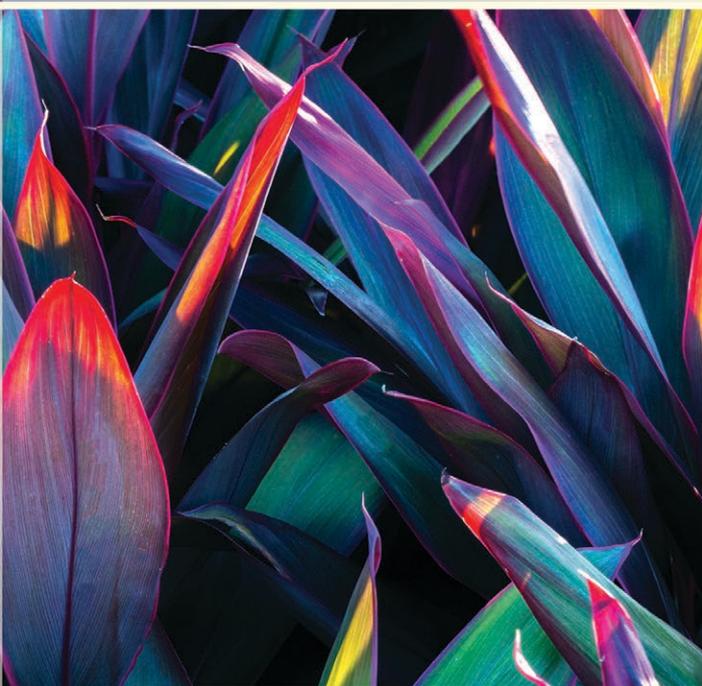




# ECHOES

Adult Student Book  
Comprehensive Bible Study  
June, July, August 2025



Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings  
Studies in Genesis, Matthew, Luke, John, Romans,  
1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter

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# ECHOES

## Adult Student Book

### Comprehensive Bible Study

#### A Bible Study Quarterly for Adults

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T A B L E O F

# Contents

## Sacred Altars and Holy Gifts

June, July, August 2025

(Studies in Genesis, Matthew, Luke, John,  
1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter)

### Unit 1: Tabernacle, Sacrifices, and Atonement

June 1	Lesson 1	The Offerings of Cain and Abel	p. 5
June 8	Lesson 2	Noah Builds an Altar	p. 12
June 15	Lesson 3	Abraham Makes an Offering	p. 19
June 22	Lesson 4	Isaac Calls on the Name of the Lord	p. 26
June 29	Lesson 5	Jacob Sets Up a Sacred Pillar	p. 33

### Unit 2: Christ's All-Sufficient Sacrifice

July 6	Lesson 6	The Boy Jesus in the Temple	p. 40
July 13	Lesson 7	Lord of the Sabbath	p. 47
July 20	Lesson 8	Cleansing the Temple	p. 54
July 27	Lesson 9	Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction	p. 61

### Unit 3: Special Offerings and the Sanctuary

Aug. 3	Lesson 10	Christians as God's Temple	p. 68
Aug. 10	Lesson 11	Our Bodies Belong to God	p. 75
Aug. 17	Lesson 12	The Two Made One	p. 82
Aug. 24	Lesson 13	Sacrifices of Praise	p. 89
Aug. 31	Lesson 14	Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple	p. 96

### Special Features

What's Ahead	p. 4
Personal Pages	p. 103
Lesson Cycle	p. 104
Coming Up Next Quarter	p. 105

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# What's Ahead

## Quarterly Preview

The summer quarter continues to explore scriptural themes around worship, sacrifice, and offerings.

**Unit 1** has lessons all from Genesis. From the narratives of Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this unit examines the building of altars and offering of sacrifices before the Sinai covenant.

**Unit 2** explores the Gospels to examine how Jesus fulfills the meaning of temple. Jesus attended temple festivals, acted dramatically to rid the temple of corruption, and finally redefined “temple” to mean His own body. Through Jesus, God’s people continue to have access to God, even once the physical temple is gone.

**Unit 3** explores what it means to offer sacrifices in the new covenant. The letters of Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter all show that Christians—individually and as the church—are a new temple, filled by the Holy Spirit.

In this quarter, here are some biblical principles you will study and apply to the situations in your own life:

- Let God decide what is acceptable.
- Expect God to show mercy when you wander away.
- Give God your devotion, especially when you don’t understand.
- Ask God to solve conflicts and grant you peace.
- Invite God to be with you on the way.
- Let yourself be surprised by Jesus and His mission.
- Recognize Jesus’ authority as Lord and God.
- Jesus will show you what God expects.
- Remain faithful, even when the world changes.
- Ask God to fill you with His holy presence.
- Hold nothing back from being transformed by God.
- Break the barriers that separate people by race or background.
- Make Jesus’ sacrifice the inspiration for everything you do.
- Join your church in becoming the light of God.

## The Offerings of Cain and Abel

Girl, have you been dipping in ‘the sauce’? Your wig looks tilted,” Lacresha said to her sister, Chantelle.

Chantelle mustered a smile at her older sister. “No, I haven’t been drinking.”

Chantelle moved away from the dessert table and closer to the door. The festivities were winding down. Chantelle, Lacresha, and their brother, Terrance, were hosting a surprise seventy-fifth birthday party for their mother.

Chantelle prepared a wonderful presentation and, through her contacts with the city, had arranged for the mayor to come to read a proclamation which dedicated the day to their mother. Their mother was obviously pleased and proud of her three children, who had made such an effort to celebrate her. They all were grateful for how much their mother had sacrificed, raising three children on her own after their father had left.

But the cost of this party had fallen squarely on Chantelle and Terrance, without help from their sister. They both knew her finances were in poor shape after years of poor decisions. And they had decided to let it go.

As Chantelle made her way to the restroom, her friend caught up with her. “Lacresha can be so mean. She knows you have alopecia,” she said. “I think she is jealous of you.”

“I don’t know why.” Chantelle said with a sigh.

“Because your mom is proud of you. Because you’ve done good.”

**1. What are some acceptable and unacceptable sacrifices to God?**

**2. How do we compare what we have and do for God against what others give to the Lord?**

**3. Is God pleased with all “sacrifices?”**

## Cain's Temptation

*Genesis 4:1–7 KJV*

1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.

2 And she again bare his brother Abel.

And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. 3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.

And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

6 And the LORD said unto Cain, why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?

7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

*Genesis 4:1–7 NIV*

<sup>1</sup> Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." <sup>2</sup> Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

When Adam and Eve are excluded from the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:23), human life continues. But it is altered by humanity's sin. Humans become part of the problem, instead of perfectly reflecting the image of their Creator.

In Genesis 4:1, Adam and Eve have their first child, Cain. Some older commentaries have taken Eve's exclamation to mean that she sees Cain as an answer to God's promise, someone to crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). But her words are not specific, and most suggest that Eve is simply acknowledging God's hand in bringing life. Now that humans have become subject to death and decay, it falls to Eve and other women to bear children to outlive their parents. Eve rejoices that she has given birth to a child, with God's help.

Verse 2 says that Eve has a second son, Abel. In Hebrew, Abel means "breath" or "vanity." Even the name is a clue about the brevity of Abel's life. The narrative gives only one detail about each of these men: Abel is a shepherd and Cain is a farmer (v. 3).

From the work of each of their hands, the brothers offer sacrifices to the Lord (v. 4). Cain brings the fruit of the ground and Abel brings fat portions from the firstborn of his flock. Abel's is seen favorably by God and Cain's is not. We are left to wonder, *Why?*

The text gives no indication of why Abel's offering is accepted, while Cain's is not. People have long theorized about this, but the Lord determines what is or is not acceptable. Since Cain is upset about the situation, God speaks directly to him (vv. 6–7). He warns Cain about sin. God's words paint an image of something dangerous (a wild animal or a demon perhaps). Sin is "crouching" and waiting to pounce on Cain (v. 7). Cain faces a choice: he can "do what is right," or he can do the opposite. God urges Cain to master this threat. Sin "desires" him, but he must not be overtaken.

**4.** *What changed about the nature of humans who were created in the image of God?*

**5.** *How might God's warnings about sin teach us to respond when we feel temptation?*

**6.** *What makes sin like a ruler or a master?*

## The First Murder

*Genesis 4:8–16 KJV*

8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

9 And the LORD said unto Cain, where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?

10 And he said, what hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. 11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; 12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. 13 And Cain said unto the LORD, my punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

15 And the LORD said unto him, therefore whosoever slayeth

*Genesis 4:8–16 NIV*

<sup>8</sup> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

<sup>10</sup> The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup> Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

<sup>15</sup> But the LORD said to him, "Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance

Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. <sup>16</sup> And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

seven times over.” Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. <sup>16</sup> So Cain went out from the LORD’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Four chapters into the Bible, we read about the first murder. As this shows, the consequences of sin are already wide-ranging and disastrous. Sin does not just alter our relationship with God, but it alters the ways that we relate to one another.

Cain ends his brother’s life (v. 8). This isn’t what a jury would call “manslaughter.” It is premeditated murder.

So God responds by asking the simple question to Cain, “Where is . . . Abel?” (v. 9). God already knows that Cain did not heed the warning. But God offers an opportunity for Cain to confess his sin. Instead, Cain lies to God and denies responsibility.

In verses 10–11, God exposes the crime. Shedding innocent blood is a severe offense (see what God will reiterate in Gen. 9:6). Even the ground which Cain tends as a farmer betrays him. It cannot hide what Cain has done. Whether as a punishment or natural consequence, God says that the ground shall no longer cooperate to grow food for him (v. 12). He will be left to roam the earth.

Cain feels sorry for himself and pleads with God (vv. 13–14). This sounds nothing like sincere repentance; but God shows mercy. Cain shall have a mark, a warning so that no one shall mistakenly take his life (v. 15). Cain leaves God’s presence, and he travels further from Eden.

**7.** *Why is the shedding of innocent blood so offensive to God?*

**8.** *Why did the ground betray Cain after his murder?*

**9.** *Why do you think God sent Cain away?*

## What Does the Lord Require of You?

Brie wanted to make a difference. To ensure a spot in her dream graduate school, she was desperate to complete her degree with honors. But she had so much going on—classes, work, church. Brie felt overwhelmed, and convinced herself that it was okay to plagiarize papers. *After all, she thought to herself, as a future counselor, I'll be helping so many people.* But her professor didn't share the sentiment.

Brie's final paper got flagged for plagiarism, and she was called before the student-conduct board. She failed the course and was dismissed from the university. While her friends celebrated and dreamed about their futures, Brie was left feeling the pain of her choices.

But eventually, Brie got back on track. She finished her degree the following year. She got into a graduate school—just not the one that would've fast-tracked her career. She took internships and worked multiple jobs for years until she finally reached her career goals. After many years, she would often think of her choice, which caused her a long delay on the journey.

Cain found himself faced with a choice too. He could have submitted to God and found the right way to honor the Creator. Instead, Cain seized the opportunity to make himself the authority. When we fail to grant God the authority over our lives, we always put ourselves in charge. If we allow sin to be our guide, we might even have the impression that we did nothing wrong.

**10.** *When have you been tempted to place yourself as the authority, rather than God?*

**11.** *What are examples of lies that we might tell ourselves, giving permission to do what is wrong?*

**12.** *What happens if we decide for ourselves what is right?*

## Submitting to God's Authority

There are no shortage of circumstances that tempt us to take a shortcut, to make our own way, or to decide for ourselves what is acceptable. But God is with us in our struggles with sin and with other people. He urges us to do what is right!

► *Is there a particular relationship that causes you heart-ache? Write the name below of a particular person, and commit to holding that relationship before God in the week ahead.*

*I will hold \_\_\_\_\_ before God in prayer this week. I submit our relationship to God's authority.*

### KEY VERSES

And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

—Genesis 4:6–7 KJV

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

— Genesis 4:6–7 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of June 2 through June 8

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Genesis 6:11–22—Obedience to God's Command.

**Tues.** John 6:15–20—Jesus Joins Us in the Storm.

**Wed.** John 14:18–27—Peace through the Word.

**Thurs.** Genesis 7:11–24—God Protects.

**Fri.** 2 Peter 2:1–9—Divine Rescue.

**Sat.** Psalm 77:1–2, 7–20—A Cry for Deliverance.

**Sun.** Genesis 8:13–22; 9:11–13—A Covenant of Peace.

## Noah Builds an Altar

Lemarcus was bent over, polishing the chrome rims of his SUV, when he heard his name. He turned his head and saw a large pair of black tennis shoes. His gaze traced up from the shoes to the large man wearing them. “Khalil?”

“Yeah, man. I thought that was you,” said Khalil.

Lemarcus stood, and the two exchanged a handshake and shoulder bump.

After complementing the work, Khalil said, “I’ve been missing you at church. How’s it going?”

It wasn’t a rebuke, but Lemarcus didn’t know how to respond. He hadn’t been to church in “a month of Sundays,” as some of the older folks used to say.

It wasn’t just his church attendance that was waning. His prayer time fallen off, and he could feel that he wasn’t seeking Christ like he once had. He didn’t know exactly how it all began.

At the fast-food restaurant where they later met for lunch, the two men laughed, talked, and caught up.

“I’d really like to see you at church,” said Khalil.

“Man, people probably don’t even remember me.”

“They certainly do, but more importantly, God does,” Khalil said, looking directly at his friend. “You can’t be gone too long or go too far from the Lord to keep Him from loving you.”

Lemarcus realized it was what he wanted—needed—to hear. “Thanks, man. I want to be there tomorrow.”

**1. When have you struggled to trust God and His ways?**

**2. When is a time that you’ve seen God restore someone who wandered?**

## Dry Land

*Genesis 8:13–17 KJV*

13 And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry.

14 And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried.

15 And God spake unto Noah, saying, 16 Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee.

17 Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.

*Genesis 8:13–17 NIV*

<sup>13</sup> By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. <sup>14</sup> By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

<sup>15</sup> Then God said to Noah,

<sup>16</sup> "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.

<sup>17</sup> Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it."

Noah and his family's journey comes to an end as the floodwaters subside and the earth becomes dry once more (Gen. 8:13). They would emerge from the ark to inhabit an unfamiliar world. From the dates in Genesis 7:11 and Genesis 8:14, it appears that the family spent over a year aboard. But at last, God lets Noah know when it is safe to exit (Gen. 8:16).

God instructs Noah with many of the same words as the initial blessing upon humanity in Genesis 1:28: "Be fruitful and increase in number." God has not rejected creation, and He is renewing it by allowing creatures to fill the

earth, just as originally intended. God's judgment, while an entirely fair response to the murder and wickedness that had spread across the earth, did not mean that He withdraws the blessing.

**3.** *What kinds of questions would Noah have after witnessing God's cataclysmic flood?*

**4.** *How are the words "multiply" or "be fruitful" words of blessing?*

## An Altar

*Genesis 8:18–22 KJV*

18 And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him:

19 Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.

20 And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21 And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

22 While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest,

*Genesis 8:18–22 NIV*

<sup>18</sup> So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. <sup>19</sup> All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

<sup>20</sup> Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. <sup>21</sup> The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done."

<sup>22</sup> "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest,

and cold and heat,  
and summer and winter,  
and day and night  
shall not cease.

cold and heat,  
summer and winter,  
day and night  
will never cease.”

Noah, his family, and all the animals step from the ark onto dry land—for the first time in over a year. Noah’s first action is to display gratitude: he builds an altar to the Lord, giving reverence to God for abundant faithfulness and deliverance. By offering burnt sacrifices on the altar, Noah acknowledges God’s sovereignty and provision. For that matter, God had even instructed Noah to bring along enough animals to account for the sacrifice (Gen. 7:2–3).

God responds with favor on Noah’s sacrifice: He accepts Noah’s offering, signified by the language of its “pleasing aroma” (Gen. 8: 21). Already, God begins describing the foundations for what will become a covenant agreement (Gen. 8:21–22). God vows to never again curse the ground or destroy all living creatures, despite the evil in the human heart. This proclamation reveals God’s sovereign decision to extend a measure of mercy and grace, despite humanity’s sin.

The passage concludes with a commitment from God to supervise the continuity of creation (v. 22). “As long as the earth endures,” God shall ensure the smooth transitions of everything that humans need for life: the changing seasons, cycles of day and night, and the passage of time.

**5.** *Why does Noah build an altar after leaving the ark?*

**6.** *What commitments in this text show God’s compassion and mercy?*

## An Agreement

*Genesis 9:11–13 KJV*

11 And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any

*Genesis 9:11–13 NIV*

<sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters

more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

12 And God said, this is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup> And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup> I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

After the flood, God establishes a covenant—a binding agreement—with Noah and all life (v. 11). This covenant is a promise that God will never again flood the earth in response to human sinfulness. The promise sets up the world that we face, where sin is allowed to persist for now, even though we can count on the fact that God will uphold justice on an eternal timeline. God extends these assurances to all future generations (v. 12).

God’s covenant is accompanied by a symbol: the rainbow (v. 13). It is a visible sign of God’s power and a reminder of His mercy and grace, even in the aftermath of harsh judgment.

The first covenant that God makes is foundational for displaying His character and desire for relationship with creation. It reveals God’s patience, willingness to extend grace, and His desire for reconciliation. God wants life to continue. The rainbow reminds humans of their reconciling God.

**7.** *How does the world change after the covenant with Noah and the promises that God makes?*

**8.** *What can we learn about God’s reconciling character from this chapter?*

## God's Daughter

My sisters and I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania, where we attended the local African Methodist Episcopal church. Our church membership was a little more than a hundred people, including children. We were not anonymous! We had to participate in Sunday school and services every Sunday. If there was an afternoon worship service, we had to stay for that too. Vacation Bible school was also mandatory, at least in my family.

You might think, with all that church training, my siblings and I were prepared for whatever life would throw at us. But as adults, we had more than our share of struggles. Many of us lost the habit of going to church at all. I thought I was too busy with a career, one of my sisters fell into addiction, and another was on the verge of divorce when diagnosed with late-stage colon cancer.

And God was faithful to each of us, despite the ways we had prioritized things other than God. It took several years before I was ready to rededicate my life to Christ, but God was ready for me. As for my sister, God performed a miracle by reconciling her marriage. With her husband at her side, she faced the cancer treatment with courage and support.

God *is* merciful and compassionate. I've seen it. Even though my sister's cancer treatments failed, she never lost hope for God to heal her. She found a nearby church during her treatment, where she began walking faithfully with Christ. She told us one day, "I feel the presence of God in my bedroom." In one of her last moments, she whispered to me, "I'm God's daughter, and He loves me."

**9.** *How is God's mercy demonstrated to us?*

**10.** *Do you tend to think that God provides extra protections and blessings on some people, or do you think that God treats all people the same?*

**11.** *When has God demonstrated patience and mercy in your life?*

## God's Patience and Kindness

Take a moment with God to review your history of walking with Him. You might ask God to remind you of a time that mercy was available to you. Perhaps the moment that comes to mind was when you were walking closely with God. Or, perhaps God will remind you of a moment that He protected and restored you, even when nothing else was going well.

► *Use the space below to write a word or a sentence to remind yourself of God's graciousness in your own story.*

### KEY VERSE

I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. —Genesis 9:13 KJV

I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. — Genesis 9:13 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of June 9 through June 15

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Genesis 17:15–22—God Promises a Son.
- Tues.** Romans 4:1–15—Abraham's Righteous Faith.
- Wed.** Romans 4:16–25—Life Out of Death.
- Thurs.** Genesis 12:1–7—A Blessing to the Nations.
- Fri.** Psalms 125–126—Joy for Weeping.
- Sat.** Hebrews 11:8–12—Abraham's Courageous Faith.
- Sun.** Genesis 22:1–14—God Will Provide a Lamb.

## Abraham Makes an Offering

The car keys fell out of Simone's hand for the third time. When she bent over to retrieve them, her heart and head were pounding. Finally, she got the car door open and the keys in the ignition. She revved the engine as she pulled out of the driveway.

Simone felt both suspended in time and as if she were running a four-minute mile. She left her mom at the hospital three hours ago to come home, change clothes, and refresh her overnight bag. Dr. Ackerman had just called, saying her mother had stopped breathing. Her mother had *stopped breathing!*

Dr. Ackerman said she needed to return to the hospital as quickly and safely as possible. As Simone traveled the familiar four-lane, busy road near her house, she looked over at the graveyard as if it were her first time. She heard a voice say, "Your mother is going to die."

As an only child and single woman, Simone considered her relationship with her mother to be one of the most important in her life. She had sought the Lord on how to best care for her mother. Simone had also surrounded herself with a strong Christian network. She was doing what the Lord called her to do: to come back home and take care of her.

With that in mind, she raised her chin as the tears started down her cheeks. "Lord, please heal my mother," Simone said. "But if she dies, I will continue to praise you, Father God!"

**1.** *When have you had to wonder what God was doing in your life?*

**2.** *How might the Psalms remind us that it is permissible to ask God direct questions about what He is doing?*

**3.** *Do you think that God might deliberately withhold details of the future from us? If so, why?*

## God Requests a Sacrifice

*Genesis 22:1–8 KJV*

1 And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.

2 And he said, take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. 4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. 5 And Abraham said unto his young men, abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

6 And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

*Genesis 22:1–8 NIV*

<sup>1</sup> Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

<sup>2</sup> Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

<sup>3</sup> Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about.

<sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup> He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

<sup>6</sup> Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, <sup>7</sup> Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

7 And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, my father: and he said, here am I, my son. And he said, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

8 And Abraham said, my son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

<sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

God initiated a covenant with Abraham by promising to bless the whole world through many offspring (Gen. 12:2–3; 15:2–4; 17:1–8). Even though Abraham and Sarah were childless, God worked a miracle by giving a biological heir to them, a son named Isaac. But as soon as Abraham receives this assurance of God’s favor, God requests a sacrifice that puts everything at stake.

In verse 1, the two translations—“tempt” (KJV) and “test” (NIV)—seem very different to our ears. In this case, the trial is not a temptation to sin but a test of Abraham’s priorities and obedience. Abraham is to go to Mount Moriah to offer his son as a human sacrifice. The request sounds like it is in direct opposition to the promises God has made and the kind of character that God has shown. Human sacrifice is one of the detestable ways that other people might worship their gods (Deut. 12:31), and nothing in Abraham’s experience would prepare him for this request from Yahweh.

Whether Abraham understands he’s being tested or not, he decides to obey. He gets up the next morning and sets out with Isaac and enough wood for the offering (v. 3). When they arrive, Abraham tells his servants that he and Isaac will go ahead to worship and return (v. 5). Abraham and Isaac are both familiar with sacrificial offerings in the ancient Near Eastern context, so Isaac wonders where the

sacrifice could be, and Abraham assures him of God's provision. His devotion to God is compelling his action, even if he doesn't understand what God is doing.

**4.** *Why do you think God tests us?*

**5.** *Why might Abraham appear willing to obey God in this situation?*

**6.** *Do you think Abraham believed he would actually have to kill Isaac?*

## God Provides a Sacrifice

*Genesis 22:9–14 KJV*

9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. 10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. 11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, here am I.

12 And he said, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and

*Genesis 22:9–14 NIV*

<sup>9</sup> When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

<sup>12</sup> "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

<sup>13</sup> Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He

Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. <sup>14</sup> And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, in the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

We have to imagine Abraham—climbing a mountain, building an altar stone by stone, hoisting wood onto it—all with the knowledge that it is meant for the sacrifice of his son. Abraham follows God's instructions, even binding Isaac and placing him on the altar (v. 9).

Abraham, who trusts God's provision, takes the knife and prepares to kill his own son (v. 10). And at the last moment, the angel of the Lord calls out to Abraham, and Abraham responds as a humble servant: "Here I am" (v. 11). God tells Abraham not to touch Isaac and affirms Abraham. His "fear" of God is evident, because he was willing to sacrifice his son. Fear in this context does not mean that Abraham was afraid (though that is certainly possible too). It means that Abraham shows devotion to God and places God's will above his own desires.

Abraham had previously believed God (Gen. 15:6), but now he has acted in faith as well. The biblical definition of faith is always a combination of belief and action—they go hand-in-hand (James 2:14–24).

Abraham finds God's provision for sacrifice, a ram that he offers to God in Isaac's place (v. 13). Abraham names the place "Yahweh will provide." This place will be a permanent reminder of God's provision (v. 14).

**7.** *What do we learn about God's character from this situation?*

**8.** *When did you go through a time of testing? How did it affect your faith?*

**9.** *When did God provide for you?*

## Jeremy's Sandwich Shop

Jeremy smiled as he turned the sign from closed to open on his shop's first day. Soon customers began entering, and Jeremy got to do what he was good at: making the best hot sandwiches in town. Jeremy's shop did well for many years after that opening day. His little shop didn't make him rich, but neither did he struggle to pay the bills. He hired reliable workers and had many regular customers who grew to be his friends. His business made Jeremy feel like he had a place in the community.

Unfortunately, the economy took a downturn, and it wasn't long before his business faltered. It felt like he was being asked to give up what he loved. He adored his shop, but most of all, he cared for the employees and knew they needed jobs.

But the day came when he planned to lay off half the staff. As he invited the first person to his office to give the news, she knew what was coming and broke down in tears. At that moment, Jeremy decided he would rather lose his home than his employees. He cashed in his retirement, sold the house, and put everything into reviving the shop. Though he didn't know how he was going to make it, the economy turned a corner, and business picked up.

Just as Jeremy remained devoted to his employees, God wants us to be devoted to Him in times of uncertainty. We see this in Abraham's story. He risked what he loved, since he believed that God provides. In that moment, Abraham found that his relationship with God meant more than anything.

**10.** *Does uncertainty draw you closer to God, or do you feel distant in those times?*

**11.** *Has God ever revealed the need for you to let go of something that didn't make sense? When?*

**12.** *What does devotion look like, when we are asked to let go of something that is good?*

## Following God in All Circumstances

We serve a heavenly Father who wants to give us good things—everything that we need for our mission in God’s kingdom (Matt. 7:11). At the same time, we face uncertainty and trouble in this world. When the trouble comes, we might let fear of losing something keep us from stepping out in faith. Try to complete each of these sentences as a reminder for yourself. How does God want you to demonstrate unshakable faith?

► *When I face uncertainty with **money**, I need to remember . . .*

► *When I am seeking **affirmation**, I need to remember . . .*

### KEY VERSE

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

—Genesis 22:14 KJV

So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”

—Genesis 22:14 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

#### Week of June 16 through June 22

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Leviticus 19:30–37—Love the Foreigner as Yourself.

**Tues.** Genesis 25:19–28—The Birth of Twins.

**Wed.** Genesis 26:1–11—Stay in the Land.

**Thurs.** Philippians 4:10–19—God Will Supply Every Need.

**Fri.** Genesis 26:12–23—God Blesses and Provides.

**Sat.** Romans 15:1–13—Live in Harmony; Welcome One Another.

**Sun.** Genesis 26:24–33—Making Peace with Others.

## Isaac Calls on the Name of the Lord

Do you understand, Ida?" asked Keysha.  
 "No," she replied. "My niece's product can be used on the hair, face, and entire body. She is a local entrepreneur. She's a perfect fit."

The women's ministry at Peace Tabernacle was planning its first annual Women's Care, Comfort, and Creativity Bazaar, featuring female merchants. Keysha had come up with the idea, and the women of the church had seized upon it. Now Ida was having problems with some of the details.

First of all, why couldn't there be multiple vendors offering similar services and products? She also didn't like the idea of having booths staged indoors and outdoors. It made it seem more like a garage sale than a bazaar. Sometimes, it seemed as though the younger women were trying to take over.

"But Ida," Keysha was saying. "We have two other vendors offering skin and hair products. We want to offer as wide a range of vendors as we can, and we want the merchants to have the best chance of making sales. That's why we agreed to limit the number."

Driving home, Ida realized the real quarrel was with herself. Did she just want to have her way?

Ida felt the familiar tugging at her heart. "I need Your peace. Deliver me from myself, Lord. Give me grace to always love. In Jesus' name, amen."

- 1.** *When have you seen a conflict escalate quickly?*
- 2.** *How might the example of Jesus shape our response to conflict?*
- 3.** *How can we be better communicators in the middle of conflict?*

## An Altar for the Worthy God

*Genesis 26:24–27 KJV*

24 And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.

25 And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

26 Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. 27 And Isaac said unto them, wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?

*Genesis 26:24–27 NIV*

<sup>24</sup> That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

<sup>25</sup> Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. <sup>27</sup> Isaac asked them, "Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?"

Near Beersheba, close to the Negev, water is essential. As the Philistines contend for these wells of water, Isaac must be realizing the critical need for water for his people.

At this point, the Lord appears to Isaac (v. 24). He assures Isaac that He is the same God who was faithful to his father, Abraham. Amidst the scarcity of water and the potential for regional conflict, God's words gives hope. The Philistines might be destroying the wells dug up by the people of God, but they don't have the final word.

"Fear not," says the Lord (v. 24). God promises to be with Isaac and to bless him. These words echo God's earlier promises to Abraham (Gen. 12:2–3; 15:1). The comparison is explicit: "I will bless you . . . for the sake

of Abraham” (v. 24). God’s fidelity to His promises will not end after Abraham is gone; the promises extend to Abraham’s children. God reminds Isaac that He is present and that He will multiply Isaac’s offspring. The covenant remains intact.

God’s faithfulness demands a purposeful response, so Isaac follows the pattern of his father, Abraham, who also built altars in memory of God’s provision (Gen. 12:8). Isaac builds an altar and calls upon the name of the Lord (Gen. 26:25). To the contemporary reader, this might sound like an archaic gesture. But Isaac builds this altar to remember a tangible location where he encountered God.

At that very moment, God’s promise of protection is tested. Abimelek, the king whom Isaac had previously deceived and who had sent Isaac’s clan away, comes out to speak to him. He is not alone, for he has brought his advisor and the captain of his armed forces. Isaac’s words reveal the uncertainty in his heart, for he wonders whether trouble has followed him to his new home.

**4.** *What factors make the survival of Isaac’s family “high-stakes” or tense?*

**5.** *In what ways has God already shown faithfulness in Isaac’s story?*

## Peace at the Table

*Genesis 26:28–33 KJV*

28 And they said, we saw certainly that the Lord was with thee: and we said, let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee;  
29 That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and

*Genesis 26:28–33 NIV*

<sup>28</sup> They answered, “We saw clearly that the Lord was with you; so we said, ‘There ought to be a sworn agreement between us’—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you <sup>29</sup> that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and

have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the LORD.

30 And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink.

31 And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

32 And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, we have found water.

33 And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day.

sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the LORD."

<sup>30</sup> Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. <sup>31</sup> Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.

<sup>32</sup> That day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We've found water!"

<sup>33</sup> He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

Based on his previous experience, Isaac anticipates a dispute, perhaps even an armed conflict with these men in the field. Abimelek, the king of the Philistines—more of a tribal leader than a “king” as we might imagine—arrives where Isaac has just begun digging a new well, after Isaac's previous wells were destroyed (Gen. 26:15–16). But instead of coming to trade blows, the men have a different intention altogether.

Against all odds, Abimelek calls Isaac “blessed by the LORD” (Gen. 26:29). This does not mean that the Philistines have adopted Isaac's God or become monotheistic worshipers of Yahweh. In their religious context, it was normal to come across powerful gods who needed to be treated with respect.

Isaac is so clearly blessed because, even when his enemies try to get rid of him, God keeps multiplying his crops a hundredfold and multiplying livestock to make him wealthy (Gen. 26:12–14). The Philistines know that Isaac has a special purpose.

Abimelek's acknowledgment of Isaac's God and the blessing upon him signals another fulfilled promise. God had said "all peoples on earth will be blessed" through Abraham and his descendants, for those who bless Abraham's family will be blessed in turn (Gen. 12:3). Blessing is an abstract concept, but one immediate kind of blessing is the absence of conflict. In the distant future from these events, God provides blessing to all nations by inviting them to become part of the family of Abraham, by faith (Gal. 3:7-9).

Now, Isaac could have taken issue with what Abimelek claims, that he and his people "always treated [Isaac] well" (Gen. 26:29). Blocking up a family's wells was certain to threaten their safety, and it could be perceived as a hostile act (Gen. 26:15). But Isaac says nothing of this. He welcomes a resolution to the conflict through the making of a "sworn agreement" or "oath" (v. 28).

To make the peace official, Isaac invites the visitors to share a feast (v. 30). Today, peace is often signaled by spoken words or a signed treaty. But in this context, sharing a meal was a way of cementing the relationship. Enemies were reconciled, not with words on a page, but around shared food at a common table. Through this meal, Isaac demonstrates the virtue of hospitality toward his guests. He treats these former enemies as honored company.

Even as Abimelek and his men return to their homes in peace, Isaac hears some additional good news. From the start of the conflict, he had been competing for the limited water resources in the area. Elusive as water had been, God comes through by leading Isaac's workers to create a reliable well. Thus Isaac gives an appropriate name to the site: Beersheba, which means "the well of the oath" (v. 33).

**6.** *How does God start to fulfill the promise to "bless the nations of the earth"?*

**7.** *How is peace demonstrated between opposing parties in the ancient world?*

## Conflict inside the House

Families can be messy. And to Sarah, hers seemed especially complicated. For as long as she could remember, her extended family always had something going spectacularly wrong. The smallest disagreement between cousins would blow up into yelling matches that left Sarah feeling exhausted. Somehow, everyone would get involved.

And now, whenever Sarah and her husband would discuss their holiday plans, she felt sick at the thought of going to her family's annual Christmas bash. And as the event drew nearer, her anxiety-induced stomach knots would become an anxiety-induced illness, until at the event she'd need to excuse herself. She was miserable.

Jesus draws this contrast: "In me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). The peace comes from God, but that doesn't put an end to the conflicts we face. Conflict is not from God, but God can still use conflict for our good, to teach us patience and endurance and to make us more like the image of Jesus.

Isaac and his later descendants would remember this experience of living in tents as unwelcome strangers. They would face the same kind of jealousy in Egypt one day, and through this God teaches His people to welcome outsiders (Ex. 22:21).

God reminded Isaac that the covenant made with Abraham was still in effect. So, even though the Philistines kept filling up his wells, Isaac did not have to fear. No matter who might come against us, we can share with others the peace that we have found with God.

**8.** *Do you find it harder to handle conflict with outsiders or with family members?*

**9.** *What does the security of peace with God invite you to do?*

**10.** *What promises are you trusting God to fulfill?*

## Peacemaking

In the first lesson of this quarter, you were invited to be holding a particular relationship before God. This week, your challenge is to find a way to invite peace or to thank a friend for your good relationship. You could make a phone call, send a letter or email, offer to mow a neighbor's lawn, or almost any other concrete way that you imagine could honor your relationship. If asked why you are doing this, you could say, "I serve a God who invites me to be at peace."

► *This week, I will make the following gesture of peacemaking or kindness:*

### KEY VERSE

And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.  
—Genesis 26:25 KJV

Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.  
—Genesis 26:25 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of June 23 through June 29

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Genesis 35:1–7—Jacob's Return to Bethel.
- Tues.** John 15:1–8—Abide in Christ, the True Vine.
- Wed.** Jeremiah 29:8–14—Seek God with All Your Heart.
- Thurs.** Matthew 18:15–20—Christ Is among His Gathered People.
- Fri.** Matthew 28:16–20—Christ Is with Us Always.
- Sat.** Psalm 16—Fullness of Joy in God's Presence.
- Sun.** Genesis 28:10–22—The Lord Is in This Place.

## Jacob Sets Up a Sacred Pillar

Is it Clifton or Charles?" asked the woman behind the banker's desk.

"Clifton." He was at the bank to see why his business loan was turned down—again. Clifton had scraped together what little money he had and borrowed from a few friends and family to lease the location to open "Clifton Burgers." The restaurant would offer some of the best burgers and walking tacos in the area, or so he hoped.

"Mr. Miller, do you know how many restaurants fail in the country every day?" Alice asked, cutting into the thoughts.

"Well, mine won't," Clifton replied. However, he had run into so many roadblocks before even opening his doors. Clifton wanted to show everybody—and himself—that he could be just as successful as his brother Charles.

"Why do you want to open a restaurant?" his mother had asked. "Did you pray about it?"

"Mom, you don't have to pray about everything!" had been his response.

"But starting a business is a serious step," Mrs. Miller had said. "Why wouldn't you go to God first? You need to seek God's wisdom and direction. Baby, you've always been a little headstrong."

Clifton sat staring at—what was her name again? All he could see was problem after problem.

**1.** *Describe a time when you've found yourself making plans without consulting the Lord.*

**2.** *How are things better when you ask God for wisdom and direction in your plans?*

**3.** *How can we learn to trust God when it seems the door is shut on our plans?*

## A Dream

*Genesis 28:10–15 KJV*

10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. 11 And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. 13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; 14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

*Genesis 28:10–15 NIV*

<sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. <sup>11</sup> When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. <sup>12</sup> He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup> Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. <sup>15</sup> I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Jacob, whose name means “trickster,” has managed to deceive his father, Isaac, by impersonating his older brother, Esau. Isaac favored his older son and planned to give a blessing to Esau, but Jacob received this blessing instead. Instead of a glorious blessing, Esau hears, “You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother” (Gen. 27:40). The revelation of this deceit fuels Esau’s hatred toward Jacob, driving him to contemplate murder (Gen. 27:41). Thus Isaac and Rebekah send him to Harran to find a suitable marriage partner and to escape Esau’s wrath.

Despite his father’s blessing, which invited God to give prosperity, wealth, and the service of surrounding nations (Gen. 27:27–29), Jacob is not presently experiencing any of that. He ventures alone into a desert wilderness. In a desolate place, he spends the night outdoors, with nothing but stones to use as pillows.

In verse 12, Jacob experiences a profound dream, composed of three distinct elements, each symbolizing a theological theme. First, the “ladder” (KJV) reaching toward heaven is more like an ancient stairway. People of this time would sometimes build square pyramids called zigurats, and these were intended to invite the gods of heaven to come down to receive worship and give blessings. In Jacob’s dream, the stairway serves as a bridge between heaven and earth, showing that God is not too distant.

Second, “the angels of God” traversing these steps show God’s active involvement in the earthly domain. God is at all times sending servants to carry out His wishes.

Finally, Jacob’s dream concludes with an appearance of God Himself, standing above the walkway (v. 13). From heaven, God speaks words of blessing to Jacob. He reiterates and extends the covenant promises to Abraham and Isaac. Like his father and grandfather, Jacob will receive land, many descendants, and blessing from other people on the earth (vv. 13–14). To those other promises, God adds the words of verse 15. God will be traveling with Jacob as he goes to Harran. While Jacob is leaving the land of promise for now, God shall bring him back safely.

4. *Why does Jacob leave his father's house?*
5. *What does Jacob's dream mean?*
6. *What does God promise to Jacob?*

## A Dedication

*Genesis 28:16–22 KJV*

16 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. 17 And he was afraid, and said, how dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

18 And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.

20 And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, 21 So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: 22 And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

*Genesis 28:16–22 NIV*

<sup>16</sup> When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." <sup>17</sup> He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

<sup>18</sup> Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. <sup>19</sup> He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

<sup>20</sup> Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear <sup>21</sup> so that I return safely to my father's household, then the LORD will be my God <sup>22</sup> and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

Upon awakening from his dream, Jacob is struck by a profound realization and a sense of God's presence. In verse 16, this revelation manifests as an awe-filled acknowledgment that God is in this place. That was true before, but Jacob's dream helped him to see a reality which had been hidden from him.

His reaction to this epiphany is to be "afraid" (v. 17). Fear in biblical texts can mean more than awareness of danger. Fear of God often means a reverential awe, a sense of wonder that we might feel when experiencing a divine encounter. Jacob declares this place is "none other than the house of God" and the "gate of heaven" (v. 17).

This encounter signifies a transformative moment in Jacob's life. In verse 18, he commemorates his vision by taking the same stone he had used as a pillow and setting it as a "pillar." This sacred stone he dedicates, turning an ordinary object into a symbol of God's unseen presence. Jacob proceeds to pour oil—something he surely needs for his monthlong journey—on the pillar. This oil is an offering and demonstration of gratitude to the Lord for His promised provision. Jacob calls the name of the place Bethel, which means "the house of God." Before he leaves, Jacob vows that he shall give a tenth of everything he obtains to the worship of God, if God is willing to keep him safe until his return (vv. 20–22).

The dream and Jacob's vow foreshadow that great blessings will come to Jacob by the providential hand of God. At the very moment that Jacob is most fearful of the wrath of his brother, the God of the universe appears to him and sets his priorities in order. Jacob has no one and nothing to fear, as long as he has God with him on the way.

**7.** *When have you become intensely aware of God's presence and felt the need to respond?*

**8.** *What is Jacob's response?*

**9.** *What is the difference between the fear that Jacob has of Esau and the fear that Jacob shows to God?*

## Enduring Presence

I hadn't been to church in years. Years later, the pain of what went wrong felt as raw as when it happened. I had given up working as a pastor. In an effort to leave it all behind, I stepped into a different job and worked for the freedom of weekends with my family.

It seemed that the more I worked, the more I was discontent. My wife and kids went to church without me. It hurt to see them trying to seek Jesus while I was running the other way. Work wasn't satisfying and left me with an unavoidable pit that couldn't be filled with success.

After feeling guilt and shame as I watched my family go to church each Sunday, I finally chose to go with them one week. But it didn't go well. Fear overtook me, and I had a panic attack. But then, I started praying again. I had conversations with my wife and with wise counselors, and went back. This time there wasn't a panic attack, just a sermon. The message spoke of a God who was breathing life into dry and dead places. I knew, right then He was breathing life into me. God has never left me, and His enduring presence is with me still.

Not long after my return, the church held a special event for one of my daughters. I remember the day well. It was that day when I sensed a calling to step back into ministry. I remember praying, "Lord, if I'm going to do this, I need You to come with me." A pastoral position opened at our church, and I stepped back into what I thought I would never do again.

**10.** *When have you struggled to see that God was with you?*

**11.** *When have you looked back after going through something difficult, only to realize that God was with you?*

**12.** *How can you remember that God is there when you are hurting?*

## A Memory Stone

In today's lesson, Jacob set up a stone to help him remember that the unseen God was with him. It even made him afraid to think that God had been present all along, but he was unconscious of this reality.

► *What is an object that helps you to remember God's presence with you? (It could be a stone, a cross, an image, or something else.)*

► *Where do you need to be reminded of God's presence most?*

*Consider placing your own "stone of memory" to remind you that God is unseen but with you.*

### KEY VERSES

And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.

—Genesis 28:18–19 KJV

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

—Genesis 28:18–19 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of June 30 through July 6

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Psalm 27—Living in God's Presence.

**Tues.** 1 John 2:20–28—Anointed by the Holy One.

**Wed.** Deuteronomy 16:1–10—Remember Israel's Redemption.

**Thurs.** Deuteronomy 16:11–17—Rejoice before the Lord.

**Fri.** Psalm 114—Judah Has Become God's Sanctuary.

**Sat.** John 10:22–30, 34–38—The Father and I Are One.

**Sun.** Luke 2:41–52—Jesus Learns in His Father's House.

## The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Jessica wiped at her tears again and blinked. She held up the note written in markers, from the six-year-old, Courtlyn. She read it one more time:

“Dear Ante Jessica you are the best ever I love you so much and your body I love your house so much that is not why I love you I love you to the moon and back of course love you back again Don’t be blue Your fav Courtlyn”

Jessica had no children, but she had taken to her good friend’s child. Jessica had been there when Courtlyn was born. She was at Courtlyn’s birthday parties, family functions and church activities.

Jessica routinely took Courtlyn for ice cream, lunch, park dates—just to spend time with her. Yesterday, Courtlyn had spent the night at her “auntie’s” house. Jessica now realized she had been feeling a little depressed. She also engaged in a bit of negative self-talk about herself, which was commonplace for her.

When the two went for ice cream, Jessica quipped about her weight as she dove headlong into the brownie-nugget mounds. She had no idea that her six-year-old play niece was taking it all in.

Wow. From the heart of this young girl, the Lord had touched and blessed Jessica’s heart. She was so thankful for Courtlyn in her life.

**1.** *Ponder a time when a child’s perspective challenged your assumptions about God. What did you learn?*

**2.** *What would it require of you to become more child-like in your view of the world?*

**3.** *What sorts of fears or anxieties keep us from asking the same questions as a child?*

## The Search for the Missing Jesus

*Luke 2:41–47 KJV*

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. 43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. 44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. 45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. 46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. 47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

*Luke 2:41–47 NIV*

41 Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. 42 When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. 43 After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. 44 Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Regular attendance of the temple for major Jewish festivals is mandated by the Law (Ex. 23:17; Deut. 16:16). But it is commendable that Mary and Joseph make the long trip “every year” (Luke 2:41). They must journey from Nazareth all the way down to Jerusalem—a distance of about seventy miles—to celebrate the Passover. This particular festival came on an important year: “[Jesus] was

twelve years old" (v. 42). That makes Jesus near an age of accountability, when a child is becoming responsible for his or her actions. Thus it is surprising that, when time to return home, "the boy Jesus [stays] behind in Jerusalem" without His parents' knowledge (v. 43).

It is *not* surprising that Mary and Joseph are unaware. They are traveling with a large group of "relatives and friends" (v. 44). In this context, a large family can share the responsibility of looking after one another. At twelve years old, Jesus is capable of taking care of Himself among relatives.

Only after a long day of travel do Mary and Joseph "[begin] looking for him" (v. 44); and subsequently, they have to turn around and go back to Jerusalem. The short description skips over the day of travel back to the city. As with any parent, the anxiety at losing a child might mean a sleepless night. What they knew about Jesus, they did not fully understand (Luke 1:32–33, 35).

Mary and Joseph spend three days searching for Jesus (v. 46). That probably counts one day going away from Jerusalem, one day traveling back, and another whole day looking for Him, in and around the city. Their anxiety no doubt increases with every hour, before they finally find him in the courts of the temple, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (v. 46).

In those days, the temple area contained three courts where the rabbis would come to teach. They would ask questions and debate the meaning of Scripture. It is possible that some of the most famous rabbis were in Jerusalem for Passover and speaking with the young Jesus. Even these learned and respected men are "amazed at his understanding and his answers" (v. 47). As a boy raised in the rural territory of Galilee, Jesus is not expected to have any formal education. But Jesus is no ordinary boy, and this is not the only occasion when he will astonish teachers and crowds (Matt. 7:28; 22:22; Luke 4:22–32).

From Jesus' perspective, He isn't lost at all. He is in discussion and study. Who better to interpret the written

Word of God than the living “Word of God,” the Son of God in the flesh (John 1:1–3)?

**4.** *What happens after Mary and Joseph leave Jerusalem? How could this have happened?*

**5.** *Why isn't Jesus looking for His parents? What is He doing instead?*

## Jesus Responds to His Parents

*Luke 2:48–52 KJV*

48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

49 And he said unto them, how is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?  
50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

*Luke 2:48–52 NIV*

<sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

<sup>49</sup> “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?” <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

<sup>51</sup> Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup> And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

When they see Jesus' ease in talking among the teachers of Israel, Mary and Joseph feel “astonished” (v. 48). They are understandably upset that Jesus has stayed behind. Mary is the first to ask the obvious question, “Why?”

Jesus responds to his parents in a way that is both

compassionate and confident: “Why were you searching for me? . . . Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (v. 49). Although Jesus would later predict the destruction of the temple (Luke 21:5–6), the temple remains the “house” of God (2 Chron. 7:1–5).

Readers of the Gospel should stop and wonder what the word “Father” means when Jesus says it. Scripture speaks of God as a father figure to Israel and as a father to Israel’s kings (Ex. 4:22–23; Deut. 1:31; 2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13). But Jesus appears to mean something more. His way of describing God is more personal. And even Mary and Joseph do not understand what He might mean (v. 50).

Nonetheless, Jesus is submissive to His parents and “obedient to them” (Luke 2:51). As the text says, Mary would remember this incident vividly—not only the anxiety of losing her son, but also His curious words to them in the temple. She would remember the faces of the Jewish teachers who were gathered and listening intently to the boy. By treasuring this memory in her heart, Mary’s witness would shape the way that Jesus’ story is told (Luke 2:51). Later, His mother would come to understand His words in a new way, especially after Jesus ascends to the Father in heaven (Acts 1:14).

The next years of Jesus’ life are summarized with a single sentence: “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 3:52). Although Jesus would be known to the world as the son of Joseph (Luke 3:23), one day the whole world would be astonished by Him and the unexpected fulfillment of God’s redemptive plan.

**6.** *How do Mary and Joseph react after finding Jesus?*

**7.** *How does Jesus react to his parents? What might be the meaning of His words in verse 49?*

**8.** *What is your own reaction to Jesus’ words and actions in this story? Do you find yourself sympathizing with Mary and Joseph?*

## A God of Surprises

Consider all the things that Mary and Joseph had experienced! They were visited by angels announcing Jesus' miraculous birth (Luke 1:26–38). They were met by strangers sent to worship a newborn child (Luke 2:15–18). A strange man took the infant in his arms and called the child “[God’s] salvation” (Luke 2:30). And then a prophet began telling everyone in the temple courts about their son (Luke 2:36–38). You might think they had all the information they needed to expect the unexpected. But God has a way of surprising His people.

Even as a young man, Jesus seems to have understood that He had a special mission from God. But to Mary and Joseph, He was only a boy who was lost and needed to be found.

Through this narrative, Luke demonstrates several points. First, Jesus has a way with words. Already at this young age, He is enigmatic and wise. His words convey the messages of God, and those who listen and obey are blessed (Luke 11:28). Second, He has a close relationship with the heavenly Father. Like key figures of Israel’s past, Jesus speaks of God as His Father. But none of those past individuals were conceived without a human father. When He eventually comes to be baptized, a voice from heaven proclaims, “You are my Son, whom I love” (Luke 3:22).

Finally, Jesus is an obedient son to His earthly parents. Even with the authority of God, Jesus was devoted to them. While His stunt may have caused some anxiety, the story was memorable in the mind of Mary. She saw something in her son that day, something that she did not expect.

**9.** *How have Jesus’ actions surprised you personally?*

**10.** *What else about Jesus’ life and ministry would turn out to be surprising?*

**11.** *Why do you imagine that God so often surprises His people?*

## Sharing the Generosity of God

We serve a God who is faithful, sometimes in ways that we don't anticipate. There's no way to prepare to be surprised. But we can participate in God's restorative plan by sharing God's love and kindness. You are invited to surprise a friend, family member, or a stranger in the week ahead through an act of kindness. (Suggestions: offer to take a friend to lunch; give an especially generous tip; write a note of encouragement to leave in an unexpected place.)

► *Because I serve a God whose generosity is surprising, I plan to share this gift with \_\_\_\_\_ in the week ahead.*

### KEY VERSE

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? —Luke 2:49 KJV

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" —Luke 2:49 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of July 7 through July 13

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Deuteronomy 5:1-7, 12-15—Honor the Sabbath Day.
- Tues.** Hebrews 4:1-10—Rest for the People of God.
- Wed.** John 7:14-24—Who Defines the Sabbath?
- Thurs.** Psalm 92—Hymn of Eternal Gratitude.
- Fri.** Luke 13:10-17—The Sabbath Healing.
- Sat.** 1 Samuel 21:1-6—Holy Bread for the Journey.
- Sun.** Matthew 12:1-8—Lord of the Sabbath.

## Lord of the Sabbath

Louis rubbed both his eyes with his huge hand. It was late. He was tired. He was sitting alone on top of one of the picnic tables outside of the cabins—thinking.

It was his annual trip when he took the boys camping in the West Tennessee woods. Louis, the youth minister at his church, had first broached the idea with his pastor three years prior. Pastor Edwards loved the idea but raised some concerns. The most important one was that anyone accompanying the boys would have to undergo background checks.

Years one and two had gone well. However, this year, Louis had trouble with two volunteers. There was Jabari, who—maybe in his attempt to relate to the boys—was full of worldly “wisdom.”

Louis told Jabari that the point of the retreat was to point the boys to Christ. “They get enough worldly advice from the world,” Louis had said. Yet, Jabari’s crude humor increased and seemingly intensified. Then there was Ghalen, who was either sleeping in or wandering away from the group.

Louis sent Jabari home the day before. Then Louis warned Ghalen that if he didn’t shape up, he’d be going home too.

Louis knew neither of the men were happy with him. And some of the other staff might not have agreed with his decision. But he had to protect these boys.

Louis swung his head toward the footsteps he heard nearby. “Want to get some rest? I can take a watch for a few hours,” said Ghalen.

- 1.** *What does holding authority look like for you?*
- 2.** *What are some characteristics of a godly leader?*
- 3.** *How do you submit to Christ’s authority?*

## The Disciples Glean; the Pharisees Complain

*Matthew 12:1–4 KJV*

1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

3 But he said unto them, have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; 4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

*Matthew 12:1–4 NIV*

<sup>1</sup> At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. <sup>2</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

<sup>3</sup> He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?" <sup>4</sup> He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.

It is the Sabbath, and Jesus and his disciples are hungry as they walk through a field. The disciples "began to pick some heads of grain" that had spouted up in the field "and eat them" (v. 1). Although there is no indication that Jesus joined them, there was nothing wrong in the disciples' actions, let alone any suggestion that this was stealing. The Mosaic law permitted gleaning by and instructed farmers to harvest crops so as to leave a remainder that travelers could eat (Deut. 23:25).

However, this was the Sabbath, and the Pharisees had apparently followed Jesus and His disciples through the fields. Upon watching the disciples pluck the grains to eat, they pounce on the opportunity to condemn these actions. "Look!" they say to Jesus. "Your disciples are

doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath” (v. 2). In essence, the Pharisees are declaring that by gleaning the fields, the disciples were working on the Sabbath day—which forbidden by the Law (Ex. 20:8–11; Deut. 5:12–15).

Jesus, however, saw it differently and responded to the Pharisees by pointing them back to the Scripture. At no point in His responses will Jesus downplay the importance of keeping the Sabbath holy, which, after all, was one of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:8–11). Jesus says during His Sermon on the Mount, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). Jesus is careful to show that He is not contravening God’s own instructions in the Sinai covenant. Jesus is going to argue that there is no violation of Sabbath by His disciples. Moreover, He is going to show that the rigid interpretation of Sabbath reveals more about the distorted mindset of the Pharisees, who lack a sense of gracious mercy in this circumstance.

Jesus begins by raising an example about David, when he and his fighting men were fleeing from King Saul (see 1 Sam. 21:1–6). Since they were in desperate need and required food, the future king “entered the house of God” and took “consecrated bread” for himself and others (Matt. 12:4).

So why was David allowed to do this? One explanation is that David was God’s anointed king, chosen for a particular role of leading the people of Israel. Like David, Jesus is a king. And like David, Jesus and His disciples are on a mission, but their mission is devoted to the proclamation of the kingdom of God. David had the authority to share this bread in a time of need, and Jesus has even more authority to permit His disciples to glean grain.

**4.** *What do Jesus’ disciples do on the Sabbath day? Why might this be considered controversial?*

**5.** *How does Jesus respond to the Pharisees?*

**6.** *How is Jesus in any way like David?*

## Mercy Greater Than Sacrifice

*Matthew 12:5–8 KJV*

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? 6 But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple. 7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

*Matthew 12:5–8 NIV*

<sup>5</sup> Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? <sup>6</sup> I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. <sup>7</sup> If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. <sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Jesus continues His defense of His disciples' actions by making a second comparison to what His disciples are doing. For context, not all labor and work is impermissible. The traditions of this day permitted saving a life, as in the rescue of an animal from a pit (see Matt. 12:11–12).

But there is a more common exception: one of the tribes of Israel, the Levites, are given the role of priests for the people. For priests, work does not stop on the Sabbath. In fact, they have added work to make an additional burnt offering (Num. 28:9–10). Temple work included the preparation of fires and slaughter of animals—acts explicitly forbidden on the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10; 35:3). Given a rigid application of Sabbath rules, according to the Pharisees' logic, the priests are chronic breakers of Sabbath law (v. 5).

Now, the priests are not doing anything wrong by the labor they perform on the Sabbath. Jesus says they are "innocent" (v. 5). Their actions are conducted at the request of God and on behalf of His people (Lev. 6:9–13). These "desecrators" are innocent of any wrongdoing.

Then Jesus makes a remarkable declaration: "I tell you that something greater than the temple is here" (v. 6). The

Pharisees are probably flummoxed by this statement. The temple is the center of worship, the place of God's holy presence. But Jesus fulfills the function of the temple; He is Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). By implication, Jesus' disciples are like priests in the service of the temple, wherever He and His disciples go.

Jesus uses the words of Hosea 6:6 to upstage the Pharisees: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (v. 7). This is not the first time that Jesus has quoted these words. He shares the same response when He is criticized for dining with "tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 9:10–13). Jesus criticizes the hypocrisy of claiming to worship God while displaying none of the "justice, mercy, and faithfulness" that are more important to the Father (Matt. 23:23).

Jesus concludes with what are perhaps the most audacious words of all. Not only does He defend the disciples' actions, but he puts an exclamation point on His own authority to decide and declares Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (v. 8). Sabbath was a gift from God and not an arbitrary set of rules, but here Jesus claims authority to interpret it. He is not simply a commentator; He is the author of Sabbath. As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus can resolve any disputes about interpretation.

If the Pharisees had not yet grasped who Jesus claims to be, there was no longer any mistaking it. Immediately after these words, the Lord of the Sabbath will take debate to the Pharisees in their own synagogue and continue His restorative work (see Matt. 12:9–14). Every aspect of worship, when viewed from Jesus' perspective, should lead God's people to show mercy.

**7.** *How could Jesus say that His disciples were in any way like the priests who work in the temple?*

**8.** *What values does God say are most important when we approach Him in worship?*

**9.** *What sort of authority does Jesus claim for Himself in this text?*

## On Whose Authority?

“I cannot wait to be a grown up. Then I’ll be in charge.”

My daughter and I were having a difficult afternoon. I had told her to finish her schoolwork before doing something else, and she was not having it. But in the end, she relented and went back to writing sentences.

Later that night I had to tell her the truth. “You know what,” I said, “no matter how grown up you get, there will always be a greater authority.”

I reminded her of when I got a speeding ticket for driving too fast and that I have boss at work who holds me accountable if I don’t do what I am asked.

“But the greatest authority of all is Jesus,” I said. No matter what my plans and desires might be, I have to submit them to God. His authority goes beyond any earthly government or organization. All that context probably went over the head of an eight-year-old.

But maybe I was using those words to remind myself. When I look at the diversity of Christian churches and denominations, it would be easy for me to apply my own standards of evaluation. Sometimes it is hard to step back and to say to myself, “Jesus can work out our differences in the end.”

As Lord and king, Jesus invites people to join His redemptive mission. While Jesus’ followers might respectfully disagree about many things, Jesus says to them all, “How are you doing at your job of showing mercy?” That is how Jesus exercises His authority.

**10.** *What is a time that you have reacted negatively to someone else’s show of authority?*

**11.** *How do you relate to the way that the Pharisees in today’s lesson were more obsessed with rules than with showing mercy?*

**12.** *What does it look like to submit to the authority of Jesus in this world?*

## Time Enough to Show Mercy

In the lesson today, Pharisees criticize Jesus' followers, but Jesus calls attention back to what is central in God's eyes: whether or not we are showing a compassionate care and understanding for one another.

- ▶ *What, if any, tradition or rule feels especially important to you?*
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ▶ *What is a compassionate way that you can look at anyone who holds a different standard? What would Jesus ask of you?*

### KEY VERSE

But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. —Matthew 12:6 KJV

I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. —Matthew 12:6 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 14 through July 20

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Isaiah 56—God Gathers Outcasts to the Temple.

**Tues.** 1 Timothy 2:1–8—Prayer and Holiness.

**Wed.** Ecclesiastes 5:1–7—Guard Your Steps in God's House.

**Thurs.** Acts 17:22–34—God Doesn't Live in Human Shrines.

**Fri.** Jeremiah 7:1–15—The False Security of Religious Posturing.

**Sat.** Malachi 3:1–6—The Messenger's Arrival.

**Sun.** John 2:13–25—Zeal for God's House.

## Cleansing the Temple

I see you went to a Christian college,” the interviewer said to Makayla. “My sister graduated from there. How did you like it?”

Makayla feigned a smile. She had not enjoyed it. It had been two years of isolation and pain. When she couldn’t take it any longer, Makayla had transferred to a public university and completed her bachelor’s degree.

Makayla had high hopes when she enrolled. She thought it would be like going to school at a big church, of sorts. She wasn’t put off by the hard work or challenging courses. Makayla had rolled up her sleeves and dived into her studies.

What she wasn’t prepared for were the very real but invisible racial lines that seemed to keep her from feeling like a part of the thriving college life that was happening all around her. The Black population at the school was only about seven percent. But Makayla had expected that, because it was a Christian college, things would be more favorable for her—or at the least that she would enjoy it. She had not.

Makayla had prayed. Should she stay or should she go? Then the Lord provided a wonderful financial opportunity for a transfer to the school that was now her alma mater.

“They had an excellent education program,” Makayla said of the Christian college.

- 1.** *Are you ever surprised by the standard that Jesus upholds, particularly in relation to believers?*
- 2.** *What do you observe in the growing secularization and removal of God from public life?*
- 3.** *What kind of prayers should we pray for our institutions?*

## Jesus Cleanses the Temple

*John 2:13–17 KJV*

13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting; 15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; 16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. 17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

*John 2:13–17 NIV*

<sup>13</sup> When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. <sup>15</sup> So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

As is customary for Jews during Passover, Jesus travels to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast (v. 13). This is the first of three, possibly four, Passovers that Jesus is recorded as celebrating (John 5:1; 6:4; 11:55).

Jesus enters the temple courts, where He finds money changers and people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. The temple courts are the outermost part of the temple complex. For travelers who come from long distances, it is more convenient to purchase an animal on site, rather than transport one. And if a person wishes to bring financial offerings, only one kind of coin is allowed in the temple. Thus money changers do business in the temple courtyards and offer "acceptable" coins (those with a high silver content), which they will gladly exchange—at

exorbitant transaction rates. Ironically, these “acceptable” coins feature pagan images, which offend many Jews, since God permits no graven image of Himself (Ex. 20:4). The priesthood who run the temple of the first century is widely seen as corrupt, but powerful. They seem to be enriching themselves by allowing this commerce.

Using a whip of cords, Jesus drives everyone out, along with their animals. He scatters the money changers’ coins and flips their tables (v. 15). He commands the people selling doves to leave. Doves are a sacrifice used especially by people who cannot afford larger animals (Lev. 5:7; 12:8). They have made His Father’s house a marketplace (v. 16).

The Court of the Gentiles, the only part of the temple where Gentiles are permitted to pray, has become a chaotic marketplace. Verse 17 reveals the disciples’ reaction, though it is not clear whether they have this reaction immediately or much later. The disciples think of the words of David, when he cries out to God while facing hostile enemies. David shows incredible courage and commitment to God’s temple: “Zeal for your house will consume me” (Ps. 69:9). Like David before Him, Jesus is passionate for God’s glory, and He risks a controversy by calling attention to a problem.

**4.** *When Jesus arrives at the temple, what does He discover in the temple courts?*

**5.** *Why does Jesus object to animal merchants and money changers?*

## Jesus Speaks about His Body

*John 2:18–25 KJV*

18 Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?

19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this

*John 2:18–25 NIV*

<sup>18</sup> The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I

temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? 21 But he spake of the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

23 Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. 24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, 25 And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.

will raise it again in three days."

<sup>20</sup> They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But the temple he had spoken of was his body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

<sup>23</sup> Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name.

<sup>24</sup> But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. <sup>25</sup> He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

The Jewish leaders (in this case, probably the authorities of the temple priesthood) ask Jesus for a sign to prove His authority from God. This request comes from a place of skepticism. They are demanding that He justify himself on their terms, and Jesus never complies with these types of demands. Since His authority comes from God, He gives a sign that they do not expect or understand. He says he will raise (or rebuild) it in three days (v. 19).

The questioners think Jesus is saying He would like to rebuild a new physical temple. At this point, the temple has been undergoing reconstruction for 46 years (v. 20). We know that the work went on long after Jesus' ministry. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the temple

work began around 20 BC and continued until AD 64. From the perspective of the temple authorities, this is not a building project that can be completed in three days.

Verse 21 gives the narrator's explanation, something for readers to understand when the listeners do not. As Jesus speaks about a temple, He is actually talking about His body. Readers of the Gospel know that Jesus is God, who took on flesh to dwell among His people (1:14). The purpose of a temple has always been to welcome the presence of God and to offer sacrifices. But now, Jesus' resurrection body can serve as a replacement temple, since meeting Jesus also means encountering God (1:18; 14:6). Through Jesus, it is no longer necessary to worship God in a particular place (see also 4:21–23).

According to John, not even Jesus' disciples understand what His words could mean (v. 22). After Jesus' death and resurrection, they come to understand more. The disciples will then "believe the scripture" and the words that Jesus has taught (v. 22). It is only after Jesus' resurrection that His closest friends realize the surprising way that God has fulfilled a redemptive plan.

The text ends by saying what Jesus continues to do during the Passover. The people are able to witness Jesus doing many miraculous signs—which John does not describe—and many respond with faith. But there remains an element of uncertainty. The faith of the crowds does not lead Jesus to affirm their trust, since He has knowledge about the hidden motives of each person (vv. 24–25). Jesus will continue to say and do things that display the heart of God, but His message will challenge the comfortable.

**6.** *How does Jesus respond to a demand for a sign?*

**7.** *How are the temple and Jesus' body connected?*

**8.** *Why wouldn't Jesus entrust Himself to the people?*

## When Is Anger “Righteous”?

The world around us seems to be angry. We hear stories of road rage, when an angry exchange between drivers turns tragic. Protests when people peacefully march in support of human rights too often diminish into angry name-calling, physical violence, and vandalism. Righteous indignation is rampant over what people do, say, and believe.

For Christians, is there a scenario when anger is righteous, or excusable? It’s easy to assume that, with Jesus as our example, imitating anything He does is acceptable. But this story is not an open invitation to start flipping tables whenever we feel offended. Jesus had a specific mission and a unique authority as the Son of God. His role was to follow the prompting of the Father, whether that meant healing the sick or turning over money tables in His Father’s house to expose rampant corruption.

Scripture generally treats anger in a negative light. James 1:19–20 says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

When faced with difficult situations, it’s easy to yield to emotions and act on them. However, wisdom usually dictates against an impulsive reaction. Jesus ultimately won over the masses through demonstrations of humility, kindness, graciousness, wisdom, and love. If you desire to be like Christ in your words and deeds, those positive qualities can set you on the right path.

**9.** *Do you think that there are scenarios where “righteous anger” is justified for Christians? What are some examples?*

**10.** *What did James mean when he said that human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires?*

**11.** *Have you ever witnessed an angry exchange between Christians in church? Was it productive or destructive?*

## A Cause Worth Praying For

As we consider our motives and hearts, we might find that there are particular issues and causes that make us angry: we feel our temperature rising, the hair on the back of our neck might stand up, and we might feel sick. This type of reaction can also prompt us to think about what God would have us do. Do you sense an invitation to pray over a particular issue?

► *As you take a moment to offer a silent prayer to God, invite Him to remind you of what things (behaviors, injustices, failures) make you angry.*

► *Because of my strong emotions, I sense that God is calling my attention to the topic of \_\_\_\_\_.*

### KEY VERSE

And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

—John 2:16 KJV

To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"

—John 2:16 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of July 21 through July 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Revelation 11:1–13—God Preserves.

**Tues.** Revelation 12:1–11—Victory through the Lamb's Blood.

**Wed.** 2 Kings 25:1–7—David's Lineage Is Cut Down.

**Thurs.** 2 Kings 25:8–21—The Temple Is Destroyed.

**Fri.** Daniel 11:21–35—A King's Treachery.

**Sat.** Matthew 23:1–12, 37–39—Lament for the Wicked City.

**Sun.** Matthew 24:1–8—Don't Be Led Astray.

## Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction

Daphne buzzed around the kitchen. It seemed like she was trying to prepare every dish that her son, Xavier, liked. "When he tastes his mamma's cooking, my baby won't be going anywhere," she said.

"Your 'baby' is twenty-eight years old, and he enlisted in the Air Force," said Robert. "He must report for duty, Daphne. I think it will be good for him. It's what he wants to do."

"How can you say 'it will be good for him?'" Daphne asked, setting the pot of brisket on top of the stove. "What if he's sent to war? What if he's kidnapped? What if he gets killed? We can talk him out of it. Don't they have people who change their minds after they've enlisted?"

"Sweetheart," Robert said, rising from the bar stool and coming to his wife. "It's going to be all right. Xavier loves God, and he believes this is a path God has for him. We need to support him."

"But I can't watch over him and take care of him where he's going," Daphne said into her husband's chest.

"Honey, you can't guarantee Xavier's safety and well-being, even while he's here," Robert replied, tightening his grip around his wife. "Listen, God is the one in control. God will take care of our son wherever he is. We're going to trust the Lord, yes?"

Robert felt Daphne relax in his arms and nod her head.

**1.** *In what areas are you currently struggling to relinquish control?*

**2.** *How do you respond when you feel the need to control the situation?*

**3.** *What are some appropriate ways to relinquish control to God, especially for things we cannot control?*

## Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction

*Matthew 24:1–3 KJV*

1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. 2 And Jesus said unto them, see ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

*Matthew 24:1–3 NIV*

<sup>1</sup> Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. <sup>2</sup> “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

<sup>3</sup> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

In verse 1, Jesus leaves the temple en route to the Mount of Olives, similar to when the glory of the Lord left Jerusalem and “stopped above the mountain east of it” in Ezekiel 11:23. Coupled with Jesus’ words in Matthew 23:38, this signals the end to God’s purposes for the temple. Perhaps startled by this, or simply taken with the beauty of the temple complex, the disciples point out the buildings to Jesus as they are walking away. But Jesus informs them that the temple will be destroyed completely (v. 2). This was shocking to the disciples, who grew up with the temple as an essential part of their religious life. How could God permit the destruction of His temple?

After arriving at the Mount of Olives, the disciples go to Jesus with a twofold question. First, they want to know when the temple will be destroyed. Second, they want to know what will be the sign of Jesus’ coming at the end of the age (v. 3). These questions are linked in the disciples’

minds, since the destruction of the temple might feel like a precursor to the end of the world for any first-century Jew. In verses 4–14, however, Jesus will temper expectations of a link between His imminent return and what will happen in the days leading up to the temple’s destruction. From the context of millennia later, it is clear that the destruction of the temple doesn’t mean the imminent end of the world. But as a good leader to His followers, Jesus prepares the disciples for a changing world, and—in the following passage—warns them to flee Jerusalem when destruction is near (Matt. 24:15–25).

**4.** *Why might the destruction of the temple be difficult for Jesus’ disciples to accept?*

**5.** *How might the redemptive work of Jesus negate the need for a temple?*

## Jesus Invites His Disciples to Stand Firm

*Matthew 24:4–13 KJV*

4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, take heed that no man deceive you. 5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. 6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill

*Matthew 24:4–13 NIV*

<sup>4</sup> Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of birth pains.”

<sup>9</sup> “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and

you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. 11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.<sup>10</sup> At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,<sup>11</sup> and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.<sup>12</sup> Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,<sup>13</sup> but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.<sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Jesus warns His disciples to watch out for false messiahs, who will deceive many people (v. 4). He says that these false messiahs "will come in my name" (v. 5). This could mean they will claim to be Jesus or might fraudulently attach Jesus' authority to their actions. It most likely denotes people who claim—or whose followers claim—to fulfill a messianic role. Hence their false statement, "I am the Messiah" (v. 5). In the first century, several would-be messiahs did arrive on the scene—Jewish nationalistic political figures or insurrectionists. Such people typically garnered a large following, until they were killed and their movement was stifled.

Jesus tells the disciples that conflict, war, and natural disasters are going to come. However, these are not indicators of the imminent end of the age (vv. 6–7). Instead, they will be a normal part of history until the renewal of all things. Jesus' disciples will have to live faithfully through such troubles, which are "the beginning of birth pains" (v. 8). As a "beginning," they cannot be used as signs to calculate the Lord's coming. Yet the image of birth

pains suggests that the hardships and sufferings that the disciples endure will eventually lead to something new and wonderful. God will work through them to give birth to His new world.

Starting in verse 9, Jesus explains what a changing world means for His disciples. They will face persecution and death, not just in Israel but among the nations. Within this situational context, many will turn away from their faith, betraying and hating each other (v. 10).

Jesus again says that many people will be deceived, this time by false prophets presumably teaching what is contrary to the gospel of the kingdom (vv. 11, 14). Wickedness will increase, resulting in a cooling off of people's love. Jesus does not specify whether He means love for God or others, but likely both are in view, since love for God and love for others are connected in Scripture (Matt. 22:37–40). The proper response to all of this is to stand firm—to endure in faithfulness, despite the troubles and changes of the world (v. 13). The person who keeps the faith will be saved.

Verse 14 serves as the conclusion to this passage, revealing the task for Jesus' disciples, both before and after the temple is destroyed. Jesus tells the disciples that the gospel will be preached to the whole world, "and then the end will come" (v. 14). While this verse lays out a kind of chronology, with an end coming after the news of Christ's kingdom reaches the nations, it does not offer a timeframe for the Lord's coming, once the gospel-spreading task is complete. Instead, what God requires is endurance in the midst of the uncertainties that come from a changing and turbulent world.

**6.** *What do you think makes people susceptible to the deception of false messiahs?*

**7.** *How does Jesus want His followers to respond to trouble or persecution?*

**8.** *How does this passage or other passages discourage attempts to calculate the Lord's coming?*

## Change Can Be an Opportunity

In many western countries, secularization is on the rise. Fewer and fewer people are attending churches. In many ways, God is not welcome in public spaces.

If we went back in time to visit the Danish Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, he might say to us, *What an opportunity!* In nineteenth-century Denmark, the established Christian church meant that being a Christian felt as easy as being born in the right place and time. Kierkegaard described his role as making Christianity more difficult, more costly, and more exceptional. He thought that Christianity needed to stand out from culture, or it would cease to have any meaning for the individual. Being faithful to Christ cannot be as simple as being a good citizen.

Where I live, we do not have that same problem anymore! Just the choice to attend church on Sunday makes my family stand out as “very religious” (or so I recently heard from a neighbor). With every change in the values of our culture, we are met with a fresh opportunity to say, *Look at what the disciples of Christ shall do!* When the foster system is full of children who need a stable home and loving caregivers, followers of Jesus can step forward. When marriage is devalued and treated as old-fashioned, Christians can quietly stand in fidelity to their spouses. When people treat their elderly parents as burdensome and quaint, Christians can welcome the wisdom of elders in the faith.

In the turbulence of a world that chases after many false kings, Christians have opportunities to be quiet beacons of hope. Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

**9.** *How does our culture challenge us to walk faithfully with God?*

**10.** *What are some opportunities to grow from these challenges?*

**11.** *How should followers of Jesus stand out?*

## Faithfulness to the End

Through Jesus' words in this lesson, each of us has been invited to endure in the faith, no matter what comes. Faithfulness can mean honoring our commitments, abstaining from what is wrong, and demonstrating excessive concern for one another—with no expectation of anything in return.

► *Choose one to answer, in light of today's lesson:*

*What commitment does God ask you to honor?*

*What behavior does God ask you to avoid?*

*What kindness does God invite you to show?*

### KEY VERSE

And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. —Matthew 24:2 KJV

“Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” —Matthew 24:2 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of July 28 through August 3

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Ezekiel 47—The River of Life.

**Tues.** 2 Corinthians 6:1–18—A Holy Temple.

**Wed.** Matthew 16:13–20—Christ Will Build His Church.

**Thurs.** Psalm 24—Seeking God's Face.

**Fri.** Psalm 63—Behold God's Glory in the Sanctuary.

**Sat.** 1 Corinthians 3:1–9—God Grows Us.

**Sun.** 1 Corinthians 3:10–23—Building on a Sure Foundation.

## Christians as God's Temple

Leela opened her lavender King James Version Bible to Ruth. It was the book the women were studying at her new church. Leela enjoyed displaying her beautiful, worn Bible. She had dozens and dozens of Scriptures highlighted in various colors.

She had suggested to Sister Elyse to encourage the women to bring a printed Bible, "because it makes for better studying." Leela also offered to be leader of any future Bible studies. She could think of several topics to cover and ways to engage the other women.

Leela had been in church for much of her fifty-two years of life. She would be a helpful addition to the church, she had told the pastor's wife.

She took a lap around the large rectangle table, repositioning the study books and pens. She was headed back to her seat when she saw two women come into the room. She couldn't remember their names. They each hugged Leela and sat on opposite sides of her.

"Is this your Bible?" asked one of them. "It's beautiful."

"And look at all the highlights," said the other. "You must read your Bible a lot."

"I came to Christ recently, and I've been reading through the Bible for the first time," chimed the first.

"Which passages have impacted you the most?"

Leela responded with a blank stare.

**1.** *What are some motivations people might have for wanting to appear wise to others?*

**2.** *What does "being wise" mean to you?*

**3.** *When have you wanted to appear wise in the eyes of others, and how might you approach it differently in light of the call to "become foolish"?*

## Building Faithfully

*1 Corinthians 3:10–15 KJV*

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

*1 Corinthians 3:10–15 NIV*

<sup>10</sup> By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup> their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. <sup>14</sup> If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Paul calls the letter's recipients "God's building" in verse 9. Paul portrays himself and the gifted speaker Apollos (see 1 Cor. 3:4–6; Acts 18:24–26) as laborers on this building. Paul rejects the view that he and Apollos are rivals. Instead, he describes their relationship as cooperative laborers working together toward a common goal. Paul's role is that of the wise master builder, the person who manages a group of workers on a building project. In Acts, Paul had founded the church at Corinth (Acts 18:1–11, 18), and

Apollos came later to continue the work sometime after Paul left.

Paul warns that believers must be careful how they build on this foundation. Paul and the other apostles' duties are not to be taken lightly, and the quality of their work will be tested. They do not have the luxury of petty rivalries or self-glory. At the same time, this exhortation also addresses the leaders of the Corinthian community. God will hold them responsible for how they build His church, because Jesus Christ is its unique foundation (v. 11).

In verse 12, Paul compares the way one builds to constructing with different materials. Some would use valuable materials that last through time and reflect the importance of the building. Others use wood, hay, and stubble, which are neither precious nor long-lasting. The nature of one's work will ultimately come to light, because the day shall declare it (v. 13). Paul here likely refers to the Day of the Lord, the time when Christ returns, judges the living and the dead, and establishes justice in the world (2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:1–4; 2 Thess. 2:2–3; 2 Tim. 4:8). The Scriptures sometimes associate this day with purging fire (2 Pet. 2:10, 13), and Paul probably draws on that same imagery here. The fires of God's judgment show the character of a leader's work. Leaders who build well will see their work survive the flames and receive a reward (v. 14). Others will find that their labor burns away; but while they will not receive a reward, God still brings them His promised salvation (Rom. 10:13). Paul thus emphasizes God's grace even toward those who fail in the work that God has given them.

**4.** *Why must church leaders build carefully upon the foundation Paul laid?*

**5.** *Why might this passage be relevant to those who aren't involved in explicitly Christian ministry?*

## God's Temple

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. 20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. 21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; 22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; 23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

<sup>16</sup> Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

<sup>18</sup> Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise.

<sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.

As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness";

<sup>20</sup> and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." <sup>21</sup> So then, no more

boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, <sup>23</sup> and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Here Paul identifies the type of building in view, calling the Corinthian community the temple of God (v. 16). Greeks, Romans, and Jews alike thought of temples as places where a deity's presence could reside.

Paul can describe the Corinthian community this way because, "the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (v. 16 KJV). The Greek pronoun translated "you" in this verse is plural, referring to the entire church. Paul's focus here is on the Spirit's role within the community, which functions collectively as God's temple.

In verse 17, Paul issues a warning based on the temple metaphor. Since the community is God's holy temple, God will destroy those who defile the community. Paul frames his warning with a play on words, as the verbs for "destroy" and "defile" (KJV) are the same Greek verb. The wordplay emphasizes the balance of God's justice: the one who destroys God's temple will be destroyed. Paul is again warning that the community's leaders should protect—not harm—the community.

Verses 18–23 weave together the major threads of Paul's response to the divisions in Corinth. The ironic contrast between the wise person and the fool returns to a theme that came up earlier in 1 Corinthians 1:18–31, where Paul argues that the divine wisdom of the gospel transcends the philosophy and values of the Greek and Roman world. Paul goes further here, saying that the world's "wisdom" is actually foolishness with God.

To support his claim, Paul quotes Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. Job 5 is a speech of Eliphaz (one of Job's friends), who highlights God's concern for the lowly, impoverished, and weak, rather than those the world considers rich, powerful, and wise. In Psalm 94, the speaker asks how long the wicked will prosper in their schemes (vv. 3–7); but the psalmist affirms God's attention and coming judgment against them (vv. 8–23).

Although the Corinthian Christ-followers thought they served the apostles, it would be more accurate to say that the apostles serve them, as do the world and its spiritual forces (v. 22; compare Rom. 8:38–39). The Corinthians themselves are also servants of Christ (v. 23).

**6.** *Why does Paul call the Corinthian church the temple of God?*

**7.** *What does Paul say will happen to those who defile God's temple?*

**8.** *Why does Paul say the Corinthians should not pursue the glory of humans?*

## God's Home, With Us

In the course of my life, I've lived in ten different houses and three different states. I've transitioned from my role as a child in my parents' home, to a single adult with roommates, to a married mother of four. With each new phase, I had to reimagine what it meant to be "at home."

One thing remains clear: a home is more than the four walls that contain it. A house might be made of drywall and ceiling tiles, of dirt and wood, of marble and gold—but a home is the life lived inside. Even with all the shifting containers, some things remained, no matter where I settled. The rhythms we practice, the meals we decide to cook, the activities we engage in—these are what determine the culture of a home.

For centuries, the Israelites connected God's "home" to the temple. The walls of the temple, the materials that fashioned it, the symbolism etched into every object—all of these helped form their ideas of what it means to be at home with God. But now, God was on the move! Imagine what a transition that would have meant for them. Paul wants his readers to understand that God is bigger than the walls of the temple. His Spirit is not the building; it is the life inside. And now, that Spirit is moving beyond the walls of the temple and into every follower of Jesus.

If God's Spirit is not bound to a building, then the universal church isn't, either. It is the life lived among believers that constitutes God's true home. When we come together, God's presence can be shared among us. That is why Paul says, "you together" are the temple. It's why unity is so important.

**10.** *What do you think makes a house a home?*

**11.** *Why do you think God chose to make His home among followers of Christ, rather than a building?*

**12.** *How might being filled with the Holy Spirit make God's presence known "on earth as it is in heaven"?*

## The Responsibility of Leaders

Again and again in today's text, Paul calls attention to the unique call for leaders of God's people. Because God's people are a temple, together, those charged with building this community will be held to a high standard. If you have a leadership position in your church community, answer the first prompt. If you do not, you can respond to the second prompt to pray for your leaders.

► *As a leader in my church, I know that the foundation of my success is Christ. I commit myself to pursuing the wisdom of God rather than the esteem of others. That might mean . . .*

► *As a member of the community that is the temple of God's presence, I commit myself to praying for my leaders. I pray that God gives \_\_\_\_\_ the wisdom required to lead without worrying what people might say.*

### KEY VERSE

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11 KJV

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of August 4 through August 10

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Genesis 2:4-7, 18-25—God Creates Man and Woman.

**Tues.** Psalm 90:1-12—Life Is Short; Live Wisely.

**Wed.** 1 Corinthians 10:23-33—Live Gloriously.

**Thurs.** 1 Timothy 4:1-5—Receive God's Gifts with Thanksgiving.

**Fri.** Psalm 139:1-12—No Hiding Place from God.

**Sat.** Psalm 139:13-24—Fearfully and Wonderfully Made.

**Sun.** 1 Corinthians 6:12-20—A Temple of the Holy Spirit.

## Our Bodies Belong to God

Marcus caught the girl looking at him for what seemed like the umpteenth time. He was standing at the end of the big mirror in the gym. He held massive dumbbells in each hand, hoisting them in a series of curls.

The girl was cute. Marcus had noticed her before. He even rearranged his schedule to be working out at the same time. While he was working out, Marcus thought about what he would say to the young woman—if anything.

His brothers teased him that he wasn't "smooth" with women. Marcus still had memories of being the "big, fat dude" in middle school. But those days were behind him.

But with Marcus's recent Christian conversion, he was learning other things about himself. First and foremost, his body belonged to the Lord. He knew it meant he should glorify God, with his body. But it all still seemed abstract and strange to him. Marcus wanted to show how fit he had become and all the work he had put into his physique. What was so wrong about that?

He set the weights back in the stacks; and as he did, he watched in the mirror as the young woman climbed off the elliptical and went to another area to continue her workout.

Marcus straightened and tried to refocus on his workout. *Maybe she will notice me if I could just get a bit stronger,* he thought to himself.

- 1.** *How does our freedom in Christ impact our bodies?*
- 2.** *In what ways should you treat your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit?*
- 3.** *How does the knowledge that God created your physical body inform your attitude about it?*

## Members of Christ

*1 Corinthians 6:12–17 KJV*

12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. 13 Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. 14 And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. 15 Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. 16 What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17 But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

*1 Corinthians 6:12–17 NIV*

<sup>12</sup> “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. <sup>13</sup> You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup> By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. <sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” <sup>17</sup> But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

Paul begins to address the Corinthians’ false view of the body in verse 12. Interpreters have long questioned why Paul states “all things are lawful unto me” (KJV) in the context of an argument against *porneia*, the Greek word for all forms of sexual immorality. Almost everyone now thinks that Paul is quoting the Corinthians, whether something they said in their letter to him or relayed to him by

Chloe's people. That's why the NIV puts quotes around the same section.

Paul is correcting their claim of total freedom. Their liberty in Christ does not extend to doing things that are not good or that will place them under the power of sin. Paul argues that readers should not use their freedom in ways that harm the church, or enslave themselves.

Verse 13 begins with another Corinthian slogan. Some of the Corinthians defended their sexual immorality by saying that it doesn't matter how one uses his or her body. They compared the relationship of the body and sexual activity to the stomach and food, which are made for each other. From a strictly egocentric perspective, it might look like the body and sex just go together, and using the body for sex doesn't carry any great significance.

Paul responds by correcting this false view of the body and its purposes. Paul shows the weakness with their analogy: the body is not meant for sexuality, but for the Lord. Its true purpose is to honor the Lord Jesus, not to satisfy one's lustful desires. And just as God's intent for our bodies is the glory of Christ, so the God who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us up by His own power (v. 14). The body is not some purposeless mass of flesh and bones; it is created by God for good purposes.

In verse 15, Paul transitions to another argument against the immoral use of the body. His specific concern is about visiting prostitutes for sex. Paul reminds the Corinthians that their bodies are "members" of Christ, a metaphor that portrays the community as parts of Christ's own body (1 Cor. 12:1–27). Paul goes further and makes the surprising claim that some of the Corinthians are actually offering the members of Christ to a prostitute.

Paul combines this body metaphor with an allusion to Genesis 2:24, which says that, when men and women come together, "the two will become one flesh." If men and women become one body in sexual union (1 Cor. 6:16), and believers are part of Christ's body (v. 15), then having sex with a prostitute would unite Christ with a

prostitute. This way of using the body would dishonor Christ, the one to whom believers are joined in one spirit (v. 17).

Paul is not drawing a contrast between flesh and spirit here. He is not saying that we are united to Christ just “in spirit.” Instead, he is showing the full unity between Christ and His people—a unity created by the Holy Spirit. A believer who visits a prostitute for sex makes Christ one body with that prostitute, which can only dishonor Christ.

**4.** *How does Paul tell his audience to use (or not use) their freedom in Christ?*

**5.** *What is Paul’s correction of the analogy of food and the stomach (v. 13)?*

**6.** *Why would a believer’s sex with a prostitute dishonor Christ?*

## The Temple of God

*1 Corinthians 6:18–20 KJV*

18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. 19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

*1 Corinthians 6:18–20 NIV*

<sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. <sup>19</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

In verses 18–20, Paul offers one more argument for using the body properly. Paul offers a concise and explicit command: “flee from sexual immorality” (v. 18). The Greek verb for “flee” can mean to avoid something bad,

even to “shun” it. Paul warns the Corinthians to stay away from sexual sin. A command to “flee” would connect back to Paul’s advice to avoid being brought under the power of another (v. 12). If sexual sin is an enslaving force, then the Corinthians must literally “flee” from its grasp.

Verse 18 gives another reason for the command to flee: sexual sin differs from other types of sin. The problem is not that God judges sexual sins more harshly, or that the people who commit them are uniquely evil. The problem is that sexual immorality involves sinning against one’s own body, and one’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (v. 19). It is a self-destructive thing to do.

Paul returns to a metaphor he used in 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 (believers are a temple of Christ, see last week’s lesson). But here he identifies each person’s body as an individual temple. Since the Holy Spirit dwells in every member of the community, a believer who engages in sexual sin desecrates the Spirit’s temple. The members of the community have received the Spirit from God (v. 19), so sinning against the body reflects a lack of respect and gratitude for the gift that God has given.

The Spirit is not simply a gift. The Spirit’s presence in our bodies reflects God’s ownership. Believers are not their own; they belong to God. Those who follow Christ have a new role as God’s servant (see also Romans 6). Paul extends the metaphor, affirming that the believers are “bought at a price” (v. 20). Interestingly, Paul does not say what that price is! He might mean Christ’s costly death (Rev. 5:9). Yet it is not necessary to precisely identify the price to understand the point. Believers now belong to God, and they must glorify Him in body and spirit.

**7.** *What makes sexual immorality unlike other sins?*

**8.** *Why does Paul call the individual believers a “temple?”*

**9.** *What might Paul mean by, “You were bought at a price” (v. 20)?*

## A New, True You

Looking back over my adolescence and young adulthood as a more mature Christian, I can see why, back then, I felt the need at times to stifle my Christianity or loyalty to God for the sake of “going along to get along.” I had this fear of seeming like someone who would not be any fun to be around or who would bring down the mood by talking about what Jesus would do. In a sense, I guess I did not feel free to be my Christian self.

I also remember that, had I leaned more into my faith and meditated more on God’s Word, I would not have let my human desires put me in situations that left me feeling like a failure in God’s eyes. I know that there is no need to dwell on prior mistakes, and it is best to learn from the past, but it is human nature to wonder what could have been had I stayed firm in my faith.

What more seasoned Christians know is that using our whole beings—the body included—for the glory of God far outweighs any satisfaction we get from using our bodies to honor and please ourselves. God understands our earthly desire to “go along to get along,” which is an age-old story that has gotten many people in trouble.

But I also want to help others see that shame does nothing but drive us deeper into the wrong patterns. God is not keeping count of my past mistakes. The love of God invites all believers to find the meaning of real freedom—freedom from being slaves to sin, slaves to our desires, or captive to what the world expects. I belong to God!

**10.** *Has the desire to “go along to get along” ever hindered your availability to be wholly transformed by God? When?*

**11.** *Why do people, even believers, sometimes resist committing to using their bodies for God?*

**12.** *Why is it important to challenge—perhaps even set aside—many of our innate desires?*

## Submitting Attitudes and Desires to God

As we contemplate a lesson about holding our bodies as sacred for God's presence—temples for the Holy Spirit—we may recognize that our attitudes and desires need to be reformed. Ask God to show you any unhelpful or self-destructive patterns that God would ask you to bring to Him in prayer. Consider writing "food," "sex," "physical appearance," or another related response in the blank below, as you offer a private prayer.

► *In what I say or do, I have not always treated my body as a temple of God's Spirit. I surrender my desires for God to reshape, for my good, and I ask God to alter my attitude around*

\_\_\_\_\_.

*Father, I devote myself to You, even my body.*

### KEY VERSE

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?  
—1 Corinthians 6:19 KJV

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.  
—1 Corinthians 6:19 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of August 11 through August 17

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 49:1–6 A Light to the Nations.
- Tues.** Romans 9:14–24—God's Mercy Reaches All.
- Wed.** Romans 10:1–15—Salvation Is for All.
- Thurs.** Romans 11:16–29—Grafted Branches.
- Fri.** Zechariah 8:1–12—God Will Dwell in Our Midst.
- Sat.** Zechariah 8:13–23—Seek God Together.
- Sun.** Ephesians 2:11–22—Built into a Holy Temple.

## The Two Made One

The shower is where?" asked Tamyra.

"Westwood," replied Khianna.

"You mean, 'Whitewood,'" quipped Lashawn.

"I am not going out there with all of those white people," said Tamyra. "You can go if you want to."

"Like they want us out there," added Lashawn. "They don't want to see any Black people."

"She invited us," said Khianna.

"She invited the office," said Tamyra. "She doesn't expect us to come."

"She asked me specifically, and said she hoped we would come."

"Oh 'we,' huh?" Lashawn said dryly.

"She" was forty-seven-year-old Bethany Gallagher, who was getting married for the second time. She lived in the posh municipality of Westwood. It was about forty miles from where Khianna, Tamyra and Lashawn lived and about million cultural constructs away.

"Bethany has been nothing but kind to me," said Khianna.

"That's just her office face," said Tamyra. "She probably doesn't have one Black friend."

Khianna sat in the car and prayed before going into the shower. She was apprehensive. Though she had been the only Black person in the room more times than she could count, she was weary of it. Still, she had come.

"Help me, Lord," she prayed. "Help me show the love of Christ."

**1.** *Have there been situations where you have felt uncomfortable because of your race? What did you do?*

**2.** *Why do you think breaking down barriers between people is important to God?*

**3.** *Is unity a purely future goal, or can we have it now?*

## A New Identity and Unity

*Ephesians 2:11–16 KJV*

11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.

*Ephesians 2:11–16 NIV*

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands)—<sup>12</sup> remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup> and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Paul begins by reminding the Gentiles of who they are in Christ and urging them to embrace that new identity. Building on this shared identity and purpose in Jesus, he acknowledges the racial and cultural tensions that had

defined the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.

Paul contrasts the Gentiles' identity before and after the coming of Christ. Before Christ, Gentiles were "separate," "excluded," "without hope," "without God," and "far away" (vv. 12–13). They had no part in God's covenant with Israel and all the benefits that came with it. But now, they have been "brought near by the blood of Christ" (v. 13). To the Gentiles, this new pathway is good news.

Paul explains that Jesus "is our peace." He "destroyed . . . the dividing wall of hostility" and "[set] aside in his flesh the law" (vv. 14–15). Paul is letting the Jews and Gentiles know that their new identity in Jesus transforms their relationships with God and with one another. The law had regulated these relationships in the past, but requirements like male circumcision are no reason to keep Jews and Gentiles separate, in light of what God has done.

Jews of this period had grown accustomed to carefully regulating access to God, as God Himself had requested they do. These kinds of laws had served a good purpose, but they also become a barrier for outsiders to come to Israel. Paul says the need for any barrier is over, that Christ's work is one of reconciliation.

Paul emphasizes this theme by shifting from second to first person in verse 14 ("he himself is our peace"). He is including Jews and Gentiles in that statement. Jews and Gentiles are on equal footing before God, since all people have the same need for salvation.

In verse 15, Paul spells out Christ's mission to bring unity. His purpose was "to create in himself one new humanity out of the two." As Paul describes it, this unity happens when groups are reconciled, first to God—through the cross—and second to one another—in the diverse community. Unity with one another will be the fruit of embracing a new life in Christ, where hostility is "put to death" (v. 16).

**4.** *What words are used to describe the Gentiles before Christ?*

**5.** *How do the Gentiles' lives after receiving Christ contrast with their previous lives?*

**6.** *How does the work of Christ impact the relationships we can have with one another?*

## **A Holy Community**

*Ephesians 2:17–22 KJV*

17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

*Ephesians 2:17–22 NIV*

<sup>17</sup> He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

<sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

<sup>19</sup> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup> In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The Gentiles have a new identity, and now Paul describes how that identity impacts their place in the Christian community. Paul's message is one of unity as he describes Jesus' work, preaching "peace" to those who were "far away and peace to those who were near" (v. 17). The language here, as well as in verse 13, alludes to Isaiah 57:19 which says, "Peace, peace to those far and near." Paul seems to interpret those two words as two categories

of people: Jews (“near” to God as inheritors of the covenant promises) and Gentiles (“far away” from God before the inclusion by faith). Paul grounds his teachings in the anticipation of a Messiah for all nations.

After alluding to the universal nature of Christ’s work, Paul says that through Jesus “we [Jews and Gentiles] both have access to the Father by one Spirit” (v. 18). Instead of emphasizing distinctions, Paul focuses on similarities. Jews and Gentiles depend on the work of Christ, and Jews and Gentiles access the Father by receiving the same Spirit.

Even though God has welcomed Jews and Gentiles, this does not erase all relevant differences. Paul reiterates his encouragement to Gentiles to leave behind any former designations, to embrace their new identity as “citizens with God’s people and also members of his household” (v. 19). The household means the family of God, which believers join as adoptive siblings to Jesus (see Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 4:4–7).

Paul then uses the image of a building—first a house and then called a “temple” (v. 21). Construction is built “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” with Jesus as the “chief cornerstone” (v. 20). The physical structure is “joined together” (v. 20).

Paul preaches good news through a message of radical inclusivity. The temple of the first century was full of divisions and separations to shield God’s presence from anything ritually unclean. But Paul addresses Jews and Gentiles, even those who were unable to come near to God in the physical temple. Now, the combined people of God are themselves a new temple and home for God.

**7.** *From this text, what are the results of the work of Christ?*

**8.** *What comes to mind when you hear the term “temple”?*

**9.** *What can we learn about Christian community from Paul’s words here?*

## I'll Separate You!

When I was little, my cousins and I loved going to my grandmother's house for sleepovers. At bedtime, we'd cram into the back bedroom of her tiny house, tucked in but not at all ready to go to sleep. Soon, we'd start making one another giggle with silly stories and jokes until the noise carried to my grandmother's listening ears and she'd call out with a stern voice, "You kids get to sleep, or I will separate you!" The threat of separation seemed the worst of all possible punishments, and it was usually enough to get us to quiet down. Yet, the very next day we could easily erupt into an argument. In those times, we wanted nothing more than to get as far away from one another as possible.

What changed? During the day we had a lot to argue over—taking turns, agreeing to what games we were going to play or who gets to have the last cookie. But at night, when all was calm and quiet, there was much less to fight about. That was when we would remember how much we loved being together!

The Jews and the Gentiles were learning to come together to live as a family. They had a lot they could fight about. Coming from very different backgrounds, each had a different understanding of what it meant to be faithful. Jews struggled to embrace Gentiles who didn't follow the Jewish laws and practices. Gentiles were entering a new way of life, without the shared memory of living as God's people. Paul says to put aside what you thought you knew; you are all family now! He shifts their focus from what divides to what they could welcome in one another.

**10.** *When was the last time you worked with someone you struggled to get along with?*

**11.** *What fears do you imagine the Jews and Gentiles had about coming together?*

**12.** *How does an identity in Christ give us peace to embrace those who are different?*

## Welcoming Others in Christ

If God was able to make one community of faith from Jews and Gentiles, what boundaries would He encourage you to erase today? Is there a particular person or kind of person—someone very different from yourself—whom you struggle to welcome as a brother or sister in Christ?

► *I think especially about \_\_\_\_\_.  
I commit to welcoming people who are unlike me, who might have a different background.*

► *If God provides an opportunity for me to overcome a barrier that separates those in Christ, this is how I will respond:*

### KEY VERSES

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. —Ephesians 2:21–22 KJV

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

—Ephesians 2:21–22 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 18 through August 24

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Joel 2:12–17—Return to the Lord.

**Tues.** James 2:14–26—Faith without Works Is Dead.

**Wed.** Psalm 146—Everlasting Reign.

**Thurs.** Psalms 149–150—A New Song

**Fri.** Luke 11:1–13—Teach Us to Pray.

**Sat.** Hebrews 13:1–8—Practice Deeds of Mutual Love.

**Sun.** Hebrews 13:9–21—Offer Sacrifices of Praise.

## Sacrifices of Praise

Are you taking a college course or something?" Assad asked Grady, who walked up to the dining table, his arms full of books. Assad had come to his cousin's house for Grady to change his oil.

"What is this?" Assad asked, picking up a heavy book.

"It's like a reference book for the Bible," said Grady.

"You know most people today just look up things."

"I do that too, but I also like books. I'm old-school."

"Right. Me too," said Assad, sitting down at the table.

"So, what are you studying?"

"The new birth in Christ believers experience because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Pastor is teaching a series on it."

"It sounds Greek to me." Assad laughed.

"It doesn't have to, if you accept Christ."

"I told you, man. I'm not ready yet," said Assad, standing up. "And if your pastor is teaching a series on this stuff, why are you beating your brains out?"

"I'm responsible for my own knowledge and love of Christ," replied Grady. "I study because I want to know more. And what Christ did for me on Calvary continues to motivate me to learn and love Him."

"One thing is for sure, cuz," Assad said, opening a large bag of chips in the kitchen. "I can always count on you to find a way to talk about God."

**1.** *Do you tend to share a lot of details or skip to the main points of a matter?*

**2.** *Describe a time you have found rich truth buried in the details of Scripture.*

**3.** *Why do you think details matter to God?*

## Jesus' Sacrifice for Us

*Hebrews 13:9–14 KJV*

9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

10 We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

11 For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. 13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. 14 For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

*Hebrews 13:9–14 NIV*

<sup>9</sup> Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so. <sup>10</sup> We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat.

<sup>11</sup> The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. <sup>13</sup> Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. <sup>14</sup> For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.

The writer of Hebrews has spent the first twelve chapters trying to show those who have placed faith in Jesus not to envy the Jewish laws and rituals. Jesus' sacrifice for our sins is superior to anything the old covenant offered, with its burnt, peace, grain, and sin offerings (see Lev. 1–6). Those were "ceremonial . . . external regulations applying until the time of the new order" (Heb. 9:10)—the "order" established by Jesus, our great high priest.

The Jewish priests would eat some of the meat offerings made at the temple, as well as the bread of the presence.

But here, they have no right to eat from the “altar” of Christ’s sacrifice (v. 10). There are at least two possible meanings of this “altar.” First, it could be a metaphor for the Communion table, since Jesus made bread a memory of His sacrifice (see Matt. 26:26). Second, this “altar” might be a metaphor for the cross. As Paul writes, “Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

The author reminds readers of the “sin offering” of the Day of Atonement (Heb. 13:11). In a foreshadowing of Jesus’ sacrifice, the “high priest [carried] the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering.” The priest sprinkled the blood from the sacrifice of a bull on the mercy seat of the ark, to atone for his own sins. Then he sprinkled the blood from the goat, to atone for the people’s sins. The bodies of those sacrificed animals were burned outside the Israelites’ camp, because they were associated with sin (Lev. 16:27). Thus the writer of Hebrews is showing that these sacrifices prefigure the sacrifice of Jesus, who “suffered” outside the city of Jerusalem for the sins of the people, to make them “holy” (Heb. 13:12). His death outside the city shows that He was an outcast, “despised and rejected by mankind” (Isa. 53:3).

For us to find grace, Jesus Himself was disgraced. If we are to follow Him, we must be ready to suffer like He suffered. The result of following Him is not to be accepted and adored by others but to receive “the disgrace he bore” (Heb. 13:13). We can endure suffering because we remember that this world is not our home. We look forward to an “enduring city” still “to come” (v. 14), a city “whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10; 12:22).

**4.** *What “strange teachings” (v. 9) were early Christians tempted to follow?*

**5.** *Why is it significant that Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem?*

**6.** *What can believers who suffer anticipate in the future?*

## Our Sacrifices for Jesus

*Hebrews 13:15–21 KJV*

15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. 16 But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

18 Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. 19 But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

20 Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

*Hebrews 13:15–21 NIV*

<sup>15</sup> Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. <sup>16</sup> And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

<sup>17</sup> Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

<sup>18</sup> Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. <sup>19</sup> I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Because Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice, believers

are inspired to make sacrifices for Him. Believers give a continuous “sacrifice of praise” (v. 15) from their lips as they thank Him for all He has done. Believers also sacrifice through their service for Him, as they “do good” and “share with others” (v. 16). For the audience of the letter, a new community of fellowship and sharing would be important, since Jewish Christians might easily be alienated from the wider Jewish community.

This new community of Christians can have confidence in their leaders, because all leaders of God’s church “must give an account” of their actions to God. While some might think they can lord authority over those under their care (as some have), no leader is exempt from standing before God and answering for what he or she does (see James 3:1). If a leader is godly, however, those they lead should gladly follow, making the “work” of leading a “joy” to them and a “benefit” to the community (Heb. 13:17).

As a leader for his audience, the author of Hebrews believes that he is delivering a godly message for them. Twice he asks the audience to pray for him, so that his conscience would remain clear, so that he can continue living a godly life (v. 18). He urges them to pray to clear some obstacle that prevented him from coming to visit them (v. 19).

In his closing benediction, the author exalts Jesus as the one whom God raised from the dead, our “great Shepherd of the sheep” (v. 20), and the one through whom the eternal covenant was sealed in His blood. The writer asks this God of peace to “equip” the readers with everything they might need to do His will (v. 21). This group of struggling believers could be assured that they had made the right decision to follow Jesus Christ.

**7.** *What sacrifices should we offer to God?*

**8.** *How does the author describe what God does through Jesus?*

**9.** *How should the Christian community respond to leaders?*

## To Sacrifice or Not to Sacrifice?

Niko had a decision to make: either accompany his friends to the premiere of the latest action movie that he had been dying to see—or follow through with his commitment to a service opportunity at his church, for homeless families. He was bummed because the movie was playing at the same time that he would need to be working.

As a newly baptized Christian, Niko knew that the right choice was to honor his commitment and show hospitality to the unhoused; but he couldn't help wanting to skip out on that to go and have some fun with his friends. Just as he was about to call them to confirm his presence at the movie, he thought about what his baptism meant. He had committed to living for Jesus, who was willing to suffering and die for others. Niko then realized the route he desired to take.

Jesus did His work in His ministry and sacrificed His life for us. There were many other things that Jesus could have done with His time, but He willingly devoted it to protect us, as a shepherd. That kind of protection, nurture, and love from Jesus can be emulated by His followers— if they are willing to look to His example of hospitality: sharing hope, loving each other, remembering those in prison, and other endeavors that could emulate the selfless sacrifice of Christ.

**10.** *Since it is impossible to live up to Jesus' perfect standard, when do you feel that you are "off the hook" in how you live?*

**11.** *Since we look forward to a future hope of a heavenly city, how hard should we work to make people feel comfortable, respected, and seen?*

**12.** *When have you "sacrificed" something for the good of the whole, the sake of evangelism, or the good of someone else?*

## Reminding Ourselves of Christ's Sacrifice

We have been studying how Jesus' sacrifice can inspire us to offer our own sacrifices. What you are asked to do is to keep the gift of Christ before you as you go about your week. As you are reminded of God's love expressed through Jesus, you should find yourself encouraged to show hospitality and care for those around you.

► *Where could you write the key verse and place it around your home? Where do you most need to be reminded of your own "sacrifice of praise"?*

### KEY VERSE

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

—Hebrews 13:15 KJV

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

—Hebrews 13:15 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 25 through August 31

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Isaiah 28:14–22—A Sure Foundation.

**Tues.** Psalm 122—Let Us Enter the Lord's House.

**Wed.** Psalm 50:1–15—Offer a Sacrifice of Thanksgiving.

**Thurs.** Galatians 3:23–29—One in Christ Jesus.

**Fri.** Ephesians 4:4–16—One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

**Sat.** Isaiah 51:9–16—Everlasting Joy of the Ransomed.

**Sun.** 1 Peter 2:1–12—Rejected by Mortals, Chosen by God.

## Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple

Popcorn duty. Really?" Briana thought. She was one of very few public school teachers at church. And she was stuck on popcorn duty?

Her church was having its annual back to school giveaway. The church was giving away book bags, pens, pencils, notebooks, and other supplies.

"I think this is going to be our largest back to school event yet," Shanice had said. "I know we are going to touch souls for the kingdom!"

Pastor had made Shanice, a school administrator, the chair of the "Back-to-School Committee." But Briana was an educator too, and she felt her expertise was not being considered for this event.

"I really appreciate your church doing this," the woman said to Briana, as she took a bag of popcorn. "I have three kids, and this will really help stretch my salary."

"I'm glad," Briana said, and smiled. What had she been thinking? She was helping her church be a light for its community.

"We would love for you to visit us," said Briana.

"I think I will," said the woman. "Do you have Sunday school? I have two elementary-aged children and a junior high schooler."

"Yes," said Briana. "I am one of the elementary Sunday school teachers. What are your children's names?"

**1.** *How do you see yourself? In a three-minute "elevator pitch" describe yourself to a stranger.*

**2.** *Scripture describes believers as a royal priesthood, set apart from the world. What does this make you think about?*

**3.** *What do you want to be known for?*

## God's Living Cornerstone

1 Peter 2:1–8 KJV

1 Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, 2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: 3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, 5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. 7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient:

1 Peter 2:1–8 NIV

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. <sup>2</sup> Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup> now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

<sup>4</sup> As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— <sup>5</sup> you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a chosen and precious  
cornerstone,

and the one who trusts in him  
will never be put to shame.”

<sup>7</sup> Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders  
rejected  
has become the cornerstone,”

<sup>8</sup> and,

“A stone that causes people to  
stumble  
and a rock that makes them  
fall.”

They stumble because they

whereunto also they were appointed.

disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

Peter says that Christians should “be holy” because God is “holy” (1 Peter 1:15). This section expands on that idea, directing Peter’s audience on how to live a holy life. Holy people who are “born again” must love each other deeply and show love in their actions (1 Peter 1:23). They show no malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, or slander toward anyone. Just as babies “grow up” on milk, believers mature in God’s “salvation” through the Word. We only have to “taste” God’s goodness to know that we want more (v. 3).

Peter switches metaphors: believers—like stones—are building a “spiritual house” around the cornerstone (v. 5). When building a structure, the cornerstone ties the first two walls together and directs how the rest of the building will be constructed. It must be perfectly straight and level and is part of the building’s foundation. Jesus is God’s chosen and “living” cornerstone on which His holy house will be constructed (v. 4). But tragically, Jesus is a stone that people rejected when they did not accept Him as God’s Messiah. This house is like a temple where believers, the “living stones,” bring offerings to Christ, the living cornerstone (v. 5). As one building, believers are unified in God’s house and rest on the Lord.

Peter quotes two Old Testament verses on “stones.” These texts might have been widely seen as referring to the Messiah, and Jesus fulfills them. Isaiah 28:16 calls the Messiah the “chosen and precious cornerstone” (v. 6) in whom we can put our complete “trust.” Psalm 118:22 describes people’s rejection of the Messiah as cornerstone. Jesus Himself quoted this verse to describe His rejection (see Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17), and Peter quotes the verse in his speech at Pentecost (Acts 4:11).

For those who believe in Him, Jesus is the solid rock on which to build faith. Jesus is “a stone of stumbling” for the disobedient (1 Peter 2:8 KJV; see Isa. 8:14), for they have rejected the source of life and redemption.

**4.** *What kind of spiritual nourishment do believers need? Why?*

**5.** *How are believers like a temple built with Jesus as the cornerstone?*

**6.** *What does it look like when people reject Jesus?*

## God's Special Possession

*1 Peter 2:9–12 KJV*

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

*1 Peter 2:9–12 NIV*

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

<sup>11</sup> Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Peter alludes to Exodus 19 for three descriptions of Christ's followers. They are "a royal priesthood" and "God's special possession" (v. 9), descriptions God used at Mount Sinai for the children of Israel. In that much earlier context, God identifies His people as those who "obey me fully

and keep my covenant" (Ex. 19:5). But in the new covenant context, this identity has shifted to center around those in Christ, who collectively "have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:10). Jews and Gentiles are now part of the family of faith.

The priesthood of believers in this context means something similar to the way that Israelites were called to be priests in relation to the nations (again, Ex. 19:5–6). Priests minister in the presence of God and convey collective worship. They are held to a high standard of behavior, since they are seen by others. Therefore, believers should "declare the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Believers must live such godly lives that the world "may see [their] good deeds and glorify God" (v. 12).

Peter then alludes to the redemption of Hosea's unfaithful wife. Through Hosea, God told the Israelites that He would "show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'" and "say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'" (Hos. 2:23). Likewise, in the new covenant context under Christ, believers have been given a new identity and holy status as God's people.

Believers live as the "people of God" in exile in this world. Above all, they resist sinful desires (v. 11). Peter's audience had plenty of sinful distractions, as we continue to witness today. But Christ's followers must not be accused of hypocrisy. Believers are always at war with wrongful desires, in a battle for their very souls (v. 11). The better they fight the battle, the more their good deeds will show that living for Christ is the better way; they shall exalt and share the goodness of God, until Jesus returns (v. 12).

**7.** *What do the Old Testament titles for God's people reveal about their identity in Christ?*

**8.** *Why should believers regard themselves as "foreigners and exiles" in this world (v. 11)?*

**9.** *What battle are believers constantly fighting?*

## Building a Cathedral for Christ

Most cathedrals we see today took decades to build. Some of the grander buildings even took centuries. If you've had the pleasure of visiting a cathedral, it's easy to see how it could have taken so long. The architecture is intricate and intentional with soaring ceilings, stained glass depictions of Bible stories, and statues commemorating heroes of the faith. Anyone who poured their life into the construction of a cathedral would have understood they were participating in a project they might never see completed. Rather, they were participating in something much bigger than themselves. Imagine what it must have been like to invest so much of your life into something you would never get to see finished.

While not all believers are called to build such impressive structures, Christ's followers are all called to invest their lives in God's kingdom purposes. This project is much larger than any one person. It started long before us, and we know it may continue when we are gone. My life isn't only about what happens in the span of years I live. When I think that way, I find motivation to resist sinful desires.

"Life is short" is a phrase we might use to justify short-sighted decisions. Since there is so little time, the logic goes, we might as well seek comfort and pleasure while we can. But thinking of ourselves as pilgrims invites us to consider that we are part of something larger than what we see in the here and now. Our lives are not about what pleasure and goodness we can derive from the world. We are putting our lives toward the bigger project.

**10.** *What are some practical ways we can shine light in the darkness?*

**11.** *How does seeing ourselves as pilgrims help us love others more fully?*

**12.** *In what ways are you tempted to make this world your home?*

## A Light in the Darkness

On our own, it may feel at times like the darkness is overwhelming. But God has called those with faith in Christ to a priestly role of witness and worship. When we join together with our Christian brothers and sisters, we are like the stones of the temple who find their place in relation to others.

► *Can you name one or more people who are your partners in the task of resisting the darkness?*

► *What role of encouragement do you bring to these others? (examples: kind words, financial support, wisdom of experience)*

### KEY VERSE

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. —1 Peter 2:5 KJV

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. —1 Peter 2:5 NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of September 1 through September 7

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Mark 1:1–8—God Sends a Messenger.

**Tues.** Isaiah 7:1–7—God Defends the Chosen People.

**Wed.** Isaiah 20:1–6—God Warns of Coming Disaster.

**Thurs.** Matthew 11:1–6—God Fulfills God's Promises.

**Fri.** Matthew 11:7–15—God Works through Unexpected Vessels.

**Sat.** Psalm 145:1–12—God Is Gracious and Merciful.

**Sun.** Isaiah 6:1–8; 38:1–5—God Strengthens Those God Calls.



COMPREHENSIVE BIBLE STUDY

# Lesson Cycle

FOR 2022-2025

	SEPTEMBER	DECEMBER	MARCH	JUNE
2022/23	<p><b>God's Exceptional Choice</b> (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 1 Samuel, Ephesians)</p>	<p><b>From Darkness to Light</b> (Studies in 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Joel, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, James, 1 Peter)</p>	<p><b>Jesus Calls Us</b> (Studies in the Gospels, Acts)</p>	<p><b>The Righteous Reign of God</b> (Studies in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Matthew, Romans, Galatians, 1 Corinthians)</p>
2023/24	<p><b>God's Law Is Love</b> (Studies in Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians)</p>	<p><b>Faith That Pleases God</b> (Studies in Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, Habakkuk, Matthew, Luke, Romans, Hebrews)</p>	<p><b>Examining Our Faith</b> (Studies in the Gospels, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Jude)</p>	<p><b>Hope in the Lord</b> (Studies in Psalms, Lamentations, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus, 1 John)</p>
2024/25	<p><b>Worship in the Covenant Community</b> (Studies in Genesis, Exodus, 1-2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Isaiah, Psalms)</p>	<p><b>A King Forever and Ever</b> (Studies in Ruth, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Matthew, Luke)</p>	<p><b>Costly Sacrifice</b> (Studies in Exodus, Leviticus, Hebrews, 1 John, Matthew, Revelation, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah)</p>	<p><b>Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings</b> (Studies in Genesis, the Gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter)</p>



# Coming Up Next Quarter

**September, October, November 2025**  
**Judah, From Isaiah to Exile**

The fall quarter invites us to discover and appreciate that God, through prophets and other leaders, gave help and guidance to the people of Israel and Judah. By learning of God's faithfulness, we may come to see the hand of God in our own lives and all human affairs.

**Unit 1** offers four lessons that recount the theological reasons for the decline of Israel, seen mainly through the prophetic ministry of Isaiah during the reign of two kings.

**Unit 2** provides five lessons on the prophetic career of Jeremiah, who lived during the worst days of the Babylonian assault on Judah and Jerusalem.

**Unit 3** gives four lessons recounting the fall of Judah and Ezekiel's prophetic messages to the people in exile. Ezekiel gives visions, signs, and symbolic actions which testify to the despair of exile and the promise of renewal.

*Comprehensive Bible Study* lessons are organized according to a thematic study of the Bible following the International Sunday School Lessons series. In six years, this cycle will touch on the Bible's key themes through studies of books in both the Old and New Testaments.

# A GOD WHO RESTORES

**T**he book of Genesis tells of a God who does not step away after creating the world. Yahweh does not set the universe in motion to leave it alone—the earth spinning on its axis with creation left to manage itself. Rather, God creates humans in His image, with their own creative and productive capacity, in order that they might be agents of order and justice for the world (Gen. 1:27–28). But that is not how the story would go.

In a crushing blow, men and women walk away from God's designs and follow the serpent's twisted logic. Instead of bringing order, they bring chaos. Instead of bringing justice, they cause harm. As a result, God excludes them from the garden and from the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:21–24). And death becomes part of the human story.

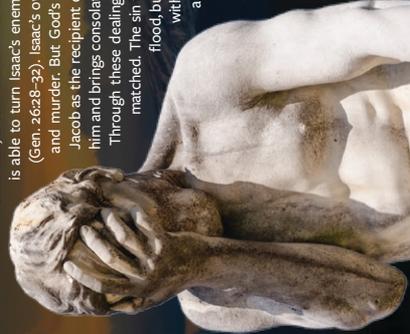
The first family of the Bible—the children of Adam and Eve—test the limits of God's patience. For when the first shepherd and the first farmer bring offerings, God looks with favor upon the sacrifice of Abel, in contrast to the offering of his brother, Cain (Gen. 4:2–5). God knows the human heart, and He pleads with Cain to master sin. But it is Cain who is mastered; he does the unthinkable by murdering his brother (Gen. 4:6–8).

And yet, God does not turn away from the humans He has made. Since they are no longer following the order of God's designs, God chooses one righteous man—Noah—to whom God preserves from destruction, along with his family (Gen. 6–7). Noah and his kin receive God's blessing, just as Adam and Eve had been blessed before (Gen. 9:1). And Noah's offering prompts God to promise restraint, to hold back from sending another flood and wiping evil away (Gen. 8:20–22). Since evil is allowed to endure, God turns to another individual, Abram, whom God renames Abraham. After receiving covenants and promises, Abraham comes to trust Yahweh as a God who keeps His word (Gen. 15:6). Abraham and Sarah have a child in their old age, and this child is destined to receive all of God's covenant blessings (Gen. 21:1–7). Yet even when God tests Abraham by commanding that he sacrifice his beloved child of promise, Isaac, Abraham is ready to obey (Gen. 21:9–12).

Years later, after Abraham has died, Isaac is left to question whether God shall be faithful again. God is able to turn Isaac's enemies into allies, and he discovers the water his family needs to survive (Gen. 26:28–32). Isaac's own children appear ready to repeat the pattern by engaging in trickery and murder. But God's faithfulness does not relent or turn away. God chooses the trickster Jacob as the recipient of covenant blessings, and when Jacob is at his lowest, God appears to him and brings consolation: "... will watch over you wherever you go," says God (Gen. 28:15). Through these dealings with humanity, God displays a redemptive purpose that cannot be matched. The sin that might lead a person to murder another cannot be wiped away in a flood, but it can be defeated by a faithful God who enters covenant relationships with utmost fidelity, promising to restore what has been broken. We serve a God who restores.

This nineteenth-century statue by Henri Vidal is located in the Tuileries Garden near the Leuvre in France. It is titled *Cain venant de tuer son frère Abel* ("Cain has just killed his brother, Abel").

© PhotoDisc/Getty Images Plus



The discovery of water and the building of a well in the desert meant survival for Isaac and his family. God gave precisely what they needed to survive (Gen. 28:32).

Tatiana Volokaj/Getty Images



This mural dates to the eleventh century and is found in the Abbey Church of Saint Savin-sur-Gartempe in France. It is sometimes called the "Romanesque Sistine Chapel".

GO69



When Jacob is at his lowest, on the run and using a rock for a pillow, God appears to him. God promises to be with Jacob wherever he might go (Gen. 28:15).

5 Cent Dollar



This tiled mosaic by Matthew Digby Wyatt (1820–1877) depicts Abraham's offering of Isaac. It is found in All Saints Church in London.

ezdmah/Getty Images Plus

# The CHOSEN

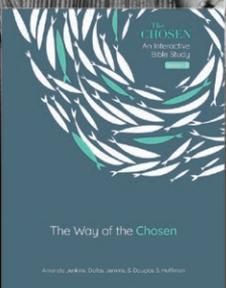
Based on the groundbreaking series, “**The Chosen**,” these interactive Bible study guides span each season.



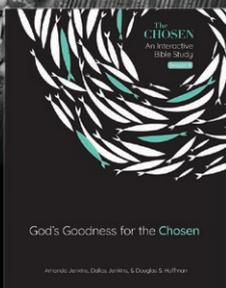
What Does it Mean  
to Be **Chosen**  
Season 1



Blessed Are  
the **Chosen**  
Season 2



The Way of  
the **Chosen**  
Season 3



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