

SPRING 2020

The Living Word

S E R I E S

Sharing His Mission



Lesson Manual

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SHARING HIS MISSION

by Jonathan McClintock



The role *mission* plays in an organization is crucial to that organization's success. William Craig, writing for Forbes.com, suggested that "high-performance organizations are linked to being mission-driven companies" ("The Importance of Having a Mission-Driven Company"). In fact, he found that a worker who actually buys into and is driven to do his work based on the company's mission, more than a paycheck, is more likely to invest in the company for the long haul and is 30 percent more likely to grow into a "high performer." In other words, the most successful workers are those who find themselves motivated more by the mission than they are by the money.

In the church this concept also holds true. Individuals who are motivated by the mission rather than the benefits of living for Jesus Christ are more satisfied in their walk with God, live with more joy, and rarely waffle on their level of commitment.

The mission of Jesus Christ was summed up in one verse, Luke 19:10: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Everything Jesus did revolved around this one purpose. God came and manifested Himself in flesh for the sole purpose of reconciling the world back into relationship with Him. And this was the mission for which He trained His disciples during His three years of ministry.

While standing on the mount, Jesus declared to His followers, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Jesus told them the message of the gospel was what would save the lost and build the church. And for His followers to build His church, they would have to buy in to the mission.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, our motivation must be found in the mission, not the many benefits promised in His Word. Yes, blessings will come and His promises are sure, but commitment to the mission is the most important call every believer has received.

LESSON MANUAL

This Lesson Manual has been developed with the goal of providing teachers numerous options to assist in preparation and delivery of each lesson.

In each lesson you will find a Focus Thought, Focus Verse, and Lesson Text that lay a foundation and give direction for the material that is to be presented. Questions are dispersed throughout the body of each lesson to provoke thought and spark discussion. We urge teachers to use these questions as a means of helping students apply each portion of the lesson.

» *How does God being “all knowing” bring you comfort?*

STUDENT WORKBOOK

The Student Workbook has been organized in such a way that students are given the tools to not only follow the major points of each lesson but will also have a tool to further their personal discipleship and devotion throughout the week.

1. The Focus Thought, Focus Verse, and Culture Connection have been included in the Student Workbook.
2. The Lesson Outline has also been included to give the student a template to follow as the lesson is being taught. In addition, certain parts of the outline correspond with the daily discipleship prompts in the Approach section. This is designed to show what part of the lesson corresponds to the particular day’s lesson text and application questions.
3. The Approach section is designed to give the student daily discipleship prompts by including portions of the lesson and application questions. The flexibility of this section allows for the student to follow along and interact during class, to become familiar with the lesson content before class, or to spend time in review during the week following class.
4. The Ask and Apply questions are presented for the purpose of helping the student contemplate the truths of Scripture and the content of the lesson. The first of the questions in each set is taken directly from the Lesson Manual, while the second question in each set is an additional prompt designed to help the student apply what is being taught.

POWERPOINTS

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God with Us

FOCUS THOUGHT

God manifested Himself in flesh to be with us.

FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 1:23

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

LESSON TEXT

Matthew 1:18–23

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Isaiah 7:14

14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

CULTURE CONNECTION

ON FRONTIER'S FRONT LINES

In 2010, three major airline companies were in the middle of merging, so the chief executive officer (CEO) of Frontier Airlines made a bold move before the merger. He disguised himself as a Frontier employee to see what it felt like to be a Frontier employee. Bryan Bedford left the comfort and security of his executive office and worked on the front lines of Frontier Airlines. One of his first jobs was emptying the lavatory after a flight. Bedford got his hands dirty—quite literally.

Everyone thought he was just a fledgling flight attendant. They did not know the CEO of their company had come to work alongside them. When he finally explained who he was and why he was there, they were amazed that their CEO would step down from his lofty office to be with them. We applaud executives who want to better their employees by becoming a rank-and-file employee themselves, but how amazing that we worship a God who wanted to save us by becoming one of us.

God did not just leave the safety of a corner office and personal parking space; He left the safety of Heaven and the angelic chorus of “holy, holy, holy” for the dangers of Earth and a murderous mob’s cry of “crucify.” He came because He wanted to be near us, with us, even within us. Of all the names whereby we know God, one of the sweetest is Emmanuel, for He is God with us.

OUTLINE

I. GOD HAS ALWAYS DESIRED TO BE NEAR US

- A. Near the Brokenhearted
- B. Near Those Who Call on Him

II. GOD SENT OTHERS TO REPRESENT HIM TO HIS PEOPLE

- A. The Priests Ministered to God for the People
- B. The Prophets Spoke to the People for God

III. GOD CHOSE TO MANIFEST HIMSELF IN FLESH TO BE WITH US

- A. Emmanuel: “God with Us”
- B. He Will Never Leave Us nor Forsake Us

hand, whether it is cleaning a room or buying a new cell phone. We all look for the perfect way to get and hold another person’s attention.

Scripture illustrates God’s challenge in getting and holding humanity’s attention. Adam and Eve successfully blocked out the Creator’s daily conversations long enough to pursue the option of determining what was right and wrong for themselves. This initial attention deficit disorder resulted in removal from their home. God still sought their attention, provided them with clothing, explained the consequences of their actions, and promised a day in the future when the serpent’s head would be bruised. God’s ultimate effort to gain human attention came when He manifested Himself in the flesh.

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Companies develop gimmicks to get their target audience’s attention. In the same way, as individuals, we do whatever we can to get our message across. It requires some strategy to wrestle attention away from preoccupations in favor of the issue at

»» SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

From the very beginning, God created men and women to be in relationship with Him. However, God gave Adam and Eve the free will to either choose or reject that relationship. Trees, plains, and oceans have no option but to wave as affirmation of God's glorious creative and sustaining acts. Birds, beasts, and sea creatures must worship as well. Adam and Eve's choice to reject God's preferences for their lives brought separation from the Creator.

I. GOD HAS ALWAYS DESIRED TO BE NEAR US

That first bite of forbidden fruit elicited a strange response from God. He sought relationship restoration rather than executing judgment. The Bible records the many efforts God has made to restore full relationship with humanity. While one lesson cannot uncover all of God's relationship efforts, the brokenhearted and those who call on Him provide examples of God's initiatives.

A. Near the Brokenhearted

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

David penned this psalm while living outside of Israel. To avoid Saul's wrath, the future king sought political asylum in Abimelech's territory. The peace ended when David feigned mental illness and suffered expulsion from the king's court. Refusing to fight against his own people left David relying completely on the Lord for his safety. He began by blessing the Lord and remembering God's responsiveness to his cry (Psalm 34:1-4).

Suffering provides an opportunity to experience God's missionary nature. The human condition guarantees people will have this opportunity at many points across their lifespan. Sadly, society around us provides many examples of people who try to care for their own brokenheartedness. The same was the case in David's day. When God's people suffer, they encounter the Lord's deliverance.

God will always be near those in need; the only question is whether we will experience His nearness as an awareness of His mercy or if we will encounter the bitterness that follows unresolved suffering. Suffering provides a gracious gift to experience God's nearness that self-sufficiency can never provide.

» *What strategies can people use to focus on God's nearness during suffering rather than giving most of their attention to reducing the pain or sorrow?*

B. Near Those Who Call on Him

Psalm 145 includes many wonderful ways to praise this God who seeks relationship. Egypt thought the gods created humans to do the work of the gods. On the other hand, Israel took the opportunity for generations to share the ways God had worked on their behalf (Psalm 145:4). They spoke of Yahweh's wonderful works, great goodness, and righteousness (Psalm 145:5-7). The psalmist gave the reader

many reasons to praise God because of all He had already done (Psalm 145:8–13). David went so far as to say the Lord opened His hand “and satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16).

The ability to see God’s majestic care for all creation set up God’s people to be a residing place for God’s Spirit. They knew no box, building, or mountain could contain the Creator who sought relationship with them. The Lord gave Moses directions for making a holy space where this covenant God could dwell among His chosen people. While they could do nothing to earn God’s favor, they would need to learn how to appropriately call on His name and maintain purity before Him.

Sadly, Israel’s example also showed rejection would come when they did not abide in this relationship. Isaiah’s first prophecy spoke of a wrong relationship with God, who sought to be tabernacled among them. Their lack of faithfulness caused God to reject their offerings. Their refusal to call on God in truth (Psalm 145:18) caused their God to call them a harlot and to bring His judgment on them.

» *Why did Israel struggle with being faithful to God? In what ways do we mirror their struggles?*

II. GOD SENT OTHERS TO REPRESENT HIM TO HIS PEOPLE

God chose one family to be the pipeline to bless all nations. Abram left Ur to search for a city made without human hands. Although he never got there, he dedicated his life to the journey. God formed a covenant with Abraham and his family. Yahweh would be their God if they would obey and follow Him alone.

When Israel grew to the strength of a nation in Egypt, God heard the cry of His covenant people and delivered them. As He had appeared to Abraham and Jacob, He would now appear to all the people. God settled on the mountain, and the people recognized the risk of being so close to God. The Old Testament provides a record of God’s effort to purify and bless His people so all the world would follow them. He sent priests and prophets to represent His desire to abide with them.

A. The Priests Ministered to God for the People

All of Israel’s neighbors had priests to help them appease their gods and give them victory over their enemies. Israel’s priests, however, proclaimed the startling message that only one God existed, and that one God wanted to be in a special tabernacled relationship with them. While God called Israel to be a kingdom of priests on behalf of the world (Exodus 19:6), Aaron and his family would need to show them how to stand in the risky territory between their holy God and all the sinful people of the world (Exodus 28–29).

Much of the priests’ work centered on the Tabernacle—the place where God chose to be present in a special way. All Israelite life revolved around the Tabernacle. In the journey to the Promised Land, they placed their tents around the Tabernacle when they

camped, and they followed it when they moved. The pillar of fire and pillar of cloud visibly reminded all the people that God was with them. Eventually, with the construction of Solomon's Temple, Jerusalem became the place where Yahweh placed His name.

Priests protected the holiness of the Tabernacle and of the people. They taught the Law in a way that key principles of clean and unclean as well as holy and unholy could be understood by all the people. They diligently worked to maintain their own purity, so they could live between their holy God and people who sought to keep the covenant.

Human failure to keep the covenant required the priests to perform their mediatorial role. Sacrificial offerings restored both the person bringing the offering and the Tabernacle where God chose to dwell. Representing people to a holy God carried a very heavy responsibility.

» *God uses His people as a royal priesthood to take the world's needs to Him in prayer. How should you pray for needs in your community and nation at this time?*

B. The Prophets Spoke to the People for God

Priests did not serve alone in the gap between a sinful people and a holy God. Prophets functioned as God's messengers to the people. Jesus would later weep over Jerusalem for its tendency to honor the graves of the prophets. They liked the idea of God's voice being with them, but they rejected the words these men and women spoke on God's behalf.

Prophets lived precarious lives. One does not need much imagination to feel the tension when Nathan challenged all-powerful and all-sinful King David with "thou art the man" (II Samuel 12:7). The king's misuse of power for sexual favors and murder threatened God's plan to use Israel as a light to the nations. Nathan highlighted the failure. The king repented. God forgave.

Elijah lived under a cloud of danger even while he experienced God's sustaining miracles of being fed by a raven's beak and a widow's hand. Ahab and Jezebel wanted the nation to serve both Yahweh and Baal. The test at Mount Carmel set the stage for Baal to fail while Yahweh answered by fire. Elijah experienced emotional and spiritual crises while running from the monarchs. The episode illustrates the reality that prophets were not perfect men, even as they carried a perfect God's words. Elijah saw sins in kings, but he could not see his own self-centeredness when he accused God of having no other followers. God's desire to speak to the people brought fallible men and women into the dangerous gap between God's holiness and human failures. Prophets could speak true words, but they could not fix the people nor themselves.

The prophets saw both nations fall and God's absolute commitment to preserving a remnant to fulfill His promises. Isaiah witnessed the king's refusal to engage in a conversation with God to save Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:10–16). He also saw the promised child who would carry the government on His shoulder and would be "called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

» *Describe your emotions when you see people choose not to follow God's purposes for their lives.*

III. GOD CHOSE TO MANIFEST HIMSELF IN FLESH TO BE WITH US

Perhaps we have all heard someone say, "That cannot end well." The observer might be watching boys compete with bottle rockets or national leaders debate over a Supreme Court appointment; in either case fireworks will ignite destruction.

The ultimate concern for a sure explosive outcome results from observing God's persistent efforts to bridge the gap between His holiness and a fallen creation. God has pledged not to take the ultimate action to destroy all creation as He considered with Noah. The rainbow serves as God's promise not to solve the problem that way.

The Gospel writers did not see Jesus' birth as a second or third attempt that followed previous failed efforts to bridge the gap. Instead the New Testament writers saw the Old Testament law, with its priests and prophets attempting to bridge the gap, as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Priestly and prophetic ministry helped all to see how radical the breach actually was between God and humanity. Rules, animal sacrifices, and prophetic utterances could never make humanity holy enough for God to be with people.

» *Why do we need God in order to be holy?*

A. Emmanuel: "God with Us"

While God demonstrated grace through Moses, the Law only provided mediated grace. Grace and truth came personally into human existence by Jesus Christ. Anything less than the Incarnation would fail to achieve God's desire to reconcile the world unto Himself (II Corinthians 5:19). The gap required truth that named sin and rebellion against God. The gap also required a grace mechanism to make God's desire to be among people possible. Jesus became that grace tool.

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

The original prophecy of the virgin's child named Emmanuel was to a hard-hearted king who was too busy solving his own problems to engage in a conversation with God's prophet. Ahaz refused to acknowledge Yahweh's presence in time of national crisis. Fortunately, as wearying to God as it might be (Isaiah 7:13), human stubbornness cannot stop God's plan.

The second giving of the prophecy seemed to be a far less critical juncture. Joseph faced ridicule and shame from others rather than the armies that had confronted his ancestor. The pregnant, unwed teen carried no less than the conception of the Holy Spirit. The shame to be confronted was the shame and sin of all humanity. The dream brought comfort and provided direction for an engaged Hebrew man, but the child to

be born brought hope to all humanity. Joseph still had to address the shame of going through with the marriage to an unwed mother, but now he knew why.

Angels carried messages to a number of people in the Old Testament, but none compared to this message. God planned to do the impossible. As great as the virgin birth was, the source of the seed in Mary's womb was not the main miracle Joseph heard. God not only wanted to be with sinful humanity, but He would bridge the gap by coming Himself.

God was present with Israel in theophanies, such as the burning bush, but He had never been present as a member of humanity. The very idea was scandalous. Emmanuel's presence would be complete rather than just in appearances. He had to be seen and handled (1 John 1:1). He had to grow and mature (Luke 2:52). He had to pray to overcome His own desire to solve the holiness-sin gap through a less painful means (Luke 22:42-44).

B. He Will Never Leave Us nor Forsake Us

Many parents have had to retrace their steps on a long journey to find their toddler's lost blanket or stuffed animal. They cannot face the hours of turmoil as the child tries to go to bed without the comfort item. Psychologists call this a transitional object. The child uses the constant companion when facing stress or when alone. Being without the item brings stress. Most children will grow out of the need for their one-eyed stuffed rabbit. The object is put in a memory box for later or just forgotten as something else becomes more interesting.

Emmanuel did not come to be a transition object. Humans will never become so holy they no longer need the Savior's grace. Separation from God, other people, and creation as a whole will not just go away because the population has gotten smarter, more economically advantaged, or has found a way to distribute resources in a way that is fair to everyone. Humans will always need "God with us." The Creator made us this way.

»»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

When the early disciples heard Jesus was leaving and they could not follow, they became afraid. They had grown used to Jesus being near. Even if a storm blew up on the lake, Jesus would come walking on the water. The Savior told them they did not yet have a complete understanding of God's intent to be with them.

The disciples thought they were losing something when Jesus went away. Instead Emmanuel took on a whole new dimension. He was with them, but soon He would be in them (John 14:17-18). He would live, and so would they. With the Holy Spirit, people can confidently know without a doubt that Emmanuel is still God with us.

Complete Submission

FOCUS THOUGHT

Since Jesus modeled submission to both earthly and heavenly authority, we must also be in submission to the authority in our lives.

»» FOCUS VERSES

Luke 2:51–52

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. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

»» LESSON TEXT

Luke 2:41–52

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.

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.

CULTURE CONNECTION

AMBER ALERTS

If Mary and Joseph could have, they would have used an Amber Alert, but they lived long before smartphones. When they were in the middle of their long walk home, they realized Jesus was not with them. When they asked family and friends caravanning with them, they all looked around and then looked at each other. No one knew where Jesus was.

If you have been in a crowd of people during an Amber Alert, you have probably observed the scene of phones ringing and vibrating all at the same time. After looking at their phones, everyone's face shows signs of stress and worry. The Amber Alert imparts the sinking knowledge that a child has gone missing. But for two deputy sheriffs, one particular Amber Alert would prove to save two scared children.

While on patrol, the two deputies spotted an RV on the side of the road. They stopped to help the three stranded people but could not repair it, so they called for a tow truck. After the truck towed the RV, the officers received the Amber Alert and realized three-year-old Leah and four-year-old Jordan must have been inside the RV. They called the tow truck driver who told them where the individuals were staying. The deputies contacted the local police, who arrested the three adults and safely returned the two missing children.

Mary and Joseph trekked back to Jerusalem. After three days they found twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple. He was safe, and wonder of wonders, this preteen was teaching the teachers.

OUTLINE

I. FESTIVAL OF PASSOVER

- A. The Custom of Joseph and Mary Was to Attend in Jerusalem
- B. Jesus Was Twelve Years Old

II. JESUS WAS LEFT BEHIND

- A. His Family Accidentally Left Him
- B. Unaware He Was Not with Them

III. HIS FAMILY SEARCHED FOR HIM

- A. Jesus Was in the Temple
- B. Listening and Asking Questions
- C. The People Were Amazed at His Understanding

IV. MARY QUESTIONED JESUS

- A. "I Must Be about My Father's Business"
- B. Jesus Submitted to His Parents
- C. We Should Submit to Both Earthly and Heavenly Authority

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Driving through different parts of North America reveals that not all drivers are created equal. It is also evident the different road signs mean different things to different people.

Perhaps the most challenging of all is the yield sign. The word alone should make it obvious what needs to happen—to give up your right of way to someone else. But in all honesty, it does not happen all the time.

Maybe it is partially because within our own human nature, yielding is not an easy thing to do. We like to be in control. We do not like yielding to anyone or anything. Submission is not something we enjoy or always do willingly.

Jesus became the ultimate example of willing submission. The way He entered this world, lived His life, and then left this world is a pattern for each of us to exemplify. In so doing we will find that the greatest blessings in this life are tied to a submissive spirit.

I. FESTIVAL OF PASSOVER

Passover is a special time in the lives of the Jewish people. It is a time of remembering and celebrating their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. It occurs in the spring and is connected to the barley harvest. During this time there is an offering of the firstfruits of the barley harvest.

A. The Custom of Joseph and Mary Was to Attend in Jerusalem

In our Scripture setting, we are told the custom of Joseph and Mary was to journey to Jerusalem and be there for Passover. In ancient times, such a trip would be quite an undertaking. The journey for this family from Nazareth to Jerusalem would be approximately eighty miles and take nearly three days. The women were not required to be in Jerusalem for Passover, but the presence of Mary shows us she was devout in her beliefs. It also lets us know she was submitted to her husband and to God in her worship.

This is significant in helping us understand that Jesus would have grown up making this annual trip. As He grew He would become familiar with the events surrounding Passover. It is estimated there were at least 2 million people in Jerusalem during Passover in the days Jesus lived, so He became somewhat comfortable moving among the press of the crowd.

B. Jesus Was Twelve Years Old

The Book of Luke tells the story of Jesus' birth and His being presented to Simeon at the Temple in Jerusalem. It skips over the early childhood years of Jesus and picks the story back up with Jesus coming to the Temple during the annual pilgrimage to celebrate Passover. This Passover was significant in the life of Jesus because of His age at the time.

Although the Jewish practice of bar mitzvah (a ceremony in which a thirteen-year-old Jewish boy is proclaimed ready to take his place in public worship) had not been instituted yet, at age twelve the religious instruction for Jesus would have become intense and focused. He would have been taught that He was soon to be considered a man and, therefore, would have obligations concerning life and worship.

» *Would you trust a twelve-year-old today to make adult decisions? Why or why not?*

II. JESUS WAS LEFT BEHIND

We may wonder, how could Mary and Joseph have lost Jesus? How could they have let the Son of God out of their sight for even a few moments? Yet, somehow, as they were returning to Nazareth, they realized Jesus was nowhere to be found. He had seemingly disappeared. No doubt it would have been a confusing and hectic time as families gathered their belongings and started the long journey back home. Being mentally and physically exhausted, it would be easy for them to overlook a few details. But still we wonder, how could they leave their son behind?

A. His Family Accidentally Left Him

To be fair to Mary and Joseph, we cannot totally blame them. It is within the realm of possibility for them to assume Jesus was somewhere in the crowd following along. Keep in mind, He was twelve years old and was expected to start acting like an adult. Also, immediate families would travel with their larger extended families. For that reason alone, the parents could have assumed Jesus was simply with other family members.

Leaving Him behind was not an intentional act on their part. It was not an indication they were not concerned for Him or did not love Him. Quite simply, it just happened. They had raised Him right and perhaps assumed He had been to enough Passover celebrations to know when it was time to head home.

B. Unaware He Was Not with Them

On the first evening of their journey, Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was not with them. Perhaps while making camp for the night and beginning to prepare dinner, they began to wonder where He was. After all, a twelve-year-old boy is going to eat.

They began to move among their family members and traveling companions asking about Jesus. Time and again they were told He had not been seen. At some point maybe they began trying to recall the last time they had seen Him. It had to have been while He was in the city since He had not been seen on the journey.

» *What emotions do you think Mary must have felt when she realized Jesus was not with them?*

III. HIS FAMILY SEARCHED FOR HIM

Like any mother or father would, Mary and Joseph began the search for Jesus.

A frantic search among the travelers was soon underway. From one group to the next, they went looking for their son. Time and again they were told He had not been seen since they left. All they knew to do was return to Jerusalem and see if something had happened to Him there.

A. Jesus Was in the Temple

From one place to another they went. Undoubtedly they went to the places they thought a twelve-year-old boy might go: the marketplace where food was sold, the areas where other children would be playing, perhaps even by the well where others would congregate.

It may have been a little while before they considered looking in the Temple. After all, how many twelve-year-olds want to hang out there? Can you imagine their surprise when they found Him in the Temple expounding the Word of God to the elders gathered there? Luke 2:46–47 states, “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. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.”

» *How willing would you be to listen to a twelve-year-old teach you a Bible study?*

B. Listening and Asking Questions

His parents must have stood there in amazement at what was happening before their eyes. Their son was in deep discussion with these much older men. By the looks on the men's faces, they were in awe of the knowledge and wisdom of this young lad. Take notice though, the Word says Jesus was "hearing them, and asking them questions." He was in no way trying to be a know-it-all. He was willing to humbly listen to the words they were saying and then ask His questions. He understood the power of submitting Himself before trying to share what He had to say.

C. The People Were Amazed at His Understanding

In the process the people were amazed that such a young man could have the wisdom and insight He did. With every question and every response, they simply sat in awe. It would have been obvious to Mary and Joseph that their son was something special.

They understood a little of who He was. They knew a little concerning why He had come into the world. But on this day, something changed in their view of Him. Even though they were still His parents, they began to realize He was not just their little boy anymore. He was becoming the man the angels had told them about all those years before.

IV. MARY QUESTIONED JESUS

Even at that, Mary was still a momma. She was still upset and wanted some answers. "Where in the world have you been?" "Do you have any idea what you have put us through?" "We were not sure if you were dead or alive." "Who do you think you are to just go off and do your own thing without telling me or your dad where you were going?" "You just wait until we get home and we'll see about this."

It is indeed an interesting time of life when young people begin to test the limits of their freedom. Parents can have a difficult time letting them stretch too far. Sometimes we forget Jesus was a normal young man, and Joseph and Mary were normal parents. The tension of such a situation would have been real.

» *Do you think Mary was slightly angry or just concerned? Explain.*

A. "I Must Be about My Father's Business"

All eyes would have turned to Mary and Joseph as they approached Jesus. People would have heard the conversation between the parents and their child. They anxiously waited to see how Jesus would respond. Would He be the typical young person and get a surly attitude, replying with some smart comment? Would He be embarrassed and simply try to walk away?

His response was compelling. In no way was it disrespectful. He looked at His mother and simply said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). He was torn between the two worlds of childhood and adulthood, recognizing this was an adult moment for Him, and He wanted them to realize that.

They did not fully understand what He was saying. In their minds it was not yet time. The day would come, but it would not be today. Even though they recognized

His wisdom and knowledge, they did not fully understand what He was saying. Luke 2:50 tells us, “And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.”

B. Jesus Submitted to His Parents

Amazingly, we read in verse 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.” He willingly left those gathered in the Temple and went home with His parents. He was submissive to the parental authority God had placed Him under while on earth.

What an incredible example! While He had the power to do as He willed, He chose to submit. He could have risen up and demanded they go on their way and let Him stay and do His Father’s work. Instead, He simply did what Mom and Dad asked Him to do. He returned home with them.

» *What is it about Jesus’ spirit and attitude here that stands out?*

C. We Should Submit to Both Earthly and Heavenly Authority

Philippians 2:5–8 speaks to us about true submission: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

The life of Jesus is a perfect pattern of one who submitted to earthly and spiritual authority. Jesus willingly gave up personal desires to submit to the plan of God. That plan required submitting to man and God. Refusing to submit to either one is not total submission.

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Paul wrote, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). In other words, when we submit, we release God to elevate and promote us to places where we can be the most effective for Him.

Our prayer today should be, “Lord, let the mind that was in Christ Jesus be in me today. Let me submit myself to the authority You have placed over me in this life and most of all help me to submit myself to Your spiritual authority. And then Lord, use me for Your glory.”

Be Baptized

FOCUS THOUGHT

To be participants in the New Covenant, we must be baptized in the covenant name of Jesus.

»» FOCUS VERSES

Matthew 3:14–15

But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

»» LESSON TEXT

Matthew 3:13–17

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Acts 2:38

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

Colossians 2:11–12

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

1 Peter 3:21

21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

»» CULTURE CONNECTION

BAPTIZING THE BAPTIZER

Imagine an elementary school art teacher showing Picasso how to paint. Or a high school basketball coach teaching LeBron James how to shoot. Or a weekend worship leader teaching Chris Tomlin how to lead. Now imagine you are the art teacher, the coach, or the worship leader. Now you know how John the Baptist felt. If we measured inadequacy in gallons, John the Baptist felt a Mediterranean Sea full of inadequate.

Yet Jesus came to him one day to be baptized by him. Little did John the Baptist know the reality of his words that Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire. He wanted to hand the divine Picasso the brush, but Jesus put the brush back in John's hand and assured him they were in the right places. Although Jesus had never sinned and never would, He needed to be baptized in order to fulfill all righteousness.

Perhaps God has asked you to do something you feel inadequate to complete. Maybe your mind is having a difficult time reconciling everything your faith is telling you. But you must remember, God's ways are perfect. If He asked you to do something beyond your ability, He will give you the ability to do what He has asked of you. We must simply trust Him and obey His direction.

»» OUTLINE

I. JOHN THE BAPTIST

- A. Preached to the People
- B. "He That Cometh after Me"

II. JESUS CAME TO JOHN TO BE BAPTIZED

- A. John Refused at First
- B. To Fulfill All Righteousness

III. REASONS FOR OUR BAPTISM

- A. New Covenant Entrance through the Covenant Name of Jesus
- B. Identifies Us with Jesus
- C. A Clear Conscience
- D. A Command
- E. For the Forgiveness or Remission of Sins

»» CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

A minister was trying to convince his audience that one did not have to be submerged in water to be baptized. Going to the story of the baptism of Jesus, the minister pointed out that John was baptizing *in* the Jordan River, but this did not necessarily mean they were going *into* the water. The minister stated that the original word for *in* could mean "in close proximity to, around, or nearby." He said the Ethiopian in the desert did not really go *into* the water but just needed to be nearby it so Philip could put some on him.

Afterward a listener walked up to the minister and congratulated him, "Reverend, that message cleared things up for me. You know the story of the disciples being in a bad storm on the Sea of Galilee? Now I know they were close to that storm but not really in it. And it warms my heart to know Paul was only around that old jail but not actually in it. And you know that part about people being cast in Hell? Well, it is nice they will only be nearby the lake of fire but not actually in it. By the way, next Sunday I plan to be in church, meaning I shall be in close proximity to it," he said, pointing to the golf course next door.

I. JOHN THE BAPTIST

A. Preached to the People

Beyond being the emcee for Jesus, John had a message that prepared people for this main event on earth's stage. John called the people to turn in a new direction. If they could not realize they had been doing life wrong, they would not accept the new life Jesus was bringing in. For John, repentance was not an emotion or a moment of prayer, but a changed life accompanied with confession of sins (Matthew 3:6). There are clear marks of such a conversion. John said fruit must appear in people's lives. If not, they would be destroyed in the fire (Matthew 3:8–10).

» *How did your conversion involve both a change of thinking and acknowledging your sins?*

Typical of a rabbi at the time, John baptized his followers. John's baptism signified these followers were stepping out from the mundane religious tradition around them and becoming heartfelt and personal in pursuing God and showing kindness to their fellow man (Luke 3:10–14). John, however, preached baptism for remission or removal of sin. This new message prepared listeners for the complete form of baptism that would come in the name of Jesus with the power of His shed blood to wash away their sins. After Jesus completed His work with the Resurrection and Ascension, John's baptism had to be replaced with baptism in Jesus' name (John 1:29, 36; Acts 4:12; 19:1–6).

B. “He That Cometh after Me”

John knew he had come to prepare the way of God, and God would appear as a man whom John would baptize. In other words, John knew Jesus was “God with us.” John announced the one coming after him was greater than he was because He existed before John. Jesus was born six months after John. But John knew Jesus was more than just a man who had been born.

John was a Holy Ghost preacher. Though John came to introduce water baptism, he also declared that Jesus came to introduce Spirit baptism. Many people today believe Jesus simply came to forgive our sins; however, John had already been preaching about a cleansing of sin. He made it clear that the purpose of Jesus coming was to bring us the Spirit infilling (Matthew 3:11). What John was doing with water, Jesus would introduce with the Spirit—total saturation. Those who reject the message of the gift of the Holy Ghost have rejected the very reason Jesus came; they have denied Christ.

» *What are some passages that show Jesus spoke about the Spirit baptism throughout His ministry?*

John, who did no miracles, had huge crowds coming to hear his clear and challenging message about turning from sin. John was a holiness preacher. It was not enough for people to confess their sins; they must turn from their sinful actions

and pursue righteousness instead. Those pursuing holiness do not live for personal gain, strife, greed, pride, or other fleshly motives. John lived a separated life in a very extreme sense and did not suffer from being “culturally irrelevant” or “judgmental and narrow minded.” John knew difficulty and persecution had a way of separating the uncommitted from the resolute.

John preached about Heaven and Hell. This should not be surprising, but many Jews had come to deny the existence of an afterlife. John warned that those who did not repent and were not baptized would be eternally lost, and he preached a very narrow message that believers should also receive the Spirit that He who was coming after him was bringing.

II. JESUS CAME TO JOHN TO BE BAPTIZED

A. John Refused at First

John refused to baptize people who were not doing it unto repentance. If their hearts were filled with pride and hatred, he instead showed them the error of their ways through his preaching. For truly, baptism will not save those who choose to continue to harbor hatefulness and pride in their hearts, refusing to repent of their sins.

At first John refused to baptize Jesus when he said, “I need to be baptized by You” (Matthew 3:14, NKJV). With Jesus, John refused not because of a “sin disqualifier” but because of a “sinlessness disqualifier.” This Man Christ Jesus did not need washing or cleansing of sin. John knew he was impure in his own eyes once he looked into the eyes of Jesus.

B. To Fulfill All Righteousness

When John resisted baptizing the Lord, Jesus responded by saying this was to fulfill all righteousness. Righteousness should be the motivation behind all we do. It is right for all of us, as Jesus pointed out to His relative John (Matthew 3:15). When a person starts asking, “Do I have to do this to be saved?” that person is demonstrating a glaring lack of a foundational desire to fulfill all that is right in God’s eyes.

Jesus came to take on the sins of the world and usher true believers into a Spirit-filled life. In baptism Jesus identified with sinful humanity. On the cross He took on the sins of the whole world.

John had been told he would see the Spirit descending on the one who would baptize with the Spirit (John 1:33). While water baptism into Jesus Christ effectively removes sins and responds to a person’s faith, it also parallels the Spirit immersion which totally consumes the believer’s life. Spirit baptism and water baptism go together. Biblically, when one occurred, the other followed closely along with it (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:16–17; 10:47; 19:5–6; Romans 6:3–5; Titus 3:5).

» ***Which came first for you, water or Spirit baptism? Explain.***

III. REASONS FOR OUR BAPTISM

The word *baptism* was a new word created around the time of the early English Bible translations. Catering to those who believed baptism to include sprinkling or pouring, the translators transliterated the Greek *baptizo* as “baptize” rather than create a theological war by actually translating the word. The true translation of that word could be “immersion.” John immersed or submerged the people in the Jordan River.

A. New Covenant Entrance through the Covenant Name of Jesus

A covenant is a binding contract between two individuals. Abraham entered into covenant with the Lord. In that covenant the Lord called His name over the believer (Genesis 22:16; Psalm 105:9; Hebrews 6:13). He called His name over Jacob in covenant as well (Genesis 28:13–15). He called His covenant name over the descendants of Israel (Exodus 6:4–8; Deuteronomy 5:2–3). He promised to bring others into His covenant, a covenant for those who would return and others who would come to Him (Isaiah 59:21; Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:4–13; 12:18–24; 13:20).

The prophets declared that a believer was to “call on the name of the Lord.” This did not mean only to vocalize the name, but to enter into covenant with the one whom that name represented. The new believer Saul—who would become better known by his Greek name Paul—was told by the servant of the Lord to rise up and invoke the name of the Lord to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Each recorded baptism in Scripture was done by the minister calling the name of the Lord Jesus Christ over the new inductee (I Corinthians 1:12–13).

B. Identifies Us with Jesus

In baptism, we take on Christ. Those who have been immersed into the Lord Jesus have put on Christ—the old self has been buried and is over with, by faith (Galatians 3:27). In the unseen realm, we are like Jesus. While others might not see a physical change after baptism, the enemy sees the new creature. The believer’s past identity has been hidden (Colossians 3:3). As children of God, we must see ourselves through this new lens. By reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, we overcome the old patterns of sin (Romans 6:3–14).

» *How do you see yourself when you try to look at yourself through God’s eyes?*

C. A Clear Conscience

Baptism washes away the sins of the past. While some make a theological argument that water cannot wash away sins, they have overlooked the act of faith in the finished work of Christ. This is not about the power of water and its ability to rinse away dirt from the body. Baptism is an act of faith in the power of Christ to wash away sin. Water immersion is simply an act of faith that God acknowledges. Baptism brings one to the end of self and gives a fresh start with a clear conscience. Just as

water preserved Noah and his family in the ark, water immersion into Jesus protects the believer from the coming destruction (1 Peter 3:21).

D. A Command

When we have a heart after the Lord, there is no need to twist our arms to make us obey the Lord. A converted heart wants to fulfill all righteousness. Simply because the Scriptures command us to be baptized is reason enough to do it. We do not have to fully understand all the significance and meaning of the act to do it. It is essential that we come with a humble heart, confess and turn from the past life of rebellion against God, and be immersed in water in the name of Jesus.

E. For the Forgiveness or Remission of Sins

Some have tried to say baptism *for* the remission of sins means *because of* our sins having already been washed away. However, baptism was first understood as initiation into a covenant. No one was baptized *because* they had made a covenant but *in order* to make the covenant. The Greek word behind the English word *for* never carries the meaning “because of” in Scripture. It always carries the sense of “into” or “toward” as in the sense of “in order to obtain” something. The end goal of water baptism in Jesus’ name is the cleansing from sin.

The key passage to show this case strongly is Matthew 26:28 where Jesus tells us His blood is for the remission of sins. Jesus did not shed His blood because sins were already washed away. One must be baptized in Jesus’ name for sins to be removed and for the work of the blood to complete its work in their lives.

» *How does it change the importance and meaning of baptism when one realizes it is necessary for washing away sins?*

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Researchers say the human mind develops highways, or well-used paths, in certain patterns of thinking. For example, once you have built the “how to ride a bicycle” path between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, you will always be able to ride a bike. Certain paths may never be built, such as doing algebra, which will make such mental tasks harder to learn later in life. The old life of sin can build superhighways that will be abandoned when we begin to travel the highway of holiness.

This is where new believers actively disassociate themselves from their old identities. Believers must count themselves as truly dead to sin and those old pathways of behavior (Romans 6:11). That four-lane highway of greed or pride gets abandoned when we learn a new direction: generosity and humility. The fist that once tightened and drew back to strike those with whom we disagreed must now reach out a hand to help those who struggle (Romans 6:13). Living the life of holiness and separation from sin is how we act on what the Lord has declared about us. We overcome the sinful ways by the power of His Spirit (Romans 8:13).

Lesson 4

March 22, 2020

It Is Written

FOCUS THOUGHT

Jesus showed us how to resist Satan and overcome temptation by the power of God's Word.

»» FOCUS VERSE

Luke 4:4

And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

»» LESSON TEXT

Matthew 4:4, 7, 10

4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

.....

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

.....

10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Luke 4:1-4

1 And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,

2 Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.

3 And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.

4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

CULTURE CONNECTION

FOMO

One of life's greatest temptations is represented by four letters: FOMO. Known as the fear of missing out, it is one of the highest-octane fuels for temptation. Frans de Waal, a primatologist at Emory University, conducted an experiment on two capuchin monkeys to evaluate the power of FOMO.

In the experiment, de Waal rewarded the monkeys when they completed a simple task. All they had to do was hand a rock to the researcher. When they handed him the rock, he handed them a cucumber. When he gave the same reward to both monkeys for completing the same task, they were content.

But when he gave one monkey a grape while giving the other a cucumber, he saw markedly different results. The monkey who was perfectly content only seconds earlier with earning a cucumber began shrieking, baring his teeth, thrashing in his cage, and pounding on the table to show his anger. He was enraged because he wanted what he did not have.

The enemy of our soul is no kinder. He fills up his five-gallon jar of temptation in hopes of filling us with discontentment, envy, jealousy, covetousness, and resentment—a deadly cocktail of emotions.

In our day FOMO is still a formidable foe. It still lures us to the bar and urges us to open wide and drink up this deadly cocktail. But we are not missing out on anything in this life when we are living the abundant life Jesus gave His life to give us. So fill up on the precious Word of God, and when the tempter tempts you to drink his cocktail, be ready to say, "It is written."

OUTLINE

I. JESUS WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT INTO THE WILDERNESS

- A. Fasted for Forty Days
- B. Tempted by the Devil

II. TURN THESE STONES TO BREAD

- A. Satisfy Your Physical Hunger
- B. It Is Written

III. JUMP FROM THE PINNACLE OF THE TEMPLE

- A. Test God
- B. It Is Written

IV. BOW BEFORE ME

- A. Offer Worship to the God of This World
- B. It Is Written

V. OVERCOMERS BY THE WORD OF GOD

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Temptation goes with the territory. It is inevitable—a part of life none of us can avoid. As long as we are living in the flesh, temptation will come our way. We will never outgrow it or mature beyond it.

I. JESUS WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT INTO THE WILDERNESS

In the Book of Matthew, we receive insight into two of the most significant events in the life of Jesus. These occurred at the beginning of His public ministry. First, Jesus was baptized by John. Then Matthew shared the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

Over the course of a lifetime, we learn there are times when temptation follows closely on the heels of great spiritual experiences. After a great worship service where God has blessed us, even temptations we have long forgotten can resurface. The key is to stay as led of the Spirit on Monday as we were on Sunday.

Interestingly, the Bible tells us Jesus was led of the Spirit into the wilderness for the very purpose of being tempted by the devil. The Spirit directed Him to a place of aloneness and separation. In some ways this can be difficult to understand. Why would God lead someone to a place where He knows the person will be tempted? Would it not be better to keep the person in a spiritual environment where temptation would have little to no power or influence?

No doubt God can do that. But there are times when He will lead us to places in our lives where our spirituality can be tested, proven, and strengthened, so we must stay close to Him and His Word. Many people fall into temptation because they do not practice the necessary spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and reading the Word.

» *Why is it important to spend time on spiritual disciplines?*

A. Fasted for Forty Days

The very word *fasting* may cause some to cringe. We do not like the idea of not eating or drinking anything for any period of time. Our flesh craves to be satisfied with natural things and rebels against being denied. For some, the thought of giving up even one meal for spiritual reasons is a formidable undertaking. Imagine doing what Jesus did and fasting for forty days.

For almost six full weeks He denied His physical appetite. He refused to give in and take nourishment into His body.

It was a time of spiritual warfare. Such a season demanded the spirit be strong and ready for battle. The only way to accomplish this was to deny the flesh and feed the spirit. Prayer and fasting were critical to Jesus overcoming the temptations He would face throughout His ministry. Without preparing the spiritual man, surely He would fall in a weak moment. In His humanity, He may not have known all He was about to encounter. Yet, in His spirit, He was well able (just as we are) to recognize when a spiritual struggle was taking place.

B. Tempted by the Devil

And sure enough, the devil showed up. He did not show up at the Lord's baptism. He waited until Jesus was in the wilderness, denying Himself of the food He would

need for strength in His body. The devil likes to show up in our weak moments. He does not always arrive when things are going well and we are full of the Holy Spirit. No, he tries to choose his moments of temptation carefully. After all, if he knows we are in a strong spiritual season, why would he bother showing up at all? But on the other hand, if he can catch us when we are weak, he thinks he has half the battle already won.

II. TURN THESE STONES TO BREAD

Temptation offers an answer for a need or desire. It presents something that will satisfy the appetites of the flesh. The first thing the devil suggested that Jesus do was to turn the stones in the wilderness into bread that could be eaten.

The challenge was prefaced with the words, “If thou be the Son of God.” This challenged Jesus’ identity. It was an attempt to appeal to the Lord’s pride in order to get Him to prove His identity. The devil knew if he could successfully stir up the ego of Jesus, he might get Jesus to yield to temptation. And Satan did so by not only appealing to Jesus’ ego but also to His hunger. It was kind of a “come on Jesus, You can prove You are the Son of God and also take care of Your hunger at the same time.”

» *What areas of pride in our lives often fall prey to temptation?*

A. Satisfy Your Physical Hunger

We understand that as we fast, the spiritual man is made more sensitive and is strengthened. However, anytime we fast we are going to feel hungry. If we fast long enough, we may feel really hungry. After a certain period of time with no food, a person may start to feel weakness as well. In a natural sense, we can avoid that by satisfying our physical hunger. Eat something. Break the fast.

We could easily assume the devil realized those physical tendencies our bodies experience during a fast. The devil knew Jesus was physically hungry and would naturally want to satisfy that physical hunger. He was planting a thought of satisfying the hunger when he said, “Turn these stones into bread.”

» *Can you discipline your physical hungers to the point where they do not control you? Explain.*

B. It Is Written

The temptation is not what destroys us. Not responding correctly to the temptation is what destroys us. The power of choice belongs to us, just as it did to Jesus. We can look at what Jesus did to find what we need to do.

First, Jesus did not give in, nor did He simply ignore the temptation. Instead, He confronted it head-on. He did not confront it with His own ideas or thoughts. He leaned on the Word of God. He knew the Word was forever settled in Heaven and Earth, and it would not fail Him, especially in times of temptation.

Jesus boldly looked at the devil and said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). By appealing to the Word of God, Jesus was appealing to the highest authority known to humanity. When we use the Word to counter the attacks of the devil in our lives, we literally place God on the battlefield and not just our own flesh. When we do that, we cannot be defeated.

III. JUMP FROM THE PINNACLE OF THE TEMPLE

During times of temptation, the flesh can do some strange things. It can either embrace what God is doing or challenge what God is doing. In the wilderness the devil was tempting Jesus to challenge God.

A. Test God

In our wilderness moments of temptation, it can be easy to question God. We may wonder if God really cares at all. Our minds may run rampant with thoughts that we may not survive this or that God will not save us if we start to fall.

To prove the point, the devil took Jesus to a pinnacle of the Temple and told Him to jump. The devil also whispered in Jesus’ ear that it would be okay; God would send angels to catch Him. During times of temptation, we may become disillusioned and subject to deception. When that occurs, we might do things that sound good at the moment, but we would never have done otherwise. Jesus refused to allow that to happen to Him.

B. It Is Written

Once again Jesus appealed to the Word of God. From the pinnacle He declared to the devil, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matthew 4:7). In other words, He was not going to put God to the test just because He was being tested. He was going to have faith in God and hold to the promises of the Word of God.

It would be easy during times of temptation to try and put God on the spot—to challenge Him to prove He really is God. We must remember that the process of facing temptation strengthens our faith and our walk with God. Foolishly challenging Him will serve no good purpose. Rather, appealing to the Word and standing firm will deliver us in due season.

» *Why is knowing God’s Word and putting it to memory crucial to gaining victory over temptation?*

IV. BOW BEFORE ME

Beyond fleshly temptations are spiritual temptations. Jesus was not immune to this simply because He was God manifested in the flesh. He still had to submit Himself to the Spirit of God when He was tempted by the devil.

A. Offer Worship to the God of This World

The devil was well acquainted with true worship. He knew what it was like to be in the presence of God and offer worship to Him. The reason the devil was removed from his

place in Heaven was partly due to his desire to be worshiped like God was worshiped.

That desire has never left him. When confronting Jesus in the wilderness, the last area of temptation the devil brought was for Jesus to worship him. He mistakenly thought that being in the wilderness would make Jesus feel as if He has been forgotten and forsaken. Since we all have an inherent need to express worship, the devil thought Jesus was prime for a redirection of His worship.

Once again the devil missed it by a million miles. He allowed his desire for worship to overshadow just how committed Jesus was. If Jesus did not succumb to turning stones to bread and jumping off of a pinnacle of the Temple, there was no chance He was going to cease His worship. Jesus knew that if our worship falls to temptation, so will everything else.

B. It Is Written

This time Jesus was much bolder and more straightforward. We get the sense there was fire in His eyes as He got as close to the devil as He could and said, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matthew 4:10).

Amazingly, after this the devil left Jesus, and God sent angels to minister to Jesus. Once the devil realized Jesus’ worship could not be shaken, he knew any further temptation would be futile.

» *Do you make a sincere effort to hide God’s Word in your heart? Explain.*

V. OVERCOMERS BY THE WORD OF GOD

We must never underestimate the value of the Word of God in our lives. God’s Word is our wellspring of hope and encouragement. During times of temptation, His Word is a source of supernatural strength in fighting off the enemy. II Corinthians 10:4 lets us know, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.”

David knew this lesson well. He realized that hiding the Word in his heart would help him not to sin against God (Psalm 119:11). He also knew the Word was a lamp to his feet and a light to his pathway (Psalm 119:105). On the battlefield with Goliath, David boldly declared the power of the name and the Word of the Lord (I Samuel 17). Because he did so, God gave him a great victory.

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

When we commit ourselves to regularly studying and applying the Word of God in our lives, we are fortifying ourselves for our wilderness experiences. We can overcome the temptations of the flesh and spirit by standing and declaring the Word of God to the enemy we face. Whether it be our physical appetites, our spiritual struggles, or being challenged in our worship, the Word of God remains our best defense.

Lesson 5

March 29, 2020

Follow Me

FOCUS THOUGHT

Jesus calls all of those who wish to be His disciples to follow Him.

»» FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 4:19

And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

»» LESSON TEXT

Matthew 4:18–22

18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

Mark 2:13–14

13 And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.

14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphæus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.

Luke 9:23

23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

CULTURE CONNECTION

1,046,593

One of the most well-known athletes in our time is Tom Brady. Since 2000 he has played quarterback for the New England Patriots. Before New England drafted him to join their team, 198 other players were chosen ahead of him in the NFL draft. Every one of those teams and their owners are wondering how many Super Bowl wins they would have if they had drafted Tom Brady.

But people are divided on him. Some people love him; some do not even like him. Some love him enough to want to know where he is at all times. They want to be close to him, maybe to get his autograph or to take a selfie with him. One such fan designed a website that can tell you exactly how many yards you are from Tom Brady at any given time—howfaramifromtombrady.com. Right now, according to the website, I am 1,046,593 yards away from him.

I do not know how accurate the website is. I doubt Tom Brady wears a GPS tracker, but if someone wanted to find him, doubtless this website could be used as a starting place. Some people are not content just to follow him on social media; they want to actually follow him around. But for a fan, that is standard operating procedure. If a fan of something as trivial as sports can become so intent on tracking a mortal man, how much more should followers of Jesus be intent on seeking Him? Jesus is calling all of us to follow Him, but following Him is more than just checking in on Sunday and giving online on Wednesday. Followers want to know where He is. They want to see Him. Look like Him. Talk like Him. Act like Him. Be like Him. Followers want to be near Him, so they can be with Him.

Tom Brady may be 1,046,593 yards away, but Jesus is just one prayer away.

OUTLINE

I. JESUS CALLED HIS DISCIPLES

- A. Follow Me
- B. I Will Make You Fishers of Men

II. ALL WHO WISH TO BE DISCIPLES MUST FOLLOW HIM

- A. Follow the Same Path
- B. Mirror His Actions

III. TO FOLLOW IS TO OBEY

- A. Leave Behind
- B. Take Up the Cross

IV. TO FOLLOW IS TO SERVE

- A. Serve God
- B. Serve Others

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Most couples will say “I do” to that momentous question asked by the pastor before God and gathered witnesses. Young men and women spend months agonizing

over invitation patterns and reception venues. Eventually they will find the limit to their wedding funds and begin to make choices on what to keep and what to abandon.

The couple will sign one piece of paper and say the simple three letter pledge. Life changes as they know it. The loving couple has no idea what the future holds, but they make the commitment of a lifetime. Faithful couples will adjust and grow together through the birth of children, career changes, unemployment, and care for each other during the aging process. Two little words served as the pledge to love until “death do us part.”

Disciples experience even greater long-term consequences when they accept Jesus’ call to follow Him. With joy we accept the offer of remission of sins and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. We discover spiritual giftings and the wonder of new life in Christ. Disciples learn the journey is much more than that initial decision to repent. We learn of the many dimensions of spiritual maturity that await us.

I. JESUS CALLED HIS DISCIPLES

Jesus' first sermon called all humanity to repentance and announced the dawning of a new age (Matthew 4:17). The rest of Jesus' life served to expand, support, and illustrate this foundational thesis statement. That simple sermon will eventually condemn all who chose to find their own way and reject the restoration opportunity provided by the Creator who entered His creation to restore all things to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19).

This new Rabbi possessed greater authority than any other speaker. John the Baptist, the strangely dressed prophet who baptized followers in the Jordan River, proclaimed Jesus to be the Lamb of God (John 1:36).

A. Follow Me

Peter and Andrew knew of Jesus from their time following John the Baptist. (See John 1.) Perhaps they had seen Jesus' baptism, heard the thundering voice, and experienced the wonder of a dove settling on Jesus' shoulder. They could feel the electric current of change in the air. They had no idea how much impact the young Rabbi's simple command, "Follow me," would make on their lives (Matthew 4:19).

Jesus called the brothers to follow Him. He did not call them to a school of philosophy or a body of authoritative texts. Jesus called them to an ever-deepening relationship with Him. They could not know the path obedience would take. They could not know the unmeasurable awe of witnessing a person brought back to life or the avalanche of pain resulting from denying their teacher in just a few years.

Students can master texts by memorizing, debating, and teaching. But a relationship with the Savior can never be mastered. Paul pointed to this reality with the heart cry, "That I may know him" (Philippians 3:10). That knowledge could only come through pursuing Jesus' power and suffering. Rather than simply reading a text, the siblings followed the Incarnate Word.

» ***What is the difference between being invited to have a relationship with Christ and being called to know the Bible?***

B. I Will Make You Fishers of Men

Jesus found Peter and Andrew while they were casting their nets. Jesus chose these active men. The men did not choose Him, as other students chose their teachers. Following Jesus was too uncomfortable and uncertain for some who self-selected to become disciples (Matthew 8:19–20). Jesus did not follow conventions of putting family first (Matthew 8:21–22; 12:46–50). The other brothers, James and John, also left their father and family in the boat as they followed Jesus.

Jesus always chose people from where they were and transitioned them toward full living. He promised only one reward to the brothers; they would become fishers of men. They understood fishing. They knew men. Now they would learn the wisdom, heart, and actions needed to collect people for the Kingdom. Jesus would change

the metaphor for farming folks. Rather than fish for men, they could respond to the Master's commission to go into the harvest. Both farmers and fishermen would draw freely from their places of labor and let the Master do the sorting later (Matthew 13:24–30, 46–50). They could love and care for the field in such a powerful way because they were free from separating good from bad—they made all welcome.

II. ALL WHO WISH TO BE DISCIPLES MUST FOLLOW HIM

Some people find peace by knowing their steps are ordered by the Lord. They trust the Lord will stoop down and move their shoe in the right direction if they start to make the wrong step. This pre-Christ perspective celebrates the gifts of following God's laws. For those who follow Jesus, the principle goes much deeper. Rather than trusting the given law, disciples rely on walking with the Lord.

A. Follow the Same Path

By definition, disciples follow Jesus. They cannot do otherwise. Disciples trust the one who allocates talents and responsibilities (Matthew 25:14–30). They trust the one who distributes spiritual gifts to the body in accordance with His divine will (1 Corinthians 12:11–12).

Following Jesus sets the direction. Nothing describes this daily choice better than the call to repentance. New converts make a 180-degree turn from following their own will to surrendering to Christ. This decision will set the course for subsequent repentance moments. As we die daily, our repentances will become course corrections. Disciples repent of all thoughts, actions, and emotions that are out of sync with the Teacher. Living as a disciple helps identify those areas of misalignment, confess them to fellow travelers, and receive the impact of fervent prayer (James 5:16–20).

Following Jesus sets the pace. The Master calls for constant, daily walking. The race requires patient runners rather than sprinters (Hebrews 12:1). Keeping pace with the Master enables disciples to engage in highly demanding moments of spiritual work as well as seasons of rest. Trusting Him to be the pacesetter helps us to ask the right questions (Acts 1:6–8), pray the right prayers, and use our spiritual gifts at the right time. We do not rush to the finish line; we let Jesus set the pace.

Finally, following Jesus sets the purpose. The early disciples had to learn why they were called. They thought they were in on the ground floor of a new kingdom and should be rewarded as such (Mark 10:35–40). That thinking came from the world around them rather than from following Jesus. They learned their purpose was to make disciples wherever the Lord led them. The purpose was clear. All the disciples had to do was follow.

» *Why do we sometimes need correction in our direction, pace, or purpose?*

B. Mirror His Actions

Mirroring Jesus' actions represents a daunting task for disciples. Nothing should inspire disciples more than Jesus' declaration of those who believe on Him, "Greater works than these shall he do" (John 14:12). Jesus' ministry caused disciples to marvel and understand Jesus had come from the Father (John 5:36). These greater works would come through prayer, following Jesus' commandments, responding to the Spirit, and living by Jesus' love principle (John 14:13–21).

Mirroring Jesus' actions begins with accepting a new identity in Jesus. Like Nathaniel, we may ask, "What good comes from our people?" Nathaniel had no evil or guile in his spirit, but he could not see the capacity of being spiritually productive (John 1:45–51). His city had not produced a great prophet or leader. Why would that change now? Following Jesus reveals the potential He places in us (John 15:16).

Following Jesus develops new thought and action patterns. For example, accomplished musicians will study a new piece of music, learn how the masters have played it, and practice. Practice will begin with a much slower tempo than will be performed in the concert halls. The actions must become engrained in the mind and fingers.

Some disciples struggle with inactivity while others struggle with hyperactivity. Disciples correct their behavior by following the Teacher.

» *What is something specific the Spirit is calling you to do to bring you closer in line with His actions?*

III. TO FOLLOW IS TO OBEY

King Saul is not the only one who thought sacrifice would make up for a lack of obedience. Paul had to inform the Roman church, as well as the church today, that willful disobedience to God's will was incompatible with the life of grace. (See Romans 6.) Grace has broken sin's control and provided forgiveness for occasional sin. But disciples do not follow the Teacher just to experience forgiveness. Grace also empowers us to live as agents of reconciliation in the world. Such a call requires obedience.

"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

A. Leave Behind

Obedience begins with self-denial. This foundational work of grace sets the trajectory for following Jesus like nothing else. The disciples' call required them to leave their nets, boats, parents, and tax table. Jesus taught His followers that they could not have dual citizenship. They must choose which master they will serve (Matthew 6:24).

Leaving is not always easy. Some who considered following Jesus left the journey before they even got started. They were not willing to leave family, property, or dreams that had just come true. Leaving our old lifestyles forces us to continually reject the common sense or collective wisdom of our culture. Even good rules must be put aside for the lifestyle Jesus desires (Matthew 5:38–48). We must indeed put away

the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:16–21) and even our childish understandings of faith (I Corinthians 13:11; Hebrews 5:12–14).

Fortunately, grace does not give up. Jesus went out of His way to invite Peter for a reconciliation conversation (Mark 16:7). He also called Peter to dinner—a place where the disciple could truly discover that his love for Jesus was deep enough to let go of some things, so he could feed Jesus’ sheep (John 21:12–17).

B. Take Up the Cross

Following and obeying Jesus requires taking up a cross. This startling image came on the heels of great revelation. The cross call did not come with the invitation to drop the nets. Personal crosses had to be connected to a deeper revelation of Jesus’ identity. He is both the Christ and the suffering one. He would gracefully lay down His own life. He would inform His followers that they must do the same.

Jesus handled His cross by seeing what was ahead and despising the cross’s shame. Obedience requires disciples to take similar steps. We must “press toward the mark” as a people who have not yet attained our goal. Counting all things as loss enables disciples to look forward without shame or fear (Philippians 3:13–15).

Jesus trusted the Father’s will. He knew the Spirit would quicken Him from the grave after three days. Since He knew He would live again, momentary death held no shameful loss or lasting stench of decay.

IV. TO FOLLOW IS TO SERVE

To follow Jesus is to serve like Jesus. God’s redemptive plan unfolded by sending a suffering servant rather than a messianic warrior. By serving, Jesus fulfilled the human mandate to tend to God’s creation. Jesus served those around Him, whether it was a child in need or disciples with dirty feet. Following Jesus always requires the posture of a servant to God and to others.

A. Serve God

God created people with needs for secure living, belonging, and purpose. The Garden of Eden provided the perfect place for humanity to flourish. Then sin broke everything. No longer could people joyfully live in service of the Creator without fear. Following Jesus opened the door to freely serve and flourish again. Going through the door of serving God and others requires faith and ongoing spiritual maturity.

Salvation represents so much more than a ticket to eternal life. Jesus told His followers that new power would come with the Holy Spirit. Followers receive spiritual giftings as individual members of the body and as the body as a whole. (See I Corinthians 12; Romans 12.) Serving God starts by recognizing spiritual giftings.

Stewards freely serve by holding their master’s goods in trust. They seek to live worthy of the master’s trust. Stewards have only one evaluation standard: faithfulness (I Corinthians 4:2). Living in the shadow of the Cross removes competition and the pressure to succeed or prove self-worth. Stewards know they are lavishly loved by God and seek His pleasure alone. Other goals fall short of a follower’s potential.

Loving and serving God becomes visible as we live out the second of the great commandments—loving others as we love ourselves.

» *How can we live out the second of the great commandments?*

B. Serve Others

Scripture boldly recounts the lives of men and women of faith. Hebrews 11 reveals the catalog of faithful people as well as chief failures. All manner of vices spring from biographical sketches of those listed. The New Testament tells a similar story. Paul called himself chief among sinners. Peter denied his Master and could have easily lost the Kingdom keys. By being restored to God through Christ, disciples reorient their lives from self-centeredness to living on behalf of others.

Peter's life provides wonderful snapshots to grasp the magnitude of disciple transformation. Peter went fishing in self-pity. When the Lord did not live up to Peter's expectations, Peter shamefully denied his friend. Yet Jesus called Peter again. This recall centered on loving Jesus by serving the Shepherd's sheep. Peter did not get sheep of his own; he would only find purpose and value by using his gifts to bless other people.

Peter wanted to know if John would have to pay the same stewardship price (John 21:21). He had not yet learned the pleasure that comes from giving up personal prerogatives to follow Christ (1 Peter 2:16–25). By the end of Peter's life, he had a more mature perspective. He encouraged fellow elders to fulfill their stewardship responsibilities for the right reasons. If they would reject all forms of pride and serve others with the humble mind of Christ, they would gain the opportunity to cast all anxiety on their Lord (1 Peter 5:1–7).

» *How does serving others impact our anxiety?*

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Disciples serve in many ways. Jesus included caring for children, visiting the sick and those in prison, giving water to the thirsty, and casting out demons. James called the church to go beyond well wishes of “be warmed and filled” and actually do something about the need. James and Paul both believed the servant role included hearing each other's confession and praying (James 5:16–18) as part of bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:1–2). Tabitha shared the love of God by making garments (Acts 9:35–36).

All followers have gifts to share. They love the one who called them so much that they follow His example. Following Jesus prepares disciples to serve others.

The Disciples' Prayer

FOCUS THOUGHT

It is important for us to pray after the manner Jesus taught His disciples to pray.

»» FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 6:9

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

»» LESSON TEXT

Matthew 6:5–15

5 And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Luke 18:1

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.

CULTURE CONNECTION

ECHO

Jesus taught us to pray. Paul admonished us to pray. Our pastors remind us to pray. But some days we are busy, forgetful, lazy, or carnal. Some days we just do not pray. We want to pray, we know we need to pray, but we do not always pray. But when someone tells us their woes, we remember the power of prayer. “I’ll pray for you.” We say it, we mean it, but we do not always do it. Why? Most of the time, it is because we forget.

Enter *Echo Prayer*, an app for iPhone and Android designed to help people keep track of those who need prayer. It is designed to keep our prayer list for us and even remind us to pray. You can set a reminder to pray at a certain time of the day or for a certain prayer request. And when God answers your prayer, click “answered,” dance a dance of joy, and keep praying for the rest of the people on your list.

Given the sincerity of prayer, let us hope we can mature beyond needing a phone alarm to call us to prayer, but in some way we must discipline ourselves to keep our promise to pray for people who ask for our prayers. And God will keep His promise when He tells us He is listening to us. Our prayers plus God’s power will produce answered prayers.

OUTLINE

I. WHEN YOU PRAY

- A. Not as the Hypocrites
- B. Pray in Secret
- C. Not Vain Repetition

II. AFTER THIS MANNER

- A. Praise
- B. Pronounce
- C. Petition
- D. Penitence
- E. Proclaim

III. ALWAYS TO PRAY AND NOT TO FAINT

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

When the doctor diagnosed her with leukemia, Nona Freeman soon learned this would be the end of her work on the mission field. She fumed about having only been there three years and already being too ill to do anything more. She was too embarrassed to ask friends to pray. However, her husband got word to one prayer warrior without Nona knowing.

For two weeks Nona struggled in such pain and weakness that she could not pray for herself. One night she had given up hope of living, but the Lord gave her a dream. She saw a man kneeling to pray, drew nearer to hear him, and recognized her praying friend. In her dream she heard him rebuke that disease, and instantly she felt something like an electric shock shoot through her body. Immediately she was awake with clarity and comfort—no more pain. She could not help but tell many of what the Lord did for her. She said, “I now know how Hezekiah the king must have felt when the sentence of death was given him by the prophet, followed by God’s graciously adding years to his life when he prayed” (Nona Freeman, *Bug and Nona on the Go*).

I. WHEN YOU PRAY

Jesus taught His disciples the new way of life in the Kingdom. He did not see prayer as an option or an addition to a disciple's life, but a norm. Jesus declared, "When you pray," as a clear marker that this activity is to be typical of a disciple, not exceptional. There is no such thing as a praying disciple—those who do not pray are not disciples.

Since this exercise would be core to a believer's identity, Jesus cleared up the confusion caused by religious behaviors and defined what prayer should be. To institutionalized religion, prayer is a routine, an obligation, and an empty ritual intended to make good things happen. For Jesus, prayer was much more.

» *Do you view prayer as an event or lifestyle? Why?*

A. Not as the Hypocrites

For some, prayer was a mask or an act—hence Jesus called them "hypocrites," meaning "actors." They put on a front they wanted others to see. Even today people know they look good to other Christians if they pray. Perhaps their prayer over their meal is sometimes for self-glory rather than to give God thanks. Even in a Pentecostal church, people can affect the right posture in prayer, they can weep, or they can lift their hands and shout "hallelujah!" with the intent of looking good to others. One must be careful not to slip into "a vague devotional mood" as C. S. Lewis described. Prayer must be much more than duty or display.

B. Pray in Secret

Rather than prayer being a presentation or a public demonstration, prayer is to be a private strategy. Jesus tells us to be like a city on a hill that all can see, but we are not to do our spiritual works in public. What the world sees of us in public will be fueled by the prayer we do in private. Those who show off with fancy prayers and projected religious behavior are hollow on the inside and powerless in private. Those who connect to their source of power in the unseen areas will have evidence of that in public.

C. Not Vain Repetition

Sadly, too many people get into a rut of prayer that does nothing. The religious institution values such rituals and memorized prayer because it is measurable. However, prayer is a conversation. Conversations have no perfect formula or measurable data like a lecture or recitation. Conversations are as fluid and flexible as the persons involved. Repeating words over and over does not make a conversation. A quality conversation connects hearts. When one or both speakers are moved, that is effective conversation.

In keeping with what the Lord Jesus taught about prayer, His earthly brother helped us understand more when he wrote, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous

man availeth much” (James 5:16). Effective prayer does something. Prayer is not a destination, but a journey.

» *What great things have you seen occur from your prayers?*

II. AFTER THIS MANNER

Jesus intended His disciples to pray with certain parameters. This “pattern prayer” for disciples was not to be repeated word-for-word with empty, rote memorization. That would go against what Jesus taught. This prayer structure shows a disciple what aspects are included in a healthy conversation with Jesus.

The most overlooked word in the prayer is the first: “Our.” Prayer should be for others and not just self. It should bring unity and not division. Even though a disciple prays in a private place, prayer pulls the body together through one Spirit.

A. Praise

Too often a prayer begins with a problem as its focus rather than the source of our answers. Effective prayer begins with uplifting the Lord Himself and recognizing the greatness of the one to whom we pray. By saying “Father”—which Jesus would have spoken in the Aramaic, *Abba*, essentially meaning “Daddy”—Jesus shows us how personally and confidently we can approach the Lord in prayer.

Approaching the Lord respectfully makes us pause and temper our approach to Him. It is too easy to not be interested in Him and just be interested in getting something for self. Witchcraft and paganism are about what the powers do for the person. Other religions are about serving “me.” The faith of Jesus is first about what we do to serve the Master of the universe.

» *Does your prayer time tend to begin with problem or praise?*

B. Pronounce

Next, before we ask for what we want in prayer, there is another important stopping point of prayer. Non-disciplined prayers often include people asserting their will on God: “Lord, I need You to do this. Father, make this happen for me. God, I want this and this and this.” By beginning with His will, our requests will come in the right spirit. By getting the right perspective in prayer, we may find we do not need to ask for some things at all.

C. Petition

As our priority, we pray the kingdom of God into existence. All around us exist the kingdoms of the flesh (self-rule), the human system, and Satanic forces. These kingdoms operate on three levels for those without Christ. First, the flesh is a kingdom of one—a person inside his or her own skin, ruled by personal desires, making choices against God’s plan. Second, the forces of this world intimidate and pressure even good people to do those things that are against God’s desire for

humanity. Often the personal drive of a human finds a place for expression in this network of selfishness, which encourages sin and rebellion against God. Third, the devil's kingdom works behind the scenes, literally, taking advantage of people who are living in sin. Satan and his forces drive people to do things they cannot explain and forever regret.

A child of God is strategically placed to expand the kingdom of light. By prayer we fight the forces of Hell and drive back the dark plot on earth's inhabitants. In the home, street, neighborhood, city, region, and country, the disciple prays God's kingdom into existence until it becomes the mountain that fills the whole earth. Human strength cannot build this empire—only the King and His forces can expand God's kingdom. Believers know the strengths of the kingdom of darkness in their area: abuse, alcoholism, doctrines of demons, and so on. Pray specifically to oust those evil elements of this present world and pray the solution that the kingdom of God will bring: gentleness, clear minds, apostles' doctrine, and so on.

» *What features of the kingdoms of this world should you pray against in your area?*

As humble servants we show up in the presence of the King and get our orders. This means a disciple consistently lays down personal desires and puts the Father's will in that place. Knowing what God's will is makes it easier for us to pray. Pray for others that the will of God be done in their lives: healing, financial supply, joy, and much more.

The Lord wants to hear our requests. We come to Him not to make demands of our wants and wishes, but to ask for the things we need. The promise of provision is now, the promise of prosperity and abundance is in the life to come. While the Lord often blesses His people with much more than necessary, we can stand in strong faith knowing He will give us everything we need—for this we can ask confidently.

This is not a weekly prayer. Jesus expects His followers to come in prayer daily. This relationship and conversation should grow day by day and not become a dead ritual.

Jesus is the Bread of Life. We must feast on Him to stay alive spiritually. This occurs in prayer and digging into Scripture. By prayer, we feast on Him each day.

D. Penitence

As disciples we cannot stay in harmony with the Lord and be in disharmony with others. We cannot expect God to do for us what we will not do for others. Unforgiveness is an open door for the devil and a closed door for Jesus. In case the disciples missed the importance of this element of the prayer, Jesus quickly taught on this principle after He finished the prayer.

The Lord does not lead anyone into temptation. By praying this we remind ourselves that temptation is never God's idea. By praying this daily, we are reminded that we will be tempted and might fall if we are not watchful. This prayer helps us stay alert to the strength we have in the one from above who holds us up from total devastation.

We should never think our victory is our own.

Disciples know their own weaknesses and the temptations that are a struggle. Therefore, we pray this prayer for ourselves as well as for others. We know our “no” zones, which trigger other things in our lives. As we pray for others (“lead us not”), we pray for each person’s different areas of struggle. This is not a blanket prayer or a magic bullet. It is a pattern for us to pray specific prayers. Jesus exemplified this aspect of the prayer when He prayed for Simon that though Satan would try to sift Simon out of the Kingdom, Simon would be converted and help strengthen the others.

Disciples take action in prayer against the enemy of their children, friends, and families. We stand up boldly in prayer for new believers who are growing in their faith. No Bible study or worship song packs the power of what an hour in prayer can do to push back the onslaught of the enemy against vulnerable new believers. We call out the strongman by name and tell him the edict from Heaven: he has no place in these lives and must let them go.

E. Proclaim

While our prayer time may glance toward what the devil and his kingdom are doing, we never finish focused on what is wrong. We focus on the King and His kingdom of righteousness. We exalt the Lord and exult in His presence: “Lord, it is Your kingdom. You are the King of my life. Your kingdom grows until it fills all the earth.”

A child of God stands on the winning side. We acknowledge that as we step away from our season of focused prayer. Recognizing that none of these things are done by one’s own power, we acknowledge the Giver of all good things: “It is Your power, Lord. You have done all these things. You have answered my prayer for healing. You have delivered my son-in-law from his addiction. You have done all things well.”

Finally, we must make sure to do prayer the same as we do every other aspect of life: do it for the glory of God. Every prayer God answers and every time He intervenes in human affairs, His brightness and His glory are increased.

III. ALWAYS TO PRAY AND NOT TO FAINT

Prayer is not an activity for weak or weary people. It takes guts and determination to pray. However, we need not be physically powerful. Jesus explained that even a little elderly woman could get what she wanted by petitioning continually. Her prayers were not in hope that the judge loved her or cared about her situation; her petitions persisted because she knew the law was in her favor. We come to the Lord as those who have nothing of any value to offer Him, but we can come boldly because we know He cares about us.

At times it becomes easy to complain more than we pray. We talk troubles rather than declare triumph. Effective prayer persists because of what the Lord has promised. Some promises and prophecies are not received because someone did not endure in prayer until the answer came.

One of the best illustrations of persistent prayer is Jesus on the eve of His death. His flesh cringed at the thought of dying. Though He had prepared for this moment long before and confidently announced it to His disciples, He went to the garden to pray in private. Jesus began by acknowledging His right to ask based on relationship: “Father.” Never stepping out of His servant role, Jesus prayed as a man to God, much as we do, surrendering His human will or desire for survival to the great will or divine design. He patterned for us how to petition in our times of need.

The purpose of His prayer and that of His disciples around Him in the garden was not to enter into temptation. They slept while He persisted in prayer. Jesus prayed for an hour and then woke His disciples to get them praying with Him and for their own sakes. So consumed by the dire situation, Jesus returned to a lonely place of prayer. The pressure was too much for His flesh to handle, and His pores broke out in bloody sweat as tiny vessels ruptured beneath the skin. He returned to wake the men and urge them to pray again. He returned to prayer once more, praying the same thing. He persisted until He conquered the temptation.

Finally, the answer came. Jesus got what He requested: a submitted will. His fears were gone. He awoke the disciples after His three-hour prayer vigil. The enemy was upon Him. The temptation to run was before Him, but He did not flinch. He had steeled Himself against the fear so much that when Simon Peter tried to fight back, our Lord turned to Him and spoke as if He had never had a struggle with the idea of this tortuous death before Him: “Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?” (John 18:11, NKJV).

» *What does it mean to “always pray and not faint”?*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

This model prayer of Jesus is not our only New Testament example of how to pray. Prayers of Paul in his letters show the same elements (Ephesians 1:15–23; 3:14–21; Philippians 1:3–11; Colossians 1:3–22). Like the Lord’s “Our Father which art in heaven,” Paul began his prayers with thanks to the Father, acknowledging His role in their lives. The apostle prayed that the eyes of their understanding would be opened to God’s plan. The most remarkable aspect of each of these prayers is how praying for others would lead the beloved apostle to end by elevating Jesus in such a fashion that much of our formative doctrine is based on his prayer endings.

Lesson 7

April 12, 2020

Hosanna!

FOCUS THOUGHT

Because Jesus is our King, we should honor Him with worship and praise.

»» FOCUS VERSE

Mark 11:9

And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

»» LESSON TEXT

Zechariah 9:9

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Mark 11:1–11

1 And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples,

2 And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him.

3 And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.

4 And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him.

5 And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt?

6 And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go.

7 And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him.

8 And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way.

9 And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord:

10 Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.

11 And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.

Luke 19:39–40

39 And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.

40 And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

»» CULTURE CONNECTION

FLASH MOB

Imagine you are seated at Chick-fil-A with your classic chicken sandwich and mountain of waffle fries laid out in front of you. You only have thirty-five minutes left on your lunch break before you need to head back to the office to finish up the day. Just as you are about to pray over your lunch, sixty people around you stand up, nod to each other, and begin to sing.

Should you run and hide or stand and sing? You did not plan for a choir concert, but you are in the middle of one, in the middle of a flash mob. A flash mob is a phenomenon where a group of people coordinate a time and place to sing together. A group of sixty Christians from several churches planned a flash mob on July 7, 2018, at a Chick-fil-A in Nashville, Tennessee. One of the beauties of worship is we can worship Jesus anywhere, at any time.

We do not have to clock out on worship when the pastor dismisses church on Sunday. We can worship Jesus anywhere, at any time. It does not have to be in a flash mob, but if it is, I hope your waffle fries do not get cold.

»» OUTLINE

I. JESUS WAS PROPHESED TO BE THE COMING KING

- A. Just
- B. Having Salvation
- C. Humble

II. TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

- A. Riding on a Colt
- B. Coats and Palm Branches
- C. The Meaning of Hosanna

III. REBUKE BY NON-WORSHIPERS

- A. Quiet the Crowd
- B. If These Hold Their Peace

IV. JESUS IS OUR KING

- A. Hosanna! He Has Saved Us!
- B. Worship and Praise

»» CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

When we read the story of Creation, especially about the forming of human beings, we realize we were created to be worshipers of God. He uniquely designed us with a desire to know Him and to worship Him. With all the ability God gave to humankind, nothing is greater than our ability to lift our hearts, our voices, and our hands in praise to our Creator.

However, God also designed us to be able to exercise the power of choice. Just because we were all created to worship does not mean everyone will worship. It is a personal decision each individual must make. For many, this is one of the hardest decisions. There is a battle raging within concerning who will sit on the throne of our lives.

For those who know Him as both Savior and King, worship is no struggle at all. Worship is the expression of a heart of gratitude from those who have been redeemed. It is how we recognize who He really is to us. Worship is the connecting force in our relationship with God.

I. JESUS WAS PROPHESIED TO BE THE COMING KING

To a people who had been oppressed and enslaved, the promise of a King who would redeem them would have been reason to rejoice. The prophet Zechariah told the Israelites to rejoice greatly and to shout. In other words, emotional worship was the order of the day. Their Deliverer was coming, and they would leave bondage forever.

A. Just

The first thing the prophet Zechariah pointed out about the Messiah was “He is just,” meaning He is perfect and morally righteous (Zechariah 9:9). There would be no sin found in Him. Further, He would fulfill the law of God completely.

To be perfect He would have to be in right relationship with God and man. We know He was in a right relationship with God because He submitted to the will of the Father. We know He was in right relationship with man because He was compassionate, generous, and merciful.

B. Having Salvation

The people did not need the blessing of material things. They were not looking for better homes or better jobs. This was not about getting an education or saving for retirement. While none of those things are bad in and of themselves, those were not the things for which Israel was looking. No doubt the days spent in oppression had made them long for such things, but there was something deep in their hearts they wanted even more. They were looking for salvation.

However, their idea of salvation and God’s idea of salvation were different. They longed for salvation from their enemies, while the ultimate plan of God would be the salvation of their souls. That is exactly what Zechariah told them their King would bring to them. He would indeed bless them materially, but even more so, He would bless them spiritually. As they sought Him, He would reward them.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” When we truly express our worship to God for bringing us salvation, and we seek His kingdom above anything else, He blesses us beyond measure.

» *What is there in your life that may be coming between you and seeking first the kingdom of God?*

C. Humble

Most people would expect a king to arrive, well, like a king. He would come in pomp and circumstance. His bearing would be regal, he would be dressed in the finest of clothing, and he would wear the most expensive crown. People would

shower him with applause and kind words. There would be important meetings and special accommodations made for a king.

But not this King. No, He would not be attended by servants and have all the finery of other kings. He would not walk with a strut and a demeanor that demanded attention. His transportation would not be a fine stallion that would be the envy of any horseman. Not at all. Rather, this King would arrive and live humbly. In fact, Zechariah said He would be lowly. Think about that for a moment. What if you were in Israel and heard that? I mean, what kind of a king arrives lowly? How could one who has such a humble demeanor ever be a victorious King? Yet the prophet declared that their King would be lowly.

» *What other passages of Scripture speak to you about the humility of Jesus?*

II. TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

A. Riding on a Colt

True to the prophecy, Mark 11:1–7 tells how a young colt came to be the transportation for the King. Jesus commanded His disciples to go to a nearby village where they would find a young, unbroken colt. They were to untie the colt and bring it back to Jesus. If anyone stopped them and asked what they were doing, they were to simply tell them the Lord needed the colt. This had to be a God thing because if someone did that today, that person would be charged with being a horse thief.

The disciples had to be wondering why Jesus would want to ride into Jerusalem on a colt. It may have made little sense to them. But the colt symbolized peace, and Jesus was bringing peace. The word peace in the Greek means “to set at one again.” It meant to take that which was broken and put it back together. Jesus was coming as a King in order to put man and God back together.

The disciples brought the young colt to where Jesus was. As they saw Him preparing to ride the colt, they put their garments on the back of the colt where Jesus would sit. They were doing their best to make Him comfortable.

» *Do you see the colt symbolizing anything else in this passage? Explain.*

B. Coats and Palm Branches

At that time approximately two million people had gathered in the city for the Feast of the Passover. A great multitude of these people lined the streets where Jesus was making His triumphal entry. There would have been citizens of Jerusalem and others from nearby places like Bethany and Bethphage. Their purpose was to be there for Passover, but that quickly changed when they heard Jesus was entering the city.

Their actions on that day showed how they viewed Him. The people began to take off their outer coats and spread them in front of Him. They also cut off tree branches and laid them down before Him. This was a common practice performed for kings of that day.

C. The Meaning of Hosanna

Mark 11:9–10 gives us some great insight when it says, “And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.”

By their proclaiming of “Hosanna in the highest,” they were elevating Him far above any earthly king. The word *hosanna* actually has a two-fold meaning. The first meaning is “save us.”

What words could have been more fitting on that day? How significant that this was during Passover, the celebration of God saving the firstborn of Israel prior to their exodus from Egypt. For centuries the Jewish people had been looking for their Messiah. Their hearts’ longing was for salvation. By using the word *hosanna*, they were saying He was not only their King—He was also their Messiah.

The secondary meaning of *hosanna* is as an expression of joy and celebration. What better reason to feel joy and to celebrate than to know the King of kings has arrived. He may have arrived lowly, but He held all power in His hands. He may have ridden on a colt that day, but there will come a day, according to Revelation 19:11, when He will ride on a white horse of victory.

» *What are some contrasts between how those crying “Hosanna” were worshipping and how some worship today?*

III. REBUKE BY NON-WORSHIPERS

A. Quiet the Crowd

It is interesting that the ones who were asking Jesus to silence the worship of His followers were the religious elite of the day. They had all the traditions and practices of religion down to perfection. They just simply did not like nor accept heartfelt, emotional worship.

Since they did not enjoy it, they did not want anyone else to enjoy it either. They quickly instructed Jesus to rebuke His disciples—to be quiet, zip their lips, put a stopper in it, calm down, quit getting excited. To the Pharisees, worship should be dignified and proper. They did not see the need for exuberance and emotion in the name of worship.

B. If These Hold Their Peace

Instead of silencing the worshipers, Jesus warned the Pharisees about the dangers of trying to stop heartfelt worship. He also wanted them to understand how much God valued worship. By doing this, Jesus was actually condemning their half-hearted, practiced-to-perfection, weak form of worship.

His words to them stopped them in their tracks. They had never heard such a thing before. Jesus boldly declared, “If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40).

God will be praised. And if men hold their peace, then nature will cry out in worship.

IV. JESUS IS OUR KING

Revelation 17:14 says, "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." This passage beautifully shows us who our King is. He is victorious over death, Hell, and the grave. He will conquer Satan at the end of time and bind him forever.

A. Hosanna! He Has Saved Us!

If ever the world needed a Savior, it is today. While we may be born again and preparing to go to Heaven, our cry ought to be, "Hosanna! Come and save us!" Our hearts should be homesick for Heaven, causing us to continually pray, "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

For thousands of years of human history, people have looked for a Savior. Since the Day of Pentecost, the church has longed for their Savior to take them out of this world. We know He has saved us; now we are waiting for that day when He will call His bride home forever.

B. Worship and Praise

While we wait with anticipation for that day, we must maintain until He comes (Luke 19:13). During the time of waiting, our worship must be continual. We need to keep fresh fire on the altar of our lives through our praise to Him.

We each have a choice. God will not make anyone worship Him. He will not pressure us to do what we were created to do. The decision is totally in our hands. But we must never forget that if we hold our peace, all of creation still sings their song to Him. All of nature lifts itself in worship to Almighty God.

God responds to our worship. As we lift our hands and our voices to Him, He takes note. We are never more at one with God than when we are fulfilling our God-given purpose by being true worshipers.

»»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Having a sense of purpose is one of the greatest needs any person has. Fulfilling that purpose is one of the greatest accomplishments any person can achieve. We tend to pursue what we are passionate about and call it "fulfilling our purpose." But what would happen if we began pursuing what God is passionate about? What would happen if we began to fulfill our two-fold God-given purpose of 1) being a worshiper and 2) leading others to be worshipers? Perhaps God would begin to bless our lives in ways we cannot even imagine. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

Lesson 8

April 19, 2020

The House on the Rock

FOCUS THOUGHT

Just like the wise man, we must build our lives upon the Rock.

»» FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 7:24

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.

»» LESSON TEXT

Matthew 7:24–27

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

Ephesians 2:19–22

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.

Colossians 1:23

23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister.

CULTURE CONNECTION

OCEANFRONT VIEW

One drive to the beach is all you need to see houses worth millions of dollars because of their million-dollar-views. Some houses are beautiful. Some need a little work. But they are the envy of most inland homeowners because of where they are built. Beachfront homeowners can wake up in the morning, draw back the drapes, and watch dolphins playing in the waves. Or they can watch the sun as it makes its climb into the eastern sky over the sea signaling a new dawn.

Their backyard is the ocean. Those houses are perfect for calm days with just enough sunshine to stay warm and just enough breeze to stay cool. But nobody wants to be near them when a hurricane is swirling. In 2004, four hurricanes came to visit the state of Florida: Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. Those houses with such enviable views of the Atlantic or the Gulf of Mexico were reduced to rubble by the time the four storms left town. They were built, not on solid, stable rock, but on shifting, unstable sand.

The view from the solid, stable rock may not be as breathtaking as the oceanfront view, but when the wind howls and the rains pound, you will be grateful you built your house on a firm foundation. Storms do not care whose last name is on the mailbox or how many zeros are on your paycheck. Heed the wisdom of Jesus. While the sun is shining, build your house for the days when it is not. Build your house on a rock.

OUTLINE

I. BUILDING A HOUSE

- A. Blueprints
- B. Strong Foundation

II. FOOLISH MAN

- A. Foundation of Sand
- B. Storm Destroyed His House

III. WISE MAN

- A. Foundation on Rock
- B. House Survived the Storm

IV. SURE FOUNDATION

- A. Gospel of Jesus Christ
- B. God's Word

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Jesus likened us, in our relationship with Him, to one who builds a house. A wise builder builds on a firm foundation. If we choose to base our foundational belief system on the Word of God, our faith will be able to withstand the rains, floods, and winds that batter against us.

I. BUILDING A HOUSE

The prospects of moving into a home where everything is new is exhilarating. However, a lot of work goes into building a new construction “from the ground up.” This adage is ever so true when building a house. It starts with the ground. Proverbs 24:27 gives wise advice to the builder concerning the first work: “Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.” In other words, make sure things are done in order. Start with the ground. Make sure the earth beneath the foundation is solid.

» *What do you think Proverbs 24:27 means by “make it fit for thyself in the field”?*

A. Blueprints

When building a house, the first things set into motion are designing the plans and drawing the blueprints. The blueprints reveal every aspect of the completed construction—what the house is going to look like down to the finest detail. Blueprints are meant to guide the contractors so there is no question where everything is to be located. Blueprints are the detailed plan of the finished product.

God has given us blueprints for our spiritual houses. His Word is the blueprint and has all we need to make sure everything is included in our houses. Not only does His Word guide us with the plan for salvation, but it gives directions on how to live a victorious life, resist sin, and overcome temptation.

A successful journey through life begins with God’s plan. We must build our spiritual houses on Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word. Jesus pointed to Himself as the source when He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

Our relationship with God begins when we believe in Jesus and surrender our lives to Him. Surrender leads to obedience as we follow His plan. The basic plan starts with repentance. Repentance is turning from the old path, making an about-face, and walking in God’s way. Matthew wrote, “Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). The disciples understood and followed the example of Jesus: “They went out, and preached that men should repent” (Mark 6:12).

The apostles followed the blueprint set forth by Jesus, even after His ascension. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). (See also Matthew 9:13; Luke 15:10; 24:47; II Corinthians 7:10; II Peter 3:9.)

After repenting of our sins, we begin to desire more of His presence in our lives. Through obedience to His Word, we are then baptized in Jesus’ name, just as the blueprint specified. Baptism was instructed by Jesus, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). As the church was established in Acts, Peter shared the plan of salvation with the crowd that gathered after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the upper room.

Feeling the conviction of sins, they asked what they should do. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). The new believers were all baptized in water in the name of Jesus. The proper response to the message of Jesus was always the same, “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). Baptism was essential for all those who believed. (See also Acts 8:12, 14–16; 10:47–48; Romans 6:3–4; Ephesians 4:5.)

When we follow the blueprint precisely and take on the name of Jesus in baptism, we are promised the gift of the Holy Ghost. The gift of the Spirit comes through our faith in Christ Jesus and obedience to His Word. There are times when this precious gift is given before baptism. (See Acts 10:47–48.) Repentance and baptism are not works to earn the Holy Spirit. We cannot earn this gift. These are simply responses of obedience and expressions of our faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus paid the price by giving His life on the cross, shedding His blood as the atonement for all our sins (1 John 2:2). All we have to do is surrender ourselves to God and allow His Spirit to move into our hearts. As this happens, we will begin speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives us utterance. (See Acts 2:38.) In the New Testament church, everyone who received the Holy Ghost spoke with tongues. (See Acts 2:3–4; 10:44–46; 19:6.) The blueprint included that very important aspect of the Holy Ghost, so we would have no question what it looks and sounds like to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

B. Strong Foundation

As we read the Word of God, we discover what He desires for our lives. Our obedience to the Word of God provides a solid foundation upon which to build our faith. Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Not only are we wise to obey Christ’s commandments, but we show our love for Him when we do so. Just as the wise man built his house upon the rock, building our faith on the Word of God is the only secure foundation. This strong rock gives us confidence that no matter what comes our way, we will be safe because our foundation is strong, grounded, and secure in truth.

II. FOOLISH MAN

Jesus referred to the man who built his house on sand as being the foolish man. It is common knowledge that sand does not provide a stable foundation for construction. For anyone to attempt to build a foundation on sand certainly marks such a person as lacking in wisdom.

» ***What do you think the Bible is referring to when it calls a foundation “sand”?***

A. Foundation of Sand

Sand is an unstable platform for a foundation. It is porous and shifts when saturated by water. A storm could easily compromise the strength of a sand-supported foundation. We can liken this to those who may know what the Bible teaches and yet disregard parts of it as unnecessary for their salvation. Or it could be those who choose what verses to believe and obey over other verses that, in their opinion, are not Heaven or Hell issues. When we dissect the Word and begin to value one part above another, we are in danger of weakening the foundation and threatening the structure.

B. Storm Destroyed His House

The foolish man lost everything because he chose the wrong foundation. When the storm began to pour rain on his house, the foundation began to erode. When the winds began to blow, the house had no stable structure to keep it together and began to weaken and fall apart.

The Bible talks about how other doctrines not founded in truth will toss us “to and fro.” These are called winds of doctrine. Paul admonished believers, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14). If we have the truth firmly established in our hearts, these other doctrines will have no impact on our lives. The teaching set forth by Jesus Christ and established by the apostles in the New Testament is the only true doctrine. Paul admonished Timothy to make sure others did not teach another doctrine: “That thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (I Timothy 1:3). False doctrine denigrates the purity of God’s Word. It adds things that were not intended and leaves out important commandments that were intentionally placed there. It appears the foolish man built his house on false doctrine, which did not withstand the onslaught of opposition.

III. WISE MAN

The man who built his house on the rock is acclaimed for his wisdom. He anticipated the worst that could happen, and then he planned accordingly. When we begin this spiritual journey with the Lord, we should look down the road and prepare for the worst that could happen. Then we should do all we can to build into our relationship that which will help us survive. If we anticipate sickness and prepare our faith to lean on God and His providence, the disease will not destroy our faith. Even if we experience sickness unto death, our faith can remain if we are securely grounded in God. He knows the beginning from the end and has our destiny in His hands.

A. Foundation on Rock

The Scripture calls the man who built his house on rock wise. Perhaps many opportunities arose to deviate from the foundation on rock. At times in our lives it may seem easier because the materials that are most accessible are not the ones that are the sturdiest. When building our relationship with Jesus Christ, we cannot compromise when it comes to laying down the foundation, no matter how inconvenient it may

seem. The very base of our faith is at risk if we choose anything else but rock.

The Book of Isaiah informs us our foundation should be the Lord God: “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16). The Rock of our foundation is that “precious corner stone,” Jesus Christ. Paul also referred to Jesus Christ being the “chief corner stone” in his letter to Ephesus: “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20). There is no other option. The Rock, Jesus Christ, is the only safe foundation we should build upon.

B. House Survived the Storm

Building on rock physically gives such a firm foundation that the house is never compromised, even in the greatest storm. There are people who go through horrendous experiences and seem to come out with their faith even stronger.

We cannot know what storms will come our way. Not all storms are from the enemy. Sometimes life brings troubles that come from being in this broken world. Sickness, loss, broken relationships, and other calamities can be the result of simply living in this world. We can be assured that whatever the source of our pain and suffering, if our foundation is solid, we have a better chance of surviving, even if we are a little battered in the process.

» *How can you develop a firm foundation to carry you through trying situations?*

IV. SURE FOUNDATION

Watching people renovate old, dilapidated homes has become extremely popular. People buy old homes and upgrade them to like-new condition. They renovate them to look more modern and then sell them to satisfied customers. It is fascinating to see the progress and enjoy the drama of renovation. The most challenging setbacks come when contractors discover problems with the foundation. If there is something wrong with the foundation, everything else must stop until it can be corrected.

Our spiritual foundation is even more critical than a natural foundation. We should inspect our foundation often to make sure it has not been compromised. If we see an area that is in question or God reveals something to us that is lacking, we should give it our full attention right away. Whatever it takes to bring the foundation back up to code is worth the sacrifice. We want to make sure our basis of belief is established on a sure foundation of truth.

» *Name some habits and lifestyles that could be a detriment to our spiritual foundation.*

A. Gospel of Jesus Christ

The gospel of Jesus Christ is central to our doctrinal foundation. When Jesus walked on this earth, He had a mission statement. It was outlined as He read from the scroll

of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). The mission of Jesus Christ was the foundation and focus of His ministry on earth. Networked in His mission was His example to us. As we watch His life unfold and His ministry come to fruition, we can align our own lives with His perfect example. He was a perfect blueprint for us to follow.

B. God’s Word

Today we may not have Jesus walking beside us in a physical form as He did when He was on earth. However, we do have His Word to guide us and help us build a firm foundation. God’s Word is relevant for every era and every person, no matter the age, race, or geographical location.

The writer of Hebrews declared, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). The New King James Version translated it, “For the word of God is living and powerful.”

The word *quick* in the King James Version is taken from the word *quicken*, which comes from the root word meaning “to make alive.” Just as God quickened Adam by breathing His breath into him, God breathes life into us through His Word. This tells us that God’s Word is alive and powerful. It is living. It is the breath of God speaking to us.

God’s Word is a solid foundation because it was established before time and lives on forever. “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89). God’s Word is eternal. It is an absolute truth we can put our trust in because it has been in existence from the beginning of time. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Knowing God’s Word is not separate from Him but is His very essence makes His Word stand above all other texts ever written. His Word breathes life into us as we read it.

» *How can we utilize God’s Word more in our daily lives?*

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Building on the Rock gives us hope that the foundation will not change. God’s truth will always be the same because God does not change. His Word was established outside the restricted box of time. It is not subject to the past, present, or future. It is forever “settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89). The Bible also says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (See Hebrews 13:8.) We must continue believing this unchanging truth, so our foundation stands firm until the end.

Since truth does not change, we can be assured it is genuine and unadulterated. The doctrinal truths in God’s Word will not waiver. If we continue to stand on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, the Chief Cornerstone, we will have the firm foundation of truth that will withstand any storm.

Good Soil

FOCUS THOUGHT

Like the good soil, we must hear and receive the Word, allowing it to produce fruit in our lives.

»» FOCUS VERSES

Mark 4:8, 20

And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. . . . And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

»» LESSON TEXT

Mark 4:3–10; 13–20

3 Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

5 And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:

6 But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

8 And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

9 And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

10 And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.

. . . .

13 And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?

14 The sower soweth the word.

15 And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;

17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,

19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

CULTURE CONNECTION

BROADCASTING

Broadcasting is a modern marvel. It is possible to sit in a radio station in one city and broadcast a signal of songs to another. One Oklahoma station employee from KOMA recalls getting requests from listeners in South Australia. That is not even on the same continent. Now that we have internet access and online streaming, people who have never been to our church can be a part of our services. But as broadcasters understand, those who broadcast give up control of who receives the signal.

That is the same method Jesus referred to in the Parable of the Sower. But Jesus was not referring to radio stations; He was referring to seed. When the sower sowed his seed for a harvest, he broadcast the seed all over the field. There was no way to control where the seed fell, which is why some fell on wayside ground, some on stony ground, some on thorny ground, and thankfully, some fell on good ground. It would be safer and more economical to drop each seed carefully into the plowed soil. Less seed would be lost, but the sower would also reap less harvest.

We are not called to inspect the soil; we are called to sow the seed. It is up to God and the hearers where the seed falls and how it grows.

OUTLINE

I. THE SOWER AND THE SEED

- A. The Wayside
- B. Stony Ground
- C. Thorny Ground
- D. Good Ground

II. THE PARABLE EXPLAINED

- A. The Sower
- B. The Seed
- C. The Wayside
- D. Stony Ground
- E. Thorny Ground

III. THE GOOD SOIL

- A. Hear the Word
- B. Receive the Word
- C. Bring Forth Fruit

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Have you ever wondered what it takes to be an effective gardener? How many of us have set out to grow something, whether a full garden or simply a small houseplant? We quickly learn that cultivating a plant is not simple work. One source describes part of the challenge of effective growing by saying, “Some people might think that weeds are the most troublesome element to deal with in a garden. It is probably more accurate to say this: the number one thing that will disappoint and dishearten a gardener is working with soil that is difficult to manage or just plain unproductive” (<http://www.garden-counselor-lawn-care.com/why-is-soil-so-important.html>).

Soil quality and condition are vital to successful growing, whether it is a potted plant or one’s spiritual life. Jesus revealed the importance of soil in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed. As disciples of Jesus, our great desire is to produce spiritual fruit.

I. THE SOWER AND THE SEED

The Parable of the Sower marked a turning point in the ministry of Jesus and introduced a larger section of parables, while serving as an interpretative guide for those who followed. This parable is one of only two included in each of the synoptic Gospels.

The setting of this parable is the Sea of Galilee, with Jesus sitting inside a boat facing the shore while teaching the crowd on the shore. One author noted, “Most of the Roman Empire’s inhabitants were rural peasant farmers or herders . . . often ignored . . . but Jesus ministered frequently among this class” (Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*). Jesus was at home in both the major metropolitan centers and the rural areas of His day.

The context of this parable would have grabbed the attention of the crowd. Most likely the people hearing the words of Jesus that day either grew their own fruits and vegetables, herded their own meat, or did both. In North America we are several steps removed from field to table, but not so in Jesus’ time. Therefore, a story about a farmer sowing seed, while a very common experience to them, would also stir their interest. Many in the crowd must have wondered, *How is this great Teacher going to draw significance from our daily existence?*

In this lesson the Master Teacher emphasized many things. He highlighted the sower, the seed, the soil, and the Kingdom, telling the listener truths about each.

A. The Wayside

Jesus began the parable by telling the audience of a sower, or farmer, who went out to sow. Some of the seed “fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up” (Mark 4:4). Luke added that the wayside-fallen seed “was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it” (Luke 8:5). The wayside refers to “a path traversing the unenclosed fields. The unproductiveness is due of course to the hardness of the trodden soil. Jesus adds that the birds devoured the seed, and this is due to its lying on the surface without penetrating it” (*International Critical Commentary: New Testament*). Other authors suggest a common practice of the era was to sow before the ground was plowed. This seed then simply got no traction because the ground was too hard for it. The seed at the wayside not eaten by birds was trampled on by people as they walked to and fro. The wayside, as Jesus’ audience would certainly know, was not a place where effective growth happened.

B. Stony Ground

Next Jesus said some of the seed fell on stony ground. This is not to be understood as seed falling directly on rock, but the seed fell on a thin layer of soil that had rocks just below the surface. If the sower had not plowed first, he would be unaware of the rocks just beneath the surface. The seed sprouted rather quickly, but its lack of roots was its demise. The stony ground permitted no roots to form.

C. Thorny Ground

Then Jesus said some of the seed fell on thorny ground. This seed landed where other seed was. That does not seem like a bad position to be in—with other seed. However, the other seed was not the same. It was seeds of thorns or briars. The seed that fell on thorny ground was not alone, but it was not with seed that would foster its growth. Jesus said the seeds of briars and thorns choked the grain, causing it to be unfruitful. Often the thistles were unseen. “They may have just been cut or burned, leaving roots from which thistles could grow with the seed to choke it out” (Keener). Even though this portion of the soil may have looked fine on the surface, lurking below were dangerous elements that would hold back and destroy fruit-bearing growth.

D. Good Ground

Lastly, Jesus mentioned the seed that fell on good ground and produced a crop that “sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred” (Mark 4:8). “All the figures Jesus reports here are very good yields” (Keener). The seed mixed with good ground produced a crop. The seed was the same in each instance; the determining factor was the soil. The soil on which the seed falls is a significant part of this parable.

II. THE PARABLE EXPLAINED

Jesus moved on to explain the parable to His disciples after helping them see why He was now speaking to them in parables. In Mark 4:9 Jesus declared, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” He encouraged the disciples to hear and listen to what He said, but it seems they were having trouble understanding. Verse 10 reports that when they were alone, they asked Jesus about the parable. Their question served as the backdrop for Jesus’ explanation of the parable and also His rationale for using parables.

A. The Sower

Jesus reported in Mark 4:14, “The sower soweth the word.” Jesus is the first sower, just as He is the firstfruits of the Resurrection and the author and finisher of our faith. He has an active role in the sowing; He did then and He does now. In this parable and during His earthly ministry, He sowed to those in the crowd. The further extension is that those who sow what Jesus sowed are also sowers. Sowing is a straightforward task, but it is not an easy task. The sower must be fully convinced the sowing will bear fruit. If not, over time the sower will become discouraged, frustrated, or bored. But when the sower believes the sowing will bear fruit, the sower continues sowing. The truth from the known realm of agriculture is that a sower scatters something of value in order to reap something of value. So too in the Kingdom, a sower spreads something of value with the hope of reaping.

B. The Seed

“The sower soweth the word” (Mark 4:14). The seed of the sower is the Word of God. When we speak the Word of God, we are sowing the words of eternal life. Is it any wonder the Bible has had such an impact on human history?

If one is sowing something other than the Word, the value is limited. How easy it is when witnessing, teaching, or preaching to get off track and ramble on about other things. All who have ever attempted sowing the Word have been guilty of doing something else while making the effort to sow the Word. It requires intentional focus from the sower to keep the discussion, Bible-study session, sermon, or lesson centered on the Word of God. That is the duty of the sower. One who does not expound the Word is not sowing anything of eternal value.

A grave danger for sowers who do not focus exclusively on the Word is they could become distracted with popular fallacies of the day. Sowers must sow the Word regardless of how it differs with popular notions of the age. Courageous sowers diligently and rightly divide the word of truth, ensuring the seed they sow is the Word of God. Sowing the false ideas of pop-culture or even other well-meaning people can lead to false doctrine. Sow the Word.

» *What are some practical ways we can “sow the Word”?*

C. The Wayside

Earlier we described the wayside, but in this passage, Jesus explained the spiritual implications of the wayside. The hardness of the soil prohibited growth. This happens in churches and in individual hearts. The seed is sown and some falls in a place where it has no chance to grow. What may seem to be a purely natural phenomenon was suddenly understood by the hearers as a deeply spiritual circumstance. “When they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts” (Mark 4:15). Satan promotes the hardening of hearts through bitterness, anger, envy, and disappointment, but ultimately the condition of the heart is determined by the hearer.

Unfortunately, having a hard heart means God’s Word has not impacted the person, creating a prime opportunity for the adversary to swoop in and steal away any lingering seed. What a disturbing description! An enemy comes in and snatches away the seed that was sown. This enemy will do everything he can to see that the seed is snatched away from someone’s heart.

Here we see another important truth about the sower, the seed, and the field. Jesus reported the seed was stolen from the heart of the hearer by the adversary. So the heart was the receptor of the Word. *Heart* is the most often used scriptural word, in both Old and New Testaments, to describe “the integrating center of man as a rational, emotional, volitional being” (*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*). Another way to say or think of it is the heart “is the seat of human will and desire” (*Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*). When the Bible speaks of the heart, it means the essence of humanity. The seed of the Word of God connects to the essence of humanity, yet people are responsible to cultivate the soil of their hearts so the Word will bear fruit in their lives.

» *Have you ever worked to lead someone to the Lord only to learn, as time went on, the soil of that person's heart was hard? Explain.*

D. Stony Ground

Earlier we learned that the stony ground was not necessarily a gravel field; it was ground with just a thin layer of soil covering the rocks underneath. The sun caused the seed to sprout up quickly, but the hardness of the rocks meant no roots could form, so depth of growth was destroyed.

Since the common practice of the era was to not plow until after sowing, the sower would be unaware of the conditions just below the surface. This is a true analogy of any who sow seed even today. Often we do not know what is below the surface—our task is to sow as effectively as we can. Time will tell whether the soil beneath the surface is good for growing. Additionally, as hearers of the Word, our task is to stir up the fallow ground, or as God said through His prophet Jeremiah, “Break up your fallow ground” (Jeremiah 4:3). Stony ground can destroy growth, but it can be plowed up for better results.

» *When working with those whose hearts seem to be “stony ground,” what have you found to be effective?*

E. Thorny Ground

The thorny ground is where thorns and thistles were trimmed or even burned down, but the roots remained. As mentioned previously, here the seed fell where other seed was. Unfortunately, the other seed would not facilitate the new seed's growth and production of fruit.

How many people in churches are in this category? Probably all have known those who did not want to continue following God's Word but wanted to have a semblance of God, so they aligned themselves with thorns and thistles. Thorns and thistles are around the church, but they do not produce fruit.

Jesus said the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the seed and block it from being fruitful. Disciples must carefully guard their hearts to discern whether any thistles are trying to grow. Some helpful questions are: Am I continuing to give to God's kingdom? Am I serving in the church? Is my life bearing fruit? Am I focused on the things of the world? Do my thoughts about life, spiritual freedom, and consecration focus on God's Word or the carnal notions of popular culture?

We must not let the thistles choke us out.

III. THE GOOD SOIL

Thankfully not all soil was challenged. Some seed fell on good soil; when that happened fruit followed. Productivity depends on receptivity: “The contrast between the unproductive and the productive soils . . . illustrates the contrast between those in Israel who were rejecting the message of the kingdom and the disciples who received the message of the kingdom” (Mark L. Bailey, “The Parable of the Sower and

the Soils”). In the life and ministry of Jesus, we find a profound dichotomy between those who believe (people from every nation, tribe, and tongue) and those who do not believe (the leaders of the Jewish people, those God called to be His own and blessed with the revelation of the first covenant). The truth of the good soil is the revelation that anyone, anywhere can receive the message of the Kingdom, mix it with faith and obedience, and live a life that is productive spiritually.

» *What does “good soil” look like?*

A. Hear the Word

Those who bore fruit heard the Word. They were in position to hear what God was saying. Their hearts were not so filled with other things that the Word could not get through. Hearing is significant because we know faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17).

B. Receive the Word

Hearing is a prelude to receiving the Word. But we can hear the Word and discard it. The thin soiled places of every human heart would like to do that every time a word comes that challenges. The call from God is to hear the Word, understand it, and then apply it to our hearts. Receiving the Word into our spirits is how to be the good soil described in the parable. This is why prayer before and after church services is so important. Sometimes it is very clear to us that God is working on our hearts through His Word, yet at other times we are not so sure. But when we pray, we allow God’s Spirit to illuminate His Word to us and help us receive it.

» *What are some ways we receive the Word?*

C. Bring Forth Fruit

Paul lists fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23. Spiritual fruit is the sign of a healthy Christian life. When we do our part to ensure the ground of our hearts is receptive and the seed is sown in our hearts, spiritual fruit is the natural result. We do not cause the growth; only God can make things grow. But God, by giving humans free will, has given people the ability to prohibit spiritual growth in their lives. The illustration of the farmer is especially relevant. The farmer sows seed and cultivates and fertilizes the field. But the farmer does not bring rain or cause the sun to shine. Only God can do that. Therefore, as we work with God, He will bring the increase into our lives. The seed of His Word is powerful, producing an abundant harvest.

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

We must prepare our hearts to be good soil, so we are able to receive the Word. The Bereans “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11). It is important to receive the Word with a heart that is ready to obey. This means we are prepared, with an open heart and a committed spirit, and we accept God’s instructions without hardness.

In Remembrance of Me

FOCUS THOUGHT

We must keep in our remembrance the sacrifice Jesus made for us.

»» FOCUS VERSE

Mark 14:22

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.

»» LESSON TEXT

Mark 14:17–26

17 And in the evening he cometh with the twelve.

18 And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.

19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?

20 And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.

21 The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born.

22 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.

23 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.

24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

26 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

I Corinthians 11:23–26

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

»» CULTURE CONNECTION

LEST WE FORGET

September 11 is one of those days that most people remember where they were when they heard the news. Even the busiest business people stopped what they were doing to watch as passenger planes rocketed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a remote field in rural Pennsylvania. No one could believe the sheer terror brought on by the terrorists who overpowered the pilots and weaponized the planes. And everyone was amazed at the selfless heroism of the first responders and passengers to sacrifice themselves for people they did not even know.

Each year, on the anniversary of that unthinkable dark day, we pause in the morning to remember the sacrifice of the first responders, passengers, and workers. And we say their names, so we do not forget them or their sacrifice. Jesus knows we are prone to forget, so He instituted a way for us to remember His sacrifice. We call it communion, the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, or Eucharist. It is a sober celebration for the blood He shed for us and for His body that was broken for us.

He was not the victim of a terrorist plot; He was the protagonist in the greatest story ever told. The Romans and the Jews did not take His life; He willingly laid it down. Jesus died so we can live. The next time our church celebrates communion together, remember Him. Remember His sacrifice. And remember that the same one who came to die for us is coming back for us.

»» OUTLINE

I. PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER

- A. A Man with a Water Pitcher
- B. Upper Room

II. JESUS WITH THE TWELVE

- A. A Betrayer
- B. Is It I?

III. LORD'S SUPPER INSTITUTED

- A. The Bread
- B. The Cup

IV. THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

- A. Practice of Communion
- B. Remember on Purpose

»» CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Parents often fear potential dangers that might come to their children. Therefore, moms and dads focus their parenting to reduce as many risks as possible. When the little one becomes mobile, parents childproof their home. Electrical sockets get

covered, and dangerous objects are removed from surfaces the child might reach.

When the child starts moving into public spaces, many parents start introducing phrases like "stranger danger" into the child's vocabulary. Parents want to protect their child from kidnapping and abuse at the hand of a stranger. Parents believe children must learn this phrase because little ones do not have an innate distrust of others. Children need to remember not to get into cars with strangers, because not remembering could be catastrophic. However, as adults we may continue to distrust those who are different from us.

Fear of strangers resides deep in the human spirit. Violence has threatened people in all periods of human history. The ministry of Christ, however, witnessed to a new way of living. Jesus called His followers to love their enemies rather than fear them. The only way for these new disciple behaviors to become a reality is to form new memories of how to respond to other people. Jesus willingly died at the hand of those who did not like Him. He offered His own experience as a new tool to create new memory possibilities in His followers.

I. PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER

Jesus and His followers had deep memories of freedom from abusive people. Passover played a significant role in both their memories of liberation and their identity as a people. Passover recreated the liberation from Egypt and pointed forward to a time when God would free them from Roman rule. Every neighborhood in Jerusalem would have engaged in house cleaning, preparation for the special meal, and welcoming extended family to the celebration.

A. A Man with a Water Pitcher

The disciples initiated the Last Supper preparations. In the past they had not attended to the daily needs of Jesus or of His followers. Those moments provided the context for multiplying the bread and fish so all could be fed. On this occasion they asked Jesus where He would like to have His Passover dinner, rather than just assuming everything would happen in an orderly fashion.

Jesus' directions to find a man carrying water sounded more foreign to His original audience than it would for us today. Carrying water in Jerusalem at that time would have been a woman's work. The unusual occurrence of a man carrying water would have certainly gotten the attention of the two men.

B. Upper Room

The disciples followed the servant all the way to his master's house. There they asked the house owner for the room prepared for their Master. Following Jesus frequently meant sleeping and eating outdoors. They had heard more teaching during walks through fields, on a hillside, in a boat, or on the Temple grounds than they had heard inside of buildings. This night they would eat inside in accordance with the Law and to provide memory guides for the future.

» *Do you think these disciples sensed something was about to happen that evening? Why or why not?*

II. JESUS WITH THE TWELVE

The twelve apostles represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus chose them to follow Him, learn His identity, accept their new mission, and continue His work to the whole earth.

A. A Betrayer

Deliverance always includes dying. Without dying, too much of the old bondage comes into the new phase of life. The Passover meal included a sauce made of dried fruits, spices, and wine or vinegar to help reflect on the first Passover when Israel triumphantly left Egypt's death. Worshipers would dip their unleavened bread and bitter herbs into the sauce to remember where they had been and reflect on the hope before them.

Jesus chose the bitter herb dip to reveal how the coming deliverance would include death by betrayal. Contemporary Gospel readers see the threads of the betrayer woven

throughout the story. The original diners did not have the insight of reading the completed story. They did not realize how isolated Judas was from the other eleven. They assumed following Jesus predestined all of them to reigning with the Messiah in His new kingdom.

B. Is It I?

Jesus revealed His pending death after the confession in Caesarea Philippi. This new revelation that one of them would betray Jesus brought sorrow on all of them. What started as a remembrance of God's deliverance quickly degenerated into self-questioning. One of them would end all their hopes.

Each disciple asked the Master, "Is it I?" Remembering the Lord's Supper calls disciples today to ask the same question. Like Judas, contemporary betrayers would be better off to have never known life than to turn back on Jesus' mission.

» *How does unrepented betrayals hinder you from celebrating the Supper?*

III. LORD'S SUPPER INSTITUTED

Jesus looked forward to that special Passover. The day had come for Him to fulfill His purpose. As captain of our salvation, He lived to suffer so He could offer cleansing to all. (See Hebrews 2:9–11.) Jesus chose a new meal for new covenant people—a meal of bread and cup.

A. The Bread

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. (Mark 14:22)

Jesus fed the multitudes in the wilderness as a sign of His delivering power. All participants linked the bread to Moses' manna, but Jesus wanted them to eat of the new bread that gave life. John 6 records Jesus' teaching on eating the bread of His body. This new bread would bring eternal life. The Lord's Supper included four acts which still guide us today.

Act 1: Jesus Received the Bread

Jesus received the bread on the table just as He had received the five loaves from the boy when thousands needed to be fed. He chose the most common staple of daily living to create the symbol of grace. In death He took the common nutrients of daily living and transformed them into a means of grace.

The common things of life become something else when placed in Jesus' hands. Disciples freely give their master everything they have. They do not hide their shame or keep honor for themselves. Instead they place all in Jesus' hands. He removes all shame and empowers the smallest gifts to become holy, Kingdom resources for the mission ahead.

Act 2: Jesus Blessed the Bread

As our true High Priest, Jesus took His blessing role quite seriously. His words brought life to all He blessed, even children, lepers, tax collectors, common fishermen,

and prostitutes. All who place what they have in Jesus' hands receive the favor of God.

Those who follow Jesus do so to fulfill His missionary purposes. All good and perfect blessings come from above, from the one who will never turn from His commitment to bless those begotten by the word of truth. These blessings serve as a sign for many more to come (James 1:17–18). These blessings provide the resources to love our neighbors as ourselves. In the Lord's Supper, disciples actively receive and count those blessings.

» *How do these first two acts challenge you?*

Act 3: Jesus Broke the Bread

Following Jesus contains several paradoxes. If you want to gain your life, you must first lose it. If you want to live, you must first die. Jesus' broken body reminds us that we too have the privilege of being broken with purpose.

More frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper would help the contemporary church recognize the value of suffering in Kingdom living. Sadly, many disciples follow the old way of pain avoidance rather than the new way of life in the Spirit. Rejecting suffering is to dip in the bitter bowl rather than partaking of the blessed bread. Learning to value brokenness will require Gethsemane-like prayer. Believers should take solace in the fact that seasons of brokenness always happen in the Lord's hands. Jesus never lets us suffer alone.

Act 4: Jesus Shared the Bread

When all of life is placed in God's hands, nothing gets wasted. All things work for His glory. Jesus shared His life with whoever was willing to follow for more than just the loaves and the fishes.

Brokenness produces blessings for others, even as the kernel of wheat's death brings life for those who get to eat its bread. Disciples never represent the end users of the Lord's Supper. They receive so they have something to give. Worship transforms disciples from wanting to get something from the Lord to wanting to share their blessings with others. Sharing our blessings with others further increases our capacity to receive gracious gifts.

» *How do these final two acts challenge you?*

B. The Cup

And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. (Mark 14:23–24)

The cup represented the greatest shift that would take place during that passion week. The Old Testament conveys the wonder of God's desire to be among humanity and restore all things back to Himself. The call of Abram in Genesis 12 included potential blessings for all nations.

The Passover meal provided the context of the covenant shift. New Covenant blood would be spilled for many. No longer would Old Covenant bulls, rams, and goats provide the Band-Aid of holiness needed to keep the people clean enough for God to dwell with them.

The New Covenant could take effect once the testator died. Jesus willingly poured out His blood, so all could be reconciled to God. The first enactment of that grace-dispensing meal had everyone drinking from one cup. While sharing a cup upsets contemporary readers, the power of the shared cup belongs firmly in the Lord's Supper. All members of the table either drink of the New Covenant cup together or they do not drink at all. As Paul would later state, we also eat of one bread because we are of one body.

That first enactment emptied the cup. In the twenty-first century, many people want a spiritual buffet where they can pick and choose the parts they enjoy. The offered cup must be drained, just as Jesus completely emptied His life. When believers willingly drink deeply and completely, they experience the overwhelming work of grace.

IV. THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. (1 Corinthians 11:24)

Modern neuroscience helps us understand that memories do not rest in a set of filing cabinets in the brain. Human memory does not work like saving computer files on a hard drive or in the cloud. Memories draw from different parts of the brain. Some memories store facts and events, while other memories relate to skills, habits, or classical conditioning where one stimulus gets linked to another. Recalling a past memory includes smells, emotions, and sights, in addition to the facts.

Recalling a memory actually remaps the human brain. The brain develops new connectors and branches for information to be transmitted. God's creative genius in making the human nervous system still holds wonderful new discoveries. These new discoveries make some interesting connections to the biblical text. For example, Paul expressed the ability to have a renewed mind by thinking on good things. Modern science has confirmed the possibility of creating new pathways in the brain by practicing such new thought patterns. Rather than processing information through fear patterns, believers develop a new mind where hope rules. Rather than living to serve themselves, they obtain the mind of Christ where they live on behalf of others.

A. Practice of Communion

Communion feeds the body of Christ rather than individuals in the body. The one loaf and one cup element of the Lord's Supper reminds us to celebrate the sacrament as a group of believers rather than for personal edification. The early church included breaking of bread in its core functions following the second upper room experience. Communion belongs in the context of the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, and prayer

(Acts 2:42). The rest of the Book of Acts demonstrates the consequence of a people who lived in these four practices.

The New Testament does not give specific guidelines for worship like Moses' sacrificial system. Perhaps this flexibility exists as a way to take the whole gospel to the whole world. Drums and colorful dance in African worship will look and sound different from zither music in India or guitars in Latin America. While our music styles differ, the Lord's Supper serves to unify the whole body of believers. By Acts 20 the church had developed a rhythm of celebrating communion on the first day of the week. Paul's first Corinthian letter shows us the Supper had long existed in the life of the church. The Corinthian church failed to celebrate the Supper as one body, thus they ate unworthily.

B. Remember on Purpose

The Lord's Supper serves as a wonderful memory device. Memories triggered by feeling the bread's texture, tasting wine or grape juice, hearing the Lord's words, and sharing the time with disciples of all ages guide the church in celebrating the Supper. A biblical understanding of memory fits well with contemporary neuroscience discoveries.

- Memories recount events from the past. Each time we remember Jesus' sacrifice, it takes on new layers of meaning. New disciples freshly experience deliverance. Elder saints remember the power of Christ's body and blood through decades of faithful service. Each remembering moment changes the memory to include the present realities.
- Remembering Christ transforms current identity. When believers make room for the body and blood of Christ to be experienced, they open themselves for transformation. Such New Covenant moments bring holiness, unity, spiritual gifting, and focus on missionary service.

» *How does a biblical understanding of remembering affect the way you approach the Lord's Supper? How does the Supper transform your outlook on tomorrow?*

»»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Extended-family meals fill the table with people who care for each other and have a shared story. Such meals can be as simple as a pizza or as elaborate as a meal prepared by a trained chef. Memories make the meal a celebration. When disciples gather around the Lord's table, they hear of the torn body and poured blood, but the meal must be a celebration rather than a wake. Remembering the Lord makes the difference. He paid the price for everlasting joy. He opened the door for faithfully living in the Spirit.

Disciples have the choice of dipping in the bitter bowl or sharing the bread and cup. All shame and sorrow disappear when we share Jesus' offering rather than betraying His mission. Remembering the wonder of the meal creates new possibilities as brothers and sisters take fresh steps to be salt and light in a hurting world. Feasting at the table provides the sustaining nourishment to do so. We leave the table in the power of the Spirit.

Watch and Pray

FOCUS THOUGHT

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must watch and pray so we do not enter into temptation.

»» FOCUS VERSE

Matthew 26:41

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

»» LESSON TEXT

Matthew 26:36–46

36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

39 And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

42 He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

43 And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy.

44 And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

45 Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

46 Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

CULTURE CONNECTION

SEALS

They say it only lasts for six months, but it has been referred to as the longest six months some people will ever endure. It is known as BUD/S: Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training in Coronado, California. For six months instructors push young, aspiring Navy SEAL candidates to their limits. The first phase is the toughest. It is even referred to as “Hell Week.” On average, two of every three young military men or women dreaming to be a Navy SEAL call it quits during the first phase. But a slim remnant press further, even though their bodies are screaming to quit. Self-will presses them past the pain until they hear the instructors say, “Hell Week is secured.”

Their instructors are not their enemies, for without the training, SEALs may not survive in the arena of war. If captured, the enemy will push them even further than their instructors pushed them. So they train . . . and train . . . and train. So do we. We do not train with push-ups and underwater missions, but we train our bodies and our spirits to talk to God and to hear His voice. And we train our bodies to glorify Him, not just to satisfy us.

If we are weak, our enemy will pounce on us to destroy us every chance he sees, but thankfully, Jesus gave us the weapon of prayer. Through prayer we can stay close to God and far from temptation. And when we pray, we know God hears us and will help us because He loves us.

OUTLINE

I. JESUS PRAYED AT GETHSEMANE

- A. Sorrowful and Troubled
- B. Let This Cup Pass from Me

II. DISCIPLES WERE SLEEPING

- A. Spirit Is Willing
- B. Flesh Is Weak

III. JESUS SURRENDERED HIS WILL

- A. Thy Will Be Done
- B. Betrayed by a Friend

IV. WATCH AND PRAY

- A. Surrender to the Will of God
- B. Strength When Tempted

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

With each passing year, our world seems to be moving further away from God. However, in times of peril, it is interesting how many people who never pray publicly turn to God when tragedy strikes. The United States Homeland Security Digital Library holds a copy of Concurrent Resolution 223

that allowed the use of the Capitol rotunda for a private prayer vigil after the tragedy of the airplanes that crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in 2001. It states, “Permitting the use of the rotunda of the Capitol for a prayer vigil in memory of those who lost their lives in the events of September 11, 2001” (www.hsdl.org).

As members from both houses of Congress gathered in the rotunda that day, Christian Americans rejoiced at the representation of faith among the leaders. They hoped things would change for the country and prayer would become a higher priority from the governmental offices right down to the homes of the citizens. But, disappointingly, after the tragic event fell further into the past, the memories were less horrendous, and people reverted back to their old habits, leaving God out of their lives.

I. JESUS PRAYED AT GETHSEMANE

A. Sorrowful and Troubled

It is hard to imagine what was running through our Savior's mind while He agonized in the garden. Being God manifested in the flesh, He knew the future. He knew His purpose was to give His life for the sins of humanity, but He also knew what would transpire before that victory was achieved. The pain and suffering must have been heavy on His mind. Being God did not diminish what the flesh would have to go through. His purpose was to suffer excruciating pain on behalf of generations of those bound by sin. In His journey from the garden, He would have to ascend into the depths of Hell before the work was complete.

The pain and suffering were not the only things on Jesus' mind as He agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane. He bore the sins of the world on His shoulders. I John 2:2 says, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." It is hard to imagine the magnitude of heaviness, sorrow, and emotional pain this caused Him. Sin is a heavy burden that pulls its victims down, even to the point of death. "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15). The emotional trauma of sin's finished product multiplied millions of times must have been excruciating. On the cross, Jesus bore all our sins. It was imperative for Jesus to carry our sins to provide atonement for them.

» *What are the emotions you feel when you think about the Crucifixion? Why?*

B. Let This Cup Pass from Me

Jesus cried out as the time was nearing for Him to accomplish His mission through suffering. He experienced every sensation we experience in the flesh. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man" (I Corinthians 10:13). By the foreknowledge of God, Jesus knew what was going to transpire in the last few hours of His life on earth. However, the thought of the suffering involved affected Him as it would any of us. With this great responsibility on His shoulders, His flesh struggled with His spirit. This cup of suffering seemed too much for Him to endure. He ultimately surrendered, but not without evidence of struggle. "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

» *What is the significance of Jesus sweating "great drops of blood" in this passage?*

II. DISCIPLES WERE SLEEPING

Nothing is more miserable than trying to keep awake when we are weary. This must have been how the disciples felt that night. The evening was late; it was past the time

to be in bed. When Jesus chided them, they probably felt a twinge of guilt, but they were still unable to keep their eyes open.

A. Spirit Is Willing

When God wakes us up in the middle of the night to pray, our spirit is compelled to obey. We are stirred when the Lord wakes us up and guides us to our place of prayer.

Those are the moments we may feel as David felt standing before Goliath with a sling and a few stones. He knew God was going to fight this battle. His spirit was willing and strong. He served a God who had fought for him in the past. God delivered him from the lion and the bear; this was not too hard for the Lord. (See I Samuel 17.) David's courage came from the confidence he had gained in past battles he had won with God at his side.

When God tells us to do something and we know beyond a shadow of a doubt it is His voice, no devil in Hell can stop us. When God shakes us and wakes us up in the middle of the night, our desire is to do His bidding. At that bidding we rebuke the enemy, we challenge legions of demons, and we speak the Word of faith, expecting healing. The very last words Jesus spoke to His disciples were an example of a spirit that is willing. He said, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17–18). This courage was evoked by confidence in what Jesus said.

B. Flesh Is Weak

There are times when the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We may be kneeling in obedience to God's call and realize an hour later that we have fallen asleep. Jesus offered an out for His disciples. He understood they were mere mortals and the flesh was not as strong as the spirit. It seems He gave them a generous dose of grace. God knows when we are tired and weary. He extends an extra measure of mercy on us when we at least show the effort. The time is not lost. Nothing is lost with God. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

If we are tired and feel we have failed the Lord, we should take a moment and let Him turn it into something good. Even if we did not get in the hour we hoped for, a few moments of obedience goes a long way with the Lord. (See I Samuel 15:22.)

» *Why is our flesh so weak?*

III. JESUS SURRENDERED HIS WILL

A. Thy Will Be Done

Jesus was honest and transparent when He prayed, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done" (Matthew 26:42). Jesus

surrendered His will to the will of the Father. His purpose for coming to earth would be fulfilled in His obedience.

B. Betrayed by a Friend

The best place to be when crisis comes is on our knees in prayer. Jesus desired His disciples to join Him, but when they did not, He persevered on His knees. The will of the Father would move forward, even to the extent that someone Jesus loved very much would betray Him. However disappointing, this was all part of the plan for the rest of God's purpose to be accomplished.

Whatever Judas felt when he kissed Jesus to identify Him for the soldiers, afterward he was filled with regret. Using an endearing gesture was all part of the deception. Jesus knew what the kiss really meant. Rather than being an endearing traditional greeting between friends, this time it was a signal used to destroy Jesus. Yet Jesus responded in a loving, gentle way, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" (Matthew 26:50).

Jesus' response to Judas is truly the mark of a Savior. In the midst of betrayal with a most hideous, grossly tragic ending, Jesus, knowing the outcome of that kiss, still called Judas His friend. At the conclusion of His betrayal, Jesus was still reaching for the precious soul of one He loved.

Is it possible for us to love souls so much that in the midst of betrayal, abuse, or the most despicable treatment, we could still be compassionate toward those people to the point of calling them friends? As our example, Jesus would be pleased if we could portray this type of unconditional love toward others. Jesus declared this kind of love when He was preaching the Sermon on the Mount. He admonished His listeners, "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:43-44).

IV. WATCH AND PRAY

Matthew 26:41 reveals the benefit of watching and praying. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Watching and praying is a mighty duo. Praying is an extraordinary tool in itself, but keeping a watchful spirit, not only for the tactics of the enemy but also for the deliverance of the Lord, injects our prayer with faith. We pray with expectation, watching and waiting for God to show Himself mighty. If we could remove the cataracts from our spiritual eyes, we would see how anxious God is to answer our prayers and come to our rescue when we are into trouble. The following verse of Scripture gives us a glimpse of the emotional desire the Lord has for meeting the needs of His children: "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (II Chronicles 16:9). When we pray with expectation, we literally watch for the salvation of the Lord.

» *How can we pray with expectation?*

A. Surrender to the Will of God

According to the dictionary, *surrender* means “to yield to the power, control, or possession of another upon compulsion or demand; to give up completely or agree to forgo especially in favor of another” (www.merriam-webster.com). When we think of surrender, we may visualize someone looking down the barrel of a gun, hands raised in surrender. At that moment nothing is more important to that person than surrendering his will to the person holding the gun (except in the event he has been commanded to recant his faith).

When people are seeking God, the gesture of raising their hands up is a sign of yielding their will to the will of God. “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). The reality is, we serve whom we obey. We cannot divide our loyalty between two choices. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24).

When we completely surrender, God can move in and work with the fallow ground of our submitted spirits. Surrendering to the will of God is essential for God to work in us.

B. Strength When Tempted

Jesus was our greatest example of how to fight temptation. When He went into the wilderness to fast and pray, He was grossly accosted by the devil. However, Jesus used the Word of God to combat the enemy. (See Matthew 4:4, 7, 10.) Through this example Jesus taught us how powerful a tool the Word of God is. Satan was defeated and finally gave up.

The Scripture outlines the power and ability of the Word. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

» *Discuss the verses of Scripture Jesus used to defeat the devil in the wilderness. Can we use those same verses today to win our battles? Explain.*

»»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Prayer is important for us to consider. There is much that could be said about the effects of prayer, the power of prayer, and the testimonies of miracles performed through prayer.

As we move through our daily routines, we must take time to reflect on God’s will, not only for the future, but for the present. “God, what do You want me to do right now about this situation?” Stopping and taking a moment to pray about a decision could change the course of our lives.

God wants to be involved in every decision we make. If we are in tune with His daily preferences in our decisions, when that life-altering decision comes our way, we will be able to turn to God, hear His voice, and make the right decision.

Made Free

FOCUS THOUGHT

Jesus died for us so we could live free from the penalty of sin.

»» FOCUS VERSE

John 19:30

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

»» LESSON TEXT

John 19:28–30

28 After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.

29 Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

Romans 6:17–23

17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

CULTURE CONNECTION

MAD GAB

Mad Gab is a fun word game. Short phrases are printed on little cards, and the phrases are broken down into little words. The player's job is to figure out the phrase by piecing the words together and sounding them out. It sounds simple, but it is not. For example, the player may read "pea sank white" on the card, but that translates into "peace and quiet."

The fun of Mad Gab is listening to players say the right answer—often with what sounds like an accent—but most of the time, they have no idea what they are saying. Mad Gab came out in the twentieth century, but I found a game of Mad Gab unwittingly played in the Book of Matthew in the first century. But this was not a game because the stakes were life and death.

Jesus had struggled up Calvary, carrying our cross. Roman soldiers slammed Him down on the rugged timber and nailed His healing hands to the cross. Some passersby came walking up to Jesus, filled with rage, though most did not even know why. (See Matthew 27:39–40.) Then the religious leaders chimed in. They pointed to the cross and screamed to the crowd, "He saved others; himself he cannot save" (Matthew 27:41–42). When Jesus heard their rant, the corners of His parched mouth began to crack and smile, because He heard truth amidst the madness.

When Jesus was given the choice between saving our lives and saving His own, He chose to save our lives rather than His own. The Romans did not take His life; He willingly died so we could live. Perhaps if they had listened to their own words, they would have understood what He was doing. As Christian author Max Lucado wrote, "He would rather die for us than live without us." That, my friend, is amazing grace.

OUTLINE

I. JESUS WAS CONDEMNED TO DIE

- A. Innocent and without Sin
- B. Led Away to Be Crucified

II. GOLGOTHA

- A. King of the Jews
- B. What I Have Written I Have Written

III. SOLDIERS TOOK HIS GARMENTS

- A. A Seamless Coat Like a Priest's Garment
- B. Let Us Not Rend It

IV. IT IS FINISHED

- A. Gave Up the Ghost
- B. Salvation's Plan Was Accomplished

V. MADE FREE THROUGH HIS DEATH

- A. Free from Sin
- B. Servants of Righteousness
- C. God's Gift of Eternal Life

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

In the United States, fallen veterans are honored for making the ultimate sacrifice to defend the lives of others. Until the events of September 11, 2001, this ideal had become routine, simply a day off from work. Only after the events of that horrible day have the people of the United States again realized the value of life. People were paralyzed as they watched the events unfold, as rescue workers ran into buildings people were desperately trying to escape. Almost twenty years have elapsed since that fateful day, and Americans still feel the impact of that day and the idea of a life sacrificed to save others.

I. JESUS WAS CONDEMNED TO DIE

A. Innocent and without Sin

Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect for Jerusalem during the time of Jesus. As prefect his primary role was to maintain law and order within the boundaries of his jurisdiction. Jerusalem was notorious for uprisings and civil disobedience in defiance of Roman rule. The Bible names Pontius Pilate as the one who ultimately condemned Jesus to death on the cross. Yet the Bible also tells us Pilate was conflicted. He stated before the mob, “What evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him” (Luke 23:22). At this point Pilate was ready to release Jesus, yet the crowd became hostile and demanded Jesus be crucified. Pilate, under pressure to maintain order by oath, chose to send an innocent man to His death.

B. Led Away to Be Crucified

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that after Pilate condemned Him, Jesus was led away to a common hall where a group of soldiers stripped Him, placing a scarlet robe on Him and a crown of thorns on His head. They spat on Him, beat Him, and mocked Him. They then replaced the scarlet robe with His original garment and took Him away to be nailed to the cross. Luke 23:26 states, “And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.” The Bible goes on to tell of the crowd that followed Jesus and the women who bewailed and lamented Him. The Creator of all things, manifest in the Man Christ Jesus, was subjected to great pain and humiliation at the hands of those He created.

» ***Have you ever stood by and watched as someone was subjected to cruel harassment by a large group of people? Explain.***

II. GOLGOTHA

We read in John 19:17, “And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha.” Just the name alone provides a dismal picture of a place that had become synonymous with death. Even today, items containing toxic elements have a skull displayed on the package to warn that the contents can cause death if ingested. Death on Golgotha was not pleasant. It was the final place of execution for those condemned to die by crucifixion.

A. King of the Jews

Jesus was referred to as King twice in His lifetime. The first was at His birth when shepherds and kings sought Him. They hailed Him as King and bowed before Him, bearing gifts. All this honor was given despite the fact this royal Baby was born and housed in a manger. The idea of a king being born, especially one that would cause

men to travel a far distance, put fear into King Herod. He sought to destroy Jesus in order to protect his throne.

The second time Jesus was referred to as King was before His death at the hands of the Jewish leaders. When Jesus was crucified, Pilate had a placard put above Him on the cross; it read: King of the Jews.

B. What I Have Written I Have Written

A famous line from Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* says, "What's done, is done." This phrase is often heard in modern society to denote something that cannot or will not be changed. When the Jewish leaders saw the sign hung above the head of Jesus, stating "KING OF THE JEWS," they protested to Pilate, who had written the phrase on the sign (John 19:19). They stated it should say, "He said, I am King of the Jews" (John 19:21). But Pilate, who was disgusted by this whole proceeding, simply proclaimed, "What I have written I have written" (John 19:22). The Bible tells us Pilate had physically washed his hands before the crowd, proclaiming he was washing his hands of the situation. It is obvious from his actions that Pilate's last action in the affair of Jesus' crucifixion was to make the sign. So disappointed with himself for giving in to the pressure of the mob and condemning an innocent man to death, he was finished with the matter and nothing so trivial as a sign was going to be changed.

» *Have you ever faced a situation that left you feeling so conflicted you just decided you were done with it? Explain.*

III. SOLDIERS TOOK HIS GARMENTS

John 19:23 states, "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat."

A. A Seamless Coat Like a Priest's Garment

The detail of the coat having no seam held special meaning to the Jewish people of that era. Exodus 28:32 states, "And there shall be an hole in the top of it, in the midst thereof: it shall have a binding of woven work round about the hole of it, as it were the hole of an habergeon, that it be not rent." These are the instructions by God given to Moses of the garment to be worn by the high priest, the only authorized person to enter the Holy of Holies and offer atonement for the sins of the Israelites. The garment was to have no seam.

B. Let Us Not Rend It

The significance of the seamless coat does not end with the relevance to the garment worn by the high priest. Leviticus 21:10 states, "And he that is the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, nor rend his clothes." While Jesus was in no position to rend his own clothes, the soldiers could have easily divided the garment into equal parts as souvenirs. While some may not see this text as being

relevant to the events at the Crucifixion, the fact the soldiers opted not to rend the garment maintained the integrity of Jesus as the ultimate High Priest.

IV. IT IS FINISHED

John recorded the last words of Jesus, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Matthew and Mark state Jesus cried with a loud voice, but John records Jesus’ final utterance. All the prophecies about His crucifixion were complete. The pain, agony, and humiliation faded with the sunlight. What lay ahead for the followers of Jesus was uncertain; what was certain was that His death to atone for the sin of all humanity was finished.

A. Gave Up the Ghost

Though the Gospel of Luke does not record Jesus giving up the ghost, there does not appear to be any specific reason for this omission. The other Gospels record this event of Jesus as if it were within His control to release His spirit. There is no doubt it was within His control. He had walked on water, healed the sick, made the blind to see, and brought the dead to life again. Jesus was God manifest in the flesh. There was nothing at any time that was not within His control. John 1:3 states, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” All these events were foretold by God through the prophets of old. It was a plan of His design in order to reconcile sinful man to Himself.

B. Salvation’s Plan Was Accomplished

When Peter preached after the Holy Ghost had come, he said, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Messiah had come and Peter told the Jews gathered in Jerusalem that not only had they missed Him, but they had killed Him. God had walked among men and had been put to death by the very people He created. The apostle Paul would go on to write, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6–8). The penalty for sin is death, a debt that was paid by the death of Jesus.

» *Why should we often reflect on the price that was paid for our salvation?*

V. MADE FREE THROUGH HIS DEATH

The writer of Hebrews stated, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:9–10). Only because He was willing to die are we free.

A. Free from Sin

Time and again in the New Testament it is written that Jesus died to free us from our sins. John 8:36 states, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Paul wrote in Galatians 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” These are but a couple of examples telling us of the freedom His death has given humanity over sin. We understand that we must have faith in Him, repent of our sins, be buried with Him in baptism, and be born again through the infilling of His Holy Spirit. Then we are commanded to live a life of submission to His will and fulfill our purpose in His kingdom.

» *If complacency kills, can we lose out on freedom by being stagnant through complacency?*

B. Servants of Righteousness

Paul wrote to the church at Rome about servitude, to both the flesh and the spirit. He explained that after conversion, we are no longer servants to our flesh, but we are servants to God unto righteousness. Righteousness is defined as “acting in accord with divine or moral law” (Merriam-Webster). God promised in Jeremiah 31:33, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.” The Spirit of God desires to show us how to live a life of righteousness. Our choices still matter; there is no autopilot when it comes to living for God.

C. God’s Gift of Eternal Life

God has given many gifts to humanity. His greatest gift was giving His Son as a sacrifice for our sins. After Jesus’ resurrection, He gave us the gift of the Holy Ghost—His Spirit living inside of us. These gifts culminate in the ultimate gift as stated in Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This life is temporary, or finite, but we are promised eternal life through Jesus Christ.

» *Can you fathom what it means to live forever? Explain.*

»»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Former US President John F. Kennedy once said, “The cost of freedom is always high, but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender, or submission.” As Christians we should have an even greater understanding of the price of freedom. Ours is the kind of freedom that transcends international borders, even transcending the limitations of this life. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice to secure our salvation from sin. It is imperative we live for Him, and through strengthening our relationship with Him, we should desire to live a life of righteousness.

Power of the Resurrection

FOCUS THOUGHT

We can have new life because Jesus rose from the dead.

»» FOCUS VERSES

Luke 24:6–7

He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

»» LESSON TEXT

Luke 24:1–12

1 Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre.

3 And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:

5 And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

6 He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee,

7 Saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

8 And they remembered his words,

9 And returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest.

10 It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles.

11 And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

12 Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

I Peter 1:3–5

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

CULTURE CONNECTION

EMPTY TOMBS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Skeptics who do not believe Jesus rose from the grave suggest reasons why His tomb is empty. One theory suggests Jesus only swooned on the cross; He did not die. Then when He was placed in the tomb, the cool, damp air in the tomb revived Him, and He walked out under His own power. But having just been beaten, crucified, pierced, and tightly wrapped in graveclothes, it seems highly unlikely Jesus would have healed in just three short days.

Others have suggested the women who reported His resurrection just had the wrong address—they went to the wrong tomb. Even if they were so bleary-eyed that they could not see straight, the Romans only had to march the women to the right tomb and show them the lifeless body of their Lord, and Christianity would have been squashed before it began. But they could not because His body was not in the tomb.

The last popular theory is the same theory the Romans propagated in their day: the disciples stole Jesus' body. But these are the same disciples who huddled behind locked doors, fearing for their lives. They did not want to die, yet they were all willing to die preaching the truth of the Resurrection. If they stole Jesus' body, surely one of the disciples would have caved under the threat of death and led the authorities to His body.

Those are three of the primary alternate theories skeptics have suggested for the empty tomb, but they all point to the same indisputable evidence. Whether they want to admit it or not, the tomb is empty.

OUTLINE

I. FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

- A. Stone Was Rolled Away
- B. Two Angels Appeared
- C. He Is Risen

II. REMEMBER HIS WORDS

- A. Delivered into the Hands of Sinners
- B. Crucified
- C. Rose Again the Third Day

III. THE WOMEN TESTIFIED

- A. Unbelief
- B. Peter Ran to the Tomb

IV. THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

- A. New Birth
- B. Living Hope
- C. An Inheritance That Can Never Perish

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The last week had been a struggle for Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary, the mother of James, and other women who had been with them. Jesus, their friend and teacher—

the one they hoped was the promised Messiah—had been crucified. Even though they were standing a distance from the three crosses, they saw the Roman soldier's sword pierce His side. They watched the water and blood gush from the wound. Every conceivable emotion rolled around in their hearts: the emptiness of losing a loved one; the disappointment of dashed dreams; the anger at the Roman soldiers who killed Him; the confusion of misunderstanding His teaching; the hopelessness of dying faith; and the bitterness of wasted time, money, and energy.

Although emotionally weary and physically exhausted, the women rose before dawn on the first day of the week and, carrying spices, went to the tomb of Jesus. They went to anoint the body of Jesus, to finish preparing Him for His burial. This was the last act of love they could perform for Jesus. Their concern was the sealed stone blocking the grave. How could they get the grave open?

I. FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

A. Stone Was Rolled Away

The nagging question bothering the two Marys, Joanna, and the other women as they climbed the rocky trail to the tomb was, *How can we get the stone rolled away?*

The tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin, who secretly followed Jesus. It was a new, unused tomb, cut into the limestone, and had a stone that sealed it. The stone may have been circular like a wheel, but it was probably square (cork-shaped) as they were “much, much more common than round (disk-shaped) ones” (www.biblicalarchaeology.org).

» ***Why do you think Joseph of Arimathea asked for the body of Jesus since he was a secret disciple? How would that affect his standing in the Jewish community?***

Because of the concerns of the Jewish religious leaders, Pilate ordered the tomb be sealed. That process involved stretching a string across the stone covering and sealing the tomb after authorities inspected it to ensuring the body was secure.

Scripture explains that guards were commanded to stand at attention by the tomb.

The Roman guard was a sixteen-man unit that was governed by very strict rules. Each member was responsible for six square feet of space. The guard members could not sit down or lean against anything while they were on duty. If a guard member fell asleep, he was beaten and burned with his own clothes. But he was not the only one executed, the entire sixteen-man guard unit was executed if only one of the members fell asleep while on duty. (www.blueletterbible.org)

Consequently, the women faced three major obstacles in opening the tomb:

1. A large, heavy stone blocked the entrance to the tomb. Who would roll it away?
2. The seal of the Roman governor authenticated the tomb. Anyone breaking the seal would face death.
3. Roman soldiers guarded the tomb. Their failure would result in death.

» ***How do you think the women expected to overcome these obstacles?***

Imagine the women’s total amazement as they rounded the bend to the tomb and found the Roman soldiers had fled the scene. The governor’s seal had been broken, for the stone had been rolled away. The tomb was open.

B. Two Angels Appeared

And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door,

and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. (Matthew 28:2–3)

The women were astonished to see the angel sitting on the large grave stone. Terrified by the heavenly being, the women bowed their faces to the earth. The angels said: “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen” (Luke 24:5–6).

C. He Is Risen

The women did not expect the Resurrection. They carried spices to anoint the body to help mask the stench of decay. They had not understood the words of the Lord. The angelic announcement took them totally by surprise. Slowly they digested the message of the empty tomb. Jesus was not there, for He had conquered death, Hell, and the grave. He was alive.

» ***Why did the women—and the disciples—fail to understand the prophecies of the Resurrection? Have you failed to understand some promises of God? Explain.***

The women looked around them. Jesus’ borrowed tomb had been new, never used. It was hewn out of the limestone hill, without a back entrance. As the tomb was unused, Jesus’ body could not be confused with any others. The Roman seal verified that His body had been in the tomb. The stone blocking the entrance to the tomb and the band of Roman soldiers testified that no one could have secretly entered the grave and stolen the body. All these facts supported the words of the angels.

II. REMEMBER HIS WORDS

A. Delivered into the Hands of Sinners

Hope and joy replaced disappointment and despair as the women absorbed the words of the angels: “Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Luke 24:6–7).

The women were aware of the facts of the previous week. They knew Judas had betrayed Jesus with a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane. They knew Jesus had been dragged illegally before the Sanhedrin and before Pilate. They knew He had been beaten and sentenced to death. Yes, Jesus had been “delivered into the hands of sinful men” (Luke 24:7).

B. Crucified

The women had stood off in the distance as the Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross and planted Him between two thieves. Crucifixion was the cruelest form of death employed by the Romans.

Roman crucifixions were designed to cause maximum pain for a prolonged period—victims’ feet and wrists were usually nailed to a wooden cross, which would hold them upright while they suffered a slow and agonizing

death, often taking several days

As such, it was usually carried out only for the execution of slaves in Roman society . . . ; the bodies were often left on the cross to rot or to be eaten by animals, but in some cases, they were removed and buried. (www.livescience.com)

As the angels had reminded the women, Jesus had foretold His death by crucifixion. Perhaps they had failed to grasp the significance of His words because of the horror of crucifixion. Surely God would not allow His Son to suffer such inhumane brutality. Yet they saw the pounding of the nails, the mocking soldiers, and the blood and water. They witnessed the Crucifixion.

C. Rose Again the Third Day

The angels proclaimed, “He is not here, but is risen” (Luke 24:6). On the first day of the week, three days after the Crucifixion, the women stood at an empty tomb. The inconceivable truth overwhelmed them. Joyfully they ran to tell the glorious news to the disciples, who had possibly gathered in Bethany.

John’s account of Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene seems to conflict with the chronology of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Tim Chaffey harmonizes the accounts in his article “Christ’s Resurrection—Four Accounts, One Reality” in *Answers* magazine. He suggests that after seeing the open tomb, Mary Magdalene ran to Jerusalem to tell Peter and John, leaving the other women—at least four more—at the tomb to hear the words of the angels. He further suggests that Mary returned with Peter and John and then lingered nearby, where Jesus appeared to her. This is a logical deduction based on Mary’s statement to the presumed gardener. Had she heard the words of the angel, she would have known Jesus was alive and would not have been weeping in despair.

III. THE WOMEN TESTIFIED

A. Unbelief

Just like Mary would have been had she waited, the other women were astounded at the declaration of the angels. The scent of the spices they had carried to anoint the body of Jesus testified to their unbelief. They had fully expected to see the broken body of Jesus in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. The empty tomb mystified them. The words of the angel stupefied them.

» *Have you ever seen an angel? If so, describe it.*

As comprehension dawned on the women, their despair turned to unspeakable joy. Leaving the spices behind—the costly spices suddenly became meaningless—the women raced to tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. He had risen from the dead, just as He had promised.

B. Peter Ran to the Tomb

Even though Peter saw the empty tomb and the graveclothes lying there, he did not totally grasp the significance. Undoubtedly the other disciples did not understand either. Perhaps that is the reason Jesus, prior to His ascension, opened the disciples' "understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:45–47).

IV. THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

A. New Birth

What is the significance of the Resurrection? What truth did Peter fail to grasp as he looked at the empty tomb and the graveclothes?

The Resurrection gives meaning to the death and burial of Jesus Christ. If Jesus had not risen from the dead, then He would have simply been another zealous religious leader who was martyred or died a natural death (e.g., Buddha). By being resurrected, He conquered death, Hell, and the grave (I Corinthians 15:12–15).

When we experience the new birth, we die to our sins in repentance, we are buried with Christ in baptism, and we arise to walk in the fullness of the Holy Ghost. This echoes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Because He arose from the dead in power and victory, we too can live in victory over sin and in the power of the Holy Ghost. Christianity is the only religion that has a risen Savior.

B. Living Hope

Bill and Gloria Gaither's classic song says, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow." The reality of a living Christ gives us hope. The resurrected Christ proves no power on earth can stand against our Savior. He won the battle and triumphed over evil. When the despair and cares of the world oppress us, we can shout, "My Saviour lives. Because He lives, my sins are forgiven and His Spirit lives inside me."

Peter said it well: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Peter 1:3–4).

C. An Inheritance That Can Never Perish

Not only do we have a living hope while on earth, we are promised an inheritance that can never perish. Peter described it as being incorruptible, undefiled, eternal, and reserved for us in Heaven.

Someday our mortal bodies will put on immortality, and then we will be with the Lord forever (I Thessalonians 4:14–18).

John's description of the New Jerusalem boggles our minds, for we cannot fathom the beauty and splendor of the eternal city. As Paul wrote, "But as it is written, Eye

hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (I Corinthians 2:9). Our finite minds are incapable of imagining the grandeur and glory of Heaven.

However, we are not anxious to see streets of gold and gates of pearl. Sure, the walls of jasper and the rainbow of colors in the foundation of New Jerusalem will be breathtaking. But what we long for is to be in the presence of Jesus. Dwelling eternally in His presence is the greatest inheritance we could ever receive.

» *What excites you most about Heaven?*

»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

The message of the Resurrection is the capstone of the gospel. Many religions teach basic moral ethics, such as the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. The founders of some religions have been martyred. But Christianity is the only religion that has a risen Savior. The story of the death and burial of Jesus Christ would be incomplete without His rising from the dead. His resurrection gives meaning to His sacrificial death. It proves that the power of evil has been defeated. And because He lives, we can live in victory.

The message of the Resurrection should motivate us to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:12–14).

The message of the Resurrection reminds us that as Christ lives eternally, so shall we. Just as Jesus kept His promise about rising the third day, He will also keep His promise about returning for His saints. We do not know when it will be, but the signs of His returning are all around us. As the Resurrection proved Christ’s victory over death, His returning will bring eternal life to those who believe in Him. The Resurrection proves He is alive forevermore.

Sharing His Mission

FOCUS THOUGHT

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are commanded to share the gospel message with everyone.

»» FOCUS VERSE

Mark 16:15

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

»» LESSON TEXT

Matthew 28:16–20

16 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.

17 And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Mark 16:15–16

15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Luke 24:46–47

46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Acts 1:8

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

»» CULTURE CONNECTION

MISSION STATEMENTS

Not all mission statements are created equal. Corporate bigwigs hire other bigwigs to brainstorm around a conference room table and devise the perfect, pithy mission statement for their company. It will be the marching orders whereby the company does business. Some are excellent; some could use a little work.

Avon's mission statement weighs in at 249 words and includes six core aspirations. That is about 229 words too long. Albertson's exists "to create a shopping experience that pleases our customers; a workplace that creates opportunities and a great working environment for our associates; and a business that achieves financial success." Their word count is a little better, but those twenty-nine words do not tell us if Albertson's sells tires or makes drinking straws. In case you are curious, Albertson's is a grocery store chain.

Jesus would have made the corporate bigwigs proud. His mission statement is specific, short, and easy to remember. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Jesus' mission statement tells us to go everywhere and tell everyone. Jesus has called us to go into all the world and make disciples.

The next time you wonder what God created you to do, remember these short verses at the end of the Gospels: go and make disciples. Jesus gave His life to give His church this mission.

»» OUTLINE

I. HIS MISSION

- A. The Spirit of the Lord Is upon Me
- B. Seek and Save the Lost

II. SHARING HIS MISSION

- A. Go
- B. Preach the Gospel
- C. Baptize
- D. Teach and Make Disciples

»» CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Jesus came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to bring reconciliation to God and man (II Corinthians 5:14-21). This mission of Jesus motivated everything He did; it was His Father's business. The Bible is clear that the lost were never far from the mind of Jesus Christ. He did not come for notoriety, to establish an earthly kingdom, or to live in luxury. He came to save the lost.

I. HIS MISSION

We see clearly from Scripture that Jesus came with one mission in mind—to seek and save the lost. Who were the lost Jesus came to save? Everyone, for “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). How, then, was Jesus going to save everyone? By accepting their repentance and then baptizing them with the Holy Spirit (David S. Norris, *Big Ideas*). This message of baptism in the Holy Spirit was so important that we see Jesus proclaim to the disciples that He will baptize them with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). And later in Acts 11:16 when Peter retold what happened at the home of Cornelius he said, “Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.” The context of this account in Acts 11 is Peter explaining to those in Jerusalem what happened in Caesarea. He explained that while he was still speaking to the gathered group of Gentiles, the Holy Spirit fell on them and they began to speak with tongues.

We may envision Peter somewhat bewildered that God had poured out the Holy Spirit on Gentiles just as He had on Jews, yet while Peter considered it, the words of Jesus illuminated his mind, “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 11:16, NKJV). Jesus was not limiting His seeking and saving to only Jews. By Cornelius and his household being filled, the disciples learned the mission of Jesus was to reach everyone.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost, and He achieved His mission through the Cross and by baptizing with the Holy Spirit.

» *Do you see how the mission of Jesus is fulfilled when someone obeys the gospel through repentance, baptism in Jesus’ name, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit? Explain.*

A. The Spirit of the Lord Is upon Me

Luke 4:16–22 records a day when Jesus went to a synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath. Bible scholars are unsure of when the synagogue became prominent in Judaism, but it is clear that by the time of Jesus, it was an accepted form of covenant continuity and worship (Leon Morris, Tyndale *New Testament Commentaries: Luke*). As the Jewish people became vassals of other nations and were not able to practice worship as freely at the Temple, synagogues became important. Some scholars believe the synagogue Jesus attended in Luke 4 was the very synagogue He attended as a child (J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*).

It is possible local synagogue leaders invited Jesus to read and to preach or that Jesus indicated His desire to read that day by standing up to read (Morris). (See Luke 4:16.) Whether invited to speak or taking the initiative Himself, one thing is clear: when the Law or Prophets were read, the reader would stand, and then after reading, it was customary for the speaker to sit down while teaching or preaching. This is what Jesus did.

“When He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written” (Luke 4:17, NKJV). Some suggest the synagogue was ordered according to a lectionary calendar, and this particular reading was the reading assigned for the day when Jesus arrived. The plain wording of the text indicates that is not the case. Luke says Jesus found the place where it was written. He knew exactly what He wanted to say that day, and He knew the particular passage. He was a prepared preacher. He stood up and read from Isaiah 61:1–2, where the prophet prophesied about the coming Messiah and His anointing. Jesus referred here to His anointing that occurred at His baptism (Norris, *I Am*).

In His ministry Jesus was an anointed man of God. It seems clear that Jesus understood His anointing by God as power for His ministry. Jesus is unique because all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily (Colossians 2:9), yet as a man, He needed the anointing of God to accomplish His ministry. From a human perspective, this might seem unnecessary; after all, Jesus is fully God. Why then would He need anointing from God to perform His ministry? Could He not simply do it as the mighty God in Christ? He could have done it that way, but that would not have been congruent with the Incarnation. God created Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. One example is the way Jesus helped John the Baptist understand the importance of Jesus being baptized. He was baptized, not because of sin, but “to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). In a similar way, Jesus, as a man, was anointed by God to perform His ministry. This serves as an example to believers, and that is the point.

» *When you witness to others, have you experienced the anointing of God helping you? What was it like?*

B. Seek and Save the Lost

As mentioned in the beginning of the lesson, the mission of Jesus was seeking and saving. Let us look further at the specifics of this mission. First, Jesus sought the lost. One effective way to understand this is by the contrast Jesus illustrates of Himself versus the Pharisees. Pharisees in the time of Jesus layered the law of Moses with many additional human traditions, putting burdens on people they were not capable of fulfilling (Matthew 23:4, 13). By neglecting the “weightier matters of the law,” the Pharisees had further corrupted themselves (Matthew 23:23). Jesus affirmed they should have kept the Law. But it was their additions to it that prohibited them and others from doing so. Worse, their oral traditions allowed them to dissociate themselves from any who did not measure up to their false views. So they had little regard for the lost. People like Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, or the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears would be excluded and avoided according to the false notions of the Pharisees. The Kingdom was not open to them; they were lost.

But Jesus sought them out. Examples fill the Gospels, proving that Jesus sought the lost. Perhaps the greatest scriptural illustration of this is Luke 15, where the stories of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son are told. In each story something of value is lost and someone searches for it. The searchers in the stories are the woman, the

shepherd, and the father. Each one looks diligently and longingly for the lost. At the end of each of those stories, Jesus says those who found the missing items rejoiced and celebrated. Verses 7 and 10 tell us there is joy in Heaven when one repents.

Jesus not only seeks, but He has the power to save. Looking at the story of the lost son from Luke 15, consider that the lost son is different from the other two lost items that precede his story in the chapter. Aggressive searches take place for the lost sheep and the lost coin, but little is told about the coin and the sheep. But when the narrative shifts to the story of the lost son, much is told of him. His rejection of the father, his running away from the father's house, and his realization that he was wrong are all key elements of the story. The lost son has volition; he has to make a choice to return to the father's house. But once his choice is made—once he realizes he is no longer fit to be a son but only a servant—the focus of the narrative shifts from him to the father. It is then the father runs to him, restores him, and rejoices with him. The father had the power to save. The father represents God, and Jesus was telling His hearers that God has the power to save even lost sons. We know God performed His saving power in the Man Christ Jesus. His atoning death on the cross and subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit on those who repent tell the tale. He runs to, restores, and rejoices with all who repent, are baptized in His name, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus seeks and saves the lost.

II. SHARING HIS MISSION

Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Our mission is the same. In our lesson text, Jesus explained the components of our mission and the tasks we need to perform to do it effectively. Before looking deeply at those passages, let us look at missions and mission statements.

Business management experts have cautioned that not having mission statement clarity can sidetrack an enterprise. While the church is certainly more important than any business enterprise, it is still beneficial for churches to have a mission statement that derives from Jesus' mission of seeking and saving the lost. One writer described a mission as follows: "a broad, brief, biblical statement of what the organization is supposed to be doing" (Aubrey Malphurs, *Ministry Nuts and Bolts*). A mission is not a vision and it is not a purpose statement; mission describes what the church is doing. A mission statement should be concise enough to fit on a T-shirt (Malphurs).

» *If you had one, what would be your ministry mission statement?*

A. Go

Jesus commanded the disciples to go—a seemingly simple command, yet one even they were challenged to fulfill. Many have noted it was the persecution of the church in the Book of Acts that propelled it beyond the walls of Jerusalem. Going can be challenging. One writer said it this way, "The start stops most." How true that is. But the command is to go.

The disciples faced obstacles to going. Initially the Romans regarded them as a sect of Judaism and treated them in similar ways, but the disciples faced persecutions from the Jews very early on (Acts 3–4; 6–7). Eventually the Romans persecuted the church as well. The threat of persecution was a significant obstacle. But the leaders of the church were not deterred. They received the mission from Jesus and moved forward in faith.

We too have obstacles. The church will always be opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil. But the command to us is the same as it was to them: go. When disciples focus on the challenges, they lose faith. But when they focus on God's Word, they are invigorated.

» *Where is God directing you to go? What is holding you back?*

B. Preach the Gospel

Going is essential, but what is done as one goes is just as important. The disciples left Jerusalem and proclaimed the gospel. They had no beautiful church buildings in which to gather and proclaim the Word of God. They simply told people Jesus died, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:1–4). The first church met in homes for worship and preaching, but their preaching of the gospel also took place in many other locations (Acts 16:13; 17:22). The disciples lived in a world with many religions. Their world was pluralistic, where various religions were celebrated but none claimed preeminence. Theirs was a deeply immoral society with little or no sense of decency. Immorality was publicly displayed and practiced as worship of idols. But still the disciples preached the gospel. They told the good news of Jesus, and God confirmed His Word.

For those whose temperaments are introverted, preaching the gospel can be challenging. Some suggest practicing telling what the Lord has done for you. It is also helpful to recognize that preaching the gospel happens not only behind a pulpit but also over a dinner table, on a break at work, and in a myriad of other places. Many excuse themselves from this task because they are not preachers. But God calls all His people to tell His gospel. Some decline the offer of telling the good news out of a sense of political correctness; after all, some say, politics and religion are the two things people in a polite society are not supposed to discuss.

Certainly there are significant challenges for those who work in secular employment. One helpful principle is understanding that the gospel of Jesus is the gospel of peace. In Ephesians 6:15 Paul taught the Ephesian church that part of the whole armor of God was the shoes of the “gospel of peace.” The gospel does not bring conflict to people. Conflict comes from the sinfulness of the human heart and the evil of the adversary. The gospel brings peace. Realizing we offer peace through the gospel can greatly encourage us to tell God's good news. Through the gospel, disciples offer peace with God. To someone stuck in the turmoil of sin, nothing can be greater.

C. Baptize

Jesus commanded the disciples to baptize in His name. In Mark 16:16 Jesus declared, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Baptism is an essential part of salvation. “Repentance and water baptism together complete the full work of forgiveness” (David K. Bernard, *The New Birth*). Baptism has many scriptural purposes though there is no scriptural record of baptism for the purpose of public confession (Bernard). We are “buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Baptism also served as a spiritual circumcision of the heart (Colossians 2:11–12). Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize, and they did as He commanded.

Disciples of Jesus today will baptize those who desire to be saved. Churches fulfilling the mission of Jesus are baptizing people on a regular basis.

D. Teach and Make Disciples

Lastly, Jesus told the disciples to begin teaching and making disciples. Through His earthly ministry, Jesus gave the pattern; now the disciples too were responsible to spread His love and grow His kingdom. In Matthew 28:18–20 Jesus told the disciples that all authority in Heaven and on Earth had been given to Him, further proof that He would enable them to fulfill the task and no obstacle could stop them. When commissioning them to go, Jesus told them to go and teach because all authority belonged to Him. The disciples were not going forth to teach and make disciples in their own authority; they went forth on the wave of Jesus’ authority. They were commanded to teach, make disciples, and baptize, because all authority belonged to Jesus.

One of the overlooked portions of this passage is the final clause in Matthew 28:20. Jesus said, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Most Christians want the presence of God and even claim it as a promise from the Bible. It is important to note the context of Scripture when the promise of God’s presence is given. For example, God promised Moses He would be with him in Exodus 3; however, that promise of presence was contingent on Moses doing what God was calling him to do. This passage is very similar. God conveys His abiding presence to those who abide in Him and do His will. Those claiming to follow Him but not abiding in Him or doing His will cannot expect God to be with them in the same way.

»»» INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Churches do many things and many of those things are very important. But the church must never lose sight of the truth that their reason for existence is to glorify God and make disciples. Let us not become sidetracked or distracted with the cares of this life and lose our commitment to our true purpose and mission.