. Even still, God assured Israel that they would again be referred to as God’s children one day. God will discipline us for our obedience. The Lord’s discipline is not a form of retribution. Any disciplinary action of God stems from love. The writer of Hebrews affirms this fact: “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son” (Hebrews 12:6, NIV).

There is no mistaking God’s love for Israel. The Israelites are referred to as God’s treasure (see Psalm 135:4) and the apple of God’s eye (see Zechariah 2:8). There is also no mistaking God’s love for you. You are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). Remember that chastening by God is not how your story has to end.

There is always hope for renewal and redemption whenever we stray from the Lord.

Into Discipleship

Applying the lessons from today’s passage in Hosea can be both challenging and transformative. The symbolic names of Hosea’s children represent God’s requirement for obedience, love, judgment, and redemption. The initial purpose of the children’s names was to relate to Israel, but we can also relate the message of Hosea to our current experiences.

One way we emulate Hosea in our contemporary society is to obey even when such is difficult. Sometimes, God requires us to do things that cause much discomfort. Consider the discomfort Hosea experienced by marrying a prostitute who would repeatedly be unfaithful to him, causing him much emotional and mental turmoil. Despite the personal suffering he knew would come, Hosea responded with obedience to God.

Obedience can require us to make the difficult choice to endure hardships, which is contrary to our desire for comfort. In your personal life, you may have to give up some social gatherings, statuses, or even money. These sacrifices may cause discomfort. As Samuel said to Saul after Saul did not follow the Lord’s instructions to destroy the Amalekites, “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22, NIV). There will always be people or desires to tempt us to turn away from God. Although obeying God will “cost” something, the consequences of disobedience are even more dire. Obedience helps us build spiritual resilience. When we cultivate a habit of obeying God, we strengthen our spiritual muscles so that obeying God becomes more natural to us than disobeying God.

Another way to apply the lessons from Hosea is to practice showing forgiveness. Gomer received undeserved grace from Hosea, despite her many acts of infidelity and the shame she caused him. Forgiveness is not easy, especially if the hurt caused by others is intentional and repeated behavior. Yet, as part of our obedience to God, we must forgive others. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32, NKJV). Hosea could not control Gomer’s actions. He responded with God’s grace and obedience to forgive him each time she betrayed him.

God does not hold us accountable for how others treat us but, rather, for how we treat them.

As you evaluate your life and the areas where you may experience what seems like unnecessary suffering, seek to find meaning in your trials. We sometimes wonder why God allows pain in our lives. Think of Job and all he endured. He never knew why God allowed the attack on him. We know because we read that Satan went to God to request permission for the attacks and that God offered Job. You are uniquely designed for the trials that have come your way. Hosea's trial was to marry a prostitute and endure all the heartache she would bring him. There was purpose behind his suffering. Likewise, there is purpose behind yours. God may never reveal to you the purpose behind your suffering as clearly as God did with Hosea. One way you can find meaning and purpose is by seeking to serve through your suffering. Remember that your suffering may not strictly be about you. Look for ways to serve

others to take the focus off you and put it on others and God.

Finally, no matter what is happening in your life, hold on to hope. Amid the judgment of Israel, God promised to restore them. No matter how far you may have strayed from God or how severe the consequences are that you face, redemption is possible with God. Our failures pale compared to the Lord's love, grace, and mercy for us. The Lord wants us to be restored to God.

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Closing Prayer

God, like Israel, there have been times when we have turned away from you. Please forgive us. Cleanse us. Restore us where we have fallen short. May our hearts desire only you and your ways. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- Why do you think God chose such an unusual method to communicate God's message to Israel through Hosea?
- What does the promise of restoration at the end of Hosea 1:10 reveal about God's character?

Into the Lesson

- Hosea's suffering was to convey a message to Israel. Think about something painful that took place in your life. How has God used that situation to help others, even though it has brought you pain?
- How do you depend on God to help you love those who are "unlovable"?

Into Discipleship

- Consider the concept of spiritual resilience. How have difficult circumstances helped you strengthen your spiritual muscles?
- What challenges do you face when forgiving repeated and intentional behaviors? How do you determine when forgiveness involves restoring the relationship or removing toxicity?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- "How He Loves" by the David Crowder Band: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCunuL58odQ>
- "Your Love Never Fails" by Chris Quilala (Jesus Culture): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoezWBPGRAc>
- "Goodness of God" by CeCe Winans: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y81yIo1_3o8

Media Options

- <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-hosea/>

- *Hosea: The Heart and Holiness of God*, by G. Campbell Morgan
- *Redeeming Love*, by Francine Rivers

Activity Ideas

- Separate the class into groups. Have them research one another's names and share the meanings they discover. Discuss if their names accurately represent their characters and why they feel like they do.
- Have the class write letters from Hosea and Gomer's perspectives, discussing how they feel about the situations that occurred in today's Scripture. Allow willing members to share.
- Encourage the class to pray for insight into their own lives regarding faithfulness to God. They should evaluate where they have fallen short and ask God to restore them.

Baptist Connection

Consider ABC-related websites for activity ideas and resources connected to your lesson—ABCUSA, ABHMS, IM, BJC, etc.

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

Week of July 27, 2025

Sunday, July 27

Proper 12 (17): Hosea 1:2-10 and Psalm 85; Genesis 18:20-32 and Psalm 138; Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19); Luke 11:1-13

Monday, July 28

Semi-continuous: Psalm 44; Hosea 2:14-3:5; Colossians 2:16-3:1
Complementary: Psalm 55:16-23; Esther 5:1-14; Colossians 2:16-3:1

Tuesday, July 29

Semi-continuous: Psalm 44; Hosea 6:1-10; Romans 9:30-10:4
Complementary: Psalm 55:16-23; Esther 6:1-7:6; Romans 9:30-10:4

Wednesday, July 30

Semi-continuous: Psalm 44; Hosea 6:11-7:16; Matthew 5:43-48
Complementary: Psalm 55:16-23; Esther 7:7-8:17; Matthew 5:43-48

Thursday, July 31

Semi-continuous: Psalm 107:1-9, 43; Hosea 8:1-14; Romans 11:33-36
Complementary: Psalm 49:1-12; Proverbs 23:1-11; Romans 11:33-36

Friday, August 1

Semi-continuous: Psalm 107:1-9, 43; Hosea 9:1-17; Ephesians 4:17-24
Complementary: Psalm 49:1-12; Proverbs 24:1-12; Ephesians 4:17-24

Saturday, August 2

Semi-continuous: Psalm 107:1-9, 43; Hosea 10:1-15; Mark 10:17-22
Complementary: Psalm 49:1-12; Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; Mark 10:17-22



“To obey is better than sacrifice.” (1 Samuel 15:22)



TRANSFORMATION

bath time with the Trinity

Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

—COLOSSIANS 3:2-3

Introduction

I married my husband in 2020. We had a combined total of seven cats and two dogs. Old man Dexter was a Shih Tzu Terrier mix. My favorite memory of Dexter was his post-bath zoomies. Once you dried him off and released him from the bathroom, he would run around rubbing his face on the carpet and his body on the couch, trying to dry himself. Yes, this made our house smell like a wet dog. It baffled me that this old snaggle-toothed dog, who could not hear and could barely see, would have a burst of energy in those moments. The water changed him. In our text for today, we will explore Paul's words to the Colossians and consider how the waters of baptism change us—unlike with Dexter—permanently.

Lesson Objectives

- To distinguish our faith from culture.
- To reaffirm our baptism (or consider baptism for the first time).
- To accept our unique journey of spiritual transformation without comparison.

Colossians 3:1-11 NRSVUE

1 So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. 7 These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. 8 But now you must get rid of all such things: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices 10 and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. 11 In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, enslaved and free, but Christ is all and in all!

Into the Scripture

Authorship and Dating

The Apostle Paul is attributed with the authorship of the letter to the Colossians. Some scholars debate his ownership of the letter because of the unique vocabulary and link to the letter to Philemon, whose authorship is also questioned. Even so, the early church read Colossians with the authority of Paul.

Most scholars who attribute this letter to the Apostle date the letter around AD 62. In the context of the early church, Paul penned this letter only about thirty short years after Jesus' ascension. Paul composed this letter while in prison, as alluded to in chapter 4, though we do not know where. Based on the timeline of Paul's life, it is likely he was imprisoned in Rome while composing the letter to the Colossians.

Audience and Occasion

The unique aspect of Paul's letter to the Colossians is that he had not met this church, nor did he establish this congregation. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Colossae, modern-day Turkey, because of a visit from Epaphras, his disciple and founder of the predominantly Gentile church.

While Epaphras had mostly wonderful things to say about the Colossians, there were a few problems that he asked Paul to address. "The town was known for its fusion of religious influences (syncretism), which included Jewish, Gnostic, and pagan influences that, in the first century AD, were described as an angel-cult" (<https://www.corner.church/blog/jesus-is-set-apart>). Paul's letter to the Colossians addressed the concerns of Epaphras and encouraged them in their faith amidst a religiously diverse town.

Two Is a Crowd

Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians, a primarily Gentile group. This letter emphasizes problems specific to non-Jewish Christ followers who were a people used to a polytheistic structure. There was a struggle in Colossae with merging culture and faith. Jesus could easily be added to the list of gods they already worshiped, BUT that changes the monotheistic foundation of the Christian faith.

It's Your Funeral

Paul uses beautiful imagery of death and resurrection to point towards baptism. His words inform his readers

of how our baptism creates a permanent change. The Apostle drafts two different lists of behaviors to put off or let die. While I do not believe these are exhaustive lists, I believe these lists represent the heart transformation that Christ's followers experience. Ultimately, the Colossians were called to put to death their habit of synchronizing culture and faith. As one habit ends, a new habit is established.

Birth Story

Paul called the Colossians to live in a new way after their deaths. Much like a baptismal candidate would be clothed in a robe after their immersion, Paul wanted the Colossians to clothe themselves with a fresh start. Unlike the list that detailed actions that Paul wanted to die off, he did not specify a list of how the Colossians were to live this new life.

Division Ends

The one instruction the audience receives is to redefine the division lines between believers. Class, gender, education, and covenant are not worthy dividers in this new life in Christ. Christ is in all. Paul's radical statement here bucked all the Greco-Roman customs that the Colossians would have known. Hierarchy mattered. Power mattered. But the Colossians were all equal under Christ.

Into the Lesson

Judgment Misses the Point

Colossians is not the only letter where Paul lists off actions to avoid. The Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians also received their own list of sins to evade. What is interesting about these lists is that they are not exactly the same. Unfortunately, these lists have been used by the church to perpetuate harm and hierarchy rather than spiritual renewal. Often these lists of vices, sins, or actions are used by Christians to create an exclusive club of "righteous" people who pat themselves on the back for their holy evasion of these specific sins. Paul did not intend his list of sins to be used to condemn our neighbors while puffing ourselves up—nor were they exhaustive plans for spiritual renewal. We must take the log out of our own eye before we even consider discussing the speck in our neighbor's eye.

Freedom from Judgment

The church must end the guise of judging our neighbor by calling it accountability. Regardless of our intentions, "Hate the sin, love the sinner" does not draw in the sinner. Our attitude of righteous superiority does nothing for evangelism and the spiritual renewal of our communities. In fact, Jesus discourages judgmental attitudes in his words in Matthew 7:1-2. No, this does not mean that believers should indulge in a sin free-for-all.



The one instruction the audience receives is to redefine the division lines between believers. Class, gender, education, and covenant are not worthy dividers in this new life in Christ. Christ is in all.

Relational Accountability

In Romans 6, Paul clarifies that our lives reflect our faith. We are called to live transformed lives as Christ followers; so why do we try to hold the world accountable to our faith standards? They have not joined our covenant. They have not committed to Jesus' teachings. Accountability is a covenant between two or more people who have agreed to walk together to grow in their faith. A relationship must be established before you earn the right to speak to another person's struggles or sins. Our culture discourages most forms of accountability. There are two extremes with accountability: one side is judgmental condemnation, and the other is a completely individualistic mindset. However, our faith isn't meant to be individualistic. I believe our faith lies somewhere in the middle of the accountability extremes.

American Individualism

American culture has created an individualistic morality system with the phrase "You do you and I'll do me." Even fast-food restaurants advertise that you can "Have it your way." Unfortunately, the American church has adopted this mindset as we have merged our faith with culture. We "shop" for churches to fit "our needs." We complain when worship does not match "our preferences." We have made Sunday morning about ourselves.

There are more ways that the church has merged with American culture that we do not realize because we have been doing these things for generations. For example, does your church have an American flag in the sanctuary? Would Paul or even Jesus have encouraged the early church to put symbols of Rome in their worship spaces? NO! In fact, when this happened to the Temple, it was called a desecration.

Why have American Christians so confidently merged our pride in country with the values of our faith? What would this syncretism look like in other countries around the world? Our Christian faith practice requires that we die to our preferences. God's love knows no borders and has no partiality for one nation over another. Merging American patriotism with our worship of Jesus creates a completely different faith than Jesus represents.

Changed by Waters

Old man Dexter, my ugly adorable dog, was briefly changed by the waters of a bath. As Christians, something transformative happens in the waters of baptism. While baptism is an outward sign of the inward grace we receive, it is also a funeral for our old self and a rebirth for our new self. The waters represent a spiritual transformation working within us.

As we discussed earlier, accountability is a preestablished relationship not meant for strangers. Baptism is a commitment to spiritual accountability with a specific congregation. Baptism makes little sense apart from a congregation. Through our baptism, we put to death the ideals of the world and put on the spirit of Jesus. No longer do we value our earthly citizenship over our eternal citizenship with Jesus. No longer do we value an individualistic mindset over the body of Christ.

Discussion: Take time to share stories of your baptismal experience. Leave space for the stories of non-Baptist practices and honor them equally.

Into Discipleship

Baptismal Covenant

As American Baptist Churches, it is important that we discuss the basics of baptism. Baptism is a public confession of faith and a commitment to Jesus Christ and to his church. There is evidence in scripture that baptism comes when a person first believes, not after a full life of trying to rid his or her life of sin. We do not come to the water perfect, but we are raised from the water . . . cleansed by the blood of Christ. It is in the waters that we identify with Christ's submission to the will of God, even unto the Cross. We submit ourselves to the will of God in the waters of baptism.

Baptists do not find biblical warrant for the baptism of infants. We believe that baptism is reserved for those who confess with their own mouths that Jesus is Lord. Baptism is not for infants, as they cannot make a personal commitment to Christ and a statement of belief. We do not baptize babies because baptism is not the thing that saves us. No human action saves us—only the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ can do that. It is in the waters of baptism that we pledge our marriage vows to God and to the church. We commit to following the teachings of Christ, being transformed by the Spirit, and growing alongside fellow believers as the body of Christ.

Invitation

At the end of our passage, Paul highlights that part of our spiritual transformation is to rid ourselves of earthly divisions. In the waters of baptism, we wash away the hierarchies that our sinful world has established. In Colossians 3:11, Paul offers a list of divisions that have been washed away. He is inviting us into a new life. Paul makes a similar statement to the Galatians: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, as we have been raised with Christ, help us to set our minds on the things above where you reign in glory. Transform us by your grace, casting off our old selves and embracing the new self that is renewed in your image. Help us to remember the transformative waters of our baptism. Let us live in harmony and unity, reflecting the love of Christ in all that we do. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- How does Paul’s imagery of death and resurrection in Colossians 3:1-11 shape our understanding of baptism?
- What challenges did the Colossians face in separating their faith from cultural influences, and how do we face similar challenges today?

Into the Lesson

- How can we ensure that accountability in Christian community is rooted in relationship rather than judgment?
- In what ways has the American church merged faith with national identity, and how does that compare with the syncretism Paul warns against?

Into Discipleship

- What are some modern “dividing lines” in the church that Paul’s message in Colossians 3:11 challenges us to overcome?

Releasing Our Divisions

As we accept our death and resurrection in the waters of baptism and make a commitment to grow with a group of fellow believers, it is imperative we recognize that each of us is on our own path of redemption. God has a different lesson plan for each of God’s children. Comparing our transformation with those of our spiritual siblings will only cause divisions. Celebrate the lessons God is teaching each of you and learn from your siblings. We are all a work in progress.

- How does baptism call us to a lifelong transformation, and what are practical ways to live that out in our daily lives?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- “Come Thou Fount” by Robert Robinson and John Wyeth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAvYMI8wwLE>
- “Take My Life and Let It Be” by Frances R. Havergal & H. A. Cesar Malan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9speOjVQ3ZA>
- “Been Through the Water” by Kyle Matthews: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37qlUc-oCy0>

Media Options

- **TV Episode:** *The Chosen* (Season 1, Episode 5: “The Wedding Gift”)—Features themes of transformation and renewal.
- **TV Episode:** *The Bible* miniseries (Episode 6: “Hope”)—The episode depicts Jesus’ birth, baptism, and beginning of ministry.
- **ZonderKidz Book:** *Baptized in the Water: Becoming a Member of God’s Family*, by Glenys Nellist (Author), Anna Kazimi (Illustrator)
- **Art:** *(After) The Baptism of Jesus*, by Mike Moyers
- **Art:** “Baptism,” by J. Kirk Richards

Activity Ideas

- **Baptism Reflection Journal:** Encourage participants to write about their baptism experience or what

baptism means to them, including a commitment to spiritual renewal.

- **Community Water Drive:** Organize a drive to provide clean water to those in need, reflecting baptism's symbolic connection to life-giving renewal.
- Take some time to ponder the divisions we have created in our culture and in our churches today. Transform Colossians 3:11 for listeners today by filling in the blanks with your own examples of division:
In that renewal there is no longer _____
and _____,
and _____,
_____ and _____; *but Christ is all and in all!*
- **Reflection:** In what ways am I called to repent of perpetuating division in God's family? How can I be an advocate for reconciliation within God's family?
- Discuss a quote on accountability by Brené Brown from *Daring Greatly*—short list of friends whose opinion you trust.
 - *Try this:* Take a 1-inch x 1-inch square of paper and make a list of people whose opinions matter to you—those people who love you, not despite but *because* of your vulnerabilities and imperfections. Brown says, “If you need more paper, you need to edit.” <https://better.net/life/daring-greatly-author-brene-browns-advice-on-living-courageously/>
 - Brown also has a feedback checklist for processing accountability. <https://brenebrown.com/resources/the-engaged-feedback-checklist/>

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Week of August 3, 2025

Sunday, August 3

Proper 13 (18): Hosea 11:1-11 and Psalm 107:1-9, 43;
 Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 and Psalm 49:1-12;
 Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

Monday, August 4

Semi-continuous: Psalm 60; Hosea 11:12-12:14;
 Colossians 3:18-4:1
Complementary: Psalm 127; Ecclesiastes 2:1-17;
 Colossians 3:18-4:1

Tuesday, August 5

Semi-continuous: Psalm 60; Hosea 13:1-16;
 Colossians 4:2-6
Complementary: Psalm 127; Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:8;
 Colossians 4:2-6

Wednesday, August 6

Semi-continuous: Psalm 60; Hosea 14:1-9; Luke 12:22-31
Complementary: Psalm 127; Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, 13-14;
 Luke 12:22-31

Thursday, August 7

Semi-continuous: Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23; Isaiah 9:8-17;
 Romans 9:1-9
Complementary: Psalm 33:12-22; Job 21:1-16;
 Romans 9:1-9

Friday, August 8

Semi-continuous: Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23; Isaiah 9:18-10:4;
 Acts 7:1-8
Complementary: Psalm 33:12-22; Ecclesiastes 6:1-6;
 Acts 7:1-8

Saturday, August 9

Semi-continuous: Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23; Isaiah 1:2-9,
 21-23; Matthew 6:19-24
Complementary: Psalm 33:12-22; Genesis 11:27-32;
 Matthew 6:19-24



FOUNDATIONS

the ruse is up

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove your evil deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek justice; rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow.

—ISAIAH 1:16-17

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence has seen a developmental boom in the last year. While many manufacturing industries are thriving, some are struggling. Fiber artists, in particular, find their work undermined by AI creations. Applications like Ideogram AI, DALL-E by OpenAI, or StableDiffusion generate images of “crochet” or “knit” projects that are not workable by actual patterns. Other applications create crochet or knit patterns that do not produce the advertised end product. Technological advancement benefits humanity, but is it worth it if the arts are hurt? Our text today addresses how God’s people practice religious rituals without heart transformation. We will discuss religious action devoid of soul, like AI art devoid of human expression.

Lesson Objectives

- To recognize that “Christianity” is not about going to a church building.
- To break the cycle of mindless ritual.
- To identify the teachings of our faith with a call to action.

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 NRSVUE

1 The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. . . . 10 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! 11 What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. 12 When you come to appear before me, who asked this from your hand? Trample my courts no more! 13 Bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and calling of convocation—I cannot endure solemn assemblies with iniquity. 14 Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove your evil deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil; 17 learn to do good; seek justice; rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow. 18 Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: If your sins are like scarlet, will they become like snow? If they are red like crimson, will they become like wool? 19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land, 20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Into the Scripture

Context

Isaiah is the first prophet in our canon; his is the first voice calling out God's people on behalf of God for their sinful behavior. The authorship of Isaiah has been debated by scholars. While the text attributes Isaiah, the details of this book span a time greater than Isaiah's historical life. The book of Isaiah covers a wide time frame—from the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to post-Babylonian exile. There are two approaches to this debate: (1) Isaiah wrote the entire book, including messages to a future audience; (2) Isaiah's disciples finished the book in the future on behalf of their teacher. Christian and Jewish communities accept both approaches, therefore we will not dwell on the subject further.

Because of the debate of authorship, dating the book of Isaiah is difficult. Even so, we can identify historical moments based on the context the author gives. For

example, in Isaiah 1:1, we have a list of kings of Judah coinciding with Isaiah's work. The death of King Uzziah happened around 768 BC; it is assumed Isaiah's career began in the 730s BC.

“Four eminent Hebrew prophets addressed themselves to the people of Israel and Judah in the latter half of the 8th pre-Christian century: Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. Strangely, no evidence suggests that any of these knew in person any of the others. Seemingly, they were apart and alone, yet Isaiah and Amos follow essentially the same lines of thought and differ significantly only in that Amos had addressed the northern kingdom (Israel) while Isaiah would emphatically include Judah and Jerusalem” (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isaiah>).

By this time, the kingdom of Israel had split in two: the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern

Kingdom of Judah. While Isaiah's words are focused on the audience of Judah, I will still refer to the people as Israel, as they are part of the twelve tribes.

Literary Analogy

The prophet was a master of words, using literary analogies, alliteration, and repetitive language to get the attention of his audience. It is no wonder that in the beginning chapter of his oracles, he associates his audience with the notorious Sodom and Gomorrah.

It is imperative that we pause and consider this comparison. First, these cities are an analogy of the behavior of God's people. However, we must remember that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was not homosexuality (as the church is inclined to teach) but greed and injustice. Isaiah's prophecy is also not a statement about homosexuality, even though the church has made it synonymous with Sodom and Gomorrah.

Sacrificial System

When God sends a prophet to speak to the people, typically, the message is addressing corporate sin and how to make things right. To make things right is an act of *atonement*. In the Hebrew scriptures, the sacrificial system was the main system for dispensing atonement. While the books of Exodus and Numbers have examples of rules for sacrifice, the book of Leviticus is the primary text we seek for sacrificial instructions.

We know from 2 Peter 3:9 that God does not want anyone to perish. Our God does not delight in destruction. The prophetic books of the Bible may seem gloomy to some readers. After all, there are chapters upon

chapters of sinful actions and the consequences for those actions. However, I invite you to consider the prophetic books an example of how deep and unconditional God's love truly is.

Into the Lesson

Israel's Hypocrisy

The people in the kingdom of Judah were hypocrites. They were performing the pomp and circumstance of all the religious rites, rituals, and festivals—BUT they were not being transformed by these practices. The people had offered burnt offerings, incense, and new moon rituals, and God detested them. The sacrificial system was not a vending machine for right standing with God. You did not insert a sacrifice and receive holiness. God expected changed behavior (repentance) to accompany the sacrificial offering.

As Protestant Christians, it is important for us to note our differences with our Abrahamic siblings. We are quick to shout about Christ's replacing the sacrificial system, and yes, we are set free! We no longer must kill innocent animals on behalf of our sin. However, Isaiah's oracle is not a condemnation of ritual sacrifice—it is a condemnation of Israel's hypocrisy. "Contrary to popular belief, the purpose of *Karbanot* [sacrifice or offering] is not simply to obtain forgiveness from sin" (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/sacrifices-and-offerings-karbanot#:~:text=Contrary%20to%20popular%20belief%2C%20the,is%20subject%20to%20significant%20limitations.>). The most common reason for these offerings include giving (tithe), substitution (what we normally expect), and drawing closer to God.



I invite you to consider the prophetic books an
example of how deep and unconditional
God's love truly is.

Corrupt Leadership

If we zoom out on the picture of our specific verses and look at Israel's behavior at the time of this letter, we will see that they were not using the sacrificial system as its intended purpose. Isaiah's words suggest that the religious leaders were requiring an excess of what God commands. God's priests had burdened the poor by increasing sacrificial requirements. These changes did not benefit the people spiritually and created an economic burden while benefiting the priests. Ironically enough, God's people had turned the worship of Yahweh into idolatry with the expectations they had placed on the practices. It is as if they were saying, "We must feed God lest God gets angry with us and smites us."

God's people were going through the motions of spiritual practices but were not being changed by God's truth. So, God's ears were closed to their prayers. The text says that God proclaimed that Israel had blood on their hands. They were attempting to worship God while behaving exactly the opposite of God's commands. The text does not explicitly say what they were doing—apart from the hypocritical worship services—but we hear what God desired them to do instead.

In verses 16 and 17, God asked Israel to wash themselves, stop doing evil, seek justice, and care for the vulnerable. One can only assume that "the blood on their hands" included exploiting the vulnerable and perpetuating injustice.

"It should be noted that Isaiah's outrage, as it is spelled out in verse 17, is not chiefly with cultic disloyalty, as it would be for the writers in the school of Deuteronomy, but with social injustice—indifference to the plight of the poor and the helpless, exploitation of the vulnerable, acts represented here as the moral equivalent of murder" (<https://bobmschwartz.com/2023/07/>).

More than Sacrifice

As we study scripture and get to know God more intimately, we will learn that God is not an eternal parent who celebrates punishing God's children. God does not enjoy pouring out consequences. God prefers a repentant heart. God wants to see changed hearts and lives. Isaiah clarified that God wants no more pomp and circumstance. God wants hearts that beat for the Lord.

Hope of Restoration

This expectation reminds me of Jesus' teachings on conflict resolution in Matthew 18. In Matthew 18:14-20, Jesus teaches his disciples to first address the problem directly with the offender. If the offender does not listen, then bring two or three witnesses. If still the offender does not listen, bring that person before the church. Finally, if the offender still does not listen, Jesus says to treat him or her as a Gentile.

To treat the offender like a Gentile is not to ostracize them or cast them out; rather, Jesus is saying, "Clearly they missed the basics of our faith and we need to start the lessons over."

Into Discipleship

Make It Count

Typically, if you visit a Baptist church on Sunday morning, you have a general idea of what to expect in the service. Predictably, there would be music, prayer, scripture reading, time for offering, and a sermon. The bare bones of a service are an easy comparison, but once you talk about the "meat" (i.e., hymns versus praise, Bible translation, dress code, participation of children), major divisions occur. My heart goes out to the Biennial planning team, knowing they must plan a gathering for a diverse group of Baptists.

Spiritual Practice

Did you know that the Greek word for "church," *ekklesia*, literally means "called-out ones"? How do our worship services point to our "called out" status?

Our Christian faith is a combination of *orthodoxy* (right teaching) and *orthopraxy* (right practice). However, the American church has accidentally created a group of Christians that only want to be spoon-fed comfortable teachings on Sundays and live their lives separately the rest of the week. I have had someone come up to me after church and ask me to stop asking audience-engaging questions during service because they do not come to church to think. We have created a ritualistic monster.

Stop Worshiping

James says that faith without works is dead. Our actions do not earn us salvation or favor with God. Our orthopraxy is a form of worship and gratitude for what God

has already done. God desires our spiritual practices to be filled with heart, not simply mindless actions. Most pastors would not want me to say this . . . but if you are only coming to church because you thought you may earn favor with God, stop. If you are only coming because your grandma told you to and you resent it each Sunday, stop. **Or, maybe, do not stop**—maybe come to the service with fresh eyes and ask for God to teach you through the ritual.

During an interview hosted by Krista Tippet, ELCA pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber talked about the value of saying the Apostle's Creed regularly. To paraphrase: We do not say the Apostle's Creed each week because all of us believe it 100 percent. We collectively say the Creed each

week as a **reminder** of what we believe and the need for spiritual support by our fellow believers.

Faith in Practice

God told Israel to stop their practices: *Stop these rituals. You do not care about them or my law. You treat me like a divine vending machine. Wash yourselves and learn to do good.*

It is time for us to go back to the foundation of our faith—to strip away all the ritualistic expectations and burdens. It is time for us to shed our idolatry of the church building, worship preferences, or dress code. As our hearts begin to beat by the Spirit's power, we have a chance to be made new.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, guide us in cleansing our hearts and actions, that we may remove all wickedness from our lives and seek to do what is right in your eyes. Help us to embrace justice and mercy, actively working to rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow. Fill us with your compassion and strength to be instruments of your righteousness in a world in need. May our lives reflect your love and justice in every way. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- What does Isaiah 1:10-20 teach about the difference between religious ritual and true righteousness?
- How does God's call to "seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow" reflect God's priorities for God's people?

Into the Lesson

- How do we sometimes fall into the trap of performing religious rituals without true transformation?
- In what ways has the church, like Judah, sometimes prioritized outward appearance over genuine faithfulness to God?

Into Discipleship

- What steps can we take to ensure that our worship is more than just a routine, but a reflection of a transformed heart?

- How can we move from passive church attendance to actively living out God's command to seek justice and care for the vulnerable?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- "The Heart of Worship (live)" by Matt Redman (popularly performed by Michael W. Smith): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6s6RuoH9pME>
- "Center" by Charlie Hall: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Y49moUtYxE>
- "Take My Life and Let It Be," sung by the choir of Christ Church Quarry Bank; written by Frances Ridley Havergal: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWf_FQCcZP4
- "Do Something" by Matthew West: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_RjndG0IX8
- "Open Up" by The Brilliance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgdNrppahI4>

Media Options

- **Video:** "Sacrifice & Atonement," by the BibleProject: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/sacrifice-and-atonement/>
- **TV Episode:** *The Chosen* (Season 1, Episode 7: "Invitations")—Shows Nicodemus wrestling with the difference between religious practice and true faith.
- **Podcast:** BibleProject: *The Prophets*—Explores the role of prophets in calling people away from empty ritual and back to God.

- **Art:** “The Pharisee and the Publican,” by James Tissot—Depicts Jesus’ parable contrasting empty religious pride with genuine repentance.
- **Book:** *Pastrix*, by Nadia Bolz-Weber—A rough-around-the-edges Lutheran pastor shares her faith journey story.
- **Book:** *Accidental Saints*, by Nadia Bolz-Weber—A rough-around-the-edges Lutheran pastor shares sacred stories about average and broken people.

Activity Ideas

- Read Joel 2:12-13 and Ezekiel 36:23-28. Then discuss the following: After all that Israel had done to defame the name of God, what did God desire for His people?
- **Reflection:** In your opinion, what are the required elements of a Baptist worship service? Are there any “deal breakers” for you? What was the inspiration for your worship expectations?
- **“Living Worship” Challenge:** Encourage participants to accompany one routine religious action with an act of justice or service, such as volunteering at a food pantry or writing letters to encourage those in need.
- **Church Worship Audit:** Have a “State of the Church” discussion or survey within your church about ways that worship services can be more connected to active discipleship, justice, and community impact.

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Ninth Sunday After Pentecost

Week of August 10, 2025

Sunday, August 10

Proper 14 (19): Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 and Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23; Genesis 15:1-6 and Psalm 33:12-22; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

Monday, August 11

Semi-continuous: Psalm 11; Isaiah 2:1-4; Hebrews 11:1-7
Complementary: Psalm 89:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-17; Hebrews 11:1-7

Tuesday, August 12

Semi-continuous: Psalm 11; Isaiah 24:1-13; Hebrews 11:17-28
Complementary: Psalm 89:1-18; 2 Chronicles 34:22-33; Hebrews 11:17-28

Wednesday, August 13

Semi-continuous: Psalm 11; Isaiah 24:14-23; Luke 12:41-48
Complementary: Psalm 89:1-18; Jeremiah 33:14-26; Luke 12:41-48

Thursday, August 14

Semi-continuous: Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Isaiah 2:5-11; Hebrews 10:26-31
Complementary: Psalm 82; Joshua 7:1, 10-26; Hebrews 10:26-31

Friday, August 15

Semi-continuous: Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Isaiah 3:1-17; Hebrews 10:32-39
Complementary: Psalm 82; 1 Samuel 5:1-12; Hebrews 10:32-39

Saturday, August 16

Semi-continuous: Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Isaiah 3:18-4:6; Matthew 24:15-27
Complementary: Psalm 82; 1 Samuel 6:1-16; Matthew 24:15-27



AMBASSADORS

celestial justice

“Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.”

—PSALM 82:3

Introduction

We can track every warning label back to a lawsuit of someone hurting themselves with improper use of their product—apart from a case involving McDonald’s coffee. In 1992, a seventy-nine-year-old woman experienced third-degree burns from her McDonald’s coffee, which resulted in a skin-grafting surgery. Ms. Liebeck attempted to get McDonald’s to cover the cost of her surgery. They refused and offered her \$800. A lawsuit unfolded because Ms. Liebeck wanted to protect others from getting hurt. In the end, Ms. Liebeck won her case and was awarded damages, and McDonald’s changed their serving practices for their hot beverages. Justice was served. In our text for today, Yahweh will pursue justice for the vulnerable and bring consequences to the corrupt.

Lesson Objectives

- To proclaim God’s sovereignty.
- To hope for God’s judgment to set things right.
- To bring God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven as God’s ambassadors.

Psalm 82 NRSVUE

1 God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: 2 “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah* 3 Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. 4 Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” 5 They have neither knowledge nor understanding; they walk around in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken. 6 I say, “You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you; 7 nevertheless, you shall die like mortals and fall like any prince.” 8 Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations belong to you!

Into the Scripture

Author

The inscription accompanying this psalm states attribution to Asaph. Of the three Asaphs in scripture, most scholars assume he is the same Asaph in 1 Chronicles 15:16-24. Asaph is a Levite and one of the worship leaders in the Temple. While Asaph could be the author, some scholars think he was the scribe of this psalm on behalf of the Temple “worship team.” Regardless, Asaph’s hands were involved in this psalm.

Language and Culture

To set the scene of this psalm, we must discuss Hebrew etymology and Canaanite mythology. *Elohim* is the Hebrew word used in verse 1 to identify both God (Yahweh) and “the gods.” Yes, the same word is used twice in this sentence but translated differently. The Hebrew word *El*, in verse 1, refers to the *divine council*. The divine council could comprise gods, angels, spiritual beings, or even appointed earthly kings. Some Jewish translations of this psalm say “you are angels” rather than “you are gods” in verse 6.

“The assembly of El is a borrowed phrase from Canaanite mythology, according to which El, the chief of the pantheon, assembled the gods in a divine council” (<https://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/ot-difficulties/psalms-song-of-songs/ps-821-who-or-what-are-the-gods-in-this-passage/>). This psalm echoes the setting at the beginning of the book of Job, where “the sons of God” gathered with Yahweh and Satan. To the

audience of Asaph’s time, both settings would not have been taken literally but as a metaphor to speak of God’s sovereignty.

Almighty Commands

God gathered the gods and judged their divine work—and found them wanting. These puny gods did not know justice; rather, they only created injustice. These minor gods perpetuated evil. As part of their judgment, God gave the divine council direct commands: to defend, maintain rights, rescue, and deliver the vulnerable.

However, God added commentary that these minor gods did not understand what is right. Justice is so integral to God’s design for creation that the foundations of the earth, the mountains, tremble at the existence of injustice. The very foundation of creation could crumble because of the lack of justice.

Divine Consequences

In verses 6 and 7, we hear the divine council’s consequences. The One True God, Yahweh, had made them mortal. These puny gods would have an expiration date. *Though the gods were known as “sons of the Most High” (Elyon) in Canaanite mythology, they cannot be!* Clearly they cannot be from God’s family tree since they reject the very foundation of God’s character. God has a heart for the poor and needy—manifested when justice and righteousness are exercised in assessing the well-being of the most helpless in society. Much like God dethroned Saul for disobedience, the members of the divine council would not continue to hold office with such corruption.

Call to Action

The last verse takes us out of the narrative of the divine courtroom with God as judge and brings us into the sanctuary. Asaph finished this psalm with a cry for judgment of the nations. The worship leader cried out because of the injustice present in the world and asked for God's intervention. This psalm would make sense to be used in worship as a prayer of the people. Picture a chorus of God's people echoing out this last verse: *We see injustice, God! Bring your judgment and your justice. We need you!*

Into the Lesson

Sovereignty

Psalm 82 highlights an important discussion of God's character. The words *omnipotent*, *omniscient*, and *omnipresent* comprise common church jargon used to describe God. But I fear we do not talk enough about God's sovereignty. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; no single thing exists which God did not make. Everything in all of existence is in God's domain. Therefore, God has the right, the sovereignty, to rule over all creation.

We tend to put God in a box or tie God's hands behind God's proverbial back. Our human understanding and expectations have us limiting God's sovereignty. Through contemplation and conversation, we try to comprehend the vastness of our heavenly Father. There's a philosophical exercise that asks, "Can God make a boulder so large that God couldn't lift it?" Unfortunately for us, our understanding will always be limited on this side of eternity.

Our God exists outside of time and space. Our God is outside of gender and physical limitations. Our God's

knowledge and power are boundless. Here are a couple of examples of scripture proclaiming God's sovereignty:

- "LORD God, you created heaven and earth by your great power and outstretched arm; nothing is too hard for you!" (Jeremiah 32:17, CEB)
- "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." (Psalm 103:19, CEB)

Divine Council and Other Gods

In verse 1, we see reference to the existence of lesser gods. For some of us, this verse may rock our faith. Questions may surface in your mind, including these: "Do we not worship the One True God? What does it mean that God willingly meets with these lower gods? How does the existence of this divine council impact our understanding of spiritual warfare?"

Scripture passages like Psalm 82 and the books of Job and Jonah give us examples of God's sovereignty. For many, these passages make us uneasy because we interpret God as a bully (especially in Job). Consider, instead, that these passages are present to challenge our faith to see what God can and will accomplish. The book of Jonah ends with God's reminding the prophet that God cares for all of creation, not just the Israelites. God forgave the Ninevites while Jonah whined and complained about his participation.

Restoration

God intends to set the world right, whether we participate in it or not. Throughout scripture, God interacted with individuals looking for co-laborers in



The worship leader cried out because of the injustice present in the world and asked for God's intervention.

the Lord's goal. Think of Abraham, Moses, Saul, David, the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. Our gracious God intends to fulfill God's promises, regardless of if humans will help.

In verses 3 and 4, God gave the lesser gods instructions on how they could set things right. But God knew that they would not. Our faithful Father continued with the plan without the assistance of these celestial beings. Paul had much to say about God's sovereignty through Christ. Here are two quotes from his epistles:

- "I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created." (Romans 8:38-39, CEB)
- "Because all things were created by him: both in the heavens and on the earth, the things that are visible and the things that are invisible. Whether they are thrones or powers, or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him." (Colossians 1:16, CEB)

Sovereign Doesn't Mean Genie

God is sovereign, but we cannot blame God for the consequences of free will actions. It is easy to look at the pain in our world and point our fingers at God. *God, fix this!* We know the Creation story. God can create miraculous things out of dust—*so why couldn't God stop the Holocaust or my baby's death?*

Discussing God's sovereignty leads us to discussions of our own free will. Yahweh is not our heavenly genie who grants us three wishes. Though God is sovereign, God also gave us free will—because what is love if it is forced? God exercises restraint for our sakes. There will come a day when Christ returns, and we will see the end of evil. There will come a day when genocide will be no more. Someday, we will see the end of miscarriages, cancer, and death. Until that day, we are called to action.

Into Discipleship

Thy Kingdom Come

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he included the phrase: *Bring in your kingdom so that your will is done on earth as it's done in heaven.* As children of God,

as humans made in the image of God, and as Christ's followers, we are called to action.

Final Judgment

The term *judgment* in scripture often has a scary reputation. When we think about judgment, the images of a lake of fire or the sound of gnashing teeth may come to mind. This image does not look like good news. But God's final judgment is about finishing the work that the Lord started back in the Garden of Eden. God will eliminate evil from this world and restore heaven and earth to its original design. We do not have to fear God's judgment because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

While many believers would like to paint a picture of judgment—including their enemies being tossed into a lake of fire—we must remember that God does not celebrate the demise of God's creation. God made humans in God's image. Our very essence isn't evil. When sin corrupts God's creation, God aims for creation's restoration. God desires creation's flourishing, not our destruction.

As we look forward to the coming end of days, let us not celebrate the demise of our enemies. Rather, let us rejoice in creation's being made right. Let us hope for all creation to have one last chance at redemption. Let us look for God's justice but hope for God's mercy.

Commission

Throughout scripture, God has communicated a desire to work with the people of God to care for all of creation. The Creation story in Genesis is the first circumstance of humans' being commissioned. Our scriptures do not get past the first chapter of the first book before telling us that we have a role to play in creation. Humans are called to be co-laborers with God, tending to and providing order for creation.

The next commission we read about involves Abraham in Genesis 12. God blessed Abraham so that Abraham would be a blessing. In Exodus 19, God made a covenant with Israel. Yahweh would be their God, and they would be God's people. God would provide for them if they were obedient to God. In Matthew 28, Jesus commissioned his followers to spread the Gospel message. In the epistles, our faith patriarchs continue to remind us that our faith is also an action. God commissioned us as ambassadors for Christ. Christ followers are the "troops on the ground" fulfilling our commission.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we ask for your guidance to uphold justice for the weak and the orphans, and to protect the rights of the lowly and destitute. Grant us the strength and wisdom to be instruments of your compassion in a world that so desperately needs it. May our actions reflect your love and bring hope to those who need it most. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- How does Psalm 82 challenge our understanding of justice and God's role as the ultimate judge?
- What does it mean that God gives commands to "gods" or spiritual beings, and how does that impact our view of God's sovereignty?

Into the Lesson

- How have you seen examples of injustice in the world that align with the injustices described in Psalm 82?
- How does the church sometimes fail to live out God's call to defend the weak and the needy?

Into Discipleship

- What are some tangible ways that we can act as ambassadors of God's justice in our daily lives?
- How can we align our prayers with the psalmist's call for God to rise up and bring justice to the world?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," sung and performed by the Grace Community Church Congregation & Orchestra; written by Charles Wesley and Carl G. Glaser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZqbHosx6sc>
- "Rescue the Perishing," performed by Acapeldridge; written by Fanny J. Crosby and William H. Doane: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=619313279569806>

Media Options

- **TV Episode:** *The Chosen* (Season 3, Episode 2: "Two by Two")—Jesus sends his disciples as ambassadors of His kingdom.

- **Podcast:** *The Bible Project: Justice*—a deep dive into biblical justice and righteousness.
- **Book:** *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, by Walter Rauschenbusch
- **Book:** *Prayers for the Social Awakening*, by Walter Rauschenbusch
- **Book:** *On Earth As It Is In Heaven*, by N. T. Wright
- **Children's Book (Convergent):** *You Will Always Belong*, by Matthew Paul Turner
- **Video Series:** *The Bible Project: "Spiritual Beings":* <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/divine-council/>

Activity Ideas

- **Justice & Advocacy Awareness Project:** Host a study group to discuss issues of injustice and identify actionable ways to help (e.g., supporting local shelters, writing to policymakers).
- **Community Prayer Walk for Justice:** Organize a prayer walk in a neighborhood affected by injustice, praying for those in need and seeking ways to serve the community.
- **State of the World & Prayers of the People:** Take some time as a group to compose your own psalm of justice. Identify injustices you see in this world. Form a prayer of the people, commonly used in liturgy. The Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* is an excellent resource if you get stuck. End the psalm with a plea for God's intervention. Then spend time in prayer, asking how God wants you involved in the solution.
- Read about and discuss Asaph through the following scripture passages: 1 Chronicles 15:16-24; 1 Chronicles 26:1; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 2 Chronicles 20:14.

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Tenth Sunday After Pentecost Week of August 17, 2025

Sunday, August 17

Proper 15 (20): Isaiah 5:1-7 and Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19; Jeremiah 23:23-29 and Psalm 82; Hebrews 11:29–12:2; Luke 12:49-56

Monday, August 18

Semi-continuous: Psalm 74; Isaiah 5:8-23; 1 John 4:1-6
Complementary: Psalm 32; Jeremiah 23:30-40; 1 John 4:1-6

Tuesday, August 19

Semi-continuous: Psalm 74; Isaiah 5:24-30; Acts 7:44-53

Complementary: Psalm 32; Jeremiah 25:15-29;
Acts 7:44-53

Wednesday, August 20

Semi-continuous: Psalm 74; Isaiah 27:1-13;
Luke 19:45-48

Complementary: Psalm 32; Jeremiah 25:30-38;
Luke 19:45-48

Thursday, August 21

Semi-continuous: Psalm 71:1-6; Jeremiah 6:1-19;
Hebrews 12:3-17

Complementary: Psalm 103:1-8; Numbers 15:32-41;
Hebrews 12:3-17

Friday, August 22

Semi-continuous: Psalm 71:1-6; Jeremiah 6:20-30;
Acts 17:1-9

Complementary: Psalm 103:1-8; 2 Chronicles 8:12-15;
Acts 17:1-9

Saturday, August 23

Semi-continuous: Psalm 71:1-6; Jeremiah 1:1-3, 11-19;
Luke 6:1-5

Complementary: Psalm 103:1-8; Nehemiah 13:15-22;
Luke 6:1-5



Though God is sovereign, God also gave us free will—because what is love if it is forced?

Real Connections: Ministries to Strengthen Church and Community Relationships

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RESTORATION

cycle breaker

When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

—LUKE 13:13

Introduction

Recently, I have loved learning skills reminiscent of my grandmother's era. Our society has created a trend of consumerism. If something is broken, we do not fix it. We throw it away and buy a new one. We have lost the art of repairing the things we own. If necessity is the breeding ground of innovation, then recessions are the perfect petri dish for learning skills of self-sufficiency. No longer do we have the funds to buy a new toaster oven when the old one breaks. Now, we look up instructions on how to fix the heating element and restore what is broken. In our text for today, we will see Jesus in the act of restoration.

Lesson Objectives

- To celebrate God's work of liberation.
- To break religious cycles that prevent ministry.
- To participate in restorative ministries.

Luke 13:10-17 NRSV

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11 And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.” 15 But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?” 17 When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Into the Scripture

Author and Audience

The gospel of Luke never explicitly specifies Luke as the author. However, this gospel has continuity with the book of Acts, in which the author clearly occasionally traveled with Paul. It is no surprise, then, that church tradition attributes the gospel of Luke to Luke, Paul’s travel companion. Luke was a second-generation Christian. He did not get to experience the ministry of Jesus firsthand and therefore set out to interview as many people as possible to record the accounts.

The introductory verses in Luke tell us the author is writing to someone named Theophilus (“God’s friend”). While we do not know if Theophilus was a real person or a blanket term the author used for all Christ’s followers, we see Luke treat the audience as a well-acquainted friend. One can assume Luke’s audience would primarily have been Gentiles, as one can notice the lack of Hebrew prophecies quoted, especially compared to those in Matthew. Instead, Luke focuses on Jesus’ humanity, placing Jesus in history as flesh and blood. This gospel has Jesus frequently eating as an emphasis on his humanity. The gospel of Luke is

not some mythological story about a god from Mt. Olympus coming down to play with humans. This story is about Emmanuel (“God made flesh”) entering history to redeem creation.

Setting the Scene

Jesus and his disciples were traveling the region of Galilee, going from city to city preaching and healing the crowds. Jesus’ ministry and reputation were spreading fast to the point where Jesus sent out seventy-two of his followers to prepare cities for his arrival. By the time we get to Luke 13, Jesus was teaching in an unknown town in Galilee. He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and began teaching, which would not have been uncommon. Small towns did not always have their own priest or resident rabbi and would depend on the laity or traveling rabbis to teach the congregation. This particular town had a synagogue leader: “It was his duty to select the readers or teachers in the synagogue, to examine the discourses of the public speakers, and to see that all things were done with decency and in accordance with ancestral usage” (<https://talkofjesus.com/an-invitation-to-exhortation/>).

Sabbath Expectations

The synagogue leader was not out of line to question Jesus' actions. In fact, that was his purpose. Unlike contemporary protestant Christian settings, it was not uncommon for teachings in synagogues to become debates about interpretation. Questions were not a threat to the Word of God when the Lord's people sought understanding. Jews have the Tanakh or Masoretic texts (we would call this the Old Testament), the Mishnah (the Law), and the Talmud (Rabbinic interpretations of the previous two).

So, the leader referenced when God gave Israel the Ten Commandments and instructed the people to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. The Hebrew word for "Sabbath" (Strong's 7676) is related to *Shabath* (Strong's 7673), which means "to cease or stop." God laid out clear expectations for the Israelites about the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a sign to the people of God's promises and a call to rest.

Jesus entered a debate with the synagogue leader by suggesting that the instructions from Deuteronomy 22:4 apply here. If an animal is in distress, you are compelled to help. So, then, why would we not help a woman, a child of Abraham, who is more important than a donkey? The synagogue leader and his companions conceded to Jesus' interpretation and were humbled.

Into the Lesson

Redefining Sabbath

In the Garden of Eden, God originally gave humanity simple instructions: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it'" (Genesis 1:28a, CEB). We were called to be stewards of the earth. Stewards help creation flourish. They do not exploit every ounce out of creation for personal gain. Even though creation was perfectly designed, sin still entered the world. Sin corrupts God's beautiful things. Stewardship morphed into the role of domination and profiteering.

Selfishness filled the earth, yet God's goals still prevailed. God chose a people with whom to labor to reach God's goals. Yahweh established a covenant with Israel and repeated it for each generation: "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (see Leviticus 26:12). Once again, God provided a structure to order creation. *My people will live by my design as stewards of creation. Together, we will help creation flourish.*

When God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, Israel was not given a rubric against which to grade their holiness. Nor were they given a hierarchy of holiness. The Law was a gift to help God's people flourish. God gave instructions not to remove fun but to enrich lives. God gave creation rest. God designed the Sabbath as a gift for



Rigidity to rule following, and over flexibility,
can negatively affect the mission field. . . .
How often do we miss the chance to love our
neighbor because we are clinging too tightly
to our own expectations?

creation. Yahweh did not want creation to constantly be working and wearing themselves out. “Then he said, ‘The Sabbath was created for humans; humans weren’t created for the Sabbath. This is why the Human One is Lord even over the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27-28, CEB).

Liberation Work

When sin entered the world, so did legalism and performance metrics. And God’s people, ironically enough, clung to the oxymoron of a righteous hierarchy. We loved having a social structure to rank our neighbors. We found it much easier to judge ourselves, and others, on the basis of productivity rather than spiritual formation. Creation was corrupted and we willingly became slaves to sin.

Sin divides communities. Sin exploits creation. Sin makes us weary. This environment was not designed by God. **Praise God!** In ordering creation, God did not include oppression or exploitation. As sin enslaved creation, God set to work, liberating them through Jesus. “Christ has set us free for freedom. Therefore, stand firm and don’t submit to the bondage of slavery again” (Galatians 5:1, CEB).

Jesus Christ, God the Son, came to earth and entered history with the desire to liberate creation from the bondage of sin. The intention of the Law was to help us flourish. It is completely logical that Jesus would heal on the Sabbath. This “daughter of Abraham” did not even ask to be healed. Jesus wanted this woman set free because liberation work is God’s work. “The Lord isn’t slow to keep his promise, as some think of slowness, but he is patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish but all to change their hearts and lives” (2 Peter 3:9, CEB).

Righteous but Wrong

The synagogue leader was confident that his interpretation of the Law was the correct one. In his mind, honoring the Sabbath was black and white. Jesus summed up all the Law and the Prophets in the *Greatest Commandment*: Love God and love others. If your interpretation of God’s Word does not result in your loving God and others, then you need to go back and read again. The synagogue leader desired righteousness but missed the essence of God’s law. As I mentioned earlier, Jewish teaching had questions and debates built into their structure. It was normal to ask questions or raise concerns

about an interpretation. Jesus could reframe the Law for the audience with a new understanding.

God’s law is anything but black and white. God wants us to put our hearts into the law. Paul highlighted the spiritually gray lines in multiple letters as he talked about our freedom in Christ. Food was a common example that Paul used to talk about the essence of the law. Meat sacrificed to idols must be avoided for some Christians, while it was not a problem for others. Christians who could eat the idol meat were invited to give up that right while in the company of “weaker” Christians as a sign of love.

Into Discipleship

Repetition of Lessons

When I was a youth pastor, game time was the bane of my existence. As a nonathlete and strictly intellectually competitive type, game time did not resonate with me. I will be the first to admit, I failed many of my athletic students as a youth pastor because I did not *try* to understand. My goal was for everyone to have fun. Their goal was to have a definitive winner. A clear winner was part of the fun. Little did I realize that my goal actually impeded on their goal.

I was too flexible with the rules because it was not a value to me. No surprise to anyone, but my athletic students would frequently rebel against my rulings. We had to coin a phrase to define the expected sportsman-like behavior for youth group games: *When we are so determined to be right that we cease to show love, we are no longer right.*

Yes, this phrase curbed the tantrums about my lack of rule enforcing. However, it has taken me nearly ten years to realize that I could have behaved differently to meet those athletic students where they were. I missed an opportunity.

A Baptist Example

Let us take a moment to consider something that Baptists do well. Traditionally, Baptists do not use wine in communion. The Gospel description and instructions from the Apostle Paul both clearly indicate the use of wine to represent Christ’s blood that has been poured out for us. This liturgical change is a perfect example of how we give up our rights for the sake of the Gospel. Baptists made

this decision both as a service to recovering alcoholics and to keep ourselves as far away from drunkenness as possible. Baptists approach our two ordinances as primarily symbols which allow for liturgical flexibility; not all denominations have that theological flexibility.

Ministry Goals

Rigidity to rule following, and over flexibility, can negatively affect the mission field. The synagogue leader, in our text, was missing a ministry opportunity to care for the afflicted woman. How often do we miss the chance to love our neighbor because we are clinging too tightly to our own expectations?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for being the Liberator of enslaved creation. Give us your Spirit to discern when we are adding to the oppressive voices in the world. Help us as we strive to be your people in word and action. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- How does Jesus' healing of the woman on the Sabbath challenge the religious expectations of his time?
- What does this passage teach us about God's priorities when it comes to human suffering versus religious tradition?

Into the Lesson

- How can we discern when religious rules and traditions hinder rather than help ministry?
- In what ways has legalism crept into modern Christian practice, and how can we refocus on God's mission of restoration?

Into Discipleship

- What areas of our lives or communities need restoration, and how can we participate in God's work of healing?
- How can we become "cycle breakers" by challenging harmful religious or social patterns?

Unfortunately, the church as a whole has been known more frequently to behave like the synagogue leader than like Jesus. We are better known for the boundaries we place around our ministry rather than having open arms. Our commission, from Genesis through Revelation, is the great reconciliation of all creation with God. This commission is our great work.

We have the opportunity to break religious cycles and heal wounds that religion has caused. We will be people fulfilling the Lord's prayer by bringing God's Kingdom here on Earth. We do not have to wait for Christ to return to live the way God designed the world to be.

Resources

Songs to Consider

- "There I a Balm in Gilead" (a traditional African American Spiritual), sung unaccompanied by The Adventist Vocal Ensemble: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fcMxI_6xsk
- "Jesus Is Calling," sung/performed by Frank C. Stanely and Harry MacDonough; written by Fanny J. Crosby & George C. Stebbins: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCvkfqjLnBY>
- "Fear Is a Liar" by Zach Williams: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1srs1YoTVzs>

Media Options

- **Book:** *Sabbath as Resistance*, by Walter Brueggemann
- **Book:** *Bridge the Gap*, by Brian Stroh
- **TV Episode:** *The Chosen* (Season 3, Episode 3: "Physician, Heal Yourself")—Depicts Jesus challenging religious norms to bring healing.
- **Podcast:** *Bible Project: The Sabbath*—a discussion on how Sabbath relates to liberation and restoration.
- **Painting:** "Healing," by J. Kirk Richards

Activity Ideas

- **Restoration Workshop:** Organize a workshop where participants learn and practice skills like repairing clothing, fixing household items, or gardening as a metaphor for spiritual restoration.

- **Church Accessibility Audit:** Assess your church's physical and social accessibility, ensuring that worship and ministry opportunities are open to all, especially those with disabilities or social barriers.
- Share stories of any unique communion experiences you have had. How did this change open up ministry opportunities? What ways could we take this flexibility into other aspects of ministry while holding steady to the truths of the Gospel?
 - Further study on Sabbath laws: (1) Exodus 23:10-19; 31:12-18; 35:2-3; Leviticus 25:1-18; Numbers 15:32-36; Deuteronomy 15; (2) Jewish perspectives on Sabbath Laws: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/102032/jewish/The-39-Melachot.htm; <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Mishnah>
- Discuss what church rules could impede ministry. In what ways could we introduce flexibility to our congregations? Consider things like worship style, dress code, roles of children in worship, worship spaces, and liturgy.

Complementary: Psalm 109:21-31; Ezekiel 20:1-17; Hebrews 3:7-4:11

Tuesday, August 26

Semi-continuous: Psalm 10; Jeremiah 7:16-26; Revelation 3:7-13

Complementary: Psalm 109:21-31; Ezekiel 20:18-32; Revelation 3:7-13

Wednesday, August 27

Semi-continuous: Psalm 10; Jeremiah 7:27-34; Luke 6:6-11

Complementary: Psalm 109:21-31; Ezekiel 20:33-44; Luke 6:6-11

Thursday, August 28

Semi-continuous: Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Jeremiah 11:1-17; 1 Peter 3:8-12

Complementary: Psalm 112; Proverbs 15:13-17; 1 Peter 3:8-12

Friday, August 29

Semi-continuous: Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Jeremiah 12:1-13; 1 Peter 4:7-11

Complementary: Psalm 112; Proverbs 18:6-12; 1 Peter 4:7-11

Saturday, August 30

Semi-continuous: Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Jeremiah 2:1-3, 14-22; Matthew 20:20-28

Complementary: Psalm 112; Proverbs 21:1-4, 24-26; Matthew 20:20-28

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

Week of August 24, 2025

Sunday, August 24

Proper 16 (21): Jeremiah 1:4-10 and Psalm 71:1-6; Isaiah 58:9b-14 and Psalm 103:1-8; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

Monday, August 25

Semi-continuous: Psalm 10; Jeremiah 7:1-15; Hebrews 3:7-4:11

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WITNESS

forgotten blessings

I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination.

—JEREMIAH 2:7

Introduction

Unlike the United States, Japan's Christian population is around 1 percent. The top two faith practices in Japan are Shinto and Buddhism. Shinto, like many indigenous spiritualities, values every aspect of nature. Though the Japanese do not say "grace" before a meal, they have a beautiful practice of gratitude. Before eating, they say "Itadakimasu," which means "thank you" but also expresses gratitude to the waiter, cook, farmer, plants, and earth for their role in the meal. Afterward, "Gochisousama" is said to thank everyone for the feast. In the events of our text today, Israel had not acknowledged God's provisions and had taken Yahweh for granted.

Lesson Objectives

- To identify God as the Creator and Sustainer of life.
- To recognize the blessings that we receive as a testimony.
- To distinguish ourselves from the practices of our culture.

Jeremiah 2:4-13 NRSV

4 Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. 5 Thus says the LORD: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves? 6 They did not say, “Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?” 7 I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination. 8 The priests did not say, “Where is the LORD?” Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit. 9 Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD, and I accuse your children’s children. 10 Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing. 11 Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. 12 Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the LORD, 13 for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

Into the Scripture

Authorship and Dating

The book of Jeremiah is attributed to a priest from the town of Anathoth named Jeremiah. Scholars believe that Jeremiah was actively prophesying during the 620s BC to the destruction of Judah in 586 BC. Jeremiah is also attributed with the authorship of Lamentations. The world around Judah was in chaos. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had been wiped away by Assyria, considered “lost” forever. Ten of the twelve tribes of Israel were effectively wiped out. Now Assyria was losing power to the Babylonians. In an act of desperation, Judah reached out to Egypt for help.

Audience

God sent Jeremiah to speak to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, although frequently referred to in the text as Israel or House of Jacob. Jeremiah 1:2 tells us that God’s

word came to Jeremiah in the thirteenth year of King Josiah’s reign. King Josiah was only eight years old when he became king, succeeding the throne after his wicked father and grandfather. However, Josiah was not like his ancestors. After rediscovering the TORAH, King Josiah led a massive religious reform in Judah. Unfortunately, his reform did not resonate with God’s people. Israel did not know Yahweh and was not motivated to return to Yahweh.

Polytheism and Idolatry

At this time in history, it was very common for each people group to have their own god or gods. Deities were tied to an ethnic group or territory of land. Egyptian or Canaanite gods are the ones we hear about most frequently in the Hebrew scriptures. Though there were groups of people that had multiple gods (polytheism), it was uncommon to collect deities from other nations. Your god’s benevolence depended on your loyalty

and submission. However, from Israel's inception as a nation, Israel had struggled with showing faithfulness to Yahweh.

All of Israel—by this time Judah specifically—had broken both cultural and religious trends by worshiping the gods of other nations. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was already wiped out by Assyria, being made vulnerable by their idolatrous practices. We know through other prophets like Isaiah that Israel maintained their religious rituals to Yahweh but also included practices to other gods and brought in pagan practices to offer up to Yahweh. The fancy word for this practice is called syncretism; think *synchronize*.

Rejecting the Breath of Life

Yahweh is without fault, yet asks, “What have I done that you would reject me?” The Israelites perhaps thought that they were not forsaking the Lord so much as broadening their religious beliefs. God used Jeremiah to express the irony of Israel's actions. Yahweh had given Israel a land flourishing with resources, yet they had made it desolate. Israel's priests, rulers, lawyers, and prophets spoke for God but did not know God's heart. By committing syncretism, Israel had rejected the sovereignty of the Creator of **all things**. They had rejected Living Water for a broken, leaky cistern, which depended on rain to fill up. Remember in the Garden of Eden when humanity was brought to life through the

breath of God? Israel was removing the breath from their lungs and trying to live. The Hebrew emphatically states that Israel traded Yahweh for “The Nothing.”

Into the Lesson

Battle of the Gods

One of my favorite stories in the Hebrew scriptures that depicts a battle between Yahweh and other gods comes from 1 Kings 18. The prophet Elijah challenged Jezebel's prophets of Baal to a contest: Who could get their god to respond to their cries? Elijah graciously let Jezebel's prophets go first. They built their altar and started to call out to their god.

They shouted, they danced, and they even cut themselves—but Baal didn't respond. Elijah built his altar and poured water all over the bull, wood, and stone until they were flooded. He called to God once and immediately Yahweh responded by setting the altar ablaze and completely consuming the bull, wood, stone, and water. Yahweh showed up . . . Baal did not. Idolatry seems so black and white in scripture. Silly Israelites, don't you know that Baal isn't real!

Cultural Gods

I remember that as a kid in youth group, any time we would talk about idolatry, the discussion would default to superficial things. My idol is my phone. My idol is my



Thus says the LORD: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves? (Jeremiah 2:5)

boyfriend. My idol is a band or celebrity. A wave of guilt and shame would overwhelm us, and we would vow to swear off our idols.

While I think these idols can be “the” idols of our lives, I think they only scratch the surface of a discussion on idolatry. Idolatry is a heart condition. Idolatry is hedging our bets. Idolatry is a fear that God isn’t enough for us. Acknowledging our true idols will make us extremely uncomfortable because they will reveal our insecurities. “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

American Church Hypocrisy

I want to offer a hard pill to swallow. The American church is at risk of being as idolatrous as Israel was. Merging faith with culture can make a mess. We have. American politics has infiltrated our worship spaces and divided God’s people. We villainize members of an opposing political party and claim the moral high ground—all the while the vulnerable continue to be exploited. Faith in American politics is idolatry.

We claim to be God’s people, but we are not embodying the divine commission of Genesis. Did God commission us to build loyalty with nations and governments? No. God sent us to go to all nations and baptize people in the name of the Trinity. God called us to care for the vulnerable. God commissioned us to be stewards of creation. Yet, we follow the world’s trend of exploitation.

Politicians are playing the shell game, distracting us from the real problem and our calling as God’s people. Politics should not determine the mission of the church. No political leader should be the spokesperson of God’s people. We worship a God who knows no borders and has no earthly allies.

Live Abundantly

In John 10:10, Jesus teaches the Pharisees to redefine their understanding of God. God’s purpose is to give life and give it abundantly. God is not like the other deities from the surrounding nations. Our God is not asking for obedience to avoid smiting us. He has given us a law to live by so that we can flourish and help creation flourish.

Rachel Held Evans framed God’s kingdom this way: “This is what God’s kingdom is like: a bunch of outcasts and oddballs gathered at a table, not because they are rich or worthy or good, but because they are hungry, because they said yes. And there’s always room for more”

(<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7145283-this-is-what-god-s-kingdom-is-like-a-bunch-of>). Her quote reminds me of an unattributed quote: “When you have more than you need, build a bigger table—not a higher fence.”

As God’s people, we are blessed. As God’s ambassadors, we are called to spread that blessing globally. There is no border with the Great Commission. There is no people group who is disqualified from learning of the hope of Christ. We must disconnect ourselves from cultural pressures that seek to cause divisions because we follow a God who intends to bring about a great reunion. Let us cast down our idols and turn our eyes upon Jesus so that we may live this abundant life.

Into Discipleship

Forgotten Legacy

The Scriptures originally were an oral tradition. For centuries, the story of God’s people was passed down by word of mouth. It is no wonder that Deuteronomy 6 instructs God’s people to share these stories in all times and all places. Yahweh wanted God’s people to remember their identity. God gave Israel the TORAH, the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, to help them define their identity as God’s people. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy consisted of laws and stories to guide Israel. These documents were a foundation for their identity.

However, by the time of King Josiah, that legacy was lost. For generations, the Israelites lost sight of God. After the reign of King Solomon, the kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom of Israel consistently had corrupt kings until their demise at the hands of Assyria. The Southern Kingdom of Judah had mostly corrupt kings with a few acceptable kings peppered in over the decades. Neither of these kingdoms maintained the story of their heritage.

Blessings Acknowledged

In a rhetorical question, God asked Israel why they did not cry out to the God who had always provided for them, like God did in the Exodus or the Promised Land. They did not remember the centuries of blessings and protection that God had poured out. Israel forgot their covenant with Yahweh: *I will be your God, and you will be my people*. They had forgotten the legacy of God’s faithfulness—thus their loyalty was easily swayed.

Our culture is one that operates at lightning speed. We are quick to move on to the next best thing to “keep up with the Joneses.” Like the Israelites, we are prone to forget how God has been consistently present in our lives. When we forget our blessings, we struggle to remain loyal to God.

It is election year (as I am writing this lesson). Politics has a way of sneaking into our lives and dismantling our foundation to sway our allegiance. Politicians and political parties make promises to us in order to buy our loyalty. We aren’t supposed to follow the ways of this world. Could you imagine the Apostle Paul seeking the Roman emperor’s instructions on his ministry? Emperor Nero was in charge when Paul was executed. However, if we are a people that remembers our blessings, we will remember who truly deserves our devotion.

Witness Told

As we work to restore our memory and recall our blessings, we build a testimony to share with others. A

testimony is a legal term that Christians have adopted to define our witness to the truth of Jesus. Our faith story is added evidence pointing towards Jesus as if we are testifying in a court of law.

A quote attributed to Rodney “Gipsy” Smith goes, “There are five Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Christian, but most people will never read the first four” (<https://thenewharvest.org.za/the-five-gospels/>). Israel had forgotten the blessings of God and, as a result, lost their witness. They forgot the God who brought them out of Egypt. They forgot the God who provided them manna and quail in the wilderness. They forgot the God who provided them the Promised Land.

American Christians are at the precipice of following Israel’s path if we do not take time to remember all that God has done for us. We must create a boundary between our loyalty to God and the idols who would distract us from our identity. As we remember the story of what Jesus has done for us, we will be able to stay steadfast to our faith and bear witness to others.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, help us to remember your steadfast love. We are people with a short attention span and tend to forget your constancy. Draw us back to you. Help us release our earthly loyalties so we can be a witness to your truth. Amen.

Reflection Questions

Into the Scripture

- How does Jeremiah 2:4-13 illustrate the danger of forgetting God’s blessings and turning to other sources for fulfillment?
- What does it mean that Israel traded “Living Water” for “broken cisterns,” and how does that metaphor apply to our faith today?

Into the Lesson

- What modern forms of idolatry distract us from fully trusting in God, and how can we recognize them?
- How has the blending of faith and culture influenced the church in ways that might lead us away from God’s original mission?

Into Discipleship

- How can remembering and testifying to God’s blessings strengthen our witness to others?
- In what ways can we ensure that our faith is shaped by God rather than by political, cultural, or personal biases?

Resources

Songs to Consider

- “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” presented by Gospel Hymns and Family Things; written by William Williams and Thomas Hastings: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgaVzFcthbU>
- “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” presented by ExaltHIM-vdo; written by Thomas O. Chisholm and William M. Runyan: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NQKHHP-CI>
- “Testify to Love” by Avalon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwQhsL98qkg>
- “Standing on the Promises of God,” from Gospel Music Hymn Sing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLlJR61wKW0>

Media Options

- **Poem:** “The Unknown Citizen,” by W. H. Auden—It is about blindly following cultural trends rather than God.
- **TV Episode:** *The Chosen* (Season 2, Episode 4: “The Perfect Opportunity”)—Focuses on misplaced priorities and realigning with Christ.
- **Podcast:** *BibleProject: “Idolatry”*—a deep dive into how idolatry affects our relationship with God today.
- **Book:** *The Lorax*, by Dr. Seuss
- **Book:** *Baptizing America: How Mainline Protestants Helped Build Christian Nationalism*, by Brian Kaylor and Beau Underwood
- **Book:** *A Baptist Democracy: Separating God from Caesar in the Land of the Free*, by Lee Canipe
- An excellent resource for faith development and creating your own testimony is *The Journey* by VantagePoint 3: <https://vantagepoint3.org/vp3-pathway/the-journey/>

Activity Ideas

- **Testimony Workshop:** Guide participants in writing and sharing their personal testimonies, reflecting on how God has worked in their lives.
- **Gratitude Challenge:** Encourage members to write a daily reflection on God’s blessings for a month, culminating in a testimony-sharing event.
- **Happy Dollars:** As a form of offering, share blessings you have experienced recently and donate a dollar to your church’s benevolent fund. Your blessings become blessings for others.
- **Reflection:** How have we been participating in idolatrous behavior within our religious practices or cultural syncretism? How are we treating God like a pagan deity? How has our pride as Americans impeded our faith in Jesus?
- Share stories about your faith-family tree. Who first introduced you to Jesus? Who told them about Jesus? What first memories formed your Christian identity?
- Take time to consider the blessings you have experienced in your life, even the blessings of unanswered prayers. Write a letter of gratitude to God for all God has done.

Devotional Scriptures

Year C Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost Week of August 31, 2025

Sunday, August 31

Proper 17 (22): Jeremiah 2:4-13 and Psalm 81:1, 10-16; Sirach 10:12-18 or Proverbs 25:6-7 and Psalm 112; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

Monday, September 1

Semi-continuous: Psalm 58; Jeremiah 2:23-37; Hebrews 13:7-21
Complementary: Psalm 119:65-72; 2 Chronicles 12:1-12; Hebrews 13:7-21

Tuesday, September 2

Semi-continuous: Psalm 58; Jeremiah 3:1-14; Titus 1:1-9
Complementary: Psalm 119:65-72; Isaiah 2:12-17; Titus 1:1-9

Wednesday, September 3

Semi-continuous: Psalm 58; Jeremiah 3:15-25; Luke 14:15-24
Complementary: Psalm 119:65-72; Isaiah 57:14-21; Luke 14:15-24

Thursday, September 4

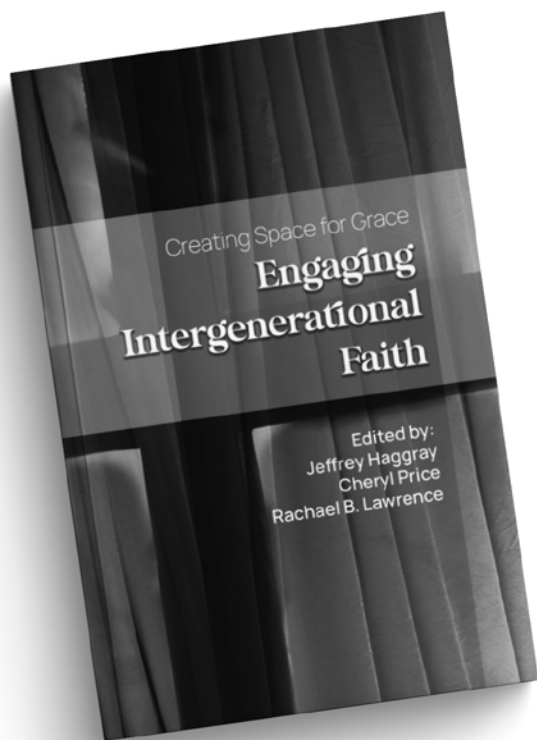
Semi-continuous: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Jeremiah 15:10-21; Philippians 2:25-30
Complementary: Psalm 1; Genesis 39:1-23; Philippians 2:25-30

Friday, September 5

Semi-continuous: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Jeremiah 16:14–17:4; Colossians 4:7-17
Complementary: Psalm 1; Deuteronomy 7:12-26; Colossians 4:7-17

Saturday, September 6

Semi-continuous: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Jeremiah 17:14-27; Matthew 10:34-42
Complementary: Psalm 1; Deuteronomy 29:2-20; Matthew 10:34-42



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