



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING
05

APRIL 05, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Mark 6:4-13;
Luke 10:1-24

FOCUS VERSES

Mark 6:7, 12-13
7And he called unto
him the twelve, and
began to send them
forth by two and two;
and gave them power
over unclean spirits;

12And they went out,
and preached that
men should repent.
13And they cast out
many devils, and
anointed with oil
many that were sick,
and healed them.

**TRUTH ABOUT
COVENANT**

Jesus grants us His
authority when we
live in covenant with
Him.

*Disciples Called
and Sent*

I WILL
EXERCISE THE

AUTHORITY

JESUS GIVES ME
WHEN I AM IN

COVENANT

WITH HIM.

COVENANT CONTEXT

After several chapters of Jesus' disciples witnessing His miracles, Jesus sent out seventy faithful followers to work miracles as He worked through them. Jesus was giving us a glimpse into what covenant relationship looks like when He empowers and sends us to do His work for His glory.

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: Why is humanity often enamored with celebrity and fame?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to this account of Jesus sending unnamed followers to work miracles because they were faithful.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. JESUS EMPOWERED AND SENT THE TWELVE

A. Jesus Gave Authority to His Disciples

DISCUSS: *What specific work or ministry do you feel God calling you to do? If you have the power to do it, do you have His authority?*

B. Jesus Gave Detailed Instructions to Those He Sent

DISCUSS: *In what ways may we better reflect outwardly the inner work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?*

C. Empowerment and Obedience Are Necessary in Our Lives and Ministry **V**

DISCUSS: *How can you multiply your influence in the lives of others for the glory of God?*

II. JESUS EMPOWERED AND SENT THE SEVENTY

A. Jesus Sent More Than Just the Twelve

DISCUSS: *What does it mean to you that Jesus is more interested in your faithful obedience than in your religious pedigree?*

B. I will live in covenant with Jesus and go where He sends me.

III. BY WHAT POWER

A. Jesus Has Power to Do the Miraculous

B. We Have Power Through Covenant Relationship with Jesus

C. I will exercise the authority Jesus gives me for the miraculous when I am in covenant with Him.

DISCUSS: *Are you willing to be a vessel through whom God can work miracles and be glorified?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to make us sensitive to hear His voice calling us and sending us
- For God to give us boldness to become active in His kingdom

LESSON CONNECTION

① Joseph de Veuster was born on January 3, 1840, in Tremelo, Belgium. When he was only thirteen years young, he was forced to quit school and work on the family farm. Six years later, he entered the ministry and chose the name Damien. His brother and fellow priest, Pamphille, fell ill and was not able to go on his mission to the Hawaiian Islands like he had hoped, and Damien volunteered to go in his place. He arrived in Honolulu on March 19, 1864, and was ordained as a priest on May 21, 1864, beginning his dedicated pastoral work on the island of Hawaii.

Seven years earlier the Hawaiian government had set up a leper colony on the island of Molokai. The lepers were isolated on a peninsula, kept away from everyone else, lest anyone else catch the contagion. Damien was a member of a four-chaplain team who ministered to the lepers on a three-month rotation, but after he met and ministered to the lepers, he decided to stay full time as their minister. He cared for their spiritual, physical, and medical needs as best as he could.

After more than a decade of selfless service, one day Damien discovered what he had doubtless feared for a while: he had contracted the disease himself. In a poignant letter, he expressed his deep connection with those he served by writing: “We, Lepers.” The beloved minister known as Father Damien died of complications due to leprosy on April 15, 1889, after sixteen years of selfless dedication. He was only forty-nine years old.

Like Damien, we are called to minister in a challenging place. We are called to minister in what some may consider Satan’s territory. Since humanity broke covenant with God in the Garden of Eden, Satan has been working as the god of this world. (See II Corinthians 4:4.) Yet, we are called to minister to those afflicted by a disease far greater, more eternal than leprosy: sin. Interestingly the Bible often compares sin to leprosy because of how devastating it is on humanity. However, God has not sent us in the world unprepared or ill-equipped; He has given us the power to take back enemy strongholds and bring the kingdom of God into what once may have felt like the kingdom of Satan.

BIBLE LESSON

I. JESUS EMPOWERED AND SENT THE TWELVE

A. Jesus Gave Authority to His Disciples

Both Gospels of Mark and Luke record that Jesus sent His twelve disciples out, along with other dedicated followers, to do ministry He had taught them to do. He sent thirty-five pairs of disciples to spread the gospel and heal the sick: “After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come” (Luke 10:1).

Jesus was not less powerful now that disciples were able to see the miraculous; He was multiplying Himself so more people could do the works He was doing. Isaiah 42 is clear that God does not share His glory with anyone else, but He does empower His people to see miracles and wonders for His glory. Jesus empowered those with whom He shared a deep, covenantal relationship. Jesus was entrusting these faithful followers who had committed their lives and resources to the kingdom of God and empowering them with His power and authority to work miracles.

These terms, power and authority, are often used interchangeably, but they are not quite the same. For example, if you are a pilot and you board a plane you are not scheduled to pilot, you may have flown that aircraft for decades. You have the power to fly it, but you do not have the authority to fly that plane on that day because you are not scheduled. Authority is the rightful permission to wield power.

God does not just call us, but He bestows us with the authority we need to act in His name. The seventy sent followers did not send themselves; Jesus sent them. He gave them His power and He gave them authority to use it for His glory. We may have the power of God within us, but we must remain vigilant and seek spiritual guidance, patiently waiting for God’s direction to show us how we should utilize the power He has granted us.

DISCUSS: *What specific work or ministry do you feel God calling you to do? If you have the power to do it, do you have His authority?*

B. Jesus Gave Detailed Instructions to Those He Sent

During the time of Jesus, four major factions were vying for influence: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and Zealots. Jesus engaged these groups, inspiring hope in some while provoking others to anger, creating a complex emotional landscape among the people. Each group sought to distinguish themselves from the others partly by the way they dressed. Their attire reflected their beliefs and social standings, forming a link between their expression of dress and their beliefs. For example, Zealots, fiercely anti-Roman and originating from Galilee, concealed small daggers in their garments to carry out assassinations as part of their militant rebellion.

Pharisees adhered strictly to Jewish law, often wearing phylacteries—small Scripture boxes—on their foreheads and arms. Some wore larger phylacteries to show off their devotion to God, cultivating an image of righteousness, which in many cases had soured to self-righteousness.

Essenes chose an ascetic lifestyle, so they withdrew from society and wore plain white robes to symbolize purity and their commitment to a disciplined spiritual life. Finally, Sadducees controlled the Temple in Jerusalem and dressed in luxurious robes, signifying their wealth and authority. Their clothing reflected their interests in aligning with Roman powers to preserve their privileged position.

When Jesus sent out the seventy, He provided specific instructions regarding their attire: “. . . take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats” (Mark 6:8–9). Jesus was making sure His followers were not mistaken for other religious groups. He wanted their identity to reflect His teachings, and He did this by commanding them what to wear and what not to wear.

DISCUSS: *In what ways may we better reflect outwardly the inner work of the Holy Spirit in our lives?*

C. Empowerment and Obedience Are Necessary in Our Lives and Ministry

Jesus gave His disciples the keys and let them drive. He gave them power and authority to cast out demons and pray for the sick to be healed, and they were healed. Mark 6 and Luke 10 both testify that the seventy disciples were so excited when they returned that they rejoiced for the miracles Jesus had worked through them. Up until that point, they had witnessed many miracles, but they were not involved with most of them.

But here, the disciples “cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6:13). Jesus was multiplying Himself. He knew He would soon go to the cross and into the grave. He did not have much time left on this earth, so He multiplied His impact, His voice, His hands, His feet, and joyfully sent the disciples to do His work. Jesus called. Jesus sent. The disciples went. God worked miracles. God was glorified.

This formula may be simple, but its application is powerful. When we hear the call of God and go where and when He sends us, we go in divine power and authority. The interplay of obedience and empowerment reveals the beautiful covenantal relationship we share with God. He empowers us, creating a mutually beneficial bond. He uses us, He builds our faith, and He gets the glory. Our obedience and His power are essential; together, they make us strong against the enemy. If you feel powerful, it is because you are living in alignment with God. If you don't, ask God to help you choose to obey Him.



DISCUSS: *How can you multiply your influence in the lives of others for the glory of God?*

II. JESUS EMPOWERED AND SENT THE SEVENTY

A. Jesus Sent More Than Just the Twelve

As noted earlier, Jesus did not send just His twelve handpicked disciples; He appointed seventy others as well. Although we do not know all of their names, Jesus empowered them with the same power and authority He gave His disciples. These seventy traveled

with Him, sometimes providing lodging, and in the case of Lazarus's family, they became close friends of Jesus. Jesus intended to involve more people, showing that ministry is not about hierarchy but responsibility. Further, Jesus rewards faithfulness. These followers were likely deeply devoted to His message, contrasting with those on the periphery who only benefited from His miracles. These individuals sought to be more than mere consumers of His teachings; they desired to be contributors.

Ministry is about responsibility, not the power of a select few. While some have greater responsibilities, no one is superior to another. God gives us diverse gifts for His glory, not ours. Although we all have these diverse gifts, the Spirit produces the same fruit in all our lives: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. (See Galatians 5:22–23.) By involving others, Jesus highlighted that covenant relationship is not elitist, unlike the religious leaders of His time who were vying for power and prestige. Covenant relationship is built on faithful obedience.

DISCUSS: *What does it mean to you that Jesus is more interested in your faithful obedience than in your religious pedigree?*

B. I will live in covenant with Jesus and go where He sends me.

What a miracle to be in a covenant relationship with God! It means we actively live out God's commandments in our daily lives. It means we actively share our faith in places God sends us and to the people to whom He sends us (as exemplified by the delivered man from Gadara). We are commissioned by God as His representatives in our world.

As the seventy soon learned, not everyone welcomes the gospel. Jesus understood and warned them: "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them" (Mark 6:11). Rejection is a real possibility when we share our faith. However, we share because we are called to be witnesses. We are not compelled to witness out of obligation but out of obedience to and love for Jesus Christ. Our mission is rooted in faith, responding to His call, and trusting that our obedience will fulfill His purpose, regardless of the immediate results.

III. BY WHAT POWER

A. Jesus Has Power to Do the Miraculous

The power of God is not subject to laws of nature, neither can humanity fully comprehend His power. After the seventy's powerful and successful missionary journey, they returned to Jesus and exulted: "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name" (Luke 10:17). Since they had followed Jesus for a while, they had stood wide-eyed and watched as Jesus exorcised demons time and time again. But when these faithful followers called on the name of Jesus, the devils fled because they are subject to the name of Jesus—namely, to the one who bears that name. His name carried his identity and authority. His identity was God, and His authority is unlimited.

Paul was right to write: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). There is no greater name known to creation than the name of Jesus Christ. When the disciples acted in His name, they wielded divine authority over evil and illness, showcasing the transformative power that comes from being aligned with Jesus Christ.

B. We Have Power Through Covenant Relationship with Jesus

Although we do not live in the disciples’ day, we have the same power and authority they wielded because we too are in covenant with Jesus. This covenantal relationship is a binding agreement that calls for mutual responsibilities for both parties’ benefit. First, we are responsible for living according to God’s Word. When we do, we honor and glorify God. In return, God graciously saves, protects, provides for us—benefits we are not worthy of.

But our relationship is deeper than mere contract because it is rooted in God’s deep love for us. Jesus let the seventy know just how blessed they were. He turned to them and said: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them” (Luke 10:23-24). That is the power of covenant relationship. Further, Jesus gave them the grand news: “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Although watching demons and diseases flee is a wonder to behold, how much more ought we to rejoice knowing we are right with God and our names are written in Heaven.

C. I will exercise the authority Jesus gives me for the miraculous when I am in covenant with Him.

Life presents a multitude of messy and complex situations that can leave people feeling hopeless or trapped. Nevertheless, we are empowered by faith to rise above these challenges and exercise our divinely-granted authority to pray about such circumstances. Just as God has performed miracles in the past, He performs them still in the present.

Remember, miracles are not for entertainment or self-promotion. Ministry results are not platforms on which to gloat or grandstand. The working of miracles is born out of God’s deep compassion for humanity. God is moved with compassion by people’s needs, and when we respond with compassion and faith in God’s power, we have a recipe for the miraculous.

DISCUSS: *Are you willing to be a vessel through whom God can work miracles and be glorified?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how God grants His authority to the faithful, not just the famous.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Francisco was far from an all-star. He made it to the big leagues, but only as a backup catcher. In 1992 his team, the Atlanta Braves, were in a dogfight against the Pittsburgh Pirates in game seven of the National League Championship Series. There would be no game eight: the winner advanced to the World Series, and the loser went home. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Atlanta came to bat trailing 2-0.

By the time there were two outs, the Braves had scored one run and loaded the bases. The next batter due up was Atlanta's relief pitcher, Jeff Reardon. The manager did not want to leave the season in the hands of a pitcher. He looked around the dugout and found an unlikely candidate to hit in such a high-stakes moment. He chose Francisco Cabrera.

Cabrera had only batted eleven times in the entire regular season of 162 games.

He was on the team to back up the Braves' starting catcher. Francisco was known more for his glove than his bat. But Atlanta needed a bat, and they called on Cabrera. He stepped into the batter's box, took two pitches, fouled off the third, and struck a line drive into left field. Two runs scored, Atlanta won game seven, and the Braves went on to play the Blue Jays in the World Series.

Francisco Cabrera was like one of the unnamed seventy whom Jesus sent to work miracles. He was not one of the well-known Twelve; he was just faithful and available, and his faithful obedience and willingness to step up when he was sent out earned him a championship just like all the Atlanta Hall of Famers. Jesus is attracted to faithful obedience, and when we respond when He calls, one day we will receive something far more valuable and beyond comparison to a meager sports championship: the words "Well done."



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING

06

APRIL 12, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 16; Luke 22;
John 21

FOCUS VERSES

Matthew 16:13-16

¹³When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

¹⁴And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

¹⁵He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

¹⁶And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God's covenant is based on His faithfulness, not our faithlessness.

Peter's Confession and Denial

I WILL
TRUST JESUS
EVEN WHEN
I DON'T
UNDERSTAND
HIS WAYS.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Much like the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, God's people in the New Testament broke covenant with God. Even after all the miracles Simon Peter had witnessed, and even worked when Jesus sent him out, he broke covenant when he forsook Jesus and denied knowing Him. But the mercy of God still reached for him to repent so God could forgive and restore him. Mercy is still part of covenant relationship with Jesus.

SG *TEACHING OUTLINE*

Icebreaker: What is the most embarrassing fall (literally speaking) you have suffered in your life?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the story of Peter falling (spiritually speaking) when he forsook Jesus and denied knowing Him.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. PETER'S FAITH

A. Jesus Asked His Disciples About His Identity **I**

DISCUSS: *Where do your ideas of who Jesus is come from? Are they rooted in God's Word?*

B. Peter Declared Jesus Is the Christ

C. I will proclaim Jesus is my Messiah.

DISCUSS: *Where do you find it most difficult to share your faith? How do you still testify there despite the difficulties?*

II. PETER'S FAITHLESSNESS

A. Peter Abandoned Jesus in the Garden

DISCUSS: *If your faith has ever wavered because you could not comprehend the plan of God, how did He reassure you?*

B. Peter Denied Knowing Jesus Three Times

C. I Will Not Deny My Identity in Christ under Any Circumstance. **V**

III. PETER'S TRANSFORMATION

A. Jesus Restored Peter

DISCUSS: *Why do we still sometimes struggle with our faith even after witnessing the miracles and wonders God works?*

B. Jesus Empowered Peter to Preach at Pentecost

C. I will submit to the Holy Ghost to transform me.

DISCUSS: *Besides Simon Peter, who else in Scripture was transformed by the mercy of God? Who else in your life has been transformed by the mercy of God?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God's mercy to help us stand after we fall
- For mercy to help others stand after they fall

LESSON CONNECTION

For a time a minister of the United Pentecostal Church International built a special connection with a Trinitarian Anglican church. Initially he was renting a room at the Anglican church's campus, holding Friday night Bible studies. After a few months the Bible study group outgrew the room, so the pastor asked if he could use their fellowship hall. It was much bigger with plenty of room to grow. The church graciously agreed, allowing him to use their hall at the same price he was paying for the smaller room.

"We just like that you're growing," the elder member of their board remarked.

As the Pentecostal church continued to grow, the pastor was unaware that the Anglican church was not growing. After a few months, the church board started having serious discussions about the Pentecostal preacher becoming their pastor. Their current pastor was in his early eighties and looking to retire. After a few months of interviews, the Anglican church board unanimously voted him in as their pastor. A church that had been around for 114 years was getting their first Pentecostal pastor.

The early years were tough. Apostolic elders around the new pastor made sure he and his wife were spiritually guarded. He served on the district youth board as a sectional representative, providing the couple with some connection apart from the weekly grind of pastoring, but still many challenges abounded. One day in a moment of frustration, the young pastor desperately called out to God, "Please, help me! This is too challenging." He had been so frustrated because he was seeking ways to bring revelation of the mighty God in Christ to the people.

In a very gentle way, he felt God ask, "Where was Peter when he received the revelation of who I am?"

As the young pastor waited for God to respond, his mind searched for answers. Eventually, he stilled his spirit and waited. The word of God came again gently saying, "Peter was in My presence when I gave him the revelation of who I am. All you are responsible for is getting these people in My presence, and I will reveal to them who I am."

In Matthew 16, Luke 22, and John 21, through the myriad of scenes we encounter, one truth is certain: Peter was in Jesus' presence. Even when Peter removed himself from Jesus' presence, Jesus found a way to invite Peter back into His presence. From these stories we glean that wherever Jesus is present, revelation, transformation, and empowerment are all possible.

BIBLE LESSON

I. PETER'S FAITH

A. Jesus Asked His Disciples About His Identity

At the foot of Mount Hermon lay the lush city of Caesarea Philippi. Situated just a few miles from nearby Jewish towns, the city starkly contrasted with traditional Hebrew religion. In ancient Israel, it became a center of Baal worship in open defiance against God. Eventually, the Greeks took control of the area, replacing Baal worship with the veneration of Greek fertility gods, like Aphrodite and Artemis. Later when the Romans conquered Israel, Herod Philip named the city after himself, continuing the long-standing practice of pagan worship. 1

Locals mystically believed the gods traveled back and forth from the underworld through a seasonal spring of water that flowed from the mouth of a cave in Caesarea Philippi. To entice the gods, people engaged in a variety of deplorable and despicable acts. The pagans believed the cave and its spring water created a gateway to the underworld; they called it the “gates of hell.”

In this cauldron of idolatry and sin, Jesus asked His disciples: “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matthew 16:13). Swirling all around were all sorts of ideas about spirituality, but Jesus did not want guesswork about who He was. He did not want His disciples then, nor us today, to guess who He was or is, which is why He later asked them directly: “But whom say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:15).

DISCUSS: *Where do your ideas of who Jesus is come from? Are they rooted in God's Word?*

B. Peter Declared Jesus Is the Christ

When Jesus asked His disciples who others thought He was, they answered: “Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.” But when Jesus asked them who they thought He was, their answer would not just pull from rumors or theories; it would come from what they had witnessed with their own eyes and ears over the last many months of following God in flesh.

Inspired by divine revelation, Peter truly saw Jesus for who He was. Simon Peter responded: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus responded: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 16:16-17). In that moment, Peter recognized Jesus' role as the Messiah. He also realized Jesus' divine nature, acknowledging His deity by declaring Him to be the Son of God. Peter finally saw Jesus. He saw Jesus as the Son of Man and the Son of God. Matthew 16 teaches that wrapped up in Jesus is both humanity and deity—making Him the incarnate God.

C. I will proclaim Jesus is my Messiah.

Peter's moment of revelation came in an unexpected setting—Caesarea Philippi, a place steeped in ancient idolatry. The disciples must have been unsettled by Jesus' decision to lead them to such a sinful place. But there in that striking location—the “gates of hell”—Jesus revealed His identity to all of them. Afterward, in a tone of undeniable authority, Jesus proclaimed: “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus promised that the forces of Hell—its cunning schemes, destructive plans, and deceptive doctrines—would be powerless against God's great church. Understanding the full essence of who Jesus is should inspire us to speak out fervently and without hesitation. He is the Messiah, the Lord of all creation. Even when we find ourselves standing at the very threshold of darkness, like Peter we can boldly proclaim Jesus is the Christ: He is our Messiah.

DISCUSS: *Where do you find it most difficult to share your faith? How do you still testify there despite the difficulties?*

II. PETER'S FAITHLESSNESS

A. Peter Abandoned Jesus in the Garden

On the night Jesus was betrayed, Peter underwent a great test of his faith. Hours earlier, he fervently vowed he would remain loyal to Jesus, even to death. Jesus was fully aware of the weakness that lay in the heart of Peter, so He forewarned him that his courage would falter that very night. Jesus predicted that before the night was over, *all* His disciples would turn away from Him, an unsettling prophecy that hung heavily in the air. (See Zechariah 13:7.)

The Gospel of Luke captures the stark transition Peter underwent: “Then took they [Jesus], and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off” (Luke 22:54). This moment marked a profound shift from faithfulness to faithlessness. Instead of standing beside Jesus as he had promised, Peter found himself trailing behind, a hesitant follower instead of a devoted disciple.

As the faith-shaking events unfolded, Peter and the other disciples were swallowed up in confusion and fear. They had abandoned the one who had cared for them so deeply. That type of heart-wrenching betrayal often occurs when we wrestle with understanding God's divine plan for our lives. Peter certainly faced this trial. This once-ardent supporter became a cowardly observer, unable to reconcile the unfolding events with his own expectations of what the kingdom of God should look like.

DISCUSS: *If your faith has ever wavered because you could not comprehend the plan of God, how did He reassure you?*

B. Peter Denied Knowing Jesus Three Times

On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter huddled in front of a campfire in the courtyard of the Temple. A servant girl recognized him, saying, “This man was also with him.

But Peter denied, saying, ‘Woman, I know him not.’ When others recognized Peter, he continued his charade, ‘Man, I know not what thou sayest’” (Luke 22:56–57, 60). In total, Peter denied following Jesus three times. He even reached for the sharpest arrow in his quiver and swore with an oath that he had never met Jesus.

Suddenly the rooster crowed, fulfilling Jesus’ prediction that Peter would deny Him three times. Peter was tested. Peter failed. He fled from there and wept bitterly. Peter abandoned Jesus when He was arrested in the Garden, but this time, he abandoned even his very identity as a follower of Jesus Christ.

C. I Will Not Deny My Identity in Christ under Any Circumstance.

No matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, denying Jesus never leads to a positive outcome. It breeds bitterness and regret within our hearts. In reflecting on Peter’s experience, we must resolve to uphold our identity in Jesus Christ unwaveringly, regardless of the trials we face. Jesus Himself cautioned us, stating that if we deny Him, He too will deny us. (See Matthew 10:33.) Embracing our covenant with Him means we commit to following Him faithfully, not only in times of joy and blessing, but also during ardent tests of faith and in moments of struggle and temptation. V

III. PETER’S TRANSFORMATION

A. Jesus Restored Peter

In just seventy-two hours, Peter underwent a profound transformation. Initially, he had been one of Jesus’ most ardent supporters, ready to defend Him even to the death. However, the weight of recent events—Judas’s betrayal, Jesus’ trial, and the Crucifixion—shattered Peter’s resolve. But when John and Peter received news that Jesus was risen from the grave, driven by a mix of urgency and disbelief, they raced to the tomb to see for themselves. John recounted the experience:

And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.” (John 20:5–8)

Even after his denials and abandonment, the story took a poignant turn when an angel told the women who came to the tomb: “Go your way and tell the disciples and Peter . . .” (Mark 16:7). First of all, Jesus still considered these men—who had followed Him and then forsook Him—disciples. Second, Jesus was willing to forgive and restore Peter. What magnificent mercy!

Jesus chose to reach out and extend grace to them, illustrating the depth of God’s commitment and the unbreakable covenant He maintains with us, even when we falter and turn away. Jesus’ deep concern for Peter vividly symbolizes how God consistently seeks to transform us. Just as He offered reconciliation to Peter after his failures, Jesus also calls each of us back to Him, even when doubts and fears cloud our hearts.

DISCUSS: *Why do we still sometimes struggle with our faith even after witnessing the miracles and wonders God works?*

B. Jesus Empowered Peter to Preach at Pentecost

One day, after these profound events, Jesus appeared once more to His disciples by the Sea of Tiberias. However, God kept appearing to Peter during the lowest moments of his life. Peter and the others had gone fishing for some money and meals. Although they fished all night, they had caught nothing. A voice from the shore called to them around sunrise: “Children, have ye any meat?” They shook their heads in embarrassment and frustration. He just smiled and offered, “Try the other side.” When they did, they hauled in so many fish it nearly broke their nets.

One of the disciples recognized the stranger on the shore. It was Jesus. Peter threw off his cloak, jumped into the water, and swam to the one he had run away from. The Spirit of God stirred within Peter, compelling and uplifting him, aligning his heart with the divine purpose Jesus would lay in front him. God was not abandoning Peter in his struggles; instead, God was empowering Peter, transforming his doubt into a mission that would be realized in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

Jesus gently guided Peter, reminding him of his calling—not to fill bellies with nets full of fish, but to nourish souls with the richness of the Word of God. The journey that began with his plunge into the water would eventually lead Peter to preach boldly at Pentecost, igniting a flame of conviction in countless hearts, just as he himself had experienced.

C. I will submit to the Holy Spirit to transform me.

Peter’s life is a reminder that God does not require perfection. He is looking for our willingness to be available for His work. Throughout Peter’s journey, although we see his many failures and missteps, he remained open to God’s calling. This openness is crucial because when we demonstrate our reliability and commitment to God’s purpose, He responds by expanding our abilities and influencing our capacity to serve.

The fundamental key to this transformation lies in our submission to the Holy Spirit. This process involves willingly allowing the Spirit to renew our minds. A mind transformed by the Holy Spirit is less likely to be deceived by misunderstandings or overwhelmed by past mistakes. Instead, we learn to embrace God’s grace as a powerful resource to fulfill His divine will in our lives, and when necessary, the grace to forgive ourselves as He has forgiven us.

Spiritual transformation can take a life like Peter’s—filled with mistakes—and make something powerful and useful out of it. Transformation is the progression of covenantal relationship. A life in covenant is a life that is progressing and becoming more like Jesus Christ, moving beyond experience into the heights of what He offers—right relationship right in the middle of the will of God.

DISCUSS: *Besides Simon Peter, who else in Scripture was transformed by the mercy of God? Who else in your life has been transformed by the mercy of God?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how God is merciful to restore and forgive us after we fall spiritually.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

When Simon Peter left the net, jumped into the water, and swam to shore, he did not know what to expect. His fellow disciple was right: it was Jesus. The same Jesus he had followed for three years; the same Jesus he had sworn he would never leave; the same Jesus he had sworn he never met. Peter may have braced himself for a deserved lecture: “Simon, you really let Me down back there.”

But Jesus graciously served him and the others breakfast. Then after breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter a simple question. “Simon, do you love Me more than these?”

Simon Peter answered, “Yes, Lord, You know I love You.”

“Then feed My lambs.”

Jesus asked again, “Simon, do you love Me?”

“Of course, Lord, You know I love You.”

“Then tend my sheep.”

Jesus asked again. “Simon, do you love Me?”

Simon was hurt. How many times was Jesus going to ask him a question, this question? Simon was frustrated and still embarrassed. He answered, “Lord, You know all things. You know I love You.”

Jesus nodded. “Then feed My sheep.”

That was it—three times. Maybe Jesus asked Simon this question, “Do you love Me?” around a fire early one morning the same number of times others asked him this question, “Are you one of His?” around a fire early one morning.

Could it be Jesus was mercifully helping Simon stand back up after each time he fell? And as long as he got up each time he fell, Simon was still standing, and he could still follow Jesus. Then Jesus looked him in the eyes—this time there was shame in Simon’s eyes—and Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Then follow Me.”

Even if you have fallen in your walk with Jesus, take Jesus’ hand and let Him help you stand again. Spend some time in repentance. If He asks you if you love Him, tell Him. You will find what Simon Peter found. You too will find His nail-scarred hand outstretched to give you the power and grace to get back up and keep following Him.



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING
07

APRIL 19, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Luke 15:11-32

FOCUS VERSE

Luke 15:20-21

²⁰And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. ²¹And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus is passionate about covenant inclusion.

The Lost Sheep, Coin, and Son

I WILL
SEARCH
FOR THE LOST AND
WELCOME
THEM HOME.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus continually reached for people the religious leaders excluded, such as sinners and tax collectors. Jesus intentionally invited them into covenant relationship with Him and taught the religious leaders that He came for all, not just for them. In order to prove this principle, Jesus told three signature parables in Luke 15.

SG **TEACHING OUTLINE**

Icebreaker: If you have ever found it difficult to include someone new in your group of friends, how did you make it work?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to Jesus' teaching in Luke 15 to include others.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. THE TEMPTATION TO EXCLUDE

DISCUSS: *How did you feel when you were excluded and saw yourself as an outsider? If someone helped you feel welcome, what did they do?*

- A. The Pharisees' Complaint
- B. Jesus' Response
- C. I will resist the temptation to exclude others.

DISCUSS: *How do you treat people others may consider "less than?" How can you love people as Jesus loves them?*

II. THE FIRST TWO PARABLES

- A. The Lost Sheep and the Rejoicing Shepherd
- B. The Lost Coin and the Rejoicing Searcher
- C. I will join in the Savior's mission to seek for the lost.

III. THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL

- A. The Undeserving Prodigal

DISCUSS: *What do you think of the younger son in this parable based on how he treated his father and his inheritance?*

- B. The Running Father (I)
- C. The Frustrated Older Brother

DISCUSS: *To which of the three parables in Luke 15 do you feel the greatest connection? What about the story resonates with you?*

- D. I will extend the Father's lavish mercy to others. (V)

DISCUSS: *Think of a time in your life when Jesus Christ "received you" (welcomed and accepted you). What was that experience like?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us remember the mercy He has given us
- For God to show us how to extend His mercy to others

LESSON CONNECTION

A preacher lost his favorite Bible. Now, this was no ordinary Bible. In addition to being a journaling-style Bible with both personal and sermon notes from years of use, there were also signatures from some of this preacher's favorite Pentecostal ministers. The list was long and included James Kilgore, Nona Freeman, J. T. Pugh, Vesta Mangun, and the like. It had taken him years to collect so many autographs of so many godly Apostolic voices. The preacher had searched out these individuals at conferences, waiting and asking for them to sign his Bible. Those signatures represented a spiritual legacy of truth that meant so much to him.

He looked for the Bible for months, hoping it was simply misplaced. His family joined him in the search, but to no avail. He had three small children who were made fully aware of the enormity of the loss to their dad. This was communicated through questions like: "Are you sure you never had it?" "Did you see it anywhere?" and "It's okay if you remember or even lied about it; just tell us if you know where it is." All the interviewing, searching, and searching again did not result in finding the treasure.

The preacher grieved at the loss of one of his most cherished earthly possessions. He marveled at how it could have happened. He had been so careful to protect it from damage or loss. The preacher was completely devastated as the Bible remained lost for months that eventually turned into years. But one day his wife was doing some spring cleaning, including in the children's toy room. There she found the Bible, signed by some spiritual "giants" of the faith, stashed in a little girl's suitcase. What an unlikely place for the Word of God to be stored: amid a baby doll, extra clothes, and miscellaneous items for make-believe. The joy the preacher felt overcame the frustration he felt at what his little girl had incidentally done. She had packed it because it was "important" for a trip she was taking in her sweet, playful imagination. "Daddy, I forgot I had used it to play. I am so sorry," she sweetly lamented.

All was forgiven quickly because all that mattered was that he had found this precious Bible so dear to his heart. Why it was lost and how it had been lost were overshadowed by the celebratory relief of it being discovered and restored to its rightful owner. If you have ever lost something meaningful to you, this story and the three Jesus told in Luke 15—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—should resonate with you. The joy of finding what is lost will always supersede the agony of the search. Through these parables Jesus invites us to share in His loving perspective. Like the shepherd, the woman, and the father, He invites us not only to search for those who are lost, but also to rejoice when they are found.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE TEMPTATION TO EXCLUDE

All of us have likely faced that dreadful moment when you walk into a room only to realize the person you were counting on to be there is not there. The adrenaline rush is something for which you were not prepared. You had a plan, a strategy of how to get through this awkward social setting, and now you are left with nothing. Your safety net of friendship is non-existent. You stand there alone, searching the crowd for a friendly (and hopefully familiar) face. *Act natural*, you tell yourself, but alas there is nothing natural about you feeling comfortable in this kind of environment without a friend to help you relax, even just a little bit.

This experience is part of life. It is unavoidable. What makes this experience so harsh is no one wants to feel excluded. One of the most basic human desires is to be included. Our Creator made us for community, but it is sadly human nature to exclude others. While the reasons may vary depending on situations and personalities, as Christians we realize Jesus was the ultimate includer. He tore down the social walls of His time. He did not limit His circle by race, gender, social status, or even spiritual status. Jesus did for everyone what we look for others to do for us: He invited people just as they were. Jesus made everyone feel equally a part of what He was doing or what He was teaching.

DISCUSS: *How did you feel when you were excluded and saw yourself as an outsider? If someone helped you feel welcome, what did they do?*

A. The Pharisees' Complaint

What endeared Jesus to the “outsiders” of that time was also what infuriated the religious “insiders.” In an effort to stay ceremonially clean, the Pharisees avoided associating with anyone they deemed as unclean. For them only two types of people existed: righteous or unclean. There was no middle ground, not even an area of gray.

The Gospels make it clear that the Pharisees and Jesus did not overlook this tension. In fact, the first two verses of Luke 15 show that the tax collectors and sinners loved to hear Jesus and be around Him. This assures us they were permitted to be around Jesus, and the expectation was they would be included. It is why we see them come often to Jesus throughout the Gospels.

B. Jesus' Response

The setting for Jesus' message in Luke 15 is vital to understanding why Jesus taught these three parables in response to the Pharisees' criticism. He taught parables because He knew those who are hungry to know Him could relate, while those whose hearts were closed toward Him would miss the meaning altogether. And Jesus knew the Pharisees were prone to excluding people. While the symbolism of these three beloved parables is powerful and interesting, we must focus on the heart of the message: God has a heart for all people. The illustrations are different and the

applications may be unique, but in each story, Jesus loves the lost enough to find and restore them.

C. I will resist the temptation to exclude others.

As believers, we recognize Jesus as our ultimate example of how we should live. He alone sets the standard of acceptable behavior. Some say our faith in God is worked out in human relationships. It is one thing to know in theory that we are to love others as He has loved us. However, the direct application and practice of that belief is not easy. In fact, it is often challenging, difficult work.

We may feel good about the way we treat people we like, but the true test comes in how we treat those we feel are unworthy of our best treatment. That is why the Pharisees could not accept what Jesus was doing by spending time with sinners. In their minds, those people were beneath them.

The Pharisees enforced a standard of their own creation. It is easy to quickly judge them, but prayerfully consider your own standards of valuing people. To whom do you give your best version of yourself? Who gets the most consideration and preference? Is it people you like (or are like you)? Jesus was demonstrating through His behavior and teaching that God's standard of value in people does not discriminate. Spiritual status is not the determining factor for His love and mercy. Whether they are sinners does not even matter. God loves people, period.

DISCUSS: *How do you treat people others may consider "less than?" How can you love people as Jesus loves them?*

II. THE FIRST TWO PARABLES

A. The Lost Sheep and the Rejoicing Shepherd

In the first parable Jesus shared, a shepherd left a flock of ninety-nine safe sheep to find one that was missing. Right away we are challenged by the clear priority of *one* sheep that has left the safety of the fold. The sheep was so valuable that the other ninety-nine were left behind in pursuit of only one. Shepherds in Jesus' audience would have appreciated this parable because they understood sheep the most. They are herd animals. They are not meant to survive on their own; in fact, they cannot. Not only are sheep social, but they are easily spooked and naturally defenseless. Sheep depend on the care of the shepherd in order to survive.

This information provides understanding of why the shepherd would respond in such an extreme way. As humans, it is easy to think *Well, at least ninety-nine are still here.* But for the shepherd, with his great knowledge of the nature of sheep and the dangers out there, there was no time to delay. He needed to find the one lost sheep quickly. He searched and searched, calling the sheep's name until he heard it bleating in the distance. He lovingly scooped it up, laid it on his shoulders, and brought the one lost sheep back to the flock. He called his neighbors to rejoice with him because he had found his one lost sheep.

B. The Lost Coin and the Rejoicing Searcher

Jesus made this point again with a shorter parable. In this parable a woman lost one coin out of ten coins. Some scholars believe her ten coins amounted to her dowry. She lit a lamp, swept the house, and searched until she found the missing coin. Wow. Again, one would assume nine out of ten is close enough, but the value of that one coin in her eyes was worth her best effort to find it. When she did find it, she went door to door to invite her neighbors to rejoice with her that what she had lost was finally found.

C. I will join in the Savior's mission to seek for the lost.

Jesus' parables certainly highlighted His love for the lost, but they were also an engraved invitation for us to join Him in seeking the lost. Some people may be lost because they wandered away and don't know how to find their way back, like the sheep. Others may be lost, even while they are still in the house, like the coin. Whether they are long gone or still around, if they are lost, it is Jesus' mission and should be ours to help find them. Let us join in with Jesus to seek those who are lost and rejoice with everyone around us when they are found.

III. THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL

A. The Undeserving Prodigal

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is the last and the longest of the three. The indicting details seem to build a strong case against the wayward son. The young son wanted what would be his when his father died, but he wanted it before his father died. It was as if he wished his father were already dead so he could have his inheritance. As a parent, nothing could be more hurtful. When he left, he wasted everything his hard-working father had earned to give him. Imagine what the audience must have felt as Jesus shared this shocking parable with them.

DISCUSS: *What do you think of the younger son in this parable based on how he treated his father and his inheritance?*

B. The Running Father

Naturally, everyone would side with the slighted father against his ungrateful son. But I Jesus continued to tell the story, and the young man's father was willing to forgive his son if he just returned. One day, he did just that. After a famine in a far country ravaged him and what little pride he had left, he walked the many miles home to his father's house and his father. In a culture that valued dignity and decorum, the father ran to meet his prodigal son. How did he know he was on his way home? Could it be that he was watching for his son to come home?

The father did not respond as many would; there was no "trial period," no reluctance on his part. Rather, the father ordered a celebration unlike any other, and the son who was lost was restored as a son, not a servant. This measure of mercy assured his family, and all the neighbors who might have wanted to have him punished for his blatant dishonor, that his rightful place in the family had been fully restored.

C. The Frustrated Older Brother

But there was another family member in the story: an older son. Most of us would identify with him more than the wayward son or the father. Another natural human desire is the desire for justice. It would seem unfair that a child who had wronged a parent could be forgiven so freely. His brother had squandered what had been given prematurely, but the older brother had been faithful. He had dutifully served his family. Such kindness to the undeserving would have naturally seemed to undermine the value of the older brother's love and loyalty.

Here we see the power of Jesus' message that day. The parallels would have been painfully clear to the Pharisees. They would have seen themselves as the older brother who had not earned their father's praise. The Pharisees viewed sinners in the same way the older brother viewed his younger brother. How could they be so freely forgiven? That is because our God is a God of marvelous mercy, and He extends His covenant invitation to everyone, especially sinners.

DISCUSS: *To which of the three parables in Luke 15 do you feel the greatest connection? What about the story resonates with you?*

D. I will extend the Father's lavish mercy to others.

Like any master communicator, Jesus knew this was His "mic drop" moment. The conviction of this final parable set in because the teacher left the application with the audience. It would be one thing for Jesus to have followed the sting of this story with a pointed finger and judgment, but He did not. He let the parable speak for itself. In so doing, we as the audience are left to answer the questions we have, not just from the perspective of the older brother, but with the realization we are also the wayward son.

While we may need to confront our tendency to demand justice as we see fit, this parable requires us to look in the mirror. We too have broken our Father's heart. We are the younger son at times; we are like the older brother at times. But Jesus is calling us to be like Him: like the Father. These parables are a clear call for us as believers to be more than recipients of God's love but also to be extensions of God's love to others. This hearkens us back to what Paul wrote to the church in Rome: "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us" (Romans 15:7). Amen.

V

DISCUSS: *Think of a time in your life when Jesus Christ "received you" (welcomed and accepted you). What was that experience like?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how our Father still welcomes lost sons and daughters home.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

It was a holiday the family would not soon forget. For years one of the adult children had not been home for the holidays. A bitter disagreement many years earlier had turned into months of awkwardness and misunderstanding. The parents and child had tried to talk, but all seemed lost. No one could agree on what had gone wrong, making them feel hopeless to find a resolution. It wasn't that the parents were unwilling to apologize; the child had made it impossible to do so.

Both sides were heartbroken, frustrated, and completely exhausted by the emotional weight of it all. Then came the silence. Communication from the child became scarce. A once close family relationship was slowly reduced to routine holiday greetings and simple "happy birthday" expressions over text messages.

The parents found themselves at a loss for what to do. Should they quit trying? They had offered repeatedly to meet with a mediator or even a family counselor. The parents were willing to meet any time, any place, with anyone their child felt comfortable mediating. The parents would pay for all expenses. All the child had to do was name the terms and show up. But the offer was repeatedly refused.

The father's resolve was simple. His inspiration was biblical: Love never fails. This became the parents' mantra and motive: We will keep loving. We will keep trying,

no matter the response. Like the father of the prodigal, they looked for opportunities to be reconciled. They prayed for ways to create that opportunity.

The reality was they had no control of the situation. They had done all they could. They were repeatedly rejected by their own. Had they done everything right? No. But their offenses did not merit such a cold response from their child. But they kept loving. They kept offering to meet. They kept inviting the adult child to join them for the traditional holiday gatherings with the rest of the family. The response of "no" seemed to never end until one Thanksgiving, they received a surprising "Yes, I will be there."

The emotional roller coaster was unlike anything the family had experienced: Would the child really come? What would it be like for everyone to see each other again after so long? How would the child respond when welcomed home? The family will never forget the moment the father opened the door and the child walked through. With tears in his eyes, a crack in his voice, and arms opened wide, the father said, "Welcome home."

No matter how far you or someone you love has gone from God, He is still reaching. Come home. Tell your family and friends they can come home. God and we want them to come. And when they do, God and we will rejoice.



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING

08

APRIL 26, 2026

LESSON TEXT

John 11:17-44

FOCUS VERSES

John 11:23-25

²³Jesus saith unto her,
Thy brother shall rise
again.

²⁴Martha saith unto
him, I know that he
shall rise again in the
resurrection at the
last day.

²⁵Jesus said unto her,
I am the resurrection,
and the life: he that
believeth in me,
though he were dead,
yet shall he live.

**TRUTH ABOUT
COVENANT**

The ultimate hope
of covenant is
resurrected life in
Heaven.

Raising Lazarus



I WILL HAVE
FAITH IN
JESUS FOR

HEALING

AND

RESURRECTION.



COVENANT CONTEXT

We have seen that part of being in covenant with Jesus gives us access to miracles of healing. But our ultimate hope of covenant with God is a promise of a resurrected life in Heaven. In this story, Jesus demonstrated absolute authority over death when He raised a four-days-dead man from the grave with just the power of His spoken word.

SG *TEACHING OUTLINE*

Icebreaker: What do we do when God does not meet our expectations?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the story of Jesus not meeting Lazarus's family's expectations.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. THE UNTHINKABLE

A. What They Expected

DISCUSS: *When you see someone go through something you wish they did not have to go through, how do you reach out to them?*

B. What Happened

C. I will trust Jesus, even when He does not do what I expect.

DISCUSS: *In your life when God delayed His answer, what did you do in the waiting? What would you do differently?*

II. JESUS' ARRIVAL

A. Two More Days

B. The Sisters' Responses **V**

DISCUSS: *What do the different ways Jesus related to Mary and Martha tell us about how He knows us?*

C. I will welcome Jesus into my desperate situation.

DISCUSS: *How has difficulty in your life brought you closer to Jesus?*

III. THE MIRACLE

A. Raising Lazarus

B. Responding to the Miracle

C. I will have faith in Jesus for healing and resurrection.

DISCUSS: *How have you experienced resurrection power since coming to Christ?*

Internalizing the Message **I**

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us see His resurrection power even in broken situations
- For God to bring life and wholeness to every part of who we are

LESSON CONNECTION

One day a woman went looking for a couch to buy on Craigslist. As she searched, she found a gorgeous couch for only \$10. It had to be a typo. Nobody would sell a couch, especially *that* couch for \$10. Maybe the seller meant \$100 or even \$1,000. She messaged the seller to clarify, and the seller replied, “No, it’s \$10, I just need it gone today.”

The buyer was excited. She called around quickly to find someone with a truck to help her haul it. Once she found a truck and driver, she rushed to pick up her newfound \$10 couch. When her friends came over to visit, she would brag to them about the deal she got. When she and her friend arrived at the house, the seller was standing there, and the couch was just as perfect as described and portrayed in the picture.

But there was one issue: the couch was twelve feet long. It was too large for the truck, and even if they could rent a larger truck, it was too long for her living room. The seller was selling it quickly and cheap because it was custom made for a great room in a mansion. It was too long for nearly anywhere except a mansion.

They spent hours awkwardly moving it around to try to make it fit in the truck bed, but it would not. She called for a larger truck, and with the help of neighbors, she finally got it to her apartment. But it wouldn’t fit through her front door. She came to the embarrassing realization that she was going to have to sell it—for \$10.

She expected one thing; life delivered another. Missed or unrealized expectations are some of the ingredients that make life difficult at times. We are not the first to battle with unrealized expectations, for we see that battle waged in the pages of Scripture in John 11 between a faithful family who needed a miracle and Jesus who was well able to work the miracle.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE UNTHINKABLE

A. What They Expected

In John 11, two sisters whom Jesus loved sent word that their brother was sick. All of us have done that: we pray for a miracle, we send a text asking for prayer, post the need on social media, or call a minister we trust. Illness of any kind leaves those concerned with a feeling of helplessness. For a believer, it is intuitive to ask for prayer and expect those prayers to be answered.

How much truer it would have been for people intimately acquainted with Jesus. People like Lazarus and his family would have known firsthand of Jesus' miracle working power. No doubt Mary and Martha had been eyewitnesses to the accounts of miraculous power that still stir our hearts as we read them in the Gospels. Lazarus's sisters did what we would have done: they sent word to Jesus to let Him know His dear friend was very ill.

On the surface, the sisters' response may seem like an ordinary response. However, Jesus was no ordinary man. Mary and Martha knew this as well as anyone. With their news came no specific request for Jesus to come and heal Lazarus. Maybe they assumed He would. Mary and Martha no doubt had seen Jesus moved with compassion to heal strangers at random gatherings of people. Surely He would be more inclined to respond to the need of someone near and dear to His already tender heart. As readers of the New Testament, we know it would not have been out of character for Jesus to take a "holy detour" to Bethany, an area with which he was very familiar.

John, the only Gospel writer to include this marvelous event, articulated the closeness Jesus shared with this family. We see this clearly in the way they identified Lazarus: "He whom thou lovest is sick" (John 11:3). These words were weighty; we can feel the pain, concern, and urgency with which they sent this news to the Healer.

DISCUSS: *When you see someone go through something you wish they did not have to go through, how do you reach out to them?*

B. What Happened

Think about it: Lazarus and Jesus were close; Lazarus was sick; Jesus heals the sick; Jesus will surely heal Lazarus. But that is not what happened. This reality, though painful to ponder, is something many of us have experienced in life and in our faith. John's retelling of these events seems . . . well, brutal. John wrote: "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was" (John 11:5-6).

That does not seem to make sense. Jesus loved Lazarus, so Jesus waited two days before coming to see him? Why would Jesus delay to heal their dear brother? He did not respond with the immediacy that seemed appropriate for such a dire situation. It is

hard to fathom the disappointment the sisters must have felt as daylight slowly faded into dusk the first day . . . and the second day . . . and the third day. They had sent word days ago with no response, no word back, no hope or word of His plans.

In the waiting, the worst imaginable outcome became their reality: Lazarus died. The only pain close to the loss of their dear brother was their deep disappointment in Jesus' delay. They had seen or heard of Jesus healing thousands of people. But bringing someone back from the dead, especially after they had been gone for a few days, was impossible. All hope was lost. Lazarus was dead, and Jesus hadn't come.

C. I will trust Jesus, even when He does not do what I expect.

We will never know why God does everything He does. And the good news is we don't have to know in order to be in covenant relationship with Him. That is where our faith must be strong that God knows what He's doing and He will do what is right, whether we understand or not. We just need to trust. He is God, and He is always good.

DISCUSS: *In your life when God delayed His answer, what did you do in the waiting? What would you do differently?*

II. JESUS' ARRIVAL

A. Two More Days

A few verses later, Jesus told His disciples: "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him" (John 11:14-15). Again, John made it painfully clear that Jesus waited to go be with this family—not just until Lazarus died but until he had been dead for days. Imagine the intensity of the moment when Jesus arrived at the home of his friends. Everyone had said their goodbyes, the body had been removed, and the tomb was sealed. The details we read provide a dramatic backdrop for what must have been a hard moment in Jesus' life and ministry. Sure, He was divine and had arrived with every intention to help and to heal, but He was also human. He felt the tension in the air and the despair His friends felt. It seems reasonable to assume Mary and Martha would not have been the only ones with questions as word of Jesus' arrival spread.

B. The Sisters' Responses

The recorded responses of the sisters were as different as the sisters themselves. Martha, the one we know to be busy, ran out to meet Jesus. Mary, the one who sat at Jesus' feet, remained in the house. Martha's faith was shattered, but she pressed through her pain: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21). If that was her way of expressing disappointment, it is understandable. She was heartbroken Jesus had not healed her brother. She knew it and so did Jesus.

But Martha continued with one of the most powerful, faith-filled statements in Scripture: "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (John 11:22). Despite the disappointment, the trauma, the absolute

exhaustion of the last few days, something in Martha said: Even now, Jesus, You can make a difference.

Jesus responded theologically. He assured Martha that Lazarus would live again. And Martha assured Jesus that she knew Lazarus would live again in the resurrection. Then Jesus made a divine claim that set Him apart as the only one able to make such a statement: “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). It was one of Jesus’ seven “I Am” statements that John recorded in his Gospel. One day Jesus Himself will raise the dead in the resurrection, for He is the resurrection and the life. Jesus was her hope right there in the midst of her pain. V

Then at Martha’s prompt, Mary made her way to Jesus. Her quick obedience reflected her sincere faith, even in her sorrow. It is amazing to see that her greeting to Jesus was the same as Martha’s: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died” (John 11:32). But Jesus responded softer to Mary than to Martha. Jesus knew both sisters and knew what they needed to hear and how. Both sisters shared their heartbreak with Jesus, and He shared His heart with them. He met each one’s need with compassion and as an invitation to draw closer to Him in their sorrow so He could minister to them.

DISCUSS: *What do the different ways Jesus related to Mary and Martha tell us about how He knows us?*

C. I will welcome Jesus into my desperate situation.

We have the same opportunity, no matter what we face or the outcome, to invite Jesus into our need. It’s okay to express our hurt and even our disappointment to Jesus. It’s even okay to ask Jesus questions. He may answer, He may not, but He already knows what we want to know. Our honesty gives Him the opportunity to show us He is still the resurrection and the life. No circumstance can change who He is or what He has promised to be.

DISCUSS: *How has difficulty in your life brought you closer to Jesus?*

III. THE MIRACLE

After the crowd led Jesus to Lazarus’s tomb, Jesus responded in two noteworthy ways. He felt their sorrow and understood their grief. The audience even commented on how much Jesus must have loved Lazarus. It is amazing to realize God Himself feels our grief. Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead and turn their mourning into dancing, but when He stood at the tomb of His friend, He felt their pain as He wept.

Second, Jesus groaned. We don’t quite know what it sounded like, but the word denotes anger. Jesus’ anger appeared to be directed at death—the ultimate curse that sin brought into the world. If it were not for sin, we would not deal with death and the lasting pain it leaves in its wake. Freeing humanity from the “sting of death” was part of Jesus’ mission to fulfill what the Law required. When Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus, He confronted sin and death. This miracle would confirm beyond all doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. He had more than the ability to heal and forgive; Jesus did not just restore what was broken or compromised; He could bring back to life what

was dead. His death on the cross would make this a reality, not just in the physical realm but in the spiritual realm as well.

A. Raising Lazarus

Jesus commanded the crowd to roll away the stone. They did and Jesus roared into the tomb: “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43). Jesus was commanding someone who was dead for four days to come back to life. Jewish tradition taught that the soul stayed near the body for three days, but by the fourth day, the body would begin to decompose. Lazarus was gone . . . but not for long. From across the gulf between life and death, Lazarus heard his friend call his name, and Lazarus started walking toward the mouth of the tomb, and death could not stop him. He came out of the grave still wearing his grave clothes. Jesus made one more command: “Loose him and let him go” (John 11:44).

B. Responding to the Miracle

This miracle, like many others, caused people to believe. They saw Jesus command death, death bowed, and they believed. Miracles are for that reason; they are so we believe Jesus is who He said He is. They are not just for us to have a better life or less pain in this one. Miracles are so we will see Jesus for who He is and worship Him as the Almighty.

C. I will have faith in Jesus for healing and resurrection.

While all of us may not share in the experience of having a loved one raised from the dead, we all share in the truth of what happened that unforgettable day in Bethany. Yes, Jesus is able to heal us, which is why we pray for Him to heal when we or others we love are sick. But He is able to do so much more. One day, Jesus will call all of us who are yet alive—or even have been laid in a grave—up in the resurrection. When He heals, we give Him glory. And when He calls us home, we will have all eternity to give Him glory.

DISCUSS: *How have you experienced resurrection power since coming to Jesus Christ?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how Jesus is still the resurrection and the life.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

I This young man had a common name but an altogether uncommon testimony. His name was John Smith, and this story starts when he was fourteen. John had spent the night at a friend's house because the next day was a Monday holiday. John's mom, Joyce, was getting ready to pick up her son when her phone rang.

Her friend Cindy said soberly, "There's been an accident."

Joyce learned that John and his friends had ventured across a frozen lake in St. Charles, Missouri. The ice was thinner than they thought, and it gave way beneath them. All the boys fell through the ice into the icy waters. Thankfully John's friends were able to pull themselves out of the water and back to safety, but John could not. He was still missing.

They couldn't see him, and they couldn't hear him. They could only yell for him and hope he emerged, but he didn't. By the time first responders arrived, he had been submerged under the freezing water for fifteen minutes. The EMTs reached him and pulled him out, but he was lifeless. They transported him to a nearby hospital, but even after forty-five minutes of CPR, he had still not responded. The doctor's daughter was in John's grade. Dr. Sutterer

tried everything he could to bring the fourteen-year-old back to life. He later told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that he had never seen anyone survive without a pulse for more than twenty-five minutes.

On January 19, 2015, John Smith died at fourteen years old.

Joyce Smith entered his hospital room and began to pray—loudly, boldly. As she prayed to Jesus, she thought, *You're either who You say You are or You're not.* She prayed, "Please come and give me back my son!" Suddenly, miraculously his heart beat again. He was in the hospital for two more weeks, and he left the hospital with no lasting damage. God had brought him back from the dead, showing him, his family, the doctors, and all who hear his story that Jesus is still the resurrection and the life.

No matter what you're dealing with, Jesus is the answer. He is able to heal and restore what sin and sickness have stolen. He is also able to command death and death obeys. Each time God commands death, it is just a glimpse into that great and glorious day when He will command death for the final time, and He will raise up everyone in covenant with Him to be with Him, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING

09

MAY 03, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 21; Mark 11;
Luke 19; John 12

FOCUS VERSES

Luke 19:36-38

³⁶And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way.

³⁷And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen;

³⁸Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus is the messianic King who sits on David's throne.

The Triumphal Entry

I WILL
SERVE AND
PLEDGE MY

ALLEGIANCE

TO JESUS
AS MY KING.

COVENANT CONTEXT

As Jesus neared the end of His life on earth, everything had been pointing to that final week as He entered Jerusalem. Rather than enter as a conquering king on a white horse, Jesus fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy by riding on a colt, showing Himself to be a meek Messiah for all humanity. At the end of that week, Jesus would introduce the new covenant based not on Jewish law, but on His death, burial, and triumphant resurrection.

SG **TEACHING OUTLINE**

Icebreaker: What is the most memorable parade you have been to or involved in?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the triumphal entry feeling like a parade for Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

DISCUSS: *What part of a parade is your favorite? How do our parades compare to the triumphal entry of Jesus?*

I. JESUS' PREPARATIONS

- A. Jesus Fulfilled Prophecy
- B. Jesus Came as a Peaceful King **I**
- C. I will see Jesus for who He really is, not who I want Him to be.

DISCUSS: *As we look at the Bible from beginning to end, how can we see the prophecies and their fulfillments are part of God's ultimate plan?*

II. JESUS' ARRIVAL

- A. The People Cried Hosanna
- B. The People Proclaimed Jesus as the Son of David **V**

DISCUSS: *Given that God's covenants were given over a span of four thousand years, what do you think when you realize God remembered and kept His covenant the entire time?*

- C. The Pharisees Complained
- D. I will choose to follow Jesus wherever He leads me.

DISCUSS: *If you feel comfortable, recount a dark time when you felt God's presence holding you up and seeing you through it.*

III. JESUS' SORROW

- A. The People Rejoiced, But Jesus Wept
- B. The New Covenant Is Bigger Than Jerusalem
- C. I will serve and pledge my allegiance to Jesus as my King.

DISCUSS: *How can we serve Jesus by honoring Him as the King of glory in practical ways today?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us understand He is Jesus, the author of the New Covenant
- For God to help us receive everything He has promised us according to His Word

LESSON CONNECTION

Danny and Carol were jumping up and down at the front door, “Hurry, Mama and Daddy, the parade is going to start without us.” Sarah and Scott could not remember when their children had been so excited. As they stood on their front porch, they could hear the marching band warming up. Thankfully it was a short walk to the center of town from their house. With lawn chairs in tow and extra snacks and drinks in the small ice chest, they were off.

Danny kept running ahead and then coming back to help speed up the process. Being the older sister, Carol was trying to be patient, but she was also anxious to find a perfect spot to watch the parade. Once they found their favorite spot, Scott unfolded the lawn chairs. Sarah pulled the ice chest closer for Carol to sit on, knowing Danny would end up on Scott’s shoulders. It was a thrilling day for the children and more than satisfying for these loving parents to watch their children enjoy the parade. However, the children would not be able to understand the sacrifice their parents made until sometime later.

Only months later, Scott arrived at school to pick up the children and take them to the hospital, where their mom lay suffering from terminal cancer. “Today is a big day,” she said with a weak smile as they inched closer to her bed. She looked so tired. The children asked why it was a big day. They could not imagine how it could be a good day when they knew why their daddy had taken them out of school early. Sarah replied, “Today, Mama is going to a parade,” trying to sound cheerful through the pain and weakness. “You both have to promise me something.” Danny and Carol quickly nodded their heads. “You have to promise me you will join me someday at the best parade ever.” They both agreed as they looked at each other. They remembered the last great parade they had gone to. Now Mama was too weak to go anywhere, but in their young innocent minds, they looked forward to the parade she was promising them. They would do anything to go to another parade with Mama.

DISCUSS: *What part of a parade is your favorite? How do our parades compare to Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem?*

BIBLE LESSON

I. JESUS' PREPARATIONS

A. Jesus Fulfilled Prophecy

Jesus and His disciples headed into Jerusalem. Jesus described the events leading up to His crucifixion in great detail. His knowledge of what the future held could have only come from an omniscient God. Drawing close to the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples into the village where He said they would find a new colt of a donkey tied. He told the disciples to untie it and bring it to Him. Jesus added that if anyone asked why they were taking the colt, they should respond exactly as He told them. Everything unfolded just as Jesus said. When onlookers asked why they were taking the colt, the disciples replied, "The Lord hath need of him," and they were allowed to take the new unriden, colt to Jesus, just as the Lord had instructed (Mark 11:1-6).

Jesus fulfilled Zechariah 9:9, further demonstrating His omniscience and control by knowing about the colt and riding one that had never been ridden: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9, NKJV). Jesus was intentional. His miracles were to show them He was as much divine as He was human. (See I Timothy 3:16.) The signs and wonders were to help His people see He was indeed God in flesh.

B. Jesus Came as a Peaceful King

When the disciples returned, they threw their cloaks on the colt's back as Jesus sat on him. The crowd along the impromptu parade route held their breath to see if this unbroken colt would buck against Jesus trying to ride it, but it didn't. The colt simply started down the hill with Jesus, the one who created him, on his back. As the one-float parade began down the Mount of Olives, the disciples and others spread their clothes on the ground for Jesus to pass over. Some people cut palm branches from the trees and laid them on the ground for Jesus. The multitude was shouting and praising God, remembering all the amazing miracles and works He had done.

The coming of the Messiah was not in the majestic manner most of them believed it would be. They did not understand God's plan was to come as the Savior for their sins, not as a regal king descending from Heaven to rescue them from Roman rule. Thus, many of the Jews missed this defining moment of fulfilled prophecy.

The prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 was also a picture of a peaceful King. Many did not realize this Jesus, who was born in a lowly manger, was God Almighty. They did not acknowledge that the one who performed miracles was the same "LORD that healeth thee" of the Old Testament (Exodus 15:26). His triumphal entry was a significant fulfillment of prophecy that He was both humble and victorious. He was a peaceful King, wooing His children to Him with love and mercy all the way from the manger to the cross. I

C. I will see Jesus for who He really is, not who I want Him to be.

Zechariah's prophecy came to pass just as God revealed. Not only did the prophecy mention the colt, but also that Jesus was just and had salvation. This celebration is known as Jesus' triumphal entry, partly because of the worshipful response of the people but also because it was the week He entered Jerusalem to lay down His life in triumph over sin, hell, and the grave.

It is imperative we understand who Jesus really is. We can confess we live according to our own personal truth, but Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Jesus is our salvation. Truth comes only through Him. Today we rejoice that Jesus is who He claims to be, not some other idea we have created in our minds. We must learn a lesson from the crowd at the parade: we must let Jesus be who He said He is and do what He said He will do. Then, and only then, is He our Lord.

DISCUSS: *As we look at the Bible from beginning to end, how can we see the prophecies and their fulfillments are part of God's ultimate plan?*

II. JESUS' ARRIVAL

A. The People Cried Hosanna

Many Jewish people had traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover. As Jesus slowly made His way through the streets of Jerusalem, many of them greeted Jesus with palm branches, shouting, "Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mark 11:9). Doubtless some of the Jews knew that shout as a stanza of a familiar hymn for Passover, which concluded with a prayer: "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD. God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar" (Psalm 118:26-27). It's remarkable how the Bible comes together so beautifully.

The second part of this psalm hit a sober chord, foreshadowing Jesus' selfless sacrifice. Jesus understood the prophecy in the Passover psalm was referring to His death. Many of these people knew the prophecies about a Messiah who would conquer, but they had forgotten the psalmist's and Isaiah's prophecies that He would triumph over sin and death through His own sinless death.

B. The People Proclaimed Jesus as the Son of David

As they followed the procession, many Jews proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of David. (See Mark 11:10.) They believed the Messiah would be a direct descendant from the lineage of King David. According to the Davidic covenant, God promised King David one of his descendants would reign over God's people forever. (See II Samuel 7:8-16.) In both Matthew and Luke, the lineage of Jesus is recorded back through King David. Jesus is the messianic King who sits on David's throne forevermore, thus fulfilling the Davidic covenant that God would always have a king on David's throne.

However, Jesus' rule would extend to the whole world, not just to the Jews, which **V** embraces the Abrahamic covenant to bless all nations. (See Genesis 12:1-3.) We can see this covenant unfold as some Greeks came to worship at the Passover Feast and asked to see Jesus as recorded in John 12. The door was opening to Gentiles, and the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled. Then Jesus announced: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." Jesus' mission was almost complete. He would soon receive His glory, through His death, burial, and resurrection, as He ascended into Heaven. In Jesus the covenants God had made with Adam and with Abraham and with David were all being fulfilled.

DISCUSS: *Given that God's covenants were given over a span of four thousand years, what do you think when you realize God remembered and kept His covenant the entire time?*

C. The Pharisees Complained

As the Pharisees observed the triumphant procession of Jesus, they should have rejoiced as well. Instead, they were angry. They had tried everything to intercept this chaos. They were distraught that everything they had tried failed. They observed the people worshiping Jesus and exclaimed to each other: "Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him" (John 12:19). They asked Jesus to stop the people. Jesus responded that if He stopped the people from worshiping, the rocks would immediately cry out. (See Luke 19:40.)

D. I will choose to follow Jesus wherever He leads me.

The hunger we see in these people to be near Jesus should inspire us to move ever closer to Him. We must follow Jesus wherever He leads. We may not know His purpose or where He will take us, but be assured He has a plan. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV). The psalmist promised that even when we walk through the dark valley of death, we have no fear; God will not leave us. We can put our trust in Him.

DISCUSS: *If you feel comfortable, recount a dark time when you felt God's presence holding you up and seeing you through it.*

III. JESUS' SORROW

A. The People Rejoiced, But Jesus Wept

It was a joyous occasion. People surrounded Jesus, praising and worshiping Him with the disciples. As Jesus drew near Jerusalem, in the midst of the rejoicing, He began to weep, overcome with grief for His beloved people. Only a short time earlier, Jesus had to flee Jerusalem due to Herod's threat on His life. As He left the city, Jesus cried out with a broken heart: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34). Then returning to Jerusalem, in the midst of the people dancing and praising Him, Jesus let His tears of mercy fall. He looked upon His city and His people

and grieved over those who had no idea what they were doing and how it would bring about the city's downfall forty short years later. Jesus still saw many spreading their cloaks on the ground beneath Him and waving palms in honor of His arrival. Sadly, most of the Jewish leaders were conspicuously absent. The ones who had studied God's law for years were too busy plotting His arrest.

B. The New Covenant Is Bigger Than Jerusalem

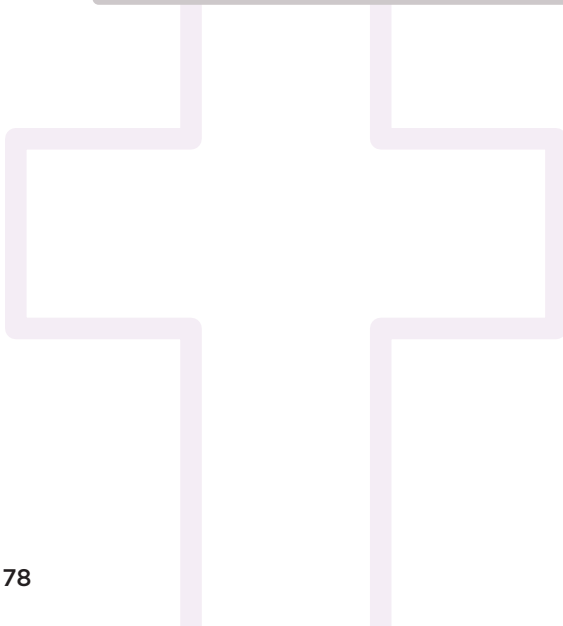
Some of the religious leaders were concerned Jesus was trying to destroy the Law, but Jesus clearly stated He came to fulfill the Law, not destroy it. (See Matthew 5:17.) The Jewish leaders had not fostered a pure relationship with God because many of them were corrupt and antagonistic toward Jesus—so caught up with the power of Rome, they neglected their purpose in God's kingdom. The Jews were called to be a light to the Gentiles. Their minds were set on a rescue operation from Roman oppression, and they gloated to think the Messiah would make Rome suffer.

The current events would take on a deeper meaning after Jesus ascended because God's plan was greater than Jerusalem or Rome. His plan was not exclusively to the Jewish people. The coming of Jesus ushered in the new covenant for *all* people. It was the whole gospel to the whole world.

C. I will serve and pledge my allegiance to Jesus as my King.

We must remember why Jesus came to this earth. His mission was for us. From the manger to the grave, Jesus' purpose was to fulfill the Law and become the perfect sacrifice for our sins. In doing so, He would close the gap between the Garden of Eden (the site of the first sin) to the introduction of the new covenant. Let us lay down our coats and cloaks and pick up the palm branches and shout as the parade goes shouted: "Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." He alone is our King and He is the only one worthy of our allegiance, our devotion, our worship.

DISCUSS: *How can we serve Jesus by honoring Him as the King of glory in practical ways today?*



Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how our arrival in Heaven will exceed the celebration of a parade. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Danny and Carol had a lifetime to realize what their mother was asking of them when she was on her deathbed. Losing their mother at a young age put a damper on their childhood fantasies. The ultimate parade, like they had imagined, was not to be, but a better one was waiting for them. They both learned about Jesus and how He was in a parade just before He died on Calvary. He also admonished His beloved children to wait for Him and come to His parade in Heaven.

Another parade? What are we talking about? There is no parade in the Bible. Oh yes there is. Jesus' triumphal entry was a parade. It was a celebration of freedom likened to the time when the children of Israel were set free from slavery in Egypt. The Passover was a time of remembering how God passed over the Israelites' homes when He slew their firstborn children. Each Hebrew household obediently applied blood from their sacrificial lamb to the door posts as Moses had

commanded. The Lord passed over the houses that had blood on their doorposts.

Jesus came as the perfect sacrifice for all our sins. Jesus' purpose was to take the place of the carefully selected, unblemished animals His people brought before the Lord as burnt offerings under the old Law. The old covenant was not abolished; it was fulfilled when Jesus—the spotless, sinless sacrifice—took the place of all the past sacrifices. This new covenant will last until Jesus returns a second time in the heavens.

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3). Everything Jesus did was preparing His children to go to the place He has prepared for us in Heaven. We may not realize or be able to comprehend all the wonderful things God has in store for us, but today we can take the necessary steps to ensure our attendance at His heavenly parade.



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING
10

MAY 10, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Luke 22:7-27

FOCUS VERSE

Luke 22:19

And he took bread,
and gave thanks, and
broke it, and gave
unto them, saying,
This is my body which
is given for you: this
do in remembrance
of me.

**TRUTH ABOUT
COVENANT**

Jesus called His
church to remember
His sacrifice until He
returns.

The Lord's Supper



I WILL

**REMEMBER
AND SERVE**

JESUS AND
OTHERS WITH

**SACRIFICIAL
LOVE.**



COVENANT CONTEXT

The week that began with so much pomp and praise for Jesus ended with so much vitriol and hatred against Him. But knowing all that would befall Him, Jesus humbled Himself and served His followers. And during the Passover meal, He announced the new covenant He was instituting: they would no longer need to sacrifice a lamb for their sins, for He would be the sacrificial Lamb for all sins for all humanity for all time.

SG *TEACHING OUTLINE*

Icebreaker: Think about the most amazing dinner you have ever had. What is the best thing you remember about it?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the import of Jesus' Passover meal with His disciples.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. FOOTWASHING

- A. Jesus Took the Role of the Lowest Servant
- B. Jesus Taught Us How to Live with One Another

DISCUSS: *If you were at the Passover dinner and no one offered to wash the guests' feet, what do you think you would have done?*

- C. I will serve with humility.

DISCUSS: *What can you do today to serve someone in humility?*

II. REMEMBERING JESUS' SACRIFICE

- A. Symbolism of the Bread and the Cup
- B. Jesus Is the High Priest and the Lamb of God **I** **V**

DISCUSS: *What do you think it was like for the high priest to be in the awesome presence of Almighty God inside the Holy of Holies?*

- C. I will remember Jesus' sacrifice.

DISCUSS: *What do you remember most when you participate in a Communion service?*

III. NOW AND FUTURE KING

- A. Jesus Promised the Holy Spirit Outpouring
- B. Jesus Promised He Would Come Back for His Church
- C. I will live in covenant and look for Jesus' coming.

DISCUSS: *What about the condition of our world shows signs to you that Jesus' coming is near?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us learn how to serve others with sacrificial love
- For God to help us always live in covenant with Him

LESSON CONNECTION

In 2019 Laura decided to take the leap and host her first Thanksgiving dinner for her family and friends in her small suburban house. The buffet of sides and wide selection of pies are stressful enough, but the most difficult task of a good Thanksgiving dinner is cooking the turkey. Laura knew it would not be like anything she had cooked before, but fret not, she had YouTube tutorials aplenty to show her the way.

She went shopping well ahead of time to make sure she could snag a large enough turkey to feed all her dinner guests. She found a twenty-pounder, paid for it, and brought it home. Now, where to store it in the freezer? It was time to clean out the freezer to make room for the star of Thanksgiving dinner. Everything was going well until that morning. She woke up ready to face the day, prepare for dinner, and . . . she forgot to defrost the turkey! She tried every fast-defrost trick she had read online, but none worked. It was still frozen solid, and dinner was only hours away.

But heat melts ice, right? She shoved the partially thawed, partially frozen entrée into the oven and cranked up the heat. That will make it cook faster, right? Hours later, her kitchen was filled with smoke. Some of the water that thawed in the oven leaked, creating a layer of grease in the bottom of the oven, causing a grease fire. Flames shot out of the oven as Laura called for help. By then her brother was at her side with a fire extinguisher and sprayed white foam all over Thanksgiving dinner. Their meal was ruined, and the kitchen was filled with smoke and covered with foam. Laura was about to break down and cry the night away.

Her cousin ordered pizza, which arrived just before her guests walked back out the door, and they ate their pizza and laughed about the Great Turkey Inferno of Thanksgiving 2019. One of her creative guests even drew a picture of a turkey on fire and stuck it to her refrigerator as a keepsake, in case she ever forgot the partially thawed, partially frozen turkey that nearly ruined Thanksgiving.

As unforgettable as Laura's Inferno Thanksgiving was for her family, today we will revisit a meal from Bible times filled with somber moments of great significance. From a shocking moment of humility to a bewildering scene of betrayal, the Last Supper is monumental in understanding Jesus' final moments with His followers.

BIBLE LESSON

I. FOOTWASHING

In Bible times, when a host invited guests into a home for a meal, it was customary for the host to provide a servant to wash the guests' feet. We derive two prominent aspects from the custom of foot washing: hygiene and humility. Many of the people in the desert area of Judea wore sandals, which quickly became dirty from the dust. They would kick off their sandals at the door so they didn't spoil their hosts' beautiful rugs or freshly cleaned floor, only to track in dust from their feet. It became a sign of hospitality to offer to wash a guest's feet. In today's society, much like we wash our hands before a meal, they practiced foot washing for hygiene as well.

The second point is humility. Foot washing became a menial but necessary practice assigned to a servant. For the head of the household to wash feet would have been a humiliating task. When Jesus—the one the disciples looked to as their rabbi, or teacher—knelt down to wash their feet, it was not only a reversal of social etiquette, but it was an object lesson on humility. John is the only Gospel that records Jesus washing the disciples' feet. (See John 13:1–17.) And John's Gospel was primarily dedicated to pointing to Jesus' deity. Interestingly, Jesus was just as divine when He was washing feet as He was when He walked on water.

A. Jesus Took the Role of the Lowest Servant

Jesus had invited His disciples to eat the Passover meal with Him. All the disciples were gathered together in the appointed place, looking forward to an evening with Jesus. Jesus had already told them He would not be with them much longer. He knew His hour had come when “he should depart out of this world unto the Father” (John 13:1).

It is not clear why no one offered to wash the dinner guests' feet at the Passover meal. None of the disciples offered to do the menial task. Perhaps they looked around for a servant and when they saw none, they simply ignored the awkward silence in the room and began eating. None of them were willing to assume the role of the lowest servant in the room.

Jesus got up from the table, set His cloak aside, and wrapped a towel around His waist. He knelt down, poured water into a basin, and gently began to wash the disciples' feet. When He was finished, Jesus took the towel and dried their feet. Jesus added another component to foot washing: loving devotion. Judas was about to betray Jesus to the Jewish religious leaders, but Peter would also deny knowing Jesus three times. Jesus could have pointed out flaws in every disciple, but it did not prohibit Him from showing loving devotion to His followers by washing their feet.

When Jesus knelt down in front of Peter, Peter asked, “Dost thou wash my feet?” Jesus explained that Peter may not understand what Jesus was doing now, but he would later. Peter shook his head and exclaimed, “Thou shalt never wash my feet” (John 13:6–8). Poor Peter had a habit of blurting before thinking. Jesus more delicately answered that if Peter did not let Jesus wash his feet, Peter would have no part with

Jesus. Peter sat back, perhaps even raised his hands in surrender, and said, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head” (John 13:9).

B. Jesus Taught Us How to Live with One Another

The picture of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet is one of true humility and love. Jesus was the greatest teacher of all time. Not only was He showing His disciples how much He loved them, but He was showing them how to love one another. When Jesus finished washing the disciples’ feet, He got up and asked them if they knew what He had just done. He went on to say, “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:13–14). When we serve each other in humility, we will prefer our brother or sister over ourselves. Learning to serve as Jesus did helps us to live in unity with each other.

Jesus’ desire is for us to learn to enjoy each other’s company and bond with those who are “of like faith.” Through His actions at the Last Supper, Jesus also showed us how to love someone who does evil against us. Jesus knelt down before Judas and lovingly washed his feet along with the others. Most likely Judas was uncomfortable. He probably had never counted on the expression of love Jesus offered him. He may have wondered if Jesus knew what he was about to do. Then it was confirmed when Jesus told him to go quickly and do what he had to do. Judas was one whom the Savior loved to the end. (See John 13:1.)

DISCUSS: *If you were at the Passover dinner and no one offered to wash the guests’ feet, what do you think you would have done?*

C. I will serve with humility.

Jesus issued clear instructions: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34–35). We look to Jesus as the perfect example of how to conduct ourselves in this world. He said to be holy as He is holy. (See I Peter 1:16.) One of the most difficult things to do as human beings is to intentionally serve with humility. It doesn’t come naturally to us because of pride, which is a poisoned fruit of sin. In fact, John declared it is one of the three worldly attributes that will separate us from God. (See I John 2:16.) However, it is good for our soul when we serve with humility. We kick pride to the curb when we put the needs of others before our own. Let us all pray for God to help us serve each other in humility, just as Jesus served His disciples.

DISCUSS: *What can you do today to serve someone in humility?*

II. REMEMBERING JESUS’ SACRIFICE

A. Symbolism of the Bread and the Cup

As the meal was wrapping up, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, and broke it. When He gave it to His disciples, He said, “This is my body which is given for you: this do

in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). Then He lifted up the cup and said, “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20). Matthew 26:28 records the last part of Jesus’ statement: “My blood . . . is shed for many for the remission of sins.” The blood of animals would no longer be necessary to cover their sins. Rather, Jesus’ blood ushered in the new covenant by providing remission for sins.

Until that point, every animal the Jews had sacrificed helped to postpone the penalty for their sins until the following year when they could offer another sacrifice. But Jesus’ sacrifice of His own life did not just postpone the penalty; His blood paid the penalty we owed. Now, we can stand before God forgiven and free from the power of sin. The writer of the Book of Hebrews was right: the new covenant is better than the old covenant because the new covenant gives us new life, something the old covenant could never do.

B. Jesus Is the High Priest and the Lamb of God

The Jewish high priest had several duties to perform every year before he was allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies, the most secure and sacred room in the Temple. As he passed through the veil, he approached the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God’s presence on earth. Atop the Ark of the Covenant were two golden cherubim (angels) facing each other with their wings outstretched, touching each other. Their faces looking at the Mercy Seat, the place where God’s presence would descend to meet with humanity. As the high priest sprinkled blood from the sacrifice he had offered onto the Mercy Seat, the presence of the Lord would fill the room. (See Exodus 25:18–20; Leviticus 16:2–4.) I

DISCUSS: *What do you think it was like for the high priest to be in the awesome presence of Almighty God inside the Holy of Holies?*

During that Passover meal, Jesus announced a new covenant through the gospel, thus fulfilling His role as High Priest (mediating between God and humanity). At the same time, He was also the Lamb of God willingly sacrificing His blood for our sins. He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. (See II Corinthians 5:21.) As God incarnate, Jesus was both our high priest and the sacrifice. V

C. I will remember Jesus’ sacrifice.

Throughout the year, we are offered communion, often during special services. Communion reminds us of the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Jesus shared communion with His disciples at the Last Supper. When He was finished, He instructed them: “Do this in remembrance of me . . . until I come.” We eat the bread and remember Jesus’ broken body for us; we drink the fruit of the vine and remember Jesus’ shed blood for us. We must remember Jesus’ sacrifice, for without it, we would all be lost. We celebrate, we remember, and we look forward in faith to the day Jesus returns for His church.

DISCUSS: *What do you remember most when you participate in a Communion service?*

III. NOW AND FUTURE KING

A. Jesus Promised the Holy Spirit Outpouring

During that same night, Jesus also promised He would pour out His Holy Spirit. In John 14, Jesus reassured the disciples: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”

After Jesus’ resurrection, He reminded the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be poured out. He told them to go to Jerusalem and wait for the “promise” there (Luke 24:49). The new covenant was a gift wrapped in His death, burial, and resurrection. These three components were the present with which the promise of the gospel was given. His death, burial, and resurrection are demonstrated through repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Today we can look forward to the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. When the disciples received the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, the promise came alive as they spoke in tongues, experiencing the divine infilling of God’s Holy Spirit. That same experience is our promise also. We have the same hope the disciples had that Jesus will dwell within us until He calls us home.

B. Jesus Promised He Would Come Back for His Church

Contrary to what many of the Jewish leaders believed, Jesus Christ was the Messiah. He may have come in a lowly manner, but He carried out His mission perfectly. He promised He would come back for His church. That is why Jesus instructed the disciples—and us, by extension—to remember His death until He comes. He was calling us to look back to what He did for us and forward to what He will do for us. Jesus is coming back for His church who has been made right with Him through the gospel.

C. I will live in covenant and look for Jesus’ coming.

Jesus’ sacrifice was the signature of His covenant with us. His work was completed. Through the gospel we have access to His presence in our lives. Looking forward to His coming is a benefit of living in covenant with Jesus. How wonderful it will be when we hear the trumpet sound and are caught up in the clouds to be with the Lord forever. (See I Thessalonians 4:16-17.)

DISCUSS: *What about the condition of our world shows signs to you that Jesus’ coming is near?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate the power and beauty of the new covenant through the gospel.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Mary stretched her neck to see Peter standing up front pacing back and forth, earnestly praying. She was shaking with excitement as she waited for whatever Jesus had promised. He told them where to meet (Jerusalem) and what to do (wait). But that was it. He did not give them a time frame. The first day they were praying for the promise; by the sixth day, they may have been praying for some fresh air. One hundred and twenty people in a second-floor room could get cramped and unpleasant. Yet, they continued to pray and wait.

As she meditated, her mind wandered. Mary had known Jesus better than anyone. Her memory pulled up the paralyzing fear she had felt when Jesus went missing for three days. She and Joseph were relieved when they found Him in the Temple teaching the teachers. He said He was attending to His Father's business. They didn't understand what He was referring to at the time, but now His meaning was loud and clear. His understanding of the Scriptures was beyond His years. She smiled as she thought, *He wrote them*. A small giggle escaped her lips as she lowered her chin and continued to pray.

Joy swelled in her heart. She knew Jesus had something extraordinary in store for those waiting for His promise; this time He would dwell within them, not just with them. Mary had a similar experience when she was carrying Him in her womb. She giggled again, thinking, *No, I'm sure*

it will be much better than morning sickness. When Mary felt His first kick in her womb, she knew it had begun. Later, when she wept at the foot of the cross, Jesus cried out, "It is finished." How she wept. For days she could think of nothing but her precious son hanging on a cross like a criminal. Then she remembered Him teaching about His suffering. He said it was necessary for Him to fulfill the old covenant and bring in the new. Now she understood. His death was required, just like the sacrificial lamb at the Temple. Jesus was that Lamb—the Lamb of God. Mary began to weep as she prayed, talking to Jesus and preparing her heart for His return.

Suddenly she heard a sound like wind, but there was no breeze. She raised her hands in worship as the sound of a rushing, mighty wind filled the room. When she opened her eyes, she saw flames, no, tongues of fire above everyone's head, and everyone was speaking in beautiful languages. She began to rejoice and jump up and down. He's coming! He's coming! Her tongue felt strange and her words were different, but a good different. She was speaking in tongues. This was the promise of the Comforter. What a wonderful experience!

She immediately felt a transformation in her heart. She was filled with the promised Holy Ghost. It was new, but warmly familiar. Oh what a wonderful day! It was as Jesus had said: His "Father's business."



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING
11

MAY 17, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Luke 22:39-46;
Romans 5:12-19

FOCUS VERSES

Luke 22:41-42

⁴¹And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, ⁴²Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus was fully human and had to surrender to fulfill covenant.

Jesus in the Garden



COVENANT CONTEXT

In this lesson, we come full circle from the beginning. Adam disobeyed and broke covenant with God in the Garden of Eden, but Jesus obeyed the will of God in the Garden of Gethsemane and extended the new covenant to us. Much of the Old Testament and even the New Testament come to an apex as we see Jesus willingly kneel to carry the weight of the world's sins and sorrows.

SG *TEACHING OUTLINE*

Icebreaker: What is the biggest decision you have made in your life so far?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the choice Jesus made to surrender His human will to the will of God.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. THE ARREST

- A. "That Thou Doest, Do Quickly"
- B. "As He Was Wont"
- C. I will prioritize prayer in every situation. **V**

DISCUSS: *Recount a time when you prayed and God gave you everything you needed in that moment.*

II. ANOTHER GARDEN, ANOTHER ADAM

- A. Jesus Had a Choice

DISCUSS: *What differences do you see between Adam and Jesus? Do you see some of those same differences in your own life?*

- B. Jesus Chose to Obey
- C. I will pray to seek God's will.

DISCUSS: *What decision are you making right now that you should make a matter of faithful prayer?*

III. JESUS' PRAYER

- A. "Great Drops of Blood"

DISCUSS: *In times when you feel alone, how does knowing Jesus went through what you go through help encourage you?*

- B. "Nevertheless Not My Will"
- C. I will surrender my will to God's will.

DISCUSS: *What area(s) of your life do you need to fully surrender to God? Are you willing to surrender to Him today?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to grant us the faith to believe in both the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ
- For God to help us fully accept that just as Adam spread sin to all people, Christ's righteous act made righteousness available to all

LESSON CONNECTION

For Christian History Institute, Eric W. Hayden wrote an article on one of the best-known preachers in history: Charles Haddon Spurgeon. His collected sermons filled sixty-three volumes, consisting of between twenty to twenty-five million words, equal to twenty-seven volumes of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. This makes it the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity. Before he was twenty years old, Spurgeon had preached more than six hundred times. Among the people who heard him were Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone, members of the royal family, members of Parliament, Florence Nightingale, and General James Garfield, who was later elected president of the United States.

When Spurgeon first arrived to pastor the New Park Street Church in 1854, the congregation had 232 members. By the end of his pastorate, nearly fifteen thousand people were added to the church. Throughout his lifetime, he preached to an estimated ten million people. His sermons sold twenty-five thousand copies every week and were translated into more than twenty languages. At least three of his books sold more than a million copies (Eric Hayden, “Charles H. Spurgeon: Did You Know?”).

We may think a Bible scholar and preacher like Spurgeon would always live in great spiritual victory, rejoicing over every success, but we would be wrong. In his comments on Psalm 88:8, Spurgeon wrote, “There are times when an unspeakable sadness steals upon me, an immense loneliness that takes possession of my soul. . . . It has become almost a matter of course that . . . sickness, and monotonous days, and grey shadows should be my portion. My God, my God, to whom can I turn for comfort but unto Thee, Thou Who didst drink the bitter cup of human loneliness to the dregs that Thou mightest make Thyself a brother to the lonely, a merciful and faithful High Priest to the desolate soul.”

His comments on Psalm 88:18 include these: “To be discountenanced or coldly treated by Christian friends, is often a consequence of a believer’s having forfeited his spiritual comfort. When the Lord is angry with His rebellious child, and is chastening him, He not only giveth Satan leave to trouble him, but permitteth some of the saints who are acquainted with him, to discountenance him, and by their cold treatment of him, to add to his grief.”

That does not necessarily mean Spurgeon surrendered to depression, but he certainly lived through difficult days. In those dark days, he remembered the words of Psalm 88:1, which begin with: “O LORD God of my salvation.” Charles Spurgeon, often known as the prince of preachers, offered, “While a man can see God as his Savior, it is not altogether midnight with him. While the living God can be spoken of as the life of our salvation, our hope will not quite expire. . . . Evil is transformed to good when it drives us to prayer” (Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Psalms*).

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE ARREST

A. “That Thou Doest, Do Quickly”

When we read all four accounts of the last events of Jesus’ life before His crucifixion, we discover He was fully aware of the suffering awaiting Him. He knew it was all foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures. (See Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 17-18.)

Matthew’s account records Jesus and His twelve disciples sharing the Passover meal. Suddenly Jesus grimly announced: “Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. . . . The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.” Judas asked, “Master, is it I?” Jesus answered, “Thou hast said.” By dipping a piece of bread into a common bowl and giving it to Judas, Jesus visually demonstrated that Judas was the one who would betray Him.

John added this sobering commentary: “And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly” (John 13:27). Although Jesus’ prayer reveals His incomprehensible suffering to come, He did not seek to delay His betrayal. The prophets had spoken, and Jesus was willing to fulfill His redemptive purpose. Even with the shame and pain He was about to endure, Jesus understood that is why He came.

B. “As He Was Wont”

When the Passover meal was finished, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives to pray, “as He was wont.” Simply stated, Jesus was a man of faithful prayer. Sometimes we know what He prayed because the Gospels writers recorded His words; sometimes we don’t. At times He prayed the words of the Old Testament, such as we see in Matthew 27:46 (compare to Psalm 22:1; Hebrews 10:5-7 compare to Psalm 40:6-8). Although some people struggle with the idea that Jesus prayed, we see abundant testimony in Scripture that He prayed because He is God incarnate: God in human flesh. It is the mystery of the Incarnation: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16). Jesus’ prayers arose from His full and genuine humanity. He was fully God, fully human. Jesus was not one divine person praying to another—an idea that violates Scripture’s radical monotheism and is difficult to distinguish from polytheism (belief in more than one god). Jesus’ prayers show us how He completely surrendered His human will to the will of God.

Mary was the first person to question the possibility that Jesus could be both God and man. Gabriel announced to her that she would conceive the “Son of the Highest” (the Son of God)—affirming His deity—and that the Lord God would give Him the throne of His father David—affirming His humanity. Mary asked: “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” The last few words of Gabriel’s answer should be accepted as the

answer to all our questions: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. . . . For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:31–37).

C. I will prioritize prayer in every situation.

We can find no better model for prayer than Jesus. He prayed before selecting His twelve disciples, before performing several of His miracles, early in the mornings, high on the mountains. Here in the closing hours of His life, as He felt the weight of the world’s sins and sorrows fall squarely on His shoulders, Jesus prayed for the strength to do the will of Almighty God.

- ☑ Since Jesus prayed, we should absolutely pray. We need His help and strength to make it through everything we go through. When we wake in the morning, let us prioritize prayer. As we go through our day, prioritize prayer. As we make major decisions, face giants, fight battles, stand on the mountain, walk through the valley, let us prioritize prayer. We will have no greater access to God than in the times we get alone with Him in prayer.

DISCUSS: *Recount a time when you prayed and God gave you everything you needed in that moment.*

II. ANOTHER GARDEN, ANOTHER ADAM

If this story feels like we are coming full circle, we are. Everything started off in a garden, the Garden of Eden. In that garden, Adam sinned and broke covenant with God. God could have walked away from us, but He kept reaching for us. In fact, Paul recorded this contrast between Jesus Christ and Adam in Romans 5. The choices each one made influenced the history of humanity. Adam’s choice to disobey God introduced sin into the world as well as sin’s consequence: death. But Jesus’ choice to obey and submit to the will of God introduced life into the world: abundant life and eternal life.

A. Jesus Had a Choice

Like a skilled attorney, Paul carefully laid out his case against Adam in Romans 5:12–21. There was precious little positive Paul had to say about Adam, but he beamed as he testified of the positive life-changing impact of Jesus Christ’s righteousness. As pervasive and destructive as Adam’s sin was, Jesus’ atonement overcame it by reversing the effects of Adam’s sin. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus exercised His power to choose by praying: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Perhaps the devil thought he was going to defeat Jesus in this garden like he defeated Adam in another garden, but Jesus prayed; submitted His human will to the will of God; and conquered death, hell, and the grave. And it all started with Jesus’ choice to do the will of God.

DISCUSS: *What differences do you see between Adam and Jesus? Do you see some of those same differences in your own life?*

B. Jesus Chose to Obey

How can we say Jesus *chose* to obey? Does this mean He could have chosen to disobey? Could He have refused the cross? It is not wrong to ask these questions, but we must remember we are asking for a rational explanation of the greatest miracle in history—the miracle of our Creator incarnate. Jesus Christ is both God and man. The mystery centers around how Jesus can be God and man at the same time, or more biblically, how God (deity) can be manifest in the flesh (humanity). From our limited view, His humanity and deity were inseparable. Only on the cross, when Jesus cried out, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” do we see Jesus’ humanity and deity part ways.

C. I will pray to seek God’s will.

Some Christians have languished over how to know God’s will for their lives. Whom should they marry? Which house should they buy? Which car should they buy? Which church, career, calling, college, city, country? But we know and we do the will of God only through prayer. While we may make a pros and cons list before we make a decision, our first step ought to be Jesus’ faithful steps: prayer. Only God knows what we ought to do, and He will order our steps if we will ask Him and faithfully walk with Him.

DISCUSS: *What decision are you making right now that you should make a matter of faithful prayer?*

III. JESUS’ PRAYER

A. “Great Drops of Blood”

Jesus’ words and physical agony revealed His intense sufferings as He wrestled with what lay before Him. As He prayed even “more earnestly . . . his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). When He arrived at Gethsemane, He told eight of His followers to sit while He went further into the garden with Peter, James, and John. The Gospel of Luke is the one account that refers to Jesus sweating “as it were great drops of blood.” Since Luke was a physician, he paid attention to these physiological details. According to Dr. Timothy Metherell in *The Case for Easter*, “This is a known medical condition called *hematidrosis*. It’s not very common, but it is associated with a high degree of psychological stress.”

As Jesus contemplated His pending suffering, His body and soul were agonizing over what He was about to do. He told the three disciples who had followed Him further to wait and watch with Him, saying: “‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.’ Then he went even further, about a stone’s throw away, fell on his face, and prayed, ‘O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt’” (Matthew 26:37–39).

He returned to find His followers asleep. Jesus asked Peter: “‘What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ He prayed again: ‘O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done’” (Matthew 26:40–42).

Again, Jesus found His disciples sleeping, so He left them and for the third time prayed the same prayer.

Luke reported: “There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.” Jesus prayed so intensely that His sweat dropped like blood to the ground. When He returned to His disciples, He found them sleeping once again. Their sorrow and weariness had sapped their strength and lulled them into sleep. Although Jesus was in the company of a few of His followers, He felt profoundly alone.

DISCUSS: *In times when you feel alone, how does knowing Jesus went through what you go through help encourage you?*

B. “Nevertheless Not My Will”

The Incarnation included all aspects of what it means to be human, including the human will. From the beginning, God created humanity with the ability to choose. Jesus is the only person who never exercised that choice in rebellion against God. It may be difficult for us to accept this thought, but the words of His prayers in Gethsemane—“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me”—indicate He wanted release from the horrendous suffering He knew lay in His immediate future. But there was no other way; this is why He came. Instead of acting on His desire to run from Calvary, Jesus surrendered His will to His divine destiny. He prayed, “Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.” His destiny included not only physical and emotional suffering but also that He, the only sinless person, would be made “to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21). The holy God of Heaven was about to carry all the sordid sins of all humanity of all time on Himself. That is love.

C. I will surrender my will to God’s will.

The most important decision we can make is to surrender to God’s will. The same apostle Peter who slept in the Garden later wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). God’s will is for everyone to be saved. He carried your cross. He carried all your griefs and sorrows; He suffered for your healing; He died for your sins. He has done everything He could do to save you, but He also gave us a choice. We must choose to surrender our will to His so we can experience the salvation He purchased for us by surrendering His will to God.

DISCUSS: *What area(s) of your life do you need to fully surrender to God? Are you willing to surrender to Him today?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate the power of making prayer our priority.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

George Müller is known as “the man who built an orphanage by prayer.” In the late 1830s, Pastor Müller felt like God was leading him to make a safe place for the orphans of his city of Bristol, England. Most of the orphans were left to fend for themselves, and many of them did not survive. God and His Word kept calling to Müller to offer them a safe place to live and someone to love them. But opening an orphanage was a major decision.

He could have raised funds and asked for donations, but he felt like this ministry should be born out of prayer. In fact, he felt like it should entirely be built by prayer, not just him raising funds. He prayed early and often, asking for God to lead him and provide for the children, if the orphanage was truly God’s will. One day in prayer, George felt God gave him peace that God would indeed provide all his needs. George had the “green light” from God; it was time to build.

Soon donations started pouring in without him asking for any money. Sometimes people brought one single coin; at other times they brought food, furniture, and clothing. George didn’t ask for help, except from God, and help continued to arrive. Within months he opened the

doors of the orphanage and over the years, cared for thousands of children who needed a home and family.

One morning, the children gathered around the breakfast table, but there was no food. Pastor Müller had watched God miraculously provide before, so he called the children to pray and thank God for the food they had to eat—although there were only empty plates and cups on the table. In moments, a baker knocked on the door with some fresh bread, saying he felt led to bring it. Then a milkman brought some milk because his cart had broken down nearby. George and all the children saw with their own eyes as God provided yet again.

George’s willingness to submit his comfort and convenience to God in prayer saved thousands of children from homelessness, disease, and despair. When Jesus prayed His prayer in the Garden, He surrendered His desire to be comfortable, and even crowned King, to the will of God to lay down His life for the souls of all humanity. It would have been easier for Jesus to walk away—and none of us could fault Him. But He chose to die for us so we could one day live with Him.

You are right; that’s not fair. But it is grace, and we thank God for it.



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING
12

MAY 24, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 27:27-31,
33-37, 45-50

FOCUS VERSES

Matthew 27:29-31

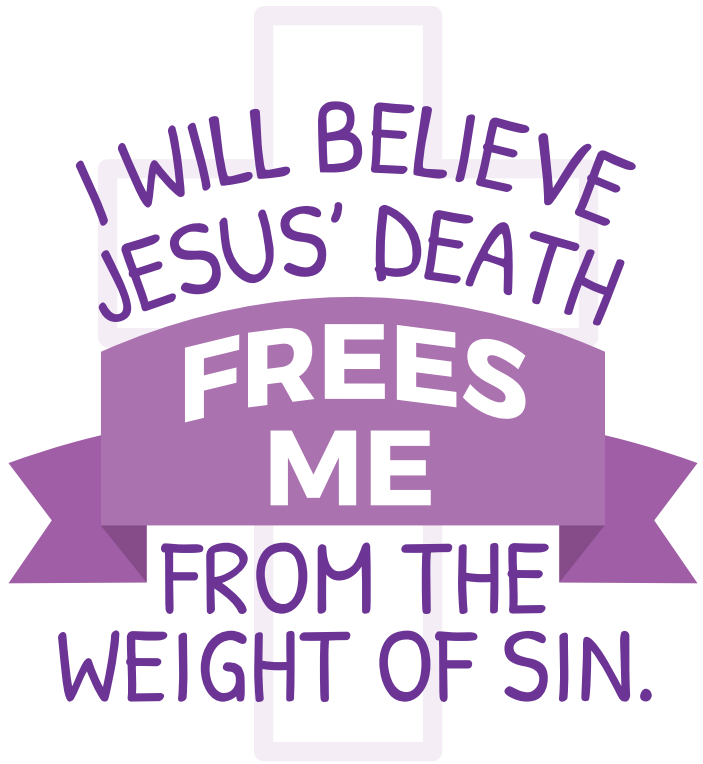
²⁹And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!
³⁰And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

³¹And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus' death atoned for our sins so we could enter a greater covenant with God.

The Cross



COVENANT CONTEXT

All the Old Testament sacrifices and ceremonies have been pointing to this day in history: the day the sinless Lamb of God laid down His own life to save us. This is what we know as the gospel—that Jesus died for us, was buried, and rose from the grave. Because of the gospel, we can be made right with God and brought into a new and better covenant with Him that will stand until Jesus returns for His church.

SG *TEACHING OUTLINE*

Icebreaker: What is your favorite hymn or song about the Cross?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the story of Jesus' atoning death on the cross.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. THE SCOURGING OF JESUS

A. Rejected

DISCUSS: *Since fear of rejection often holds us back from doing what we know we should, what can we learn from Jesus' example when He was rejected?*

B. Mocked

C. I will remember that Jesus was humiliated to save me.

DISCUSS: *Based on Hebrews 12:2, what is the joy that is set before us, and how can we use it to motivate us to self-sacrifice like Jesus did?*

II. ATONING FOR THE BROKEN COVENANT

A. Jesus Died for Everyone

DISCUSS: *Share a testimony (yours or someone else's) of God reaching people who were far away from Him.*

B. I will enter into covenant with Jesus. **V**

III. THE CROSS

A. The Death of the Testator

B. Bondage and Freedom

DISCUSS: *Before coming to God, if you ever tried to break a sinful habit by your own strength, how different was it when you had God's help?*

C. I will thank Jesus for being bound to make me free.

DISCUSS: *Even after Jesus sets us free, why do we sometimes still act like we are enslaved by sin?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For us to be thankful for Jesus' sacrifice
- For us to be motivated by Jesus' sacrifice to sacrifice for others

LESSON CONNECTION

I magine you are the high priest of ancient Israel. You wake on the tenth day of the seventh month: the Day of Atonement. First you pull on the pure white robe. Then you put on the ephod of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen, woven through with gold thread. By itself, the ephod is a sight to behold. You put the mitre on your head and make sure its gold plate proclaiming “Holiness to the Lord” is centered at the front. The golden epaulets bearing great jewels engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel rest heavy on your shoulders. More gems, also set in gold, line your chest in rows over your heart. These symbolize how you bear the weight of your people on your shoulders and your heart, especially today.

You reach the Tabernacle and step through the curtained gate into the courtyard. The sacrifices are waiting for you: a bullock and a pair of goats. You cast lots to determine which goat will live and which will die. At the brazen altar, you sacrifice the bullock and one of the goats and collect the blood. You wash at the brazen laver and step into the Holy Place. The golden candlestick lights your way past the table of shewbread. Coals glow bright on the incense altar. Your hands tremble as you approach the great, thick veil that screens off the Holy of Holies. Your heart pounds against the gems on your chest. Tiny golden bells jingle on the hem of your robe, as if Jehovah needs some warning of your approach.

On this day only, you alone may step behind the veil. You slip past it and into the most sacred space in all Israel: the Holy of Holies. The Ark of the Covenant glitters golden before you, the upswept wings of the angels meeting over the Mercy Seat. With bated breath and beating heart, you sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the Mercy Seat and in front of the Ark. If you have not done the offering correctly, if God does not accept your sacrifice, you forfeit your life. But you breathe a sigh to realize you’re still alive in the holy presence of God. As you offer a cloud of incense, the presence of God rests on the Mercy Seat, and you know the sacrifice is accepted. The people’s sins over the past year have been atoned for. Although they can’t be fully forgiven until a sinless sacrifice is offered, this is the best you can do.

With immense relief you step out of the Tabernacle into the sunlit courtyard where the scapegoat is waiting, held by an attendant. You lay your hands on it and confess over it the sins of the people of Israel, and the attendant leads it far out of the camp into the wilderness to be turned loose, symbolically carrying the people’s sins far away. The atonement is complete. Israel is at one with God once again—cleansed and still loved. You and your people will live, at least for one more year.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE SCOURGING OF JESUS

A. Rejected

Caiaphas the high priest had very selfish concerns as he stood outside the palace of Pontius Pilate and watched Jesus on trial. Caiaphas was far less concerned with cleansing his people of sin and far more concerned with clearing out this unwanted Messiah figure who was leading the high priest's followers away. So, Caiaphas and his fellow priests worked the crowd into a frenzy. As Pilate demanded, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" the people screamed back, "Let him be crucified." Pilate argued back, "Why, what evil hath he done?" And the people cried out even more, "Let him be crucified" (Matthew 27:22-23). Finally, Pilate washed his hands of the matter and delivered Jesus to be scourged and then crucified.

All of this was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53:1-7. As prophesied, Jesus was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). As Jesus stood before Pilate, the governor marveled that Jesus refused to make a case in His own defense, but this too was fulfilling Isaiah 53:7. Already bruised, battered, and beaten, the Roman soldiers yanked Jesus over to the whipping post and scourged Him—a horrific and often-deadly punishment. It was so brutal that Pilate seemed to have hoped this vicious torture would satisfy the crowd's bloodlust, but they still demanded Jesus' execution. Even these stripes laid on Jesus' back were fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. (See Isaiah 53:5.) All His suffering had a purpose.

DISCUSS: *Since fear of rejection often holds us back from doing what we know we should, what can we learn from Jesus' example when He was rejected?*

B. Mocked

For the Roman soldiers, this trial and execution seemed a novel diversion from the boredom of garrison duty in this backwater province. The entire unit was called together into the common hall for the spectacle. They twisted together a crown of thorns and pressed it onto Jesus' head, draped a cape around His bleeding shoulders, and put a rod into His hand like a scepter. Then all took a knee before Him and hailed Him as "King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:29). When they were frustrated by Jesus' stoic silence, they tore the rod from His grasp and beat Him over the head to drive the thorns still deeper.

Although these rough Roman soldiers had no knowledge of biblical prophecy, still they were fulfilling it by their actions. They bowed their knees and proclaimed Jesus as King in mockery, but one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (See Isaiah 45:23; Philippians 2:10-11.) In fact, John recorded in Revelation 1:7: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they

also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”

C. I will remember that Jesus was humiliated to save me.

Why did Jesus endure all of this? Why didn't He summon twelve legions of angels to His defense as He said He easily could? If one angel could decimate 185,000 of King Sennacherib's Assyrian troops by morning, what could twelve legions have done? In a day Jesus could have wiped the mighty Roman Empire off the map. But instead, Jesus “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). But why would He be willing to be humiliated, tortured, and killed? Hebrews 12:2 declares: “Jesus . . . for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.” We are the joy that was set before Him—every man, woman, and child who has ever come to faith in Him. Jesus, who knew the end from the beginning, could look down through the ages and see you sitting in church today. He suffered then so you could be saved now.

DISCUSS: *Based on Hebrews 12:2, what is the joy that is set before us, and how can we use it to motivate us to self-sacrifice like Jesus did?*

II. ATONING FOR THE BROKEN COVENANT

Atonement was at the heart of Jesus' mission. To atone is to make amends or pay the penalty for wrongdoing. It has also been described as the way by which we can once again be at one with God. All that is true because until our sins are atoned for, repented of, and set aside, they will constantly separate us from the presence of our holy God. God knew we could never atone for our own sins. Even the holy rituals the high priest performed under the old covenant could only roll sins forward one year. They were only acceptable to God because He knew the ultimate, sinless sacrifice of Christ was coming.

A. Jesus Died for Everyone

When the soldiers finally tired of their sport, they laid the heavy timber cross over Jesus' shoulders and led Him through the mob-crowded streets to a rocky hill just beyond the gates of Jerusalem. There they nailed Him to the cross, fulfilling even more prophecy. (See Psalm 22:16.) Then they raised Him between earth and Heaven to suffer and die.

Crucifixion was the most torturous of deaths. It could take days for the victims to die. It was so horrible that one of the chief benefits of being a Roman citizen was exemption from this form of execution. Jesus suffered this torture for all of humanity. Finally, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). This was more than a cry of despair. It was a reference to Psalm 22, similar to how older hymns are usually named by their first words. Any student of Scripture near the cross would have caught the reference. Doctors of the Law likely could have quoted this psalm by heart. We have to wonder if they were struck by their own fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 22:7-8. As Jesus cried out, “I thirst” and someone offered Him vinegar to

drink, did any onlooker think of Psalm 22:15? As the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothes at the foot of the cross, they had no idea they were fulfilling Psalm 22:18.

But perhaps the message Jesus wanted us to hear most clearly, that He surely didn't have the breath to sing or recite was this: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee" (Psalm 22:27). In other words, Jesus died for everyone. For those at the ends of the earth, those who feel so far away from God that grace could never reach them, for every kindred, tongue, racial group, and nationality—Jesus died for everyone.

DISCUSS: Share a testimony (yours or someone else's) of God reaching people who were far away from Him.

B. I will enter into covenant with Jesus.

In that brutal yet holy moment, the veil in the Temple that had blocked people from entering the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom, as if God Himself had reached down and torn it in half. The veil was inches thick and over six stories high. Scholars have surmised that a team of horses could not have pulled it apart. This dark day was the dawning of the new covenant Jesus promised to bring. All the years of sacrifices and symbolism had their end and fulfillment at the cross.

*"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."
(Hebrews 8:10)*

Every year the high priest had walked, trembling, into the Holy of Holies bearing the blood of bulls and goats. Now in the fulness of time, Jesus entered one single time into the Holy Place and offered His own life's blood once and for all. No longer would sin merely roll forward year after year. Now every sin could be cleansed instantly and forever by the blood of the sinless Lamb of God. And just as the high priest had carried the names of the tribes of Israel on his shoulders and over his heart, so Jesus carried the weight of the world on His shoulders; we were the burden laid on His heart. V

III. THE CROSS

A. The Death of the Testator

The glory of the cross is not found in the blood-stained timber; it is found in what Jesus accomplished for us that day. His death was the key that unlocked hope for the entire world and ushered in a new covenant with humanity. Hebrews 9:15–17 details how Jesus' death brought about a new testament. The Scripture likens this to the reading of a will and the distribution of an inheritance. The will of God was to distribute the gift of salvation to everyone who would believe and obey the gospel. But just as children do not receive their inheritance until their parents die, for God's will to take effect, there had to be the death of the testator, or the one who had written the will. Jesus was "the mediator of the new testament," or covenant with humanity. He died so "they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:15).

B. Bondage and Freedom

Without Jesus Christ we were sentenced to be slaves to sin. The world loves to proclaim that the sinful life is a life of freedom, but alcoholics (being honest) would tell you how hard it is to quit drinking. Ask those addicted to drugs, sexual immorality, cigarettes, or pornography how easy it is to break free. Ask workaholics to cut back from their eighty-hour work weeks. Ask gluttons how easily they can quit excessive eating. It is so hard to stop because revolts are never easy. The ruler always tries to crush the revolt and whip his subjects back into line. It is often less painful to accept the shackles and tread one more time around in a circle pushing the devil's millstone, like Samson—blind, weak, and bound, trapped in the cycle.

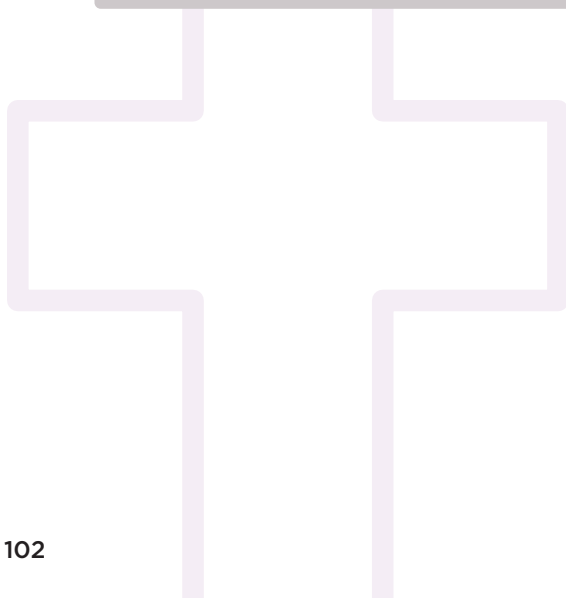
DISCUSS: *Before coming to God, if you ever tried to break a sinful habit by your own strength, how different was it when you had God's help?*

But Jesus came to change all that. We who once were servants to sin are now set free. And Jesus didn't just free us, He also adopted us as His sons and daughters. Now we are heirs of that eternal inheritance Jesus' death purchased for us. We are not just set free and turned loose into the world to fend for ourselves. We are adopted as children of the King, brought into His kingdom, and will one day be seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

C. I will thank Jesus for being bound to make me free.

When the mob came for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, He surrendered willingly, yet they bound His hands. He did not raise a hand to defend Himself. He did not run from the flogging post. Bands of love for us held Jesus to the cross far more firmly than any nails ever could. How much gratitude should we feel toward the one who was bound to make us free? All He asks in return is for us to accept that freedom. How heartbreaking it must be for Jesus to have gone through all that and still have so many people reject the freedom and grace He gives.

DISCUSS: *Even after Jesus sets us free, why do we still sometimes act like we are enslaved by sin?*



Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how some people choose bondage over freedom although Jesus offers freedom.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The term *institutionalization* is used to describe the state of prisoners who have spent so much time in the prison system that they have difficulty adjusting to freedom after their release. In some cases they would prefer not to leave the prison at all. This is incredible considering the terrible quality of life on the inside. Life is monotonous and strictly regimented most of the time with moments of brutality, humiliation, and terror. One would think prisoners would be counting down the days to their release with hash marks on the walls.

Yet some prisoners are literally forced to change into civilian clothes and then kicked out of the prison against their will. One inmate told of a woman who, when forced to leave the prison she had called home for many years, went out the same day and committed a robbery, allowed herself to be caught, pled guilty, and was immediately sent back to prison. A prison guard told of a man who had been incarcerated for thirty-seven years, and once he was released, spent three weeks living with his daughter. When he ran out of money and did not want to become a burden, he donned a ski mask,

took a sawed-off shotgun, drove to a local convenience store, and sat in the car for eight hours waiting for someone to call the police to arrest him and put him back in jail.

It boggles the mind of anyone who has not experienced institutionalization, but bondage to sin and Satan is much the same. The sinful life is often painful but still comfortable—frightening, yet familiar. Old habits die hard. We grow attached to our chains. We feel safe behind our bars. We can fear the unknown outside the prison walls. What will our life be like if we put all our faith in Jesus Christ? Will it be worse out there than it is in here?

Jesus paid the price for every one of us to be free. He purchased our pardon on Calvary. He died to set us free. Whoever the Son sets free is truly free. And He assures us He has a far better life awaiting us outside the devil's high fences and razor wire. Jesus promises abundant life in this world and eternal life in the world to come. Jesus was brave enough to be bound so we could be free. Will you be brave enough to leave the chains behind and walk through the prison gates He has broken?



JESUS
CHRIST



SPRING
13

MAY 31, 2026

Jesus' Resurrection

LESSON TEXT
Matthew 28:1-20

FOCUS VERSES
Matthew 28:6-8
⁶He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.
⁷And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.
⁸And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT
Jesus' resurrection conquered our final enemy, death.

I WILL FIND
HOPE
AND ETERNAL
LIFE
THROUGH
JESUS' GOSPEL.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Although all founders of history's religious leaders have died, only Jesus has resurrected. His resurrection is at the heart of who we are as Christians. Without it, the gospel would not be good news, for sin and death would still reign. However, Jesus conquered sin, death, and hell and invites all humanity into this new and better covenant with Him.

SG *TEACHING OUTLINE*

Icebreaker: What is the closest you have ever come to a near-death experience?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the fear many people have of death.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection. **I**

I. THE RESURRECTION

A. Conquering Death

DISCUSS: *What are some reasons people may fear death? What is Jesus' answer to these fears?*

B. New Life

C. I will respond to the gospel and be born again.

DISCUSS: *What is one thing you are very happy to leave in the past?*

II. LIVING IN COVENANT WITH CHRIST

A. The New Covenant

B. I will maintain my covenant with Jesus Christ.

DISCUSS: *What are some ways you prioritize your relationship with Jesus in your daily life and for your family?*

III. THE GOSPEL AND FAITH FULFILLED

A. Our Faith Is Not in Vain

DISCUSS: *How do you think the disciples felt that day when the risen Jesus suddenly appeared to them?*

B. Fear Not

C. I will find hope and eternal life in Jesus. **V**

DISCUSS: *What is one way your life has changed as Jesus trades fear for hope in your life?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to bring our families, friends, neighbors, and coworkers to new birth
- For God to replace fear with hope in our lives and in the lives of others

LESSON CONNECTION

① **T**he Romans and the Jews were remembering Jesus' words that He would rise again. A squad of Roman legionnaires in full armor, swords belted on, spears and shields in hand, were commissioned to guard—of all things—a tomb. A massive stone was rolled across the entrance. Pontius Pilate's own seal of imperial Rome was pressed into wax on the stone, proclaiming no one was to open the tomb upon pain of death.

The hardened men standing guard were some of the world's most skilled fighting men. Rome's legions had conquered the then-known world, and these particular men were used to fighting Jewish insurgents who bitterly resented the Romans. If Roman soldiers retreated, the penalty was sometimes decimation: one man in ten killed by his nine fellow soldiers. The penalty for losing a prisoner or for falling asleep on guard duty was also death. It had been a long three days, but these men would have been alert and ready for trouble.

They knew the man in the tomb they guarded was dead. Just three days earlier, they had crowned Him with a thorny crown, draped Him with a cape, and beaten Him over the head with the rod they had given Him as a scepter. They had bowed the knee and mocked, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Some of these soldiers may have been at the Place of the Skull to watch Jesus of Nazareth die on a rugged Roman cross. They knew He was dead.

Roman executioners were efficient. They speared Him in His side, and blood and water flowed from His broken heart and flooded chest. He was dead and buried, and they were only there to prevent His followers from stealing His body and starting vicious rumors that He was alive. These veteran soldiers could send any such rabble of rebels running if they tried anything.

Then the ground started shaking. The soldiers stumbled, bracing themselves against anything they could get their hands on. A figure dropped from the sky, a blinding flash of brilliant white in the pre-dawn darkness. In a moment he rolled back the stone from the tomb and then calmly sat on it as if satisfied that his job was done. The hardened veteran soldiers were frozen with fear. Nothing in their years of combat had prepared them for anything like this. They could fight men, but this was no man.

When they could get their limbs to move again, they fled the scene. But where would they go? Pilate would have them executed if he knew they abandoned their post. Clearly, something supernatural had happened, so they went to the chief priests. Maybe the religious leaders could explain what these men had seen. The priests listened to their story, took counsel with the elders, and then offered the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, "Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept" (Matthew 28:13). It was a far-fetched story, but who would believe them if they told the truth?

They took the money.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE RESURRECTION

A. Conquering Death

Death reigned like a tyrant until Jesus' resurrection. In the ancient world, death even reigned over the pagan gods of the nations. Ancient worshipers believed that gods like the Canaanite god Baal or the Egyptian god Osiris died and rose again every year in a cycle tied to the seasons and crop cycles. But unlike these false gods, Jesus conquered death once and for all when He rose from the grave, never to die again.

We can almost imagine Jesus asking these questions as He rose triumphant from the tomb: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (I Corinthians 15:55). Up until that moment, the fear of death was the most devastating fear in the world. But no longer. Those who are saved have no reason to fear death, knowing it is only the beginning of eternal life. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus proclaimed: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Why should we who know Jesus Christ fear anything He holds the keys to and has control over?

DISCUSS: *What are some reasons people may fear death? What is Jesus' answer to these fears?*

B. New Life

Just as Jesus asserted He now holds the keys to death and hell, so He also holds the keys to Heaven. He entrusted these keys first to the apostle Peter, and through him to the church as a whole. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter was the first to use those keys to unlock the door to the kingdom of God. After Peter preached about Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, the natural response of the crowd was conviction: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter slipped the divine keys into the lock and turned them when he answered: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Through Jesus' death, we die to our old way of life. When we are buried with Him in baptism, our old life of slavery to sin is dead and buried. When we receive the Holy Spirit, the breath of God is breathed into us to make us alive again. We rise from the dead just like Jesus rose, and we are changed. We are empowered to walk in new life.

C. I will respond to the gospel and be born again.

This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, or the good news Jesus came to enact and commissioned His disciples to spread across the world. This is the gospel they were all willing to lay down their lives to preach. What a hopeful message Jesus has given us: We can be born again. Old things can be left dead and buried behind us. All things can become new. We can become new creatures in Christ Jesus. Our past does not have

to define our future. Our failures of yesterday are not our destiny for tomorrow. Jesus offers us a brand-new life and a fresh start, a new identity as a child of God.

DISCUSS: *What is one thing you are very happy to leave in the past?*

II. LIVING IN COVENANT WITH CHRIST

A. The New Covenant

Hundreds of years before this beautiful new covenant, the prophet Jeremiah watched his nation fall deeper into apostasy and eventually to Babylon. Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet because despite his decades of faithful witness, his people rejected his message from God and paid the price. Yet even in the midst of devastation, God still communicated a promise to His people through Jeremiah: “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33). The writer of Hebrews was inspired to connect this promise with the Cross. (See Hebrews 8:10.) This is the new covenant Jesus came to establish. No longer would the Law be written on cold, hard tablets of stone as they were originally given to Moses. Now God would write His law on fleshy tables of the heart.

When we receive the Holy Ghost, with the supernatural sign of speaking in tongues, God dwells within us and writes His law on our hearts. Being led by the Spirit does not mean we have license to ignore the commandments of God. Instead, it means they are even nearer and dearer to our hearts than ever. Rather than an external code of laws, they become an internalized way of life. We are no longer spiritually dead people trying to follow a list of dos and don'ts. Now we are spiritually alive and empowered to follow God's principles from the heart.

B. I will maintain my covenant with Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, the old covenant had to be maintained regularly. So, too, the new covenant with Jesus must be regularly maintained as well. In the Old Testament, God's people had to offer a sacrifice every morning and evening. Today we are called to die daily to our own sinful desires through repentance. In the Old Testament, they were told to write God's Word on the posts of their house and talk about it when they were sitting in their house, when they were walking by the way, when they woke up in the morning, and when they lay down at night. They were to diligently teach the Scriptures to their children. (See Deuteronomy 6:4-9.) In the same way, we must stay focused on the Bible as the Word of God. It should be a daily part of our lives and a constant part of our conversations. In the Old Testament they were commanded to keep the Sabbath holy to the Lord. Today we are called to be faithful to gather in the house of God to worship and hear His Word.

No covenant, whether new or old, will long survive if neglected. Ancient Israel neglected their sacrifices, Scriptures, and Sabbaths, and before long the next generation knew not the Lord or the things He had done for Israel, and they began doing what was right in their own eyes (Judges 2:10). Their nation fell into idolatry

and was ultimately destroyed. The same can easily happen to us today if we neglect these basic disciplines that maintain our covenant with Jesus Christ. It goes worse for people who once entered into covenant with God and then fall away from Him than for those who have never known Him at all. (See II Peter 2:21.) It is far better to know Him and stay close to Him and reap all the blessings of covenant.

DISCUSS: *What are some ways you prioritize your relationship with Jesus in your daily life and for your family?*

III. THE GOSPEL AND FAITH FULFILLED

As Jesus lay in the tomb, the disciples should have known Jesus had done all this to institute a new covenant and was about to rise again in victory over death, hell, and the grave. They should have realized because He had clearly laid out the plan of His Passion for them in the lead-up to the cross. He had told them He would be crucified and the third day He would rise again, but they were too busy jockeying for position to pay attention.

For these disciples, this was their darkest hour. They were hidden away behind closed doors, likely fearing they would be the next to carry Roman crosses. But then, just as dawn was breaking, Jesus rose in fulfillment of all that had been prophesied and all He had promised.

A. Our Faith Is Not in Vain

To the disciples, huddled in that closed room unaware of what was happening at the tomb, it must have seemed their faith had been in vain. They had left all and followed Jesus. They had walked the dusty roads with Him for over three years, living lives of homeless men. They had been through storms with Him and suffered hunger and persecution. All this they had done because they had faith that Jesus was the Messiah, who had come to save Israel. It had seemed so close. They had walked alongside as Jesus rode the donkey, triumphantly entering Jerusalem as the crowds waved palm fronds and shouted, "Hosanna!" They had seen Jesus cleanse the Temple in righteous anger. Surely He would cleanse Israel of the Roman conquerors next.

And then they saw Him arrested, tried, convicted, crucified, and buried in a borrowed tomb, with the crowds turning against Him. The combined power of the Sanhedrin and Rome crushed their hopes. They must have felt shame at how they had scattered and fled, and even denied Jesus when they had all sworn they would gladly die with Him (Matthew 26:35). It must have seemed like it had all been a farce and their faith had been in vain.

Until. Suddenly Jesus was standing in their midst. They should have been waiting at the tomb that morning for Him to rise, but instead He came and found them. Isn't that how God works? When we are not where we should be, He comes and finds us right where we are. Yes, He scolded them for their lack of faith and hardness of heart, but He was also willing to let them put their fingers in the print of the nails and thrust their hand into His side if that's what it took for them to believe.

DISCUSS: How do you think the disciples felt that day when the risen Jesus suddenly appeared to them?

B. Fear Not

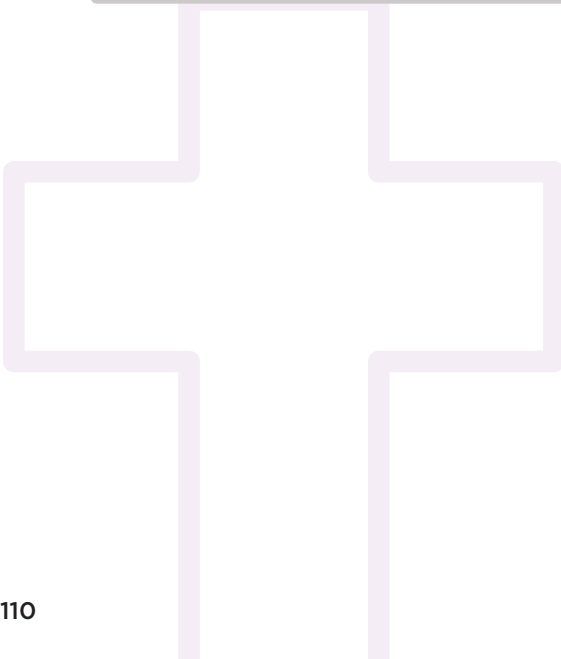
The women who were first at the tomb saw the open tomb and the angel seated on the stone. The angel's face was shining like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. The angel kindly called to the women: "Fear not ye" (Matthew 28:5). Fear is a natural physical and mental response, but in this and many other circumstances, the command was given to "fear not." God will never give us a command without also giving us the power to obey, so clearly God can help us to overcome and move beyond our fears.

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7). With the power of God on our side and the power of the Holy Ghost in us, whom should we fear? Knowing that no one can separate us from the love of Christ, why should we fear? Perfect love casts out fear. As the old hymn says, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone."

C. I will find hope and eternal life in Jesus.

- ▼ Because Jesus died for us and rose again triumphantly, we have hope both for this life and the next. It would be terrifying to think that this life with all its heartaches and struggles is all there is, but we have hope in Christ not in this life only but also in the world to come. We have hope knowing no matter what the enemy brings against us, God can turn it to good, just like He turned the cross that was made to destroy into a source of eternal salvation. God turns even apparent defeats into ultimate victory. No matter what, no matter how dark, no matter how difficult, our faith is not in vain. Our Jesus arose, and one day, we will too.

DISCUSS: What is one way your life has changed as Jesus trades fear for hope in your life?



Teacher Option: Share the stories below or share one of your own to illustrate how the Resurrection is at the heart of what we believe as Christians.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Two groups of witnesses went out into the world from that empty tomb. The soldiers, bribed by the chief priests, spread the word that Jesus' dead body had been stolen away by His disciples while the soldiers slept. The disciples, with no hope of personal gain, spread the word that Jesus was alive again. The soldiers' lie died away almost immediately. The apostolic truth lives on almost two thousand years later.

Shortly before Jesus ascended to Heaven, Jesus commanded the apostles: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). And they obeyed. Ancient tradition states the apostles divided up the then-known world and cast lots to determine who would go where to preach the gospel, and all except John (who wrote Revelation) were martyred for the faith.

James the son of Zebedee was first, killed with the sword by King Herod. According to historical accounts, Peter was crucified upside down at Rome, unwilling to die in the same manner as his Lord. Andrew was crucified in Greece on an X-shaped cross. Thomas, who had once doubted Jesus' resurrection until Jesus showed him His scars, pressed east as far as India, preaching the gospel and was killed there. Philip is said to have witnessed across

Asia Minor and then down to North Africa, where he converted the wife of the Roman governor to Christianity. In retaliation the governor had Philip executed.

The former tax collector, Matthew, carried the gospel across Parthia, Persia, and south to Ethiopia, where some writings say he was stabbed to death. The apostle Bartholomew carried the gospel east, especially to Armenia. He was either beheaded or flayed alive for his faith. James, the son of Alphaeus, remained at Jerusalem, preaching the gospel until he too was martyred. Simon the Zealot carried the message to Egypt, North Africa, and then Persia where he was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god. Matthias, who was chosen by lot to replace Judas, preached in Syria until he was burned at the stake.

Some claimed the apostles were liars, that they stole Jesus' body and were lying when they claimed to be eyewitnesses of His resurrection. But what lie could possibly motivate men to travel the world preaching a message they knew was a lie? What lie could possibly be worth dying for in some of the most excruciating ways possible? They did not lie. Jesus rose again, He appeared to these men, and He is still alive and living in us today.



THE FIRST
CHURCH



SUMMER
01

JUNE 07, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Acts 1:1-14

FOCUS VERSES

Acts 1:6-8

⁶When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

⁷And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

⁸But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus commissioned us to share His covenant with the world.

Jesus' Great Commission



COVENANT CONTEXT

Although Jesus' earthly ministry had come to an end, His covenant with humanity continued in a new, closer way. He promised He would continue to dwell among His people by filling us with His Holy Spirit. As the Book of Acts demonstrates, He will give us power through His Spirit to be witnesses and make disciples for Him.

SG **TEACHING OUTLINE**

Icebreaker: What subject could you talk about for an hour right now with no preparation?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to our calling to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. JESUS' CHARGE

A. The Power of the Spirit

DISCUSS: *When you think about the power that comes with God's Holy Spirit, how does that power show up in your daily life?*

B. The Spread of the Gospel **I**

C. I will share the gospel with my family, friends, and neighbors.

DISCUSS: *Besides speaking, what are some ways you can be a witness on a daily basis with your actions and lifestyle?*

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

A. Spiritual Power Versus Political Power

DISCUSS: *How does a shift in mindset away from political or earthly power and toward spiritual power change how you think about power?*

B. I will invest my life and resources in the kingdom of God.

DISCUSS: *What are some of your life's resources (time, talent, and treasure) that you can invest into God's kingdom?*

III. ESTABLISHING THE KINGDOM

A. Sharing the Gospel

B. Making Disciples **V**

DISCUSS: *What does making disciples look like after someone has experienced the new birth?*

C. I will make disciples for Jesus.

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us see the Holy Spirit's transformation in every aspect of our lives
- For God to help us to be witnesses not just with our words, but with the entirety of our lives

LESSON CONNECTION

Bridget worked as a finance counselor for a large university on the West Coast of the United States. For the most part, she enjoyed her job. The pay and benefits were generous for her area. She was comfortable in her knowledge of her subject matter, and she found a sense of accomplishment in guiding students in making wise financial decisions.

However, Bridget was not passionate about finance, nor was she overly passionate about higher education. Bridget was an artist. Her nights and weekends were consumed with all things artistic. She enjoyed finding new and unique ways to convey the images in her head onto canvas. Acrylics worked just fine if she did not have much time, but she also experimented with watercolor, oil, pastels, ink, and even charcoal. She also enjoyed restoring old furniture and turning discarded appliances and housewares into expressive art displays. When she needed a new blouse or dress for a special occasion, she preferred to make her own rather than browsing online clothing retailers. If nothing else, her hands found themselves crocheting or knitting unique items for whatever gift-giving holiday was next. Her art had found its way into local coffee shops and tourist attractions, and she happily manned a tent at local and regional art shows to display and sell her work.

One weekend a visitor showed up at Bridget's church. Bridget introduced herself warmly to the young lady, welcoming her to the church. During small talk, the visitor asked Bridget what she did for a living. Without thinking, Bridget replied, "I'm a finance counselor." Bridget's husband overheard her comment and quickly interjected, "No, she's not, she's an artist; finance is just her job." The group shared a hearty laugh, and Bridget's husband proceeded to brag on his wife's accomplishments until she turned red with embarrassment.

Later Bridget reflected on what her husband had said at church. While he had commented lightheartedly, she realized there was truth in his words. At her core, she was an artist. Her identity as an artist showed up in every area of her life. Her artistic touch showed up at her work office, where the walls were plastered with stunning pieces she had created to assure and inspire students. Her artistry consumed her free time as she often spent quality time with friends in art galleries. Even at church, her pastor had harnessed her talent to create all of the church's social media graphics.

Bridget could see a spiritual analogy immediately. Just like her artistry touched every aspect of her life because that was who she was at her core, her identity as a follower of Jesus Christ also touched every aspect of her life. Even before she was an artist, she was a Christian. She knew that the Holy Spirit within her was designed to permeate every aspect of her being. Therefore, her thoughts, emotions, actions, relationships—yes, even her art—were different because of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

She bowed her head and silently prayed: *Lord, if I allow the artistic gift You gave me to show up in all aspects of my life, let Your Holy Spirit show up even more so. I am an artist only by Your grace and mercy so I may be a witness to You in this world.*

BIBLE LESSON

I. JESUS' CHARGE

Shortly before Jesus ascended into Heaven, He gathered His faithful followers together and gave His final words, a sure guarantee. They would receive the Holy Spirit and the power that only comes through the indwelling Holy Spirit. This promise reminded His followers that God's covenant relationship with His people was not over with the conclusion of Jesus' earthly ministry. God had always desired to dwell among His people and He would continue to be right there in their midst. Just as God once walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day, tabernacled Himself in the center of the Israelite camp, and became incarnate in human flesh, God would continue His eternal covenantal practice of abiding among His beloved.

A. The Power of the Spirit

Luke recorded Jesus' charge at the beginning of the Book of Acts, providing the context for every other event recorded in Acts. From the early outpouring in the upper room to Paul's witness in Rome and everything in between, none of the events of Acts would have been possible without the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was necessary not only to give Jesus' followers power but also to provide them with direction and clarity.

Jesus plainly told His followers they would not understand the things that are in God's power, which includes knowledge of "the times or the seasons" (Acts 1:7). God's Spirit would provide power for a different, albeit specific purpose: to be witnesses unto Jesus Christ. Being filled with the Spirit's power mandates that we understand and accept our roles as Spirit-filled witnesses, all the while understanding that not *all* God's power has been given to us. For example, God gives us power to testify to others of the grace of God, but He has not given us power to walk on water.

DISCUSS: *When you think about the power that comes with God's Holy Spirit, how does that power show up in your daily life?*

B. The Spread of the Gospel

Jesus charged His followers to be witnesses to all people in the known world, starting locally in Jerusalem, moving regionally into Judea, breaking social barriers into Samaria, and then into the furthest reaches of the earth. The geographic outline of the Book of Acts mirrors this pattern. What began in Jerusalem in Acts 1 rapidly expanded until this miracle-filled book concluded in Rome in Acts 28. I

While some of Jesus' followers may have been surprised at Jesus' encouragement of a worldwide witness, those knowledgeable of Old Testament prophecy would have recognized salvation for all peoples was always part of God's covenantal plan. Abraham received one of the earliest prophecies of this promise: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). Peter quoted this promise in

Acts 3:25 and Paul quoted it in Galatians 3:8. In both places, it was used to invoke the continuation of God's ongoing covenant relationship with humanity.

Other Old Testament passages also foresaw the eventual salvation of all Gentiles. Psalm 22:27 prophesied: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD." Isaiah 49:6 foretold that the coming Messiah would be "a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." Malachi 1:11 promised the Lord's "name shall be great among the Gentiles." Memorably, the prophet Jonah begrudgingly witnessed to Nineveh, the capital of the Gentile kingdom of Assyria, and thousands of Gentiles received a taste of God's grace and mercy that was later fully realized in the Book of Acts.

C. I will share the gospel with my family, friends, and neighbors.

As believers who seek to be like the New Testament church in Acts, we are now called to receive the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of God. However, being filled with God's Spirit comes with a responsibility to be a witness to all with whom we interact. The indwelling Holy Spirit permeates our entire being, influencing our thoughts, words, emotions, actions, and lifestyles. Thus, we are called to be witnesses with our entire being. We often associate being a witness with speaking, but we also witness by what we think about and dwell on, what we care about, how we respond to others, how we live in an unholy world. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to saturate us until we are witnesses with every part of our lives.

DISCUSS: *Besides speaking, what are some ways you can be a witness on a daily basis with your actions and lifestyle?*

II. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The statement that God is on our side is somewhat of a misnomer. It is more accurate to say we need to make sure we are on God's side by living as citizens of His kingdom. Yes, if we are filled with His Holy Spirit and endeavoring to do His will, then He is on our side, but before that happens, we must make sure we are on His side, living in covenantal relationship with God Almighty.

Jesus encouraged His followers to pray for God's kingdom to reign on the earth and to pursue God's kingdom first and foremost. (See Matthew 6:10, 33.) By shifting humanity's focus away from the temporal and onto the eternal, Jesus hoped we would reprioritize our covenant relationship with God, correctly bringing our thoughts and actions in line with God and His will.

A. Spiritual Power Versus Political Power

The question the disciples asked in Acts 1:6 betrayed a sad reality: Despite hearing Jesus' teachings, seeing His miracles, and even witnessing His resurrection, the disciples were still looking for Jesus to sit on a throne in the heart of Jerusalem and set up His earthly kingdom. Jesus' response was a gentle reminder not to be concerned with such things because that power was not granted to them.

The two references to *power* in verses 7 and 8 provide an important distinction regarding God's kingdom and the power He gives us. His responsibility is overseeing the times and seasons, such as setting up kingdoms and bringing them down. He has not granted that power to humanity. Jesus' statement would have reminded His audience of the prayer in Daniel 2:21, which affirmed that only God could change "the times and the seasons," and only God "removeth kings, and setteth up kings." The Jews in the first century would have loved to overthrow Rome, but that was not up to them; that power belongs to God.

By contrast, the power granted to us is for the specific purpose of being witnesses of the gospel of Jesus Christ around the world. This commission crosses language lines and national borders by calling Spirit-filled followers into "the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). God's kingdom on earth would not come by military campaigns and conquests, but by His Spirit encompassing the entire globe.

DISCUSS: *How does a shift in mindset away from political or earthly power and toward spiritual power change how you think about power?*

B. I will invest my life and resources in the kingdom of God.

We are most in tune with God's Spirit when we get right what the disciples initially got wrong: We must understand what power belongs to us and what power belongs only to God. When we operate in our assigned roles—we invest all we are and everything we have into God's kingdom—we are acting in covenant with God. Just as Jesus gave His all for us by dying for our sins, rising again to conquer death, and abiding with us through the Holy Spirit, so now we give our all by being witnesses with our whole being. Such is the nature of our covenant relationship with God; He gave His all, and in response we give our all.

DISCUSS: *What are some of your life's resources (time, talent, and treasure) that you can invest into God's kingdom?*

III. ESTABLISHING THE KINGDOM

By filling us with His Spirit, God writes His covenant on our hearts. (See Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10.) Until Jesus does set up His royal throne in the heart of Jerusalem, God's kingdom is established in our hearts. When we seek to bring people to Jesus by sharing the gospel and making disciples, we are actively participating in establishing God's kingdom. We are seeing our prayers answered before our eyes as God's kingdom comes and His will is done. (See Matthew 6:10.)

A. Sharing the Gospel

The gospel message is simply defined as the good news of Jesus Christ, who died to pay the price for our sins, was buried for three days, and rose again to offer us new life in Him. We share the gospel with our words but also with our testimonies: the testimony of how He saved us from our sins and the testimony of our example. As the adage goes, "Actions speak louder than words," so our consistent testimony of a Christ-honoring lifestyle sometimes speaks louder than our words. In fact, Jesus

taught in Matthew 5:14 that people may see our good works first before they glorify our great God.

▼ B. Making Disciples

Everyone who has been born again is called to make disciples of those who are not yet born again. In his book *Follow to Lead*, Stan Gleason writes that we should make strangers friends and friends disciples. It is difficult to disciple someone to Jesus if we do not even know them yet. Make a friend. Go out for coffee, invite them to dinner, ask them if you can pray for anything for them. Be genuinely interested in people. Making disciples often starts with making friends.

Making disciples includes sharing the gospel with others and teaching them how to rightly respond to the gospel according to Acts 2:38: Repent of your sins, be baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost with the initial sign of speaking with other tongues. But that is only the beginning. Biological birth is necessary for human life, but parents must nurture and grow their baby to maturity. Similarly, part of the believer's role as a witness in God's kingdom is mentoring, training, and teaching new believers to a mature relationship with Jesus. After someone experiences new birth, the church is responsible for nurturing and training him or her to grow and continually become more like Christ.

DISCUSS: *What does making disciples look like after someone has experienced the new birth?*

C. I will make disciples for Jesus.

Stan Gleason compared making disciples to the first-century relationship between rabbis and disciples. He wrote that rabbis would “spend their lives teaching, training, imparting, and sharing their lives, values, and principles. This is how the Lord Himself lived, and His disciples followed His model during their ministries” (Stan Gleason, *Follow to Lead*). Making disciples is all about relationships.

Just like Jesus and His disciples, we are now commissioned to make disciples. (See Matthew 28:19.) This includes teaching and encouraging fellow believers and training new converts on how to live in covenant relationship with Jesus Christ, even after their initial new-birth experience. The commission to make disciples and to be witnesses go hand in hand. As we bear witness to the saving message of Jesus Christ, we will naturally make disciples. By fulfilling these commissions, we participate in establishing God's kingdom on earth. All of us who are Spirit-filled should continually rededicate ourselves to these great commissions.

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how our true passion should be to witness for Jesus Christ. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Not everyone will have the artistic talent and drive of Bridget, the young lady from the opening story. However, many people can identify with having a deep-rooted passion for a topic or subject matter. For some, their passion may be business related, while others are deeply passionate about education. Some may find their passion in playing an instrument, while others might be passionate about building things with their hands. If you are not sure what your passion is, ask yourself: What subject could I speak on for an hour right now with no preparation? If you can answer this question, you might have found your passion.

Our passions typically consume the majority of our time. This is why our relationship with God must be our highest passion. God may not be calling us to give up our passions of business, construction, education, or art. As Spirit-filled witnesses, our relationship with God must show up in every aspect of our lives. Does the art we create reflect a deep-rooted relationship with God? Does how we treat our employees and do business reflect a pure heart that only comes from being in right relationship with God? Can we find ways to honor God and be Spirit-filled witnesses to our coworkers, regardless

of our profession? Can we be witnesses unto God on the golf course as well as in the sanctuary?

Bridget changed her language after that interaction. She no longer introduced herself as a finance counselor. Instead, she described her profession with a bold proclamation: “I’m an artist.” Her shift in mindset also changed how she spoke about God. She no longer simply told people she went to church as if that were the mundane summary of a boring Christian walk. She told anyone who would listen how much she loved God and how He had changed everything in her life for the better. Her coworkers, students, and art patrons noticed a difference in how she conducted herself as they observed the Holy Spirit radiating through every aspect of her life. Her thoughts and emotions were holier. Her speech was purer.

Her ability to spread the gospel and make disciples was exponentially revolutionized when she realized that, at her core, she was a witness. She was not only a finance counselor or even an artist. She was a blood-bought child of the King of kings, a citizen of God’s kingdom, filled to overflowing with the power-instilling Spirit of Almighty God. And she was living every day so others could have the same encounter with God she had.



THE FIRST
CHURCH



SUMMER
02

JUNE 14, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Acts 2:1-18, 38-39

FOCUS VERSES

Acts 2:37-39

³⁷Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

³⁸Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

³⁹For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus inaugurated the new covenant when He poured out His Spirit.

The Day of Pentecost

I WILL RESPOND
TO THE GOSPEL
BY OBEYING

ACTS 2:38.

COVENANT CONTEXT

After Jesus' promise to empower His people, He took another step closer in His covenant relationship with humanity when He filled His followers with His Holy Spirit. Upon preaching the gospel, a newly Spirit-filled apostle Peter preached to the crowd how they too could be in covenant relationship with Jesus: repentance, baptism in Jesus' name, and the infilling of His Spirit.

SG **TEACHING OUTLINE**

Icebreaker: What is your favorite holiday to celebrate with family and friends?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to the Jews' love for Jewish feasts such as the Feast of Pentecost.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. THE DAY OF PENTECOST

A. Tarrying in Jerusalem **I**

DISCUSS: *Why is unity such an important component of the church? What does unity look like in the daily life of the church body?*

B. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit **V**

C. I will tarry in prayer to be empowered by the Spirit.

DISCUSS: *If you have you ever "tarried" while waiting for a promise from God, what did that waiting period look like and feel like?*

II. THE GOSPEL AND OUR RESPONSE

DISCUSS: *What elements in Peter's message were so convicting for the listeners that they evoked such a willing response?*

A. What Must We Do?

B. The Generational Promise

DISCUSS: *What are some recent testimonies you have heard of Acts 2:38 experiences around the world?*

C. I will follow the plan of salvation Peter preached in Acts 2:38.

DISCUSS: *If you have responded to the gospel and been born again, what was that experience like for you? If not, why not respond and be born again today?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to fill us all with His Holy Spirit as we respond to the gospel through repentance and baptism
- For God to continue to pour out His Holy Spirit in our church and community, just like He did in Acts 2

LESSON CONNECTION

An Apostolic chaplain walked onto the floor of the oncology ward in a suburban Florida hospital for another day of rounds. He loved his profession, visiting people in dire situations and sharing God's comfort and peace with whomever would allow him. As was his custom, he visited the health unit coordinator—affectionately known as “the HUC”—to gather a list of patients and see who could use a visit. The HUC greeted the chaplain with a warm smile and was helpful as always, saying, “Room 12 could use a visit. She's been very emotional and is always reading her Bible and praying.” The chaplain smiled and expressed thanks; he knew where to start.

As a chaplain employed by the hospital, he was not allowed to actively invite patients to church, but he was allowed to share his faith with anyone who would ask him. The chaplain stopped briefly at the door of room 12 to whisper a prayer: “Lord, help me be a witness to this patient today. Let your Holy Spirit guide me to be a witness.”

The patient sat in her bed, hunched over with her Bible in her hands. She greeted the chaplain with a smile and invited him to sit. She told him the tearful story of her battle with cancer and how her treatments had changed and developed over several years as the cancer grew and shrank and eventually bounced to different parts of her body. The road had been long and hard and she confessed to growing weary in the journey. “However,” she said, “since getting cancer, I've been closer to God than ever before. I'm reading my Bible and praying more than ever. I just want to experience more of God.”

Inspired by her faith, the chaplain asked if he could pray and the patient consented. As the chaplain prayed, he felt the Holy Spirit course through His body, just like he felt every Sunday at church. He knew God's presence was there. As he prayed with fervor and emotion, he suddenly heard someone speaking with tongues. *Who is that?* he wondered. After a few seconds, he realized with a shock it was him; he was the one speaking in tongues.

The chaplain quickly wrapped up the prayer. Knowing the hospital's policy on proselytizing, visions of his imminent termination began to dance in his head. He could imagine nothing more than the patient reporting him and him quickly being fired. Little did the chaplain know, but he had nothing to fear—God was indeed leading this interaction.

The patient grabbed the chaplain's hand. “Did you just speak with tongues?” she asked. When the chaplain said yes, tears filled the patient's eyes. “I told you how I've been getting closer to God since being diagnosed with cancer. I've been reading and praying like never before. One day while praying, I suddenly began to speak in a language I did not understand. I wasn't trying to, but it happened anyway. Oh, it felt so good. And ever since then, I've been praying for God to bring someone into my life to teach me about tongues.”

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE DAY OF PENTECOST

According to Deuteronomy 16:16–17, the Jews were expected to attend three major feasts in Jerusalem. The Feast of Passover, also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, celebrated the Hebrews' deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The institution of the Feast of Passover is described in Exodus 12, Leviticus 23, and Deuteronomy 16. The Feast of Booths, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrated God's miraculous provision for the Israelites while they wandered through the wilderness after leaving Egypt. The institution of the Feast of Booths is described in Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16.

In between these two feasts was the Feast of Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks, which occurred fifty days after the Feast of Passover. The institution of the Feast of Pentecost is described in Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16. Pentecost celebrated the firstfruits of the harvest. On this particular celebration, Jesus' followers would celebrate a new firstfruit—the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon humanity.

A. Tarrying in Jerusalem

Before His ascension, Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 1:4–5.) As Hebrews, they were already in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. Because of the crowd, Jesus' followers would have initially blended in with all the others who had made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast.

During the waiting period between Jesus' ascension and the Day of Pentecost, the number of those who were willing to wait slowly dwindled. The apostle Paul stated that Jesus had appeared to over 500 individuals after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:6), yet only 120 were present in the upper room (Acts 1:15). While some of the larger crowd undoubtedly had reasons why they could not wait, they missed out on the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Possibly they were not fully convinced of Jesus' message, even after witnessing Him resurrect and ascend. One might speculate that only after the number had decreased to 120 were they truly able to be “with one accord” (Acts 2:1). I

DISCUSS: *Why is unity such an important component of the church? What does unity look like in the daily life of the church body?*

B. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

The miraculous moment the Holy Spirit was poured out on the 120 was a moment none of them would ever forget. By all accounts, their gathering in the upper room seemed to be quite ordinary. They had already conducted the business of replacing Judas with Matthias, and they were continuing in daily, fervent prayer. The time was just past nine o'clock in the morning (Acts 2:15), and those gathered were sitting down (Acts 2:2).

As unremarkable as this moment might have appeared to onlookers, it was filled with such a spirit of unity and focus on God that God chose this moment to bless His followers with the greatest gift they would ever receive: His own indwelling Holy Spirit. A visible sign of fire accompanied this initial outpouring as well as the audible supernatural sign of speaking with other tongues, or languages. While the sign of fire was not repeated, the sign of tongues was, making speaking in tongues the normative sign for receiving the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 8:17; 10:46; 19:6.) The demonstration was so spectacular that thousands of people outside the upper room heard and were amazed.

This outpouring marked the beginning of the new covenant God had always wanted to share with His people. In Peter's sermon, he connected this event to prophecy from Joel 2:28–32, indicating the same God of the prophets was responsible for this event as well. Now, just as David's "tongue was glad" (Acts 2:26) upon witnessing the Lord, those present at Pentecost would experience a gladness like never before as they spoke with other tongues.



C. I will tarry in prayer to be empowered by the Spirit.

As believers who desire to experience God in the same way the New Testament church did, the upper-room experience provides a helpful template for us to follow. Just as those believers gathered together regularly in unified prayer, we can expect God's Spirit to be poured out when we seek Him in the same way. Additionally, we need to purpose within ourselves to be willing to "tarry," which means "to linger in expectation" (*Merriam-Webster*). The 120 had a promise from Jesus that they would receive power when they were baptized with the Holy Ghost (Acts 1:5, 8). Many of the people who witnessed Jesus after His resurrection did not tarry in the upper room; they faltered in their faith, being unwilling to linger. The faithful followers who excitedly awaited the outpouring of God's Spirit likely would have waited longer if the Lord had required it. In following their example, we must continue daily in prayer, gathering together with fellow believers with an unwavering expectation that God will pour out the Holy Spirit upon all who desire Him.

DISCUSS: *If you have ever "tarried" while waiting for a promise from God, what did that waiting period look like and feel like?*

II. THE GOSPEL AND OUR RESPONSE

Some have erroneously argued that the tongues spoken on the Day of Pentecost were just to witness to the diverse crowd gathered for Pentecost. However, this argument is not consistent with the remainder of the Book of Acts. When believers spoke with tongues in Acts 10:46 and 19:6, all who were present had been talking with each other in the same common language. Additionally, while all who were gathered on the Day of Pentecost came from around the known world and spoke many different languages, they were all Jews gathered together for a common Jewish feast. When Peter preached, he did not do so in an unknown language but presumably in Greek or Aramaic; everyone present understood his words, and they were driven to respond.

The content of Peter's sermon demanded a response. Peter demonstrated in certain, convicting terms that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but his audience crucified Him. Three days later the Spirit of God Himself raised Jesus from the grave and Jesus ascended with all power and glory. Peter demonstrated that Jesus' life and ministry and the current outpouring of the Holy Spirit marked a new closeness in God's covenant relationship with humanity, which King David and the prophet Joel foretold. These faithful Jews gathered for the Feast of Pentecost would have been familiar with Hebrew Scripture and were immediately persuaded by Peter's words. They were so convicted at the conclusion of Peter's sermon that they cried out in unity: "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

DISCUSS: *What elements in Peter's message were so convicting for the listeners that they evoked such a willing response?*

A. What Must We Do?

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and preached what we now refer to as the gospel. The gospel is the story of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gospel has already been completed. However, the gospel cannot exist in a vacuum, as if it were another mundane page in a history book. The gospel demands our response. We cannot encounter the message of what Jesus has done for us without choosing to embrace or reject the gospel.

The hearers of Peter's sermon felt compelled to respond, which naturally comes from hearing the gospel message. They could not hear the gospel and do nothing. Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who now dwelt within him, preached the now-famous words: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). Peter not only succinctly described the gospel, but also summarized the proper response to the gospel.

B. The Generational Promise

For those of us living in the twenty-first century, we can be comforted knowing that not only was Acts 2:38 recorded in God's Word, but verse 39 was as well. Peter instructed his followers on the proper response to the gospel, and he prophesied that this promise was not for that day only, but for all believers around the world and for generations to come. The phrase "afar off" can refer both to generations in the distant future and also those who were geographically distanced from Jerusalem.

As today's believers, we can read this passage with hope and comfort. No matter how long ago the events of Acts occurred and no matter how far away we may live from Jerusalem, we still have the opportunity to respond. The promise was not just for one day or the early days of the church; the promise is for us as well.

DISCUSS: *What are some recent testimonies you have heard of Acts 2:38 experiences around the world?*

C. I will follow the plan of salvation Peter preached in Acts 2:38.

Now that we have read the events of Acts 1 and 2, we stand alongside the hearers of Peter's sermon and must also decide what our response will be to the gospel message of Jesus Christ. We also are compelled to ask, "What shall we do?" Will we reject Jesus' saving work, or will we respond by repenting, submitting to baptism, and allowing ourselves to be filled with God's Spirit?

If we choose to respond positively to the gospel, we must begin with repentance. We must abandon our sinful lifestyles and make an ongoing and concerted effort to flee from sin. While repentance can occur in a moment, repentance is also a lifestyle. We wake every day and choose to turn away from sin and toward Christ. We must also be baptized by immersion in water with the name of Jesus called over us. This is the only way believers were baptized in the Book of Acts. (See Acts 8:16; 10:48; 19:5.) We are baptized in Jesus' name because His is the only name that can save us (Acts 4:12). When we are baptized, our sins are washed away, and we become new creations in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4).

Finally, we have an assurance that when we respond in faith to the gospel, God will fill us with His Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking in tongues. Some have been filled before they were baptized, such as Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44-48), showing speaking in tongues as the normative sign of receiving the Holy Spirit seen all throughout the Book of Acts. Speaking in tongues cannot be taught, nor should it be intimidating for a new believer. The Holy Spirit is God's free gift to us and every hungry heart for God should be experiencing the outpouring of His wonderful, life-changing gift.

DISCUSS: *If you have responded to the gospel and been born again, what was that experience like for you? If not, why not respond and be born again today?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how God leads us to teach His Word to others who are hungry for Him. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The Apostolic chaplain sat by the cancer patient in the little hospital room, stunned by her revelation. The chaplain had prayed for God to give him an opportunity to witness to her but did not expect for the opportunity to happen like this. God had taken control of his tongue and allowed him to speak with tongues, which served as the answer to the patient's prayer. She had prayed for someone to teach her about tongues, and God had sent the only Apostolic chaplain in the hospital—which employed almost a dozen chaplains—to her hospital room on an otherwise ordinary Tuesday morning. Inspired, the chaplain opened his Bible and turned to the Book of Acts. The remainder of their visit was a Bible study on Acts, showing how the New Testament believers responded to the gospel message of Jesus Christ through repentance from sin, baptism in Jesus' name, and receiving the Holy Spirit with the sign of tongues.

Later, the chaplain reflected on that instance and praised God for demonstrating that He was still filling faithful believers who reached out to Him in faith. In Acts 2, the 120 did not know they would speak with tongues. Instead, they faithfully prayed and sought more of God, ready to receive the Holy Spirit

in whatever manner He chose to give. Similarly, this patient knew nothing about tongues but knew she wanted more of God. In response to her faith, God filled her with His Holy Spirit with the sign of tongues. In further response to her faith, God orchestrated a miraculous encounter with an Apostolic minister who would further expound to her the beautiful blessing of God's Holy Spirit.

True stories like this one remind us that God is unchanging and the promise of Acts 2:38 is still in full effect today. We can be recipients of God's Holy Spirit and fully expect others to receive God's Holy Spirit as He continues to pour out this wonderful blessing upon humanity. Missionaries have told stories of saints in access-challenged nations receiving the Holy Spirit with the sign of tongues even though the Bible was outlawed and Christianity was illegal. Pastors have told stories of hungry souls who came to their church with no knowledge of God or the Bible, knowing only that they felt compelled to enter in and receive what God had for them.

We can now be filled with unwavering confidence, that as it was in the first century, so it can be in our church and our community. Lord, let Your Holy Spirit fall here just like on the Day of Pentecost!



THE FIRST
CHURCH



SUMMER
03

JUNE 21, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Acts 8:1-17

FOCUS VERSES

Acts 8:15-17

¹⁵Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

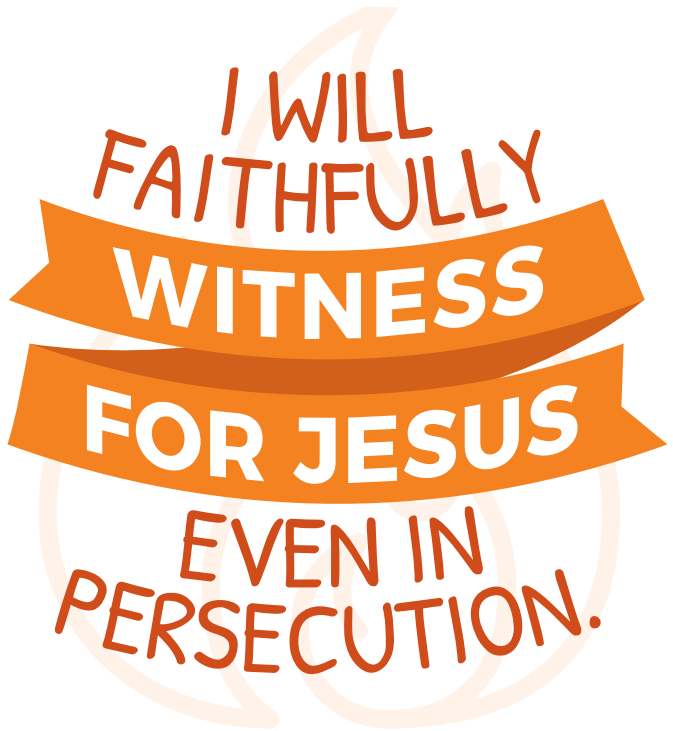
¹⁶(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

¹⁷Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God calls His church to be His witnesses to everyone.

Revival in Samaria



COVENANT CONTEXT

Up until this point in Israel's long history and the church's short history, God's covenant had been primarily to the Jews. However, once persecution spread the Hebrew Christians out of Jerusalem, God led a Greek-speaking Jew named Philip to the city of Samaria where God invited the Samaritans into covenant with Him through the gospel and the born-again response to the gospel.

SG TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you could speak any language fluently beside your native language, what would you speak?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to God's deep desire to reach people with the gospel from all cultures and languages.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. POWERED BY PERSECUTION **I**

- A. Persecution in Jerusalem Led to Great Joy in Samaria
- B. I will not allow persecution to prevent me from sharing the gospel.

DISCUSS: *If you have ever experienced rejection or opposition as you attempted to spread the gospel, how did you respond?*

II. THE NECESSITY OF THE SPIRIT

- A. What Was Present
- B. One Sign Absent
- C. I will witness to others about the necessity of receiving the Spirit.

DISCUSS: *Why is receiving the Holy Spirit more important than experiencing physical miracles?*

DISCUSS: *What are some ways you can spread the gospel message to your friends, neighbors, and coworkers and talk with them about the importance of receiving the Holy Spirit?*

III. EXTENDING COVENANT

- A. Jews and Samaritans
- B. Jesus Extended Covenant to the Samaritans **V**

DISCUSS: *If you find it difficult to witness to any particular groups of people, how can you overcome this obstacle to be a faithful witness?*

- C. I will witness to everyone by excluding no one.

DISCUSS: *When you see others the way Jesus sees them, are you more loving and inclusive? If not, how can you be?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to give us boldness to witness to everyone
- For God to give us endurance for any persecution that may come our way

LESSON CONNECTION

Pastor John knew this hospital visit would not be easy. He stood in front of the receptionist of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and felt himself turning red as he attempted to pronounce the name written on the yellow sticky note in his hand. *I should have Googled how to pronounce this name before I came inside*, he thought to himself. The receptionist looked at him with suspicion and then picked up her desk phone and punched in some numbers. She spoke some Spanish into the phone for a few seconds and then set the phone down.

“Mr. Echevarria said you can head back,” she said, subtly correcting Pastor John’s pitiful pronunciation. “Do you speak Spanish? None of the family speaks English.” Pastor John shook his head no and the receptionist sighed. “I’ll come with you then,” she said.

As the receptionist guided the pastor through a labyrinth of locked doors and white hallways, he reflected on how this visit came about. A missionary he had never met sent him a Facebook message asking him to visit this young couple. Their baby daughter was born prematurely and was struggling for life in the NICU. The mother was a backslidden preacher’s daughter and the father had no background in church. This young family had only recently arrived in the country and the rest of their family was still overseas, so they were alone in the United States with no community and no one to visit with them. Pastor John could not deny that God’s hand had ordained this connection; now He prayed for God’s help to minister to this family. Not only was he unsure of how to comfort the parents of a struggling infant, he was unsure how to minister to someone who spoke a different language.

Shortly after the receptionist led Pastor John into the room and facilitated the introductions, her pager sounded and she hurried away. The pastor and the family resorted to using translation apps to communicate back and forth. The conversation was slow and cumbersome, but Pastor John could sense this couple was desperate for a miracle for their baby girl. Finally, he boldly asked (with the help of his smartphone), “¿Puedo orar por ella?” (“May I pray for her?”)

With misty eyes, the mother—who undoubtedly remembered her parents preaching about the power of prayer in the overseas church where she grew up—nodded and moved to the incubator and laid her hands over the clear casing. The child’s father and Pastor John joined her and laid their hands on the glass next to the mother’s. Pastor John knew he could not pray in Spanish, but he hoped the sentiments of his simple country English words would translate. As he prayed for the baby’s healing and the family’s salvation, he watched the tears flow from both parents’ eyes. He knew God truly ordained this opportunity to witness to these parents.

BIBLE LESSON

I. POWERED BY PERSECUTION

The word *power* does not sound like it belongs in the same conversation as persecution. If anything, power evokes thoughts of dominion and conquering. When the disciples were promised power when the Holy Spirit fell upon them, likely few of them imagined the persecution that would fall on them only a few chapters later in the story in Acts. However, the power Jesus promised in Acts 1:8 was not power for dominion, but power to “be witnesses.” The New Testament believers had the power to endure persecution because in doing so, they spread the gospel message around the known world.

The persecution of the early church pushed them to evangelize quicker than they may have done otherwise. In the days following the Day of Pentecost, the believers were still largely clustered together in Jerusalem. However, when the murderous Saul began to seek out Christians to martyr them, the new believers scattered from Jerusalem into the surrounding countryside, including the region of Samaria. The promise of Acts 1:8 was already beginning to take shape. The followers of Jesus had witnessed in the city of Jerusalem and the region of Judea, and now they would witness to people who were not fully Jewish in Samaria. The gospel was beginning to reach all nations. I

A. Persecution in Jerusalem Led to Great Joy in Samaria

Enter the story of Philip, a Greek-speaking deacon appointed in Acts 6 to serve tables in Jerusalem. As the Christians spread out from Jerusalem, God used Philip the deacon as an evangelist. He preached to the Samaritans the saving message of Jesus Christ, and the entire city was compelled by his preaching and miracles. The entire city experienced great joy upon experiencing Philip and his ministry.

The progression of the story in Acts 8 is striking. In verse 1, we read of the beginning of persecution and how believers began to scatter. In verse 2, the early Christians buried their friend Stephen after Saul and his colleagues brutally martyred him. In verse 3, the same hateful Saul was actively arresting and imprisoning Christians. For such a bleak introduction to one chapter, verses 4 through 8 provide a shocking contrast: While the Christians in Jerusalem suffered, the city of Samaria experienced joy.

The writer Luke reflected on these events with inspired understanding. The hardships in Jerusalem prompted the worldwide evangelistic efforts that began in Samaria. But once persecution moved them out of Jerusalem, Philip sought safety in Samaria, and God sought to save the Samaritans. The Christians’ persecution led to even greater joy for Samaria. Only God could work all this together for good.

B. I will not allow persecution to prevent me from sharing the gospel.

Although few in North America have experienced the type of violent persecution the believers in Acts 8:1–3 experienced, persecution still occurs in milder forms, such as mockery, slander, and social rejection. For those outside of North America, especially in countries where Christianity is illegal, such violent persecution may still be a daily

reality. Regardless of our context, the story of Philip and the other believers in Acts 8 provides an example for us to follow: No matter what persecution or opposition may come our way, we must purpose within ourselves not to allow anything to stop us from spreading the gospel.

DISCUSS: *If you have ever experienced rejection or opposition as you attempted to spread the gospel, how did you respond?*

II. THE NECESSITY OF THE SPIRIT

The story of the Samaritan revival in Acts 8 also provides an important lesson for followers of Jesus who want to believe and minister as the early church did, for this passage reminds us of the utmost importance of the indwelling Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking in tongues.

A. What Was Present

On the surface, it would seem Philip's ministry in Samaria was immediately successful. The crowds "with one accord gave heed" (Acts 8:6) to Philip's preaching; any preacher will tell you this is a great start. In addition God worked miracles for the people of Samaria. Many had demons cast out, and others experienced obvious and undeniable physical healings (Acts 8:7). During the revival, a local sensation known as Simon the Magician believed Philip's words and was baptized (Acts 8:13), which demonstrated to the locals that Jesus had more supernatural power than anything Simon could have conjured up. Many others also obeyed Philip's preaching and submitted to water baptism in Jesus' name (Acts 8:16). According to verse 8, the entire city experienced great joy (mega joy). By the metrics already listed, Philip's ministry in Samaria was a resounding success. But Philip looked over the revival and Samaria with concern. He was not satisfied. Philip knew that until the Samaritans had received the Holy Spirit, God's work in Samaria was not finished.

DISCUSS: *Why is receiving the Holy Spirit more important than experiencing physical miracles?*

B. One Sign Absent

Some have tried to argue that it is possible to receive the Holy Spirit without speaking in tongues. Those who make this argument have not studied closely the Samaritan revival in Acts 8. If not tongues, what other sign was absent that proved to Philip the Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Spirit? The believers in Samaria had heard Philip preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and they responded in faith. They experienced miracles, submitted to baptism in Jesus' name, and even experienced mega joy. Might not all of these be signs of the indwelling Holy Spirit? Philip did not think so. He knew definitively that the Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Spirit despite all of these wonderful supernatural signs. The only way they could have known the Samaritans had not received the Holy Spirit was because they had not heard them speak with other tongues.

Philip was so concerned about the absence of the Spirit outpouring that he reported this to the apostles still dwelling in Jerusalem. Peter and John, upon receiving this word, traveled to Samaria despite the constant threat of persecution. Peter and John knew any risk was worth it to make sure the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit.

C. I will witness to others about the necessity of receiving the Spirit.

To be truly Apostolic in the sense that we think and minister like the apostles did, we will have the same outlook about Holy Spirit infilling and the supernatural sign of speaking in tongues. We will not be satisfied with anything less than the same experience as the New Testament church. Even if new believers have experienced healing in their bodies and feel great joy and have been baptized in Jesus' name, if they have not yet spoken with tongues as God gives them the ability, God wants to complete their new-birth experience by filling them with the Holy Spirit.

If you have experienced the indwelling Holy Ghost with the sign of speaking in tongues, you can witness boldly to God's changing and lifesaving power to be witnesses unto Him. Allow God's power to flow through you to witness about the absolute necessity and wonder of receiving the Holy Spirit.

DISCUSS: *What are some ways you can spread the gospel message to your friends, neighbors, and coworkers and talk with them about the importance of receiving the Holy Spirit?*

III. EXTENDING COVENANT

The outpouring of God's Spirit on the Samaritans was yet another sign of God's desire to be in covenant with all of humanity. This new covenant, which Jeremiah prophesied would be written in their hearts, was now being poured out on a notorious foe of the Jews—the Samaritans.

A. Jews and Samaritans

During the era of the New Testament, Jews and Samaritans did not get along with one another. They lived in separate regions with tense and bigoted opinions about each other. The tension dates back to the era of Israel's Divided Kingdom. Second Kings 17:24–29 records how the Assyrian kingdom resettled refugees from several different pagan countries into the region of Samaria. These foreigners began to intermarry with the Israelites and turn their already cold hearts even further from God and toward idols. As time passed, the Samaritans developed their own form of Judaism. One notable difference between their beliefs was the Jews worshiped at the Temple in Jerusalem while the Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim. This difference not only reflected the nuances of their belief systems but also kept the Jews and Samaritans from having to interact with each other.

B. Jesus Extended Covenant to the Samaritans

The Jews viewed the Samaritans as impure half-breeds; the Samaritans viewed the Jews as arrogant elitists. However, Jesus saw both Jews and Samaritans as souls in

need of salvation. Jesus showed no partiality. He wanted to offer His new covenant to both of them. While Peter and John journeyed to Samaria after receiving Philip's call for help, it is possible Peter and John reflected on the times Jesus interacted with Samaritans. They may have remembered Jesus requiring them to pass through Samaria. (See John 4:4.) During that brief trip, Jesus ministered to a woman with a scandalous past; in turn, she witnessed to her neighbors, and many came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. (See John 4:39–42.) Perhaps Peter and John wondered with excitement how many of those same individuals would now experience the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was completing a work in Acts 8 that He had begun in John 4. Just like Jesus needed to go to Samaria in John 4, the Holy Spirit needed to be poured out in Acts 8. Jesus was extending His covenant promise to the Samaritans just like He had to

▼ the Jews.

DISCUSS: *If you find it difficult to witness to any particular groups of people, how can you overcome this obstacle to be a faithful witness?*

C. I will witness to everyone by excluding no one.

Philip was an appropriate choice for God to send as an evangelist to the Samaritans. In Acts 6, he was one of seven men appointed as deacons to help serve the Greek-speaking community of Jews in Jerusalem. The Greek-speakers had been neglected, and Philip—described as a man of good reputation, “full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” (Acts 6:3)—was chosen to help make sure no bias or bigotry was present as these newly appointed deacons served meals to the widows daily. Philip had a reputation for ministering cross-culturally and making sure no one was excluded. When he became an evangelist to Samaria, Philip's mindset had not changed. Just like he ministered to everyone in Jerusalem, he also spread the gospel to everyone in Samaria.

Just like Philip, we must purpose in our hearts not to exclude anyone as we witness. Every person we interact with is created in God's image, and God deeply wants to be in covenant relationship with that person. This truly means everyone: the people we like and the people we do not like as much, those who speak our language and those who do not, those with different skin tones and cultural norms, and even those whose previous life of sin seems insurmountable. We need to desire to see others as God sees them. Since God loves them and wants to save their souls, we should be willing and eager to witness to them.

DISCUSS: *When you see others the way Jesus sees them, are you more loving and inclusive? If not, how can you be?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how God longs to reach for everyone, despite any cultural or language barriers. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

After Pastor John gave the Echevarria family a church card with his cell phone number scribbled on it, he made his way out of the maze of hospital hallways and back to his vehicle. On his drive back to the church, he reflected on all the excuses he could have made not to make that visit. He did not know these people, and he did not speak their language. He was uncomfortable in hospitals and was worried about saying something out of place. However, because he allowed God's Spirit to lead him and did not allow his personal discomfort to get in the way, a divine connection was made.

The pastor quickly went to work preparing the church for this new family's potential visit. He asked around his church and found a lady who knew enough Spanish and was willing to translate. He bought a simple interpretation system with a microphone for the interpreter and headsets for the guests. He prepared his leadership team to be ready to receive this family with warmth and comfort. However, after all his preparation, two months passed and the family had not visited. Pastor John's texts and calls to the family went unanswered. He was disappointed, but he never stopped anticipating and hoping for their visit.

One Sunday, during the preservice prayer, he felt compelled to step outside and pace the covered walkway in front of the church. He remembered the young Spanish-speaking couple and whispered their names in prayer. He reflected on that visit and prayed that something he did or said would stick with them to draw them to the Lord. As he paced in front of the church, he saw an unfamiliar car enter the parking lot. To his welcome surprise, the Echevarrias stepped out of the car. In their arms was a healthy baby girl, fully healed by the power of Jesus' name.

In the following months, this family became faithful members of the church he pastored. God filled the mother with the Holy Ghost, and the father was baptized in Jesus' name and also filled with the Holy Ghost. By the parents' request, Pastor John dedicated their miracle baby girl to the Lord. Every Sunday they walk through the doors of the church, they are a testimony of God's desire to save everyone. They are a living example of what could happen when believers live to share the gospel with everyone, regardless of any perceived barriers that may stand in the way.



THE FIRST CHURCH



SUMMER
04

JUNE 28, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Acts 9:1-20

FOCUS VERSES

Acts 9:17-18

¹⁷And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.
¹⁸And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

God can radically transform His enemies into His covenant people.

Paul's New-Birth Experience

WE WILL

WELCOME

EVERYONE

AS A BROTHER
OR SISTER
WHOM GOD
TRANSFORMS.

COVENANT CONTEXT

In Acts 8, God invited the Samaritans into covenant with Him. Although the Samaritans were partly Gentile, they were also partly Jewish. However, here in Acts 9, God recruited a zealous Pharisee named Saul to preach the gospel to Gentiles, setting up the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 to bless all nations through the Jews.

SG *TEACHING OUTLINE*

Icebreaker: Where would you visit if you could visit any country in the world?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to God extending His covenant to everyone in the world, including the Gentiles.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. SAUL ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS **I**

A. Saul's Plan to Persecute Christians

DISCUSS: *Why do you think Saul thought he was doing a good thing by persecuting Christians?*

B. God's Plan to Recruit Saul

C. I will allow the Lord to redirect my steps.

DISCUSS: *How was your conversion experience similar or dissimilar to Saul's?*

II. FROM THE OLD COVENANT TO THE NEW

A. Saul's Transformation

DISCUSS: *What are some aspects of your old life that you were proud of but are now ashamed—that you now consider "rubbish" but once held in high regard?*

B. I will fully embrace my new life in Christ.

III. PAUL: THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

A. From Enemies and Outcasts to Covenant People Together **V**

DISCUSS: *What relationships do you have that were once marked by hostility or division but have been transformed by the power of Christ?*

B. The Transforming Power of Jesus

C. I will welcome all people as brothers or sisters God transforms.

DISCUSS: *How can you purpose to be radically inclusive in your evangelistic efforts and ensure you spread the gospel to everyone, not writing off anyone as being unworthy of your witness?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to restore broken relationships within the body of Christ
- For God to help us see everyone, regardless of how different someone may be, as a potential brother or sister in Christ

LESSON CONNECTION

Harold was raised in a rural town in the northeastern United States. In his tiny town of 1,500 people, his exposure to other languages, ethnicities, and cultures had been extremely limited. Everyone in his town had the same skin tone, verbal tics, and cultural quirks. He had never even considered other ways of thinking and living until he found himself surrounded by a small sampling of the world's diversity packed into a crowded cafeteria at Bible school.

Harold sat at a round table with several students and one of the professors. Lively conversation ebbed and flowed across the room, mostly going unnoticed by Harold and his fellow students. Suddenly, the professor interjected into the conversation, "Do you hear that?" The students looked confused as the professor smiled with his trademark cheeky grin, declaring, "It sounds like Heaven. Revelation 7:9 says every nation and every language will be present before God's throne. This student body looks like a good start."

Prompted by the teacher's words, Harold began listening more intently to nearby conversations he had previously disregarded as background noise. At the table nearest to Harold sat four students attempting to communicate in French—none of the four spoke the same dialect of French. One student hailed from France, another from the French-speaking Canadian province of Quebec, another from Louisiana Cajun country, and the fourth from the French-speaking African country of Cameroon. The four students laughed and joked as they compared pronunciations and cultural differences.

Beyond these, Harold identified distinct Russian, Chinese, Australian, and Jamaican accents. He saw students who had come from every corner of the United States. Harold then considered the sole online class he was taking that semester because of a course scheduling conflict. In that class he was studying alongside distance learners in Fiji, the Dominican Republic, and rural Saskatchewan in central Canada. The professor had noted he previously had taught online students from several countries representing every continent except Antarctica.

Harold and his tablemates began to excitedly verbalize this diversity to one another and to the professor. With a smile, knowing he had seized upon a teachable moment, the professor asked the table of eager students, "Why do you suppose everyone here at this school gets along so well? There are some in this room whose countries are at war with each other. There are some in this room whose ancestors enslaved the ancestors of others in this room. By the world's standard, they should hate each other, don't you think?"

The students were silent. They had not considered such a perspective, yet at the same time, the answer to the professor's question felt obvious to these students who were intensely engaged in the study of God's Word. Harold piped up, "Only Jesus could do such a thing. The world will always have division and disunity, which is why the end times will be full of wars and violence. Only Christ will be able to unify what the world is trying to tear apart."

BIBLE LESSON

I. SAUL ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

One of the most iconic conversion stories in the Bible is the apostle Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. At that time, the Bible still refers to him as *Saul*. In fact, it is a common misunderstanding that Saul's name was changed on the road to Damascus (when in actuality the two names are Roman and Hebrew variations of the same word). He spent three years with Jesus in Arabia, and then he returned to Damascus, later went to Jerusalem, and then traveled to Tarsus by way of Caesarea. (See Galatians 1:17; Acts 9:26–30.) Saul eventually ended up in Antioch, where he was a faithful part of a ministerial team for many years, possibly over a decade, before he was commissioned as a missionary during a prayer service (Acts 13:1–3). I

During this entire time, it would appear he was still known as Saul. He was not referred to as Paul until he began his missionary travels. (See Acts 13:9.) While he is most widely known for his missionary journeys and letters he wrote to various churches, many years passed between his conversion and his travels and letters. Before he was a missionary, before he wrote a single epistle, and before he became one of the most influential Christian ministers in the New Testament church, he was simply Saul, a zealous Pharisee en route to Damascus to persecute Christians. During this trip to Damascus, Saul had an unexpected and life-changing encounter.

A. Saul's Plan to Persecute Christians

By his own description, Saul was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:5–6, NKJV). He was extremely knowledgeable of Hebrew law and prophecy. He sincerely believed he was doing God's good work as he zealously persecuted Christians. Saul had already consented to Stephen's brutal execution and had broken into houses all around Jerusalem looking for Christians to persecute and imprison (Acts 8:3). However, his murderous intent could not be contained in Jerusalem. He received intel and permission from the high priest to travel to Damascus to find even more Christians to imprison.

DISCUSS: *Why do you think Saul thought he was doing a good thing by persecuting Christians?*

B. God's Plan to Recruit Saul

While Saul had a plan to persecute Christians, God had a plan of His own. God knew that someone as zealous as Saul would make an excellent warrior for His cause. God also knew that someone as educated and thoughtful as Saul would require an experience he would never be able to deny. God blinded Saul with a bright light and spoke to him with a booming voice from Heaven. Saul knew such an experience could only happen by the power of the God he knew as Jehovah. When the voice identified Himself as

Jesus, Saul finally realized that Jehovah and Jesus were one and the same—Jesus was Jehovah who came in flesh.

C. I will allow the Lord to redirect my steps.

Saul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus is an inspiring example of God's great mercy. Just as Saul was willing to be transformed when he had an undeniable experience with Jesus Christ, so we must allow the Lord to redirect our steps when we are going down a wrong path. While hopefully we will not be errantly jailing and murdering Christians like Saul was, any path that leads us away from God is a wrong path. We must be willing to allow God to guide our path in every juncture of our lives.

DISCUSS: *How was your conversion experience similar or dissimilar to Saul's?*

II. FROM THE OLD COVENANT TO THE NEW

Saul was a Pharisee trained “at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law” (Acts 22:3, NKJV). Consequently, few in Saul's day were more qualified to articulate and argue the intricacies of Jewish law. Yet, when confronted with the reality of Jesus' identity, Saul's outlook completely changed. He so completely embraced Jesus Christ that he would later describe the old covenant of the Law as “the ministry of death” and considered himself to be one of the “ministers of the new covenant” (II Corinthians 3:6–7, NKJV).

A. Saul's Transformation

Saul transitioned away from understanding his relationship with God in terms of legalistic obedience to the Old Testament law. Such a mindset only led to death, but the new covenant—which emphasizes a personal relationship with God through the indwelling Holy Spirit—brought life. Such a shift in mindset meant Saul would not be able to rely on his own personal accolades and accomplishments anymore. Under the old covenant, his training and pedigree were points of pride. Indeed, Saul was later able to easily recite his heritage, education, and personal qualifications in Philippians 3:5–6. However, under the new covenant, Saul would count these credentials as “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8, NKJV). A personal relationship with Jesus Christ was of more value and a greater qualification than anything he could attain by his own power or merit.

DISCUSS: *What are some aspects of your old life that you were proud of but are now ashamed—that you now consider “rubbish” but once held in high regard?*

B. I will fully embrace my new life in Christ.

Saul's mindset completely changed when he embraced his new life in Jesus Christ. Similarly, we must choose to abandon our former prideful, sinful way of thinking and allow ourselves to be transformed through the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of us. Maybe none of us will experience a blinding light and booming voice like Saul did, but all of us have an opportunity like Saul to embrace Jesus Christ when we hear the gospel. Saul

could have chosen to reject the gospel and continue in blindness, both physically and spiritually. We, too, can choose to reject the gospel of Christ, or better yet, we could join with Paul and allow the truth of God's Word and His Holy Spirit to change our hearts and minds.

III. PAUL: THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

Multiple theories exist surrounding the reason for Saul going by Paul, but it is worth noting that Saul is a Hebrew name and Paul is a Greek name. Since Paul would later be known as an “apostle of the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13) and Greek was the common language of the Roman world, the name change was likely pragmatic. His missionary efforts would be readily accepted by non-Jews if he used a Greek and Roman name rather than a distinctly Hebrew name.

This theory is further supported by the context in which Saul's name change is recorded (Acts 13:4–12). While witnessing in Cyprus, Saul and Barnabas had an opportunity to witness to the Roman proconsul of the region, Sergius Paulus, a Gentile. During this evangelistic effort, a Jewish false prophet opposed Saul and Barnabas, hoping to dissuade Sergius Paulus from converting to Christianity. This false prophet was called *Bar-jesus* in Hebrew and *Elymas* in Arabic, which literally meant “sorcerer or magician.” Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost, rebuked Elymas, who was immediately struck with blindness. This miracle so profoundly impacted Sergius Paulus that he was converted.

In the middle of this story of Saul opposing a Jewish false prophet while witnessing to a Gentile, Luke recorded that Saul was also known as Paul (Acts 13:9). By listing Paul's name change here and subsequently never using the name Saul again, Luke signaled to the reader that Paul's role was moving forward in the Book of Acts. Paul's ministry did include Jews, but Paul was primarily an apostle to Gentiles.

A. From Enemies and Outcasts to Covenant People Together

The hostility between Jews and Gentiles is well-documented throughout the entire Bible. Paul was knowledgeable not only of Jewish doctrine but also Jewish history and would have been keenly aware of this deep-seated hatred. However, Paul recognized God's desire was to bring both Jews and Gentiles into covenant relationship with Him.

Paul described this new relationship in his epistle to the church at Ephesus. He recorded that Jews and Gentiles had previously been separated by the old covenant of circumcision. Under the old covenant, Gentiles were regarded as “aliens,” “strangers,” and “foreigners,” without any hope of salvation (Ephesians 2:12, 19). However, under the new covenant, Jews and Gentiles are now “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). The old covenant of circumcision no longer divided humanity, and the new covenant of Jesus Christ now unified humanity. ▼

DISCUSS: *What relationships do you have that were once marked by hostility or division but have been transformed by the power of Christ?*

B. The Transforming Power of Jesus

Paul understood unequivocally that Jesus was the solitary force of transformation that allowed this new covenant relationship to exist. Paul wrote that Jesus was the one who made those who were separated to be reunited, broke down walls of division, abolished the former covenant of the Law, and reconciled all of humanity to Himself (Ephesians 2:13–16).

Now, instead of circumcision, Jesus had implemented a new covenant signified by the indwelling Holy Spirit, which would only be accessible through Jesus. It was a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that the new covenant would be one written on the heart, rather than on tables of stone. Elsewhere, Paul summed up this new covenant relationship in this manner: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

C. I will welcome all people as brothers or sisters God transforms.

Paul's commitment to radical evangelistic inclusion provides the template for present-day Christians to follow. Paul refused to be deterred by any human dividing line. Throughout his ministry he witnessed to everyone, regardless of skin color, ethnicity, language, or nationality because there is no more inclusive message than the gospel.

Perhaps Paul's time as a minister at Antioch (where he was still known as Saul) helped guide his radical inclusion. As recorded in Acts 13:1, Saul the converted Pharisee, ministered alongside a rather diverse group of ministers. This group included Barnabas, a Levitical Jew from Cyprus; Simeon, a man whose skin was so dark it was part of his nickname; Lucius, an African from Cyrene, which is in present-day Libya; and Manaen, described by his relationship with Herod the tetrarch, likely indicating Manaen had been a wealthy, upper-class Gentile.

If Paul welcomed all believers as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, present-day believers are without excuse. Every person, regardless of how different each one may seem from us, is still a child of God, made in His image, whom God is wanting to transform by the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit. He is just waiting on us to tell them all about Him.

DISCUSS: *How can you purpose to be radically inclusive in your evangelistic efforts and ensure you spread the gospel to everyone, not writing off anyone as being unworthy of your witness?*

Teacher Option: Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how God wants to use us to reach people much different from us. The following story may be a continuation of the Lesson Connection or a stand-alone story.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

As Harold left the school cafeteria that day, he reflected on his own upbringing in the small town where he grew up. He cringed as he remembered his unsaved family members who commonly made degrading jokes about other races, skin tones, and nationalities. Harold cringed again as he remembered how he used to laugh at these jokes without having ever met someone from the group of people being mocked.

While it might have been easy to dismiss these jokes as harmless banter, now that he attended Bible school with many of the groups he once joked about, he saw how hurtful these jokes could be. If he would not have dared to say the joke in front of someone from this group, why would he say it when they were not around? Embarrassed and ashamed by this part of his past, he got alone in his dorm room and bowed his head to repent and ask forgiveness of the Lord.

Studying his Bible, Harold resolved to endeavor to daily live out Paul's charge to the Ephesians: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29). Harold also resolved to

live out the prayer of the psalmist: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psalms 19:14).

Harold had recently learned a quote from the late Bishop T. F. Tenney: "I do not ever want to have fewer brothers and sisters than God has sons and daughters." If Jesus loved the world so much that He died for each of them to adopt them into His family, Harold felt he could do no less than accept every believer as his brother or sister in Christ.

If God is no respecter of persons and shows no partiality, Harold decided he could not make blanket judgments about entire groups of people whom He had never met. If God offered salvation to every person, regardless of race, class, or gender, Harold wanted to witness to everyone, no matter how different each one was from him. He was grateful from that day forward for his professor who took an otherwise normal lunch period to engage his students in an unforgettable teachable moment.

The next time he was in the cafeteria, he stopped to listen. And he smiled: It really did sound like Heaven.