

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY 2026

January 4, 2026

Sin and Forgiveness

Printed Text: 1 John 1:5-10; 1 John 2:1-6

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 59:1-8

Background: Genesis 3:1-24; 1 John 1:5-2:6

Key Text: 1 Jn. 1:8-9

January 11, 2026

Repentance and Faith

Printed Text: Luke 15:11-24; Acts 2:38-39

Devotional Reading: Mark 1:14-20

Background Reading: Isaiah 1:10-21; Ezekiel 18:20-23, 27-32

Key Text: Luke 15:24

January 18, 2026

Prayer and Humility

Printed Text: Genesis 18:25-27; Luke 18:9-14; 1 John 5:14-15

Devotional Reading: Psalm 141

Background Reading: Nehemiah 1:4-11; Daniel 6:10;

Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 18:1-14; John 17:1-26

Key Text: Luke 18:14

January 25, 2026

Call and Growth

Printed Text: Matthew 4:18-20; 16:16-18; John 21:15-18; 2 Peter 3:14-15, 18

Devotional Reading: Colossians 2:1-7

Background: John 1:40-42; Ephesians 4:11-16;

Philippians 3:12-16; Colossians 1:9-11; Hebrews 6:1-3

Key Text: John 21:17

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 4 January, 2026, 09:00 AM EST

Meeting ID: 848-9423-0612

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Sin and Forgiveness

Printed Text: 1 John 1:5-10; 1 John 2:1-6

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 59:1-8

Background: Genesis 3:1-24; 1 John 1:5-2:6

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: The Man and The Woman Sin - Genesis 3:1-13
Tuesday: God Pronounces Judgment - Genesis 3:14-24
Wednesday: God's Wrath Is Revealed - Romans 1:18-25
Thursday: Jesus Warns Against Defilement - Mark 7:14-23
Friday: A Prayer for God's Mercy - Psalm 51:1-12
Saturday: God Demands Right Living - Micah 6:1-8
Sunday: Jesus, Our Advocate - 1 John 1:5-2:6

KEEP IN MIND:

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9, NRSV)

LESSON AIM:

ASPIRE to “walk in the light” of God’s presence,

ENCOURAGE someone else to develop a more intimate relationship with God.

COMMIT to spend intimate time with God, and

BACKGROUND:

Christianity was 60 or more years old and had become a powerful influence in many parts of the Roman Empire by the time this epistle was written. It was natural that there would be attempts to integrate the Gospel with other philosophies that were prevalent at that time. Gnosticism was one such philosophy that was disrupting churches.

Gnosticism taught that human nature was dualistic, that spirit and body were two separate entities. It taught that sin resided in the flesh only, that the body could do as it pleased without affecting the spirit’s raptures, and that mental, mystical piety was totally consistent with a full, sensual life. Gnostics denied the Incarnation that Christ was God in the flesh; they held that Christ was a phantom, a man in appearance only.

This epistle appears to be a response to the heretical Gnostic teaching. Throughout the epistle, John goes to great lengths to emphasize that Jesus is the actual, material, authentic manifestation of God in the flesh and that moral transformation results from genuine knowledge of God.

LESSON COMMENTARY:

Walk in the Light of Christ (1 John 1:5-10; 2:1-2, NRSV)

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true;

⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

At the time of John's writing, the church of Jesus Christ was being infiltrated by an false "theology" called Gnosticism. Gnosticism taught that salvation was obtained by knowledge instead of righteousness. Because this "knowledge" was superior to God's truth, it could only be understood by these teachers who believed that Christ could not have been both man and God. Their view was that the body is evil, so God could not have been resurrected and united with something as evil as flesh. The Apostle Paul had to remind the church of Ephesus to beware of these teachers. Since Gnostics taught that the more one sinned, the more grace one obtained, Paul had to counteract this teaching with the power of righteousness that can be found only in Christ Jesus.

John begins this portion of his epistle with a very simple statement. Since John himself was an eyewitness of the historical Jesus, naturally he had firsthand knowledge of all that Jesus did and taught. John says that "God is light, and in him is no darkness" (1 John 1:5). The words "light" and "darkness" are synonymous with truth and error. John is saying that through the Person of Jesus Christ, we have received the knowledge of God. This revelation is not very difficult to comprehend once we know and believe in Him. We can dispel all darkness, ignorance, and lies that are in the world if we believe in Him.

Then, John refutes the Gnostics and their heresy by making it clear that we have a responsibility to "walk" in this revelation that God has given us. We cannot walk in spiritual darkness and ignorance and claim fellowship with Jesus Christ. To do so would be deception of the greatest kind. In fact, John puts it this way: We "do not the truth" (v. 6). Truth demands that we not only believe the Word but live it. James puts it this way: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). John is saying, "I don't care what others are teaching; here is the truth from one who was an eyewitness of the Lord Jesus. If you want to have fellowship with Him, walk in the revelation you are receiving from me."

The apostle clarifies that view by the third point he makes. The person who is determined to walk in these progressive revelations of Jesus Christ as the only way to the Father and eternal life is the one who benefits from this fellowship that is provided by God Himself. Not only do we have fellowship with God, but we are able to fellowship with other true believers of all races, cultures, and social strata. It doesn't matter about the level of knowledge one possesses. We are saved, brought into His eternal kingdom, and washed only by the blood of the Lamb of God.

John continues refuting the Gnostics, who believed that human beings could ascend to a higher level of "consciousness," and that knowledge "releases" us from a sinful nature. John says, "Before you believe that lie, here is the truth. We were all born with a sin nature. To believe otherwise is deception."

In his epistle, John makes a distinction between "sin" and "sins." The former refers to the Adamic nature we all inherit. It is this inherent nature of sin that prompts us to commit sins. Gnostics believed that we could be released from our Adamic nature

through esoteric knowledge. However, John says that is a lie. The only way our Adamic nature can be changed is through Jesus Christ.

If we say, as the Gnostics believed, that we no longer have an Adamic nature once we are saved, we are deceiving ourselves and not living in God's truth. However, when we agree with God that our sinful nature causes us to commit sins, and we bring those sins before God, John assures us that God is faithful and righteous, willing to forgive the repentant sinner, and capable of purging us from all forms of iniquity.

Keep the Commandments of Christ (1 John 2:1-6, NRSV)

¹My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

²and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

³Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments.

⁴Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist;

⁵but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him:

⁶whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked.

John wraps up this part of his letter by affirming another powerful truth. The apostle shares with his followers, whom he calls "little children" or "dear ones," that he is not giving them a license to sin. On the contrary, John lets us know that Christ living in us can empower us to say no to sin. However, if we do stumble and fall on this journey, we are not to worry. God has given us an Advocate: "Jesus Christ the righteous." In Greek, the word translated as "advocate" refers to one who is a legal advisor and pleads on behalf of another. The apostle makes it clear that Jesus Christ is our substitute Advocate who pleads to the Father on our behalf.

Jesus uses this term to describe the work and nature of the Holy Spirit, who is called "another Comforter" (John 14:16), or an advocate like Jesus. But in his epistle, John wants his readers to have no doubt that it is the historical Jesus of Nazareth and His work on the cross that provides atonement for all sin. Jesus became our propitiation. Jesus Christ is considered our High Priest and is similar to the high priest who offered the blood for the sins of the people on the Ark in the Old Dispensation (see Leviticus 16). He is also the only One whose blood God accepts for people to be cleansed from sin. Thus, Jesus is both our High Priest and Sacrifice at the same time. It is through Jesus Christ and Him alone that all the world can be cleansed from their sin nature and their sins.

John continues his diatribe against Gnosticism by helping believers recognize fundamental truth. The apostle declares that it is not enough to say that we know Jesus Christ. The Apostle James affirms that even demons believe there is a God who saves (see James 2:19). For John, the true test of faith is obeying God's commands.

The word "commandment" literally means a decree given by one who has authority to make such a decree. John was very familiar with God's commandments since he was part of the Lord's "inner circle." John knew firsthand that God's commandments were not grievous to the believer. They are spiritual instructions to help us grow stronger in

the Lord and become the men and women God intended from the foundation of the world.

On the other hand, John says that the person who does not keep God's decrees and refuses to adhere to His standards, yet claims an intimate relationship with Him, is a liar. How can we declare our allegiance to God and yet disobey His Word? Since God and His Word are one, to disobey God's Word is to disobey Him. There is no way we can have fellowship with God and be disobedient to His truths. God is serious about our obeying His Word. We cannot claim an abiding relationship with Him and not do what He says. We are only deceiving ourselves. But the good news is that those who choose to keep and obey God's Word will grow and develop in their spiritual lives. John affirms that God's love is molding and shaping obedient believers into His divine nature so that we can know we are in Christ and He is in us.

Because there are so many people who say, "I know the Lord," John gives us a litmus test to prove our intimacy with the Father: "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6, NIV). Believers must study Jesus Christ and see how He lived among people so that they can live in the same manner. Jesus tells us to take up His yoke and learn of Him so that we can become meek and lowly as He was (Matthew 13:28-30). Are we doing that? Jesus demonstrated how we should serve others by washing His disciples' feet (see John 13:1-17). Whose feet have we washed lately? Jesus went to the cross to die for the sins of the whole world so that we might have access to the Father (John 12:24-27). Have we laid down our life for anyone? The goal of true believers is to become like Jesus in all they do and say.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

1. John declares that if we say we have no sin we are liars, but also that we should not sin. Is John confused in his teaching about sin? Discuss.
2. How can we live in the world and not be influenced by the world?
3. Why is John not espousing a "works theology" for salvation?

LESSON TO LIVE BY:

So many people go to church and serve in various functions, yet it seems as though the church is powerless against the social ills of our time. Consider whether our seeming lack of power be due to our lack of intimate fellowship with God, or whether there is another reason why the church does not seem to be making a dent in the problems that people face every day.

Before people can have meaningful relationships with others, they must love themselves. This does not refer to a worldly, self-centered, narcissistic love, but to a proper sense of self-worth. Certainly, God values human beings. He made them in His image and showed people that they have infinite value to Him by His willingness to die for them. To achieve a healthy sense of self-esteem and self-worth, people need to have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ and see themselves through God's eyes. To maintain a relationship with God, it is necessary to confess one's sins when they occur. God, who is faithful, will forgive our sins.

The person who aspires to have an honest relationship with God opens the door for meaningful relationships with other believers. That's because all believers have the same objective: to walk in the light of God's presence.

Zoom Sunday School Classes – January 11, 2026, 09:00 AM EST

Meeting ID: 848-9423-0612

Pass Code: 669872

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Repentance and Faith

Printed Text: Luke 15:11-24; Acts 2:38-39

Devotional Reading: Mark 1:14-20

Background Reading: Isaiah 1:10-21; Ezekiel 18:20-23, 27-32

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Turn Away from Sin - Ezekiel 18:20-23, 27-32

Tuesday: Learn to Do Righteousness - Isaiah 1:10-21

Wednesday: Jesus Has power to Forgive Sins - Mark 2:1-12

Thursday: Draw Near to God by Faith - Hebrews 11:1-10

Friday: Repent and Seek God's Face - 2 Chronicles 7:11-22

Saturday: Repent and Be Baptized - Acts 2:32-39

Sunday: The Prodigal Returns - Luke 15:11-32

KEEP IN MIND:

"for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry " (Luke 15: 24).

LESSON AIM:

IDENTIFY with the characters in Jesus' parable;

SENSE God's grief over his lost children; and

SUGGEST culturally appropriate ways to rejoice with new believers.

BACKGROUND:

Parables are illustrations Jesus uses to teach kingdom concepts, principles, or to demonstrate the nature of God using characters and settings relatable to the hearer's everyday life and customs. His aim is to make the kingdom known to His disciples and others following Him. There are three parables of Jesus in Luke 15: the lost sheep (verses 1-7), the lost coin (verses 8-10), and the prodigal son. Each story demonstrates God's heart in retrieving that which is lost and the great lengths to which love drives Him to recover what belongs to Him. The parable of the lost sheep is also in Matthew 18:12-14, but the lost coin and prodigal son are only in Luke's Gospel.

The telling of parables was often prompted by Jesus' encounters with the Pharisees and scribes to answer their complaints and accusations , or confront their attempts to entrap Him. In Luke 15:1-2, their complaint was about Jesus' inclusion of sinners at the

dinner table with them. The Pharisees and scribes positioned themselves in their community above the average person. Because of their knowledge of the Law, they were considered the authority on what was acceptable. But here Jesus leveled the access to God the Father because through the Son all are welcome at the dinner table--a place of communion and intimacy.

Lesson Commentary:

Life on My Own Terms (Luke 15:11-13, NRSV)

¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons.

¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

Jesus, the ultimate storyteller, uses a powerful climax to this discourse to grab the hearers' attention and make a memorable point. He uses an illustration that hits home because those listening could in some way relate to the story of this family conflict with an unexpected resolution. His central characters are a father and his sons. The younger son makes what is considered an insulting and brazen request of his father: to receive his share of the inheritance before his father's death. The father grants his request and releases him to do whatever he pleases. The younger son leaves and goes far from his father's house to live as he wishes. He pursues a wild life with no inhibitions and no rules but also no protection. Jesus shows how the younger son takes for granted what it means to be in his father's house with all the rights and privileges he receives because of his connection.

1. Who in this narrative do you identify with most? How so?
2. How can stories like this parable help us teach and learn valuable life lessons in a different way?

Rock Bottom Results (Luke 15:14-19, NRSV)

¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs.

¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!'

¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you;

¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."

Jesus in this part of the story, shares with those listening the results of the younger son's decision to leave his father's protective covering and provision. The younger son has spent all of his share of his father's inheritance, which could be assumed to be a sizable amount. His sin and folly have left him broken inside and out. The younger son has plummeted into an existence that is beneath his heritage. Worse yet, a famine has hit the country.

The younger son has nothing left to support himself with during this troublesome time and has to find work in a foreign country. He is able to get a job doing something no upstanding orthodox Jew would even think to do, working in the fields feeding pigs. Pigs are considered unclean, and for the son to be around them—especially to feed them—is disgraceful. This character in Jesus' parable has hit such a low and is so famished that he desires to eat what the pigs are eating but is not allowed.

Satan always seeks to lure people into what appears attractive, exciting, and fun. As Jesus shows in this parable though, the result always leaves a person worse off than they could ever imagine.

The son in his despair realizes that there is another way out of his trouble. He comes to his senses and recognizes that he can go home and work for his father as one of his hired hands. The son decides not to die of hunger but to go back to his father. He says within himself that he will ask for forgiveness and further debase himself by acknowledging that because of his actions and behavior he is no longer worthy to be called a son but will be satisfied to be received as a hired hand.

1. Have you ever worked hard simply for the recognition, and did not receive it? Why do you think that happened?
2. How could we be more hospitable toward those who we are unfamiliar with? How could we do better in practicing humility when asked to do something that is out of our normal routine?

Fully Restored (Luke 15:20-24, NRSV)

²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.'

²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate;

²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

The younger son moves on his decision and heads home, but while making his way toward the property, his father recognizes him from afar and runs out to meet him. His father is filled with compassion and so grateful to see him alive that he throws his arms

around his son's neck and kisses him. This is not the greeting the younger son expects. The father could have been angry with him for spending his inheritance and returning home broke. He could have banished him from his property. But the father's response is the opposite.

The father loves as only a parent can: unconditionally. This parable is Jesus' most powerful depiction of the love of God as Father. This parable displays God's redemption. Humanity deserves to be cast out but because of the Father's fierce, unending love we are called back into relationship.

The repentant son wants to explain to his father how he has sinned against him and God; he truly wants to accept responsibility for his poor decisions and brazen behavior, bringing shame to himself and his family name. The younger son humbles himself before his father, believing he is no longer worthy to be his son. The father has a different response to his son's request. He calls his servants to bring out the best robe and out a ring on his son's finger and sandals on his feet. He puts his son back in his rightful place and gives him authority as if he never left. The father then calls for a celebration with the finest of food and drink because this son who was dead is now alive again, he was lost but now has been found.

The telling of this story by Jesus must have been very jarring for the Pharisees and scribes. A son who behaved so poorly would never be accepted back into a typical Jewish household or received in such a way by a father. But Jesus shows what God the Father is really like. His nature and character is not to see His creation banished for eternity, for He longs for us to return to fellowship with Him and repent (2 Peter 3:9). As noted in Scripture, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble who turn away from sin (James 4:6-8; 1 Peter 5:5-6). The parable of the prodigal son gives the original hearers and believers today a display of God's great love, mercy, and grace that we can do nothing to earn.

The Community Forms (Acts 2:38-39, NRSV)

³⁸Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."

The response to Peter's prophetic word was immediate. His precise and logical presentation of the Gospel intellectually convinced many of those present. However, intellectual acceptance is not enough to cause people to turn away from wickedness. True repentance is a heart issue. King Solomon was correct in his advice, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23, NIV), because as Jeremiah observed, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jeremiah 17:9, NIV).

The sin of rejecting and crucifying Jesus was great, yet Peter's words held out hope; so, the question, "What shall we do?" undoubtedly means, "What shall we do to be saved?" This is the first time that the most important question ever asked was

expressed and the first time it was ever answered. Peter was ready with an answer and issued the first altar call, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (v. 38). Although salvation is free, it is also conditional on heartfelt repentance. True repentance is a change of heart whereby one becomes sorrowful for having offended and disobeyed God. It determines to turn away from unrighteousness and to turn to Christ and follow His example of holy living by His grace.

By repenting and calling on the name of the Lord, the people would receive both the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. However, this promise was not limited to Peter's immediate audience or even to those of his generation. It was also a promise to the next generation and to every generation thereafter. The forgiveness of sin and gift of the Holy Spirit is the birthright of every new believer in every generation who answers the call of the Lord.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

1. How should we embrace our sisters and brothers when they come into the body of Christ? Sometimes people leave our local church for various reasons. How should we celebrate their return?
2. In what ways do we understand the love of God by the character of the father in the parable?
3. Believers are the instruments God uses to spread the Gospel message. Why is it necessary for believers to be able to give a precise and logical explanation of their faith? How does one learn to give logical explanations, and where do believers get the courage to share their faith?
4. Many modern-day Christians believe that Spirit-filled believers are still gifted with the ability to speak in tongues, while many others strongly disagree. What do you believe about modern-day speaking in tongues and why? Is your belief based on church tradition or sound biblical study? How can one be sure?
5. During the reconstruction period and through the period of Jim Crow segregation, the church was the spiritual, social, and political center of the Black community. In modern times, the church has become far less influential. What are some of the social and political factors that may have contributed to this decline? What are some of the implications of the church's decline in influence? What can the church do to improve its relevance to Black society? To society in general?

LESSON IN SOCIETY:

The parable of the prodigal son is a timeless display of the dangers of living outside God's protective covering. No matter what distance we place between God and ourselves, He is always reaching out to retrieve that which is lost. God's love is boundless; but it takes a conscious decision to receive God's love. He told this parable for those listening in His time, and the illustration carries on with us in our time to share with others the Father's redemptive, unfailing love. In response to the revelation that the Father is constantly reaching for those who are lost we are called to seek those whom the world would deem "lost." Homeless, incarcerated, addicted, and oppressed people are the very ones God wants to give an opportunity for

relationship with Jesus Christ, even if they put themselves in their negative situation. How can we be more intentional about receiving those who were “lost” when they make efforts to return to community?

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 18 January, 2026, 09:00 AM EST

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Prayer and Humility

Printed Text: Genesis 18:25-27; Luke 18:9-14; 1 John 5:14-15

Devotional Reading: Psalm 141

Background Reading: Nehemiah 1:4-11; Daniel 6:10;

Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 18:1-14; John 17:1-26

Key Text: Luke 18:14

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Praying for Wisdom - James 1:2-8

Tuesday: Praying and Seeking God - Jeremiah 29:10-14

Wednesday: Praying with Thanksgiving - Philippians 4:4-9

Thursday: Praying for Protection - Psalm 61

Friday: Praying as Jesus Taught - Matthew 6:5-15

Saturday: Praying for Others - Genesis 18:23-33

Sunday: Praying for Mercy - Luke 18:9-14

KEEP IN MIND:

“I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 18:14, NRSV).

LESSON AIM:

UNDERSTAND the importance of prayer and learn how to develop a more consistent prayer life.

DISCERN which occasions call for bold prayer and which occasions call for humble prayer.

BACKGROUND:

There were two corporate prayers, one at 9:00 a.m. and the other at 3:00 p.m., when the morning and evening sacrifices were being offered. The prayers were held in temples with complex buildings and courtyards. It was in the courtyards that there were

massive gatherings of travelers and other worshipers who brought their own private sacrifices, praying individually and, most likely, out loud. This is the scene that Jesus was setting as he told the parable.

Taxes in Roman Palestine consisted of both direct and personal taxes collected by state officials and various indirect taxes such as customs. Tax collectors who were caught stealing had to give up their position as well as give back all that was stolen plus an additional 20%. They were branded as robbers and were stripped of their civil rights. Tax collectors were very much hated for their corrupt practices of collaborating with foreign imperialists and raising taxes unjustly. There was no regulatory body that checked their collections, which also enabled them to add to their own personal coffers.

LESSON COMMENTARY:

Intercessory Prayer (Genesis 18:25-27, NRSV)

²⁵Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"

²⁶And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake."

²⁷Abraham answered, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

God is inherently just and righteous, and His actions reflect His character. Believers can trust that God will always do what is right. The presence of even a few righteous individuals can have a significant impact. Believers are called to live righteously and be a positive influence in their communities. God's willingness to engage with Abraham shows His patience and mercy. Believers should be encouraged by God's readiness to listen and respond to their concerns.

Abraham's dialogue with God shows the importance and power of intercessory prayer. Believers are encouraged to pray for others, trusting in God's willingness to listen. The presence of even a few righteous individuals can have a significant impact. Believers are called to live righteously, understanding their potential influence on their communities.

Abraham's acknowledgment of being "dust and ashes" teaches us the importance of approaching God with humility, recognizing our own limitations and God's greatness. Abraham's boldness in interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah demonstrates the power and importance of intercessory prayer, encouraging believers to pray for others. God's willingness to engage shows that God is open to dialogue with His people, inviting us to bring our concerns and requests to Him. By understanding our identity as "dust and ashes" helps us maintain a proper perspective on our relationship with God and others, fostering a spirit of humility and dependence on Him.

Persistent Prayer (Luke 18:9-11, NRSV)

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt:

¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

Persistent prayer develops and arouses a Christian's spiritual life that may have been dormant. Christians can really experience spiritual growth and an awareness of God and what His mission is for their life. A new direction can surface as a result of persistent and diligent prayer.

The parable of the widow who would not give up is an illustration of Jesus' message about persistent prayer being heard and answered. We are totally powerful against evil forces as we depend on God. Through prayer, we show God that we trust Him by opening our souls and hearts to Him.

Devotion and sincerity are the hallmark of effective prayer. It is not so much the amount of time as the depth of intimacy with God that affects the outcome of our prayers.

Fasting and Prayer (Luke 18:9-12, NRSV)

⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt:

¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.'

Fasting is a sign of disciplined obedience, a sign to God that a Christian is willing to "do without" and sacrifice himself so someone else can benefit. The act of fasting requires abstention from food and/or drink for a specified period of time. The early Christians associated fasting with penitence and purification (Matthew 6:16; Mark 9:29). Fasting is coupled with prayer over this specified period of time.

Prayer is the means of bringing a Christian through the fasting process. Jesus emphasized the need to pray always and to not get discouraged if the prayer isn't answered right away. Diligent prayer brings a Christian closer to God; it awakens the spirit and unfolds God's messages to the Christian while he is in steadfast prayer. Revelations or answers to other situations may also be revealed while one is waiting for an answer to another prayer.

One who is powerless releases all to God in prayer until an answer is granted. Such prayers are powerful and can deliver an individual out of an impossible situation. The Parable of the Unjust Judge demonstrates how God uses an unlikely person without his knowing it to grant compassion and justice. Luke 18:7 demonstrates how the unjust judge did not realize that God was using him to avenge His people. The judge is an outsider to God's Word and therefore does not recognize God's power.

Sincere Prayer (Luke 18:13–14, NRSV)

¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'

¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

The tax collector was not acting pretentious like the Pharisee. He acknowledged to God his wrongdoings and asked for forgiveness. He made no bargains with God; he

only requested that he be granted mercy. The Pharisee tried to cause embarrassment to the tax collector, but he only embarrassed himself by making a laundry list of all his great accomplishments and how he had avoided being involved in any sinful activity. The Pharisee thought God would acknowledge this prayer, but God receives those who in repentance ask for His mercy rather than those who display their own righteousness.

In verse 14, Jesus said the tax collector would receive God's mercy rather than the Pharisee. To Jesus' listeners, this was a shocking reversal of judgment since the Pharisees had assumed a standard of righteousness and were considered by others as righteous. (Another such reversal was displayed in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:30–35.) The tax collector stood far from the crowd, humbled himself before the Lord, and lamented for his wrongdoing before God. In contrast, the Pharisee, in his arrogance, stood where everyone could see and hear him and pointed out the tax collector. The prayer of the tax collector was sincere because he dealt with himself and his sins; that of the Pharisee was not sincere because he boasted of how good he was and how sinful others were.

The Pharisee believed that because of his fasting and tithing, he was more righteous than other men. It was a common belief of the Pharisees that because Moses went to Mount Sinai to receive the Law (Ten Commandments) on Thursday and came back on Monday, fasting was required because it was a special indication of holiness. The Pharisee tells of all the good things he has done, the sins he has not committed, and the extra money he has given, all of which he believes add to his stature as a righteous person.

Confident Prayer (1 John 5:14-15, NRSV)

¹⁴And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

¹⁵And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.

John prepares to give us reasons why the believer can live with confidence in eternal life. Simply put, if we "have the Son," we have life. If we do not have the Son, we have nothing. John refers to the God kind of life that culminates in eternal or everlasting life.

Eternal life is ours the moment we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ and accept Him as our Saviour. We don't have to wait to get to heaven to receive the benefits God has for us. The apostle's purpose in writing to these believers is to let them know the promise they have in Christ. If we believe God and trust that He has given us His Son as the only way to the Father, we have eternal life. We don't have to "fly away" or "come up on the rough side of the mountain" to be blessed. God wants us to know and have confidence that we can have what He says right now.

The word "confidence" (v. 14) means a fearless and unwavering faith in communing with God. It also means that all fear and anxiety that is often associated with a human being's relationship to God has been removed. Therefore, we can come boldly to the throne of grace at all times. There is no fear in our relationship with God. So, whatever we ask for that is in line with God's will, we can have faith and assurance that He will give us.

God's Word gives us confidence to believe that if we love God and love others as God says we ought to, we are His children and can receive all the blessings He has for us. Can you trust in God's Word today?

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

1. What did Jesus mean when he said, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on earth"?
2. What did Jesus think of the publican who didn't have much to say in defense of his sins?
3. Do you think God listens to you more when you pray just before an event or when you pray before, during, and after the event? Why?
4. Name some of the things in the world that believers need to gain the victory over.
5. How does understanding our human frailty enhance our appreciation for God's grace and mercy in our lives?

LESSON IN SOCIETY:

Some of us spend more time with our friends and our clubs than we do with God. If we get in a bind, we want God to listen to us immediately and grant our command as if He were a genie. Others who also say they love Him, call on Him and expect an instantaneous response. They expect the same attention from God as someone who daily talks to Him. If you don't show someone you love that you really do care for them and only call on them when you want something, they will not readily come to your aid. The same goes with God. God desires us to spend time with Him on a regular basis. Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

Let the Lord know that you love and care for Him all the time, not just when things don't go right. Be persistent in your prayer life just as you are in your public life and show God that you believe that there is no way you can live without His guidance and care.

Zoom Sunday School Classes – 25 January, 2026, 09:00 AM EST

Meeting ID: 848-9423-0612

Pass Code: 669872

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84894230612?pwd=Zk1ESitzbGZwTIJyV21UZXY5aTVPZz09>

Call and Growth

Printed Text: Matthew 4:18-20; 16:16-18; John 21:15-18; 2 Peter 3:14-15, 18

Devotional Reading: Colossians 2:1-7

Background: John 1:40-42; Ephesians 4:11-16;

Philippians 3:12-16; Colossians 1:9-11; Hebrews 6:1-3

Key Text: John 21:17

Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Grow By Following Jesus - Matthew 4:18-22
Tuesday: Grow in Love for God –Deuteronomy 7:7-11
Wednesday: Grow in Spiritual Wisdom - Colossians 1 :3-12
Thursday: Grow in the Fear of the Lord - Proverbs 1:2-7
Friday: Growing Discerning Good from Evil - Proverbs I:8-12
Saturday: Keep on Growing - Philippians 3: 10-16
Sunday: Grow in Grace and Knowledge - 2 Peter 3:14-18

KEEP IN MIND:

"He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:17, NRSV).

LESSON AIM:

RECOGNIZE how the disciples accepted Jesus' call;

REFLECT on how choosing to follow Jesus transformed their lives; and

WORSHIP God for the blessings in our lives that have come because we follow Jesus.

BACKGROUND:

As His earthly ministry and reputation gained prominence throughout the region-- From Nazareth to Judea, Samaria, and Galilee--Jesus experienced rejection, opposition, and escalating hostility. Particularly in His hometown of Nazareth, the reaction to His ministry ranged from amazement to mistrust. However, no reaction was harsher than that of the Roman government under Herod.

Herod's familial line had been particularly violent throughout all its generations. From Herod the Great (73-4 BC), who slaughtered all of Bethlehem's males under the age of two, to Herod Antipas (c. 20 BC-AD 39), who ordered the execution of John the Baptist, they had a deep history of resisting God's purposes and rejection God's prophets, and they used any means necessary to silence opponents.

The Romans were becoming even more hostile and violent in their rejection of Jesus. After John the Baptist was arrested, Herod Antipas took the power and presence of the kingdom of God head-on. Imprisoned for condemning Herod's incestuous relationship with his niece Herodias, John refused to be silenced (Matthew 4:12; Mark 6:17). Herod Antipas, whom Jesus called "that fox" (Luke 13:32), reacted in typical Roman fashion--he wanted John dead.

After learning of John's death, Jesus moved to Capernaum, an important seaport city located on a major trade rout. More important, His actions triggered fulfillment of a centuries-old revelation that the Messiah would be the light to the land allocated by divine covenant to the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali, where Capernaum was located.

Lesson Commentary:

Called as Disciples (Matthew 4:18-20, NRSV)

¹⁸As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

¹⁹And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people."

²⁰Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Jesus sees two men, Simon (called Peter), and Andrew, while He is walking by the Sea of Galilee. These brothers are fishermen engaged in their trade when Jesus challenges them to disrupt all societal norms and conventional expectations. Both men are engaged in meeting their family's needs. Both men have as a priority meeting the fishing quotas they paid as in-kind taxes to tax collectors on behalf of Rome.

Jesus invites Simon Peter and Andrew to re-order their priorities. He offers them the opportunity to catch something much more valuable than fish. In following Jesus, they will fish for people. Fishermen had a reputation or being rough and unpolished and were largely despised. But when Jesus appears, their lives change. They immediately accept Jesus' transformational call, which gives them new purpose for their lives. They are experienced and well-prepared for their calling, but instead of catching food to feed the body for a short time, Simon Peter and Andrew will be casting their nets to catch people or eternal life.

- 1 How can we become better "fishers of people"? How can we extend our nets farther to draw in more people for Jesus?
2. When you first accepted the call to follow Jesus, how did you feel? Nervous? Confident? Reserved?
3. Since Jesus came into your life, how has your life changed for the better?
4. How would your life have been different had you not followed Jesus?
5. Has a reluctant spirit hindered you from responding to Jesus? Are you uncomfortable changing the way you do things, yet get frustrated when nothing changes for the better in your life? When Jesus calls, how will you answer?

Jesus, Son of the Living God (Matthew 16:16-18)

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do men say that I am?" Jesus, being God, already knew the community's perspective, so why did He ask the question? He asked the question in order to hear His disciples' interpretation of public opinion. Is this same question relevant for believers today? Yes, it is as equally significant today as it was back then. How we interpret and respond to the world's portrayal of Jesus will disclose our own perceptions of Him. Do we agree or disagree with the anti-Christ depictions?

If we concur with the counterfeit images we see on television or in movies, articles, newspapers, and magazines, then we need to question our understanding of Jesus. These deceptive representations can shake and challenge the faith of a new believer. For the mature in Christ, it should reinforce the necessity to stay grounded in our convictions and strengthen our desire to share the Gospel with others. If our faith is tossed to and fro by every new idea that surfaces in the media about Jesus, we need to

reevaluate our attitude about the Christian faith and ask the question, "Do I really believe Jesus is who He says He is, the Messiah?"

To avoid being persuaded by media hype, Christians need to be immersed in the Word of God and rooted in the fundamental truth of the Gospel. Jesus was never moved by contradictory and antagonistic attitudes. He remained focused on teaching and preaching the Gospel and fulfilling His destiny. Similarly, when the Word is practiced in everyday living, the truth of God's Word is clearly visible in the life of a believer. We should not be panic-stricken by what society says about our Lord. It should only create in us perseverance, an attitude that we will never succumb to the world's folly.

If the Lord were to ask you, "Who do you say that I am?" what would be your response? It is amazing how varied these responses would be, even within the body of Christ. When Jesus asked Peter this question, Peter answered by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and said that Jesus is the Son of the living God. The term "Son of the living God" reflects Jesus' eternal and personal Sonship. Before the foundation of the world and prior to taking on human flesh, Jesus enjoyed an intimate relationship with the Father in heaven. Jesus is called the Son of God because His incarnation and birth into the human race were created by the Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus into our hearts as Lord and Saviour, we are adopted into the family of believers. However, Jesus alone is the only begotten Son of God. In these passages of Scripture the Lord is revered as the "Living God." The word "living" is used to stress the significance in knowing that the God we serve is alive, active, and sitting on the throne!

Peter's Ministry (John 21:15-18, NRSV)

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep."

¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go."

Our Lord addressed Peter by his original name, as if he had forfeited that of Peter through his denying him. He now answered, thou knowest that I love thee; but without professing to love Jesus more than others. We must not be surprised to have our sincerity called into question when we ourselves have done what makes it doubtful. Every remembrance of past sins, even pardoned sins, renews the sorrow of a true penitent. Conscious of integrity, Peter solemnly appealed to Christ, as knowing all things, even the secrets of his heart. It is well when our transgressions and mistakes make us humbler and more watchful. The sincerity of our love of God must be brought to the test; and it is appropriate for us to inquire with earnest, preserving prayer to the heart-searching God, to examine and prove us, whether we are able to stand this test. No one can be qualified to feed the sheep and lambs of Christ, who does not love the

good Shepherd more than any earthly advantage or object. It is the great concern of every good man, whatever death he dies, to glorify God in it; for what is our chief end but this, to die to the Lord, at the word of the Lord?

Remain Steadfast (2 Peter 3:14-15, 18)

¹⁴Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish;

¹⁵and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him,

¹⁸But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

The underlying theme of these verses is the second coming of the Lord. Whether our lives on earth are ended in death or whether we are alive when the Lord returns, we want to be found ready. To be found "without spot, and blameless" is to be fully like Jesus (v. 14). This thought should motivate us to examine every aspect of our lives and think about what we may be doing when we are suddenly taken to be with the Lord. The standard is perfection, but the Lord knows our weaknesses and frailties, and the blood of Christ covers all of our sins. So, we have great peace as we look forward to His return. The only reason the Lord is delaying His return is to give more people the opportunity to be saved before He returns.

Peter closes the epistle in much the same way as he opened it. He addresses the Christians as his "beloved," indicating his deep love and devotion to these Christian communities. Interestingly, Peter uses this term of endearment more than any other New Testament author. He urges them to "know these things before" or to take seriously all that he has told them. This is a good time to stop and remember that Peter's intent in this and the previous epistle was to comfort the Christians. He desired that his reminders of the wonderful promises of God should serve to provide them with assurance of their calling, election, and the glories that awaited them as followers of Christ.

He asks them to stay alert and avoid "being led away with the error of the wicked." Peter is not asking the Church to remain unnecessarily fearful; instead, he is asking that they remain mindful of the dangers of heeding false teachings. Peter had been with Andrew, John, and James on the mountainside when Jesus warned them to "Take heed lest any man deceive you: For many will come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Mark 13:5-6). Peter now urges the Christians to hold to their "stedfastness" or their faith and confidence in Jesus Christ.

THOUGHTS TO PONDER:

1. Do you believe that Christians are eagerly awaiting Jesus' return? Discuss why or why not?
2. Discuss ways that you think the church can help prevent people from following false teachers.
3. What do you think Peter means when he warns that the church should be found "without spot, and blameless"?

4. Compare Peter's analogy of the "day of the Lord" coming as a "thief in the night" (v. 10) with Jesus' proverb about the ten virgins awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13). Discuss the similarities and differences.

LESSON IN OUR SOCIETY

Many times, we get complacent in our attitude about life. We claim: "if it ain't broke don't fix it." We remain content to stay in our lane or stick to what we know; we don't ever want to make waves. Yet, we often lament that nothing changes in our lives and that we can't ever seem to get ahead, leaving us unfulfilled and uninspired. Repeatedly doing the same thing the same way but expecting a different outcome is popularly described as "insanity." Jesus knows that living under God's authority requires speaking a life change. His ministry inspires this transformation.

As a prophet, He challenges people with unpopular spiritual truths. As the Son of God, He offers the kingdom of heaven to those who repent. As the Son of God, He offers forgiveness to those who rejected Him because they could not see beyond the man.

Jesus calls all kinds of people to be disciples. Simon Peter and Andrew were motivated to answer the call, and they willingly left their comfort zone for Jesus. They did not make excuses about the inconvenience of following Him. Instead, they acted immediately. Jesus calls each of us for the kingdom of heaven. When He asks us to serve Him, we must be like the disciples. We must act immediately.

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