



**LIBERATING
FAITH STUDIES**



**LOVE
FOR
ONE ANOTHER**

LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES

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The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary as a signal for silence
- II. Singing
- III. The Apostles' Creed
- IV. Prayer, closing with the Lord's Prayer in concert
- V. Singing
- VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
- VII. Responsive reading of the lesson text by school
- VIII. The Decalogue

The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while the classes are being arranged
- II. Class study of the lesson
- III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
- IV. Closing bell — silence

The Closing

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

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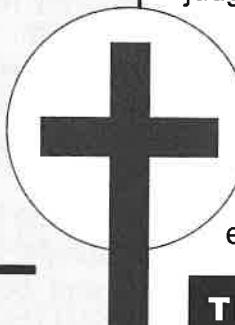
— Lessons —

Lessons • Dr. Cathrine S. Powell

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.



The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

When Love Is Lost

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 37

Focus Scripture: Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28

Key Verse: So his (Joseph's) brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. Genesis 37:11 (NRSV)

GENESIS 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28 (NRSV)

GENESIS 37:2-11

2 This is the story of the family of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding the flock with his brothers; he was a helper to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves.

4 But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

5 Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.

6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream that I dreamed.

7 There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf."

8 His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more because of his dreams and his words.

9 He had another dream, and told it to his brothers, saying, "Look, I have had another dream: the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

10 But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him, and said to him, "What kind of dream is this that you have had? Shall we indeed come, I and your mother and your brothers, and bow to the ground before you?"

GENESIS 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28 (KJV)

GENESIS 37:2-11

2 These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.

4 And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.

5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more.

6 And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed:

7 For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf.

8 And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words.

9 And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me.

10 And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?

11 And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

11 So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

23-24a

23 So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves that he wore;

24a and they took him and threw him into a pit.

28

28 When some Midianite traders passed by, they drew Joseph up, lifting him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt.

23-24a

23 And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him;

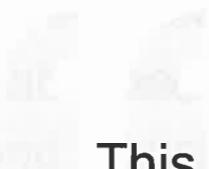
24a And they took him, and cast him into a pit....

28

28 Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

KEY TERMS

- **Agape Love** – A Greco-Christian term used to describe love and charity in their highest forms, including God's love for humankind and love to be expressed for God by humankind.
- **Blended Families**
 - Also known as step-families; applies to more than 50% of families in the United States; includes children from previous relationships/marriages of one or both parents.
- **Polygamy** – A custom or practice wherein men legally can be married to more than one woman.



This quarter's lessons focus on love, an essential attribute for Christian disciples.

INTRODUCTION

This quarter's lessons focus on love, an essential attribute for Christian disciples. We begin this series of lessons with the well-known story of Joseph, which illuminates love (or the lack thereof) as it was experienced in Jacob's family. Jacob was the grandson of Abraham, whom God called to be "the ancestor of a multitude of nations." God promised, "I will make you [Abraham/Abram] exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (Genesis 17:6).

Life within a family with this divine inheritance would suggest, from a human perspective, an environment wherein love, peace, and harmony should prevail. Furthermore, God specifically

commanded Jacob (and all of Israel) to "teach their children so that they and future generations would know God and obey his commandments" (Psalm 78:5-8). Nevertheless, Jacob failed to demonstrate unconditional love among his children and to teach them to love unconditionally. Consequently, extreme jealousy, hatred, and serious familial dysfunctions arose within Jacob's family.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Jacob's was a "blended family." He lived during a time when Jewish people practiced *polygamy*. The story of Jacob's marriage to two sisters is well known. Perhaps less well known is the fact that Jacob fathered twelve sons and at least one daughter with four women, including Leah and Rachel, as well as their handmaidens. Jacob loved Joseph, one of Rachel's sons, most. Jacob's other children were well aware of this fact because Jacob openly conveyed his preferences for Joseph.

Parental Favoritism Produces Jealousy and Hate, Genesis 37:2-4

It is important to note that, in Jacob's

biological family, the practice of parental favoritism was intergenerational. His parents, Isaac and Rebecca, showed favoritism between Jacob and his twin brother, Esau. Isaac chose Esau, and Rebecca chose Jacob. Consequently, for many years, relations between Jacob and Esau were fraught with extreme jealousy and hate (Genesis 25:19–27:46).

Today's scriptures begin with scenes suggestive of a peaceful pastoral setting. The interactions between Jacob's sons, however, quickly change original perceptions. Seventeen-year old Joseph was working alongside his older ("half") brothers as a sheepherder. Immediately, we can see that the brothers looked upon Joseph with disfavor. Why they

disfavored Joseph gradually unfolds. In addition to their father's favoritism, the brothers also disliked Joseph because he tattled on them (v. 4). Hence, the brothers "hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him." Like "the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back," the special coat Jacob made for Joseph provoked the older brothers to violent

anger and destructiveness.

his body (Genesis 46:28-34).

Jealousy and Hate Led to Violence and Destructiveness, Genesis 37:5-11

God used dreams to reveal to Joseph the special plans God had for his life. Young Joseph arrogantly reported on dreams that suggested he would be superior to his brothers. This made deep-rooted jealousies and festering grievances worse. Notably, Jacob rebuked Joseph for talking about his dreams (v.10), but he obviously did nothing to effect reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. Jacob focused instead on what Joseph's dreams might mean. Perhaps Jacob also recalled how he, the younger twin in his family, had attained the blessing that normally would have been passed on to Esau, the first-born. Nevertheless, the extreme jealousy and hate culminated with Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers for twenty pieces of silver, and lying to cover-up their deeds. Jacob, on the other hand, lived with inconsolable grief for many years. Until their reunion in Egypt, Jacob believed voracious wild animals had killed Joseph and devoured

SANKOFA

The strength, capacities, and contributions of contemporary African American families are testaments to our abilities to persevere and progress in spite of seemingly insurmountable adversities. Paradoxically, slavery's cruel systems of oppression aimed to destroy African American families. Prohibitions against

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legal marriage were among its atrocities. Family separations were also common as parents and children were often sold and owned by different slaveholders.

Multiple ownership created serious obstacles to family unity. Travel to different plantations for familial visits was wholly based

upon the approval of slaveholders. In many cases, instead of allowing travel for familial visits, slave masters selected new mates for slaves to "marry." Since legal marriages were prohibited, practices such as "jumping the broom" were established. One of the most horrible results of these oppressive acts is the fact that prior to the abolishment of slavery in the United

States, many African Americans grew up without knowing either their parents or their siblings. Despite all of the obstacles to family unity, love among African American families for each other is a remarkable characteristic for which contemporary African Americans are renowned.

CASE STUDY

Frederick Douglass, renowned orator, writer, abolitionist, and statesman, is an example of the kind of resiliency and perseverance that has propelled African Americans to claim and exhibit God-given rights, including “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Douglass was born into slavery around 1817 (the exact date is unknown). He was separated from his mother as an infant. He came to know her through infrequent visits when she would slip away from her owner’s plantation to visit him at night. Douglass never knew his father, who was believed to have owned his mother as a slave. In his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Douglass gave detailed, graphic

accountings of his life as a slave. Childhood, as slaves knew it, ended for Douglass at age six, when he was taken from his grandmother and other family members. He was forced to live and work in his owner’s home. Severe beatings and oppressive, inhumane treatments pervaded his life until he escaped from slavery to freedom around 1838.

**Despite the pain
and sufferings of his
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Memories of his mother are sad commentaries of slavery’s toll on Frederick’s family life: “She (his mother) died when I was about seven years old....I was not allowed to be present during her illness, at her death, or burial.” Recalling how little contact he’d been allowed to have with his mother, Douglass said he “received the tidings of her death with

much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger.” Despite the pain and sufferings of his early life, Douglass developed love for God and determined to serve his oppressed brothers and sisters. Douglass attributed his aspirations for life beyond and without slavery as well as the faith that propelled him forward in spite of his struggles, to

God.

LIFE APPLICATION

Children are socialized and personal identities are developed in the home, as lessons on love (positive and negative) are taught. Like Jacob's family, through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are also heirs to a divine destiny. Failure to teach and practice agape love in our homes will not only "infect" the immediate family with major dysfunction, it can also spread to the church and other relationships beyond.

Jacob's family's story is rife with examples of family dysfunction. Agape love could never thrive in this environment! The family's relationships were primarily characterized by unresolved conflicts that fostered extreme anger, envy, jealousy, and hatred. Parental favoritism, sibling rivalry, and feelings of estrangement were supporting frameworks from which the dysfunction emerged and continued.

Struggles for love are common among families today. However, we can rejoice in the fact that God has no stepchildren!



Like Jacob's family, through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are also heirs to a divine destiny.

All are equal, with assurances that God "is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34). Yet, the experiences of Jacob's family can teach us a lot about the importance of love in family relationships, and especially how impactful the behavior of parents and guardians can be with creating loving relationships among children. Fortunately, we also have scripture, such as 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, to help us understand what godly love looks like: patience and kindness, as well as familial relationships wherein envy, boastfulness, unselfishness, and so forth are absent. Modeling Christian discipleship at home is imperative!

Serious reflection on the impact of our behavior in our own homes and with our families is also crucial. This forms the baseline for evaluating the prospects of our being able to persuade others to model Jesus' teachings. Modeling love is more important than talking about it. Others, especially younger impressionable observers, are watching us. Finally, we must remember that we are obligated to love. Love is basic to

Lesson 1

September 6, 2020

Christian identities. “Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

QUESTIONS:

1. What experiences do you have with parental favoritism?
2. What advice would you give to others who “struggle” because of parental favoritism?
3. How do you demonstrate love toward others – in your home, the church, and beyond?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Lord, we thank you for loving us, choosing us, and commissioning us to be your ambassadors. Your Word tells us to

let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to you in heaven. We pray, Father, that love will be the fuel that powers our lights, and that we will never forget the importance of shining our lights at home before attempting to “light the way for the world.” In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Closing Song: “I Don’t Know Why Jesus Loves Me” by Andraé Crouch

I don't know why Jesus loved me
 I don't know why he cared
 I don't know why he sacrificed his life
 Oh, but I'm glad, so glad he did
 He left his mighty throne in glory
 To bring to us redemption's story
 Then he died but he rose again
 Oh, but I'm glad, so glad he did
 (repeat)

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

August 31–September 6

Monday	Genesis 30:22-24; 35:16-20	(Rachel, Mother of Joseph and Benjamin)
Tuesday	Genesis 37:12-17	(Joseph Checks on Brothers at Dothan)
Wednesday	Genesis 37:29-36	(Jacob Convinced that Joseph Is Dead)
Thursday	Psalm 106:1-6, 16-22	(From Slave to Ruler of Egypt)
Friday	Acts 7:9-15a	(Jacob Lives with Joseph in Egypt)
Saturday	James 4:1-7	(Caution, Disputes May Lead to Violence)
Sunday	Genesis 37:2-11, 23-24a, 28	(Jealousy Divides Families)

GOD REWARDS OBEDIENCE

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 41:14-57

Focus Scripture: Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52

Key Verses: “So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you.”

Genesis 41:39-40 (NRSV)

GENESIS 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52 (NRSV)

Genesis 41:25-33

25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.

26 The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one.

27 The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, as are the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind. They are seven years of famine.

28 It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do.

29 There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt.

30 After them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt; the famine will consume the land.

31 The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous.

32 And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.

33 Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

37-40

37 The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.

38 Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?”

GENESIS 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52 (KJV)

Genesis 41:25-33

25 And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he is about to do.

26 The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years: the dream is one.

27 And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.

28 This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh: What God is about to do he sheweth unto Pharaoh.

29 Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt:

30 And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land;

31 And the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following; for it shall be very grievous.

32 And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

33 Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.

37-40

37 And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants.

38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?

39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you."

40 You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you."

50-52

50 Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potipherah, priest of On, bore to him.

51 Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For," he said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house."

52 The second he named Ephraim, "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes."

39 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art:

40 Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou.

50-52

50 And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him.

51 And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.

52 And the name of the second called he Ephraim: For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.

KEY TERM

- Ishmaelites** – Descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's oldest son; Hagar, Sarah's handmaiden, was his mother.

INTRODUCTION

From human perspectives, Joseph had every reason to become bitter. As a young shepherd boy, Joseph's brothers hated him so much that they forcibly took him from his father, who adored him, and sold him to a caravan of Ishmaelites. This ultimately led to Egyptian enslavement (Genesis 37:28-36). The scriptures tell

Joseph proved bitterness/hatefulness do not necessarily reproduce the same emotions.

us that "the Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master" (Genesis 39:2). However, scriptures also inform us that this period in Joseph's life was

turbulent, punctuated by false accusations from his master's wife, unjustified imprisonment, and disloyalty from fellow prisoners. The latter might have helped Joseph gain release from prison at least two years before he was officially released. In all of this, Joseph proved bitterness/hatefulness do not necessarily reproduce the same

emotions. With God's teachings during this difficult period, Joseph emerged with his faith and integrity intact, along with a spirit of love instead of bitterness.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Joseph Rises to Power, Genesis

41:25-33; 37-40

Today's lesson begins with the final days of Joseph's imprisonment and the beginning of the "new purpose" to which God directed Joseph's life. The cupbearer finally "remembers" to tell Pharaoh about Joseph, whom he met in prison. Since no one else could interpret Pharaoh's dream, the cupbearer suggested that Pharaoh should send for Joseph. Joseph succinctly and convincingly interpreted Pharaoh's dream. In a show of true leadership, Joseph also gave recommendations for Egypt to prepare for the famine that would definitely come. This was a fourteen-year plan, which was immediately adopted by Pharaoh as he also elevated Joseph, thereby giving him vast power to save the nation of Egypt.

Joseph Is Doubly Blessed, Genesis

41:50-52

Names, among the Hebrew people, had meaning! Joseph followed this tradition as he was blessed to have two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. With naming his first-born son, *Manasseh*, Joseph acknowledged forgetfulness and forgiveness. Notably, Joseph said, "God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father's house" (v. 51b). While naming *Ephraim*, Joseph was praising God for prosperity and spiritual fruitfulness in spite of Joseph having suffered through Egyptian slavery and imprisonment for thirteen years. Indeed, Joseph's obedience

Joseph said, "God
has made me forget
all my hardship and
all my father's house"
(v. 51b).

was blessed.

SANKOFA

Joseph was a seventeen-year-old Hebrew when his brothers sold him into slavery. Thirteen years later, he was released from prison and declared second in command over all of Egypt (Gen. 41:46). Hence, Joseph spent thirteen years in prison for a crime he did not commit. Due process was obviously

never a consideration in his case. Unfortunately, imprisonments of this nature are historically linked to African Americans and the institution of slavery in the U.S.A.

Of course, slaves were considered to be property, with no human rights. Therefore, they were notoriously imprisoned at the whims of slave masters or other authority figures. In 1865, when the Civil War ended and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution passed, slaves were supposedly granted the same rights as all Americans. Following Reconstruction, *Black Codes* were established. These laws represented new forms of control over free Africans and, through imprisonments, guaranteed perpetuation of free labor practices. After *Black Codes* were declared unconstitutional, Jim Crow Laws, along with the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups, continued the cycle of oppression and abuse. In all cases, incarceration rates and forced free labor

ensued for African Americans. This abhorrent trend continues!

Statistical reports indicate glaring discrepancies between incarceration rates for people of color versus Caucasians. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) report on criminal justice (2019) indicates that despite the fact African Americans and Hispanics comprise about

These laws represented new forms of control over free Africans and, through imprisonments, guaranteed perpetuation of free labor practices.

32% of the United States' total population, 56% of incarcerated people were African American and/or Hispanic. Disparities between sentences for drug-related offenses were equally as glaring. Although similar rates of drug usage were found, African Americans were six times more likely to be arrested than Caucasians. The effects

of these disparities upon incarcerated individuals, their families, and our nation are catastrophic. The United States, according to the NAACP, "makes up about 5% of the world's population and has 21% of the world's prisoners." Family separations, unemployment rates, and

economic deprivations are just a few negative impacts that continue after prisoners are released. Among them are lifetime prohibitions against voting and responsibilities for on-going supervision in spite of employment capabilities and/or opportunities. In essence, through legislation and criminal justice disparities, systems of oppression and control over African American lives and families have persisted from 1619 when the first Africans arrived in the United States to current life.

CASE STUDY

The life story of Nelson Mandela exemplifies love versus bitterness, the underlying theme in today's lesson. Because he actively resisted and engaged politically to end

Apartheid in South Africa, his native land, Mandela was arrested and incarcerated with a life sentence. While incarcerated, Mandela continued his leadership among his people and completed a law degree, despite the harsh treatments he endured. He was ultimately a central player in the demise of Apartheid. Apartheid was

legislatively enacted in 1948 by an all-white government. Similar to *Jim Crow laws* in America, *Apartheid laws* codified racial discrimination and oppression against Africans, despite their being the majority population. Consequently, Africans were forced to live in separate areas from the white population, use public facilities, and forced to severely limit interracial contacts. Along with many other atrocities,



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Africans were driven from their land and forced to live in tribal communities, designed to create further divisions and increase disempowerment of Africans. Thus, the minority population controlled the majority.

At age 72, in 1990, Mandela was released from jail, and he worked with a

newly-established, more sympathetic government to end Apartheid in 1991. On May 10, 1994, Mandela was inaugurated, becoming South Africa's first black president. His other accomplishments are too numerous to note. Among them was a Nobel Peace Prize for his role in mediating differences among all Africans

to effect healing and restoration. In 1996, Mandela signed a new democratic Constitution that guaranteed majority rule, freedom of expression, and equality for minorities. Instead of bitterness for his incarceration and other offenses, Mandela later reflected upon his life with this comment: "Until I changed myself, I could not change others." Like Joseph, Mandela suggested personal revival and new perspectives occurred during his incarceration and the long fight for freedom and democracy in Africa.

LIFE APPLICATION

Jesus warned that his judgment, at the Second Coming, will include the following indictment: "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me" (Matthew 25:43). What will your response be? We can see from today's discussions as well as the current injustices in our criminal justice system that not every

prisoner deserves to be incarcerated. Also, in cases where guilt is established, disparate treatments, based on race and other personal characteristics, are unjust and must be noted and confronted. Jesus compels us to action, not to judgment. We are called to serve! God reserves judgment for himself (Romans 2).

Mandela later reflected upon his life with this comment:
"Until I changed myself,
I could not change
others."

Statistics infer that we are likely to have many more people among us, including church members, who are affected by our criminal justice system. Notably, the NAACP reported that one in every 37 adults, or 2.7% of America's adult population, are "under some form of correctional supervision." As with all charity, concerns for those affected needs to begin in our homes

and with our families. The church is likely the next priority. However, the need to go beyond family and the walls of the church is almost screaming for our attention.

QUESTIONS:

1. How has this lesson changed your

perspectives on currently incarcerated individuals and those who have been released?

2. What new “in-reach” and “out-reach” ideas do you have for ministering to incarcerated individuals, as well as their loved-ones?
3. What ministries would you recommend your congregation sponsor to create more inclusiveness with incarcerated/imprisoned populations?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Dear Lord, we are grateful for the opportunity to see how you achieve your purposes in spite of life’s circumstances. Incarceration comes in many forms and presents innumerable challenges. Please anoint us and bless us with understanding to fulfill your callings for each of us. In the name of Jesus, please use us to bring honor and glory to your name in this and all areas of life to which you might send us. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 7 – September 13

Monday	Acts 13:1-5	(Paul and Barnabas Appointed for Ministry)
Tuesday	Genesis 41:9-13	(Joseph, Chief Interpreter of Dreams)
Wednesday	Genesis 41:14-24	(Dreams of Cows and Corn Explained)
Thursday	Genesis 41:34-36	(Preparing for the Expected Famine)
Friday	Genesis 41:41-49	(Storing Grain for the Future)
Saturday	Genesis 41:53-57	(Egypt Feeds the Middle East)
Sunday	Genesis 41:25-33, 37-40, 50-52	(Leadership During Crisis)

LOVE VERSUS GUILT

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 42

Focus Scripture: Genesis 42:6-25

Key Verse: Then Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood” Genesis 42:22 (NRSV)

GENESIS 42:6-25 (NRSV)

6 Now Joseph was governor over the land; it was he who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground.

7 When Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he said. They said, “From the land of Canaan, to buy food.”

8 Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.

9 Joseph also remembered the dreams that he had dreamed about them. He said to them, “You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land!”

10 They said to him, “No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food.

11 We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies.”

12 But he said to them, “No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!”

13 They said, “We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan; the youngest, however, is now with our father, and one is no more.”

14 But Joseph said to them, “It is just as I have said to you; you are spies!

15 Here is how you shall be tested: as Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here!

16 Let one of you go and bring your brother, while the rest of you remain in prison, in order that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you; or else, as Pharaoh lives, surely you are spies.”

GENESIS 42:6-25 (KJV)

6 And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.

7 And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

8 And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.

9 And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

10 And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come.

11 We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.

12 And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

13 And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

14 And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies:

15 Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither.

16 Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.

17 And he put them all together in prison for three days.

18 On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God:

19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here where you are imprisoned. The rest of you shall go and carry grain for the famine of your households,

20 and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die." And they agreed to do so.

21 They said to one another, "Alas, we are paying the penalty for what we did to our brother; we saw his anguish when he pleaded with us, but we would not listen. That is why this anguish has come upon us."

22 Then Reuben answered them, "Did I not tell you not to wrong the boy? But you would not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood."

23 They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter.

24 He turned away from them and wept; then he returned and spoke to them. And he picked out Simeon and had him bound before their eyes.

25 Joseph then gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to return every man's money to his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. This was done for them.

KEY TERMS

- **Grain** – A chief component of the Israelites' diet, grain was essential for sustaining life. It was eaten in parched or raw forms, as bread or porridge (Lev. 23:14).
- **Reconciliation** – The restoration of friendly/compatible relationships.

17 And he put them all together into ward three days.

18 And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God:

19 If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses:

20 But bring your youngest brother unto me; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so.

21 And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.

22 And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required.

23 And they knew not that Joseph understood them; for he spake unto them by an interpreter.

24 And he turned himself about from them, and wept; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes.

25 Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way: and thus did he unto them.

INTRODUCTION

Most of Joseph's boyhood dreams became a reality at age thirty. His mother was deceased by then. His father, Jacob, was well advanced in age but still alive, living in Canaan with the rest of his family. However, there is nothing to indicate that Jacob ever bowed before Joseph. His brothers did bow with great humility! Their reunion was the culmination of a long series of events that led Joseph

to slavery, imprisonment, elevation to the second highest office in Egypt, and ultimately to become God's special ambassador. At this time, Joseph was well prepared and positioned to save the lives of his family (as well as others). Consequently, God used Joseph as his instrument for blessing and preserving a remnant of his people (the Israelites) for new beginnings after the famine.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Joseph's Dreams Fulfilled, Genesis 42:6-14

As Joseph predicted, famine spread throughout the land. Canaan, Joseph's homeland, was not spared! Only the Egyptians had enough grain to sustain life for themselves and others.

Joseph, as second in command to Pharaoh, was in charge of sales and distribution.

To avoid starvation, Jacob sent all of his sons, except Benjamin, his youngest son, to buy grain in Egypt. Still showing favoritism, Jacob withheld Benjamin because he believed Joseph was dead, and Benjamin was now the only remaining

son of Rachel.

Upon meeting Joseph in Egypt, the brothers did not immediately recognize Joseph. He was twenty years older, and although he understood Hebrew, Joseph was using an interpreter to communicate with them. Desperate to transact their business and return home with the much-needed grain, the brothers "bowed themselves before him (Joseph)

with their faces to the ground" (Genesis 42:6). Joseph recognized his brothers immediately and remembered his dreams. Naturally, Joseph did not immediately trust his brothers, and perhaps he still had some resentment toward them. This would explain why "he treated them like strangers and

Spiritual maturity and growth, however, are evident in the fact that Joseph refrained from arrogantly saying, "I told you so," or by reminding them of his dreams.

spoke harshly to them" (v. 8). Spiritual maturity and growth, however, are evident in the fact that Joseph refrained from arrogantly saying, "I told you so," or by reminding them of his dreams. Without showing any desire to avenge himself, Joseph also took advantage of the opportunity to learn about the rest of the

family, especially his brother Benjamin and his father.

Joseph Tests His Brothers, Genesis 42:8-20

According to Joseph, he decided to test his brothers to verify their honesty in dealing with him, and to save their lives (v. 20). The test began with Joseph accusing his brothers of being spies, which could have led to their being thrown in jail with no hopes of returning home. Even with his tests, Joseph showed mercy as he began with much harsher demands for the brothers to prove themselves, and later reduced his requirements (vs. 15-20). The prevailing demand in Joseph's requirements was his insistence that

Benjamin should be brought to him. Although they still did not recognize Joseph, the brothers' guilty consciences are evident as they voiced convictions about their treatment of Joseph and beliefs that they were now being punished. Joseph responded with weeping privately before blessing his siblings with grain,

returning their money to them, and giving provisions for those journeying back to Canaan. Only one brother, Simeon, was retained. However, Joseph never wavered in his demand to have Benjamin brought to him.

SANKOFA

Close parallels between Joseph's experiences and Frederick Douglass' experiences with slavery continue to emerge. One poignant example occurred during a reunion between Douglass and Thomas Auld, who once owned Douglass as a slave. Auld was on his deathbed. Douglass, now a free man who had spent years speaking out about Auld's cruelty toward him and his family,

visited Auld. Both men cried! Neither man sought to deny either the cruelty and oppression, or the bitter memories, but both welcomed reconciliation.

Auld is noted to have said to Douglass, "I always knew you were too smart to be a slave, and had I been in your place, I



Neither man sought to deny either the cruelty and oppression, or the bitter memories, but both welcomed reconciliation.

should have done the same." Frederick Douglass as a free man was now able to speak with no fear of retribution. He corrected Auld's perspectives on their relationship. Douglass explained that he never saw himself as being enslaved by another man, but by an oppressive, dehumanizing system. Likewise, Douglass explained that he never saw himself as a runaway from another man. As Joseph saved his people after his freedom from prison, Douglass also used his life, as a freeman, and all of his abilities to save his people. He advocated for the abolishment of slavery in the United States as well as the bestowal of all equalities and civil rights afforded by the United States Constitution.

History implies that both Auld and Douglass were changed by the time of their reunion. Auld could now comprehend the gravity of his sins against Douglass and other slaves. Douglass, on the other hand, could look beyond Auld and see that the institution of slavery had victimized both of them. While Auld had been privileged by the system, it had also

promoted his decline into deepest levels of human depravity.

CASE STUDY

Tyler Perry's life story presents an inspirational contemporary case for seeing how loving those who hurt or offend us is a path that frees us to fulfill God's purposes for our lives

Tyler Perry's life story presents an inspirational contemporary case for seeing how loving those who hurt or offend us is a path that frees us to fulfill God's purposes for our lives

adults outside his home. Dropping out of high school and even considering suicide at one point are among many negative events that highlight the toll such treatments took on his worldview. However, it is heartwarming to see how Tyler used those events to bless not only

himself, but also the world, as love and forgiveness are prevailing themes in all of his works. Likewise, his love for God and how God uses all circumstances, including the most painful experiences, to fulfill his great and wonderful plans is a recurring theme in all of his works.

Like Joseph, Tyler also shed tears as he approached reconciliation with his father. He reports that he finally confronted his father with his pent-up emotions, but was moved to tears to hear his father express love for him. That reconciliation obviously freed Tyler Perry to move forward, thereby expanding his blessings and bringing encouragement to others.

LIFE APPLICATION

Loving those who have hurt us is easier said than done. For humankind, urges to avenge or vindicate ourselves are natural reactions. No matter how hard we try, we cannot wish hurtful words or experiences away. However, as we see in the lives of Joseph, Frederick Douglass, Tyler Perry, and others, our perspectives on such memories can be

transformed. As a result, love can abide in ways that will help us as well as "those who trespass against us" to become more like Jesus. In that regard, Jesus calls us to a different, superior level of understanding that challenges us to love when hate would seem more realistic from a worldly point of view. Romans 12:2 urges us to be transformed through renewed minds. We can't do it on our own, but, according

to Philippians 4:13, we "can do all things through Christ who strengthens (us)."



Loving those who
have hurt us is easier
said than done.

The scriptures are filled with references to the requirement to love our enemies. In Matthew 5:43-48, we find vivid descriptions of Jesus' position on this subject. Jesus acknowledged that the Jews had heard strongly opposing teachings from the Pharisees. Succinctly, their teachings had focused on loving one's neighbor and hating enemies. Jesus, on the other hand, explained that those who would be Jesus' disciples must behave differently. The essence of Jesus' teaching is encapsulated in his command to "love

your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be children of the father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44b-45a). Praying elevates our minds and softens our hearts, both of which are essential to the empowerment we need to help others, including our enemies, to come to know and worship our true and living God.

QUESTIONS:

1. How have you sought God's help with overcoming adversity created by others?
2. Is there someone with whom you need to seek reconciliation? How will you initiate reconciliation?

3. How might you use this lesson to help others?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Lord, we accept your Word and want to be more like Jesus. Thank you for teaching us that we must and can love everyone, including those who hurt and abuse us. Help us to look beyond who or what appears to be the source of our painful experiences to seek your presence, the comfort and deliverance that only you can provide. Please bless us to also seek to understand and fulfill your purposes in every situation. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 14—September 20

Monday	Psalm 51:1-12	(Have Mercy on Me, a Sinner)
Tuesday	Luke 23:9-15	(Pilate's Judgment of Jesus, "Not Guilty")
Wednesday	Genesis 42:1-5	(Brothers Sent to Egypt to Buy Grain)
Thursday	Genesis 42:26-28	(Joseph Returns Money with Grain)
Friday	Genesis 42:29-34	(Joseph Questions Motives of Brothers)
Saturday	Genesis 42:35-38	(Jacob Vows Not to Send Benjamin)
Sunday	Genesis 42:6-25	(Joseph Confronts Brothers for Past Behavior)

GOD'S PLAN REVEALED

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 43-45:1-15

Focus Scripture: Genesis 45:1-8, 10-15

Key Verse: “*And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.*” *Genesis 45:5 (NRSV)*

GENESIS 45:1-8, 10-15 (NRSV)

Genesis 45:1-8

1 Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

3 Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

5 And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

6 For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest.

7 God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors.

8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.”

10-15

10 “You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have.

11 I will provide for you there—since there are

GENESIS 45:1-8, 10-15 (KJV)

Genesis 45:1-8

1 Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

2 And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.

3 And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.

4 And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

5 Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

6 For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earring nor harvest.

7 And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

10-15

10 And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children’s children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:

11 And there will I nourish thee; for yet there

five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.'

12 And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you.

13 You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here."

14 Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck.

15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

12 And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you.

13 And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.

14 And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck.

15 Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.

KEY TERM

- **Goshen** – A fertile region, located in northeast Egypt. The Israelites occupied this area from the time of their rescue by Joseph until their exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.

INTRODUCTION

A lot has happened in the life of Joseph's family since last week's lesson. Having left Simeon in Egypt with Joseph, the other brothers have returned home with the grain they purchased. However, the famine has persisted longer than the grain supply could sustain Canaan's population. Consequently, Jacob began to pressure his sons to make another trip to Egypt to purchase more grain. However, Jacob was not willing to allow Benjamin to accompany them as

Joseph had demanded. The other sons were unwilling to return to Egypt without Benjamin. Joseph had clearly informed them that, without Benjamin, he would not agree to see them again. There was no one else to whom they could appeal to purchase grain! After much debate and Judah's offer of himself as guarantor for Benjamin's safe return, Jacob agreed to meet Joseph's demands. Benjamin would accompany his brothers on this trip to Egypt.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Joseph Reveals Himself, Genesis 45:1-4

Surprisingly, Judah had to offer himself to Joseph as a substitute for Benjamin. Joseph had deceptively arranged to have his brothers temporarily restrained before announcing Joseph's decision to

detain Benjamin. To justify his decision, Joseph had covertly arranged to have Benjamin accused of theft. As Judah pled for Benjamin's release, Joseph learned of Jacob's favoritism toward Benjamin as well as his belief that Joseph had died from attacks by wild animals (Genesis 44:1-34).

Until now, Joseph's distinctiveness as an Egyptian elite had been maintained throughout their time together. However, Joseph's whole persona changed during this encounter. His love and affection for his family were overwhelming! Joseph temporarily lost control of his composure and emotions. After sending everyone away and regaining self-control, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. We can only imagine the fear the brothers must have experienced upon hearing Joseph say, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt" (v. 4b).

Joseph Reveals God's Master Plan, Genesis 45:5-8

Notably, Joseph did not dwell on his

brothers' sins against him. He had a greater vision for understanding the past, and God's plans for the future. Instead of anger or vindictiveness, Joseph quickly moved to assuage his brothers' guilt. He directed their attention to God, urging them to understand how God was using everything that had happened to implement his plans. Implementing God's plans was Joseph's top priority! According

**Joseph did not dwell
on his brothers' sins
against him.**

to Joseph, "God sent me before you to preserve a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors" (Genesis 45:7). Likewise, it was God, and not Pharaoh, who was responsible for his status in Egypt.

A New Home in Goshen, Genesis 45:10-15

Joseph had all of his brothers, including Benjamin, together, and he had lots of good news to tell them. At Joseph's direction, arrangements would be made to settle the whole family in Goshen. Living in Goshen would enable the Israelites to continue day to day life pretty much as they had known it in Canaan. Joseph promised there would

be room for his father, all of his siblings, and successive generations. The land would also support their flocks, herds, and so forth. Joseph also assured his brothers that, because of his position with Pharaoh, he would be able to take care of his family through the remaining five years of the famine. Urging his brothers to go and tell Jacob all they had heard and seen, Joseph also instructed them to bring Jacob and the whole family as well as their possessions to him and a new life in Goshen. Continuing to show love and forgiveness, Joseph ended this visit with kisses. He kissed Benjamin first, but quickly reached out to his other brothers with kisses. God's favor upon Israel would later be confirmed

magnificently. God spared all of Goshen from the wrath of the ten plagues that Egypt experienced when Pharaoh refused to obey God's commands.

SANKOFA

Forgiveness is frequently a misunderstood and misapplied concept. Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers

demonstrates how forgiveness is just as meaningful to the offended as it is to the offender. Joseph's brothers may never have asked him to forgive them. But we can easily see that forgiving them was essential to Joseph's need to fulfill God's purpose and specific assignment for Joseph in Egypt. God was saving the nation of Israel!



Forgiveness is frequently a misunderstood and misapplied concept.

Despite the harsh realities of discrimination and other inhumane treatments, forgiveness is a major theme historically reflected in the lived experiences of African American Christians. Even during the most painful periods in American history, sincere African American Christians found liberation despite physical bondage. As

knowledge of and experience with God increased, so did understandings about the powerful links between forgiving trespassers and receiving forgiveness from God. Our ancestors exemplified beliefs that living in ways that honored God generated new, higher-level consciousness and sensitivities that

enabled them to view slave masters and other abusers differently.

One poignant example is William Grimes, an ex-slave and author of the first ex-slave's narrative, *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*. In recounting an incident when he was severely punished for something he did not do, Grimes said he forgave his oppressor, and prayed that God would also forgive him and change his heart. Grimes' rationale: the slave master would otherwise be doomed to much direr punishment if he didn't change. Grimes essentially operated from a superior moral/ethical framework that enabled him to pity the slave master for behavior that could forever separate him from God. God was Grimes' master, not the man who was abusing him. Painting a vivid picture of liberation in the Spirit of God, the oppressed (Grimes) triumphed over the oppressor!

CASE STUDY

In October 2019, Americans were

stunned by an unabashed display of forgiveness in a Dallas, Texas courtroom. Amber Guyger, a former police officer, had just received a ten-year prison sentence. Guyger's sentence resulted from her having shot and killed Botham Johns, a young African American male, in his own apartment. Guyger's defense was that she shot Botham because she believed he was in her apartment.

Brandt's message to Guyger was, "I hope you go to God with all the guilt, all of the bad things you may have done in the past. If you truly are sorry, I forgive you, and if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you."

Much controversy continues to surround this case — from the defense Guyger presented to the appropriateness of the ten-year prison sentence for this unimaginable crime. Yet, Brandt Jean, Botham's younger eighteen-year-old brother, with the judge's permission, arose from his seat to address Guyger. Brandt's

message to Guyger was, "I hope you go to God with all the guilt, all of the bad things you may have done in the past. If you truly are sorry, I forgive you, and if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you." Going further with his forgiveness,

Brandt asked and received permission from the judge to hug Guyger. Permission was granted Brandt and later, the judge, hugged Guyger as well.

As previously mentioned, controversies surrounding this case continue, and in its wake, many criticized Brandt for quickly forgiving Guyger. Speculations on whether an African American with similar charges would receive the same compassion as Guyger abounds. Although he was only an eighteen-year-old at the time, Brandt Jean staunchly defends his decisiveness and forgiveness. Neither race nor his own pain and loss seem to have influenced his forgiveness. Instead, his faith in God and concern for Guyger's soul are apparent. Despite controversies, Brandt followed his own conscience to focus on Guyger's soul and God's will, instead of the criminal act that led to his brother's death.

LIFE APPLICATION

Forgiveness is not always easy. The difficulty is reinforced by the fact that the memories of pain and suffering

(especially in cases where we feel unjustifiably harmed) do not go away. Wanting to avenge ourselves is natural for all humankind. However, as is often the case, this natural propensity is contradictory to God's Word. The role of avenger is one that God reserves for himself. In Leviticus 19:18, God says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you

shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

Forgiveness is not always easy. The difficulty is reinforced by the fact that the memories of pain and suffering (especially in cases where we feel unjustifiably harmed) do not go away.

Contrary to much popular thinking, forgiveness does not let perpetrators "off the hook." Neither does it minimize the seriousness of offenses against others. It's personal. The offender and the offended must confess to God

and repent for their sins. Forgiveness, however, frees the offended as the focus shifts from human pain and suffering to focus on Almighty God, who still wipes away all tears and heals every wound.

QUESTIONS:

1. Is there someone whom you need to forgive? What would it take for you to offer them forgiveness?

2. With forgiveness as a lens, review this lesson to identify similarities between Joseph, African slave traditions, and Brandt Jean.
3. Compare the word *conform* to the word *transform*. What is the difference?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Pray The Lord's Prayer in unison, and with special focus on the demands for forgiveness.

Closing Hymn: "At the Cross" – AMEC Hymnal #139

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 21–September 28

Monday	Psalm 43	(During Trouble, Maintain Hope in God)
Tuesday	Genesis 43: 1-15	(Benjamin Sent to Joseph with Gifts)
Wednesday	Genesis 44: 1-13	(Stolen Cup Found in Benjamin's Grain)
Thursday	Genesis 44: 14-17	(Brothers Offer to Become Slaves to Joseph)
Friday	Genesis 44:18-26	(Judah Pleads with Joseph for Benjamin)
Saturday	Genesis 44:27-34	(Jacob Will Die Without Seeing Benjamin)
Sunday	Genesis 45:1-15	(Joseph and His Brothers Reconcile Their Differences)

LOVE AND DEVOTION TO OTHERS

Lesson Scripture: 1 Samuel 19:1-7; 23:1-18; 2 Samuel 9

Focus Scripture: 1 Samuel 19:1-7

Key Verse: Jonathan spoke well of David to his father, Saul, saying to him, "The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you." 1 Samuel 19:4 (NRSV)

1 SAMUEL 19:1-7 (NRSV)

1 Saul spoke with his son Jonathan and with all his servants about killing David. But Saul's son Jonathan took great delight in David.

2 Jonathan told David, "My father Saul is trying to kill you; therefore be on guard tomorrow morning; stay in a secret place and hide yourself.

3 I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you; if I learn anything I will tell you."

4 Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul, saying to him, "The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you;

5 for he took his life in his hand when he attacked the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; why then will you sin against an innocent person by killing David without cause?"

6 Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan; Saul swore, "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death."

7 So Jonathan called David and related all these things to him. Jonathan then brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.

1 SAMUEL 19:1-7 (KJV)

1 And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.

2 But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself:

3 And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee.

4 And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good:

5 For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?

6 And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain.

7 And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

KEY TERMS

- **Covenant** – An alliance or agreement between two parties with equal or unequal authorities. God's covenants with humankind are the latter type, as humankind can never achieve equality with sovereign God.
- **David** – Israel's second king; a descendant of Abraham, chosen by God in his youth, to become King Saul's successor to the throne of Israel.
- **Jonathan** – King Saul's son.
- **Saul** – Israel's first king; because of arrogance and disobedience, God denounced Saul's kingship (1 Samuel 15) and determined that Saul's descendants would not ascend to Israel's throne. Instead, God chose David. This action was a fulfillment of God's promises in the Abrahamic Covenant.



Inclusive love is a core principle, a defining precept of the gospel.

today – *Inclusive Love*. It brings a new focus on love and its impacts on human relationships. Inclusive love is a core principle, a defining precept of the gospel. It is unconditional love that actualizes the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34-40).

Most of us are familiar with the saying, "Blood is thicker than water." Of course, blood really is thicker than water, but the expression implies that love for family should always triumph over love for others. This first session focuses on the story of David and Jonathan, who were not related biologically and came from very different backgrounds. Despite these differences, David and Jonathan developed powerful bonds of love between them. Their relationship exemplified agape love and defied humankind's limited perspectives on love.

INTRODUCTION

We begin a new unit of study on love

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Jonathan Protects and Defends David, 1 Samuel 19:1-5

This session begins with King Saul having spoken with Jonathan and his servants about killing David (v. 1). Saul was obsessed with the idea of either murdering David or having someone else carry out his evil plans. Saul was a troubled man! Apparently, he became filled with jealousy and hatred for David because of David's popularity with the people. From the time David confronted and defeated

Goliath, the public held David in high esteem and vigorously praised him. Saul initially loved David. David's victory over Goliath profoundly impressed Saul. He applauded David's skills as a warrior, and he even brought him to live in his own home. Living together apparently ignited the beginnings of a deeply abiding friendship between David and Jonathan.

God continuously blessed David. The more David succeeded, the more popularity he gained among the people. Saul did not like the possibility of David being more popular than he was. Unresolved anger and jealousy festered

in Saul's heart. Extreme anger and hatred toward David evolved. An evil spirit from God (1 Samuel 18:10a) caused Saul to experience episodes of raging madness and torment. Sometimes, Saul relied on David to help restore his comfort, but the desire to kill David remained constant. So, Saul tried numerous times to kill David, but God always preserved David's life.

Although Jonathan disagreed with his father's feelings toward David, there are no indications that Jonathan disrespected his father.

Jonathan, however, made a covenant with David, and according to 1 Samuel 18:1, "The soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own." In essence, Jonathan was "sandwiched" between love for his father and his love for David. Although Jonathan disagreed

with his father's feelings toward David, there are no indications that Jonathan disrespected his father. Instead, he tried to reason with him as he defended David. Jonathan also warned David to be alert, and kept David informed on negotiations (on David's behalf) with his father (vs. 2-5).

Jonathan Seeks Reconciliation, 1 Samuel 19:6-8

Jonathan's efforts appear to have been successful this time. After listening to Jonathan, Saul vowed "as the Lord lives, he (David) shall not be put to death" (1 Samuel 19:6). Subsequently, Jonathan brought Saul and David together (v. 7). The conflict between the two appeared to be resolved, without Jonathan having to denounce his love for either David or his father. However, Saul's hatred and bitterness toward David was deeply rooted. As soon as another war broke out, and David's superior skills as a warrior were manifested, Saul would try to kill him again (1 Samuel 19:8-10).

SANKOFA

Understanding how the love between Jonathan and David extended beyond the limits of biological relationships brings deeper insights into God's unlimited, unconditional love for the redeemed. Theologically, this kind of love is like "spiritual glue" that unites all Christians, without regard to race or creed or other

As we prepare to vote, it is important to be guided by our relationship with God and our knowledge of his commands. Therefore, we cannot be "single issue" voters!

human attributes. As we prepare for the 2020 elections in the U.S.A., it is important to note that although God doesn't change, the way people interpret and apply God's Word can and does vary. As we prepare to vote, it is important to be guided by our relationship with God and our knowledge of his commands. Therefore, we cannot be "single issue" voters! Neither can we be concerned only about our personal needs and desires. We must be concerned about others, especially those who are marginalized, excluded, oppressed, and disrespected.

Unlike many of our ancestors, we have the whole Bible (66 books) as a ready reference for guidance on personal decision-making about in whom we should invest our votes. In the early 1800s, our ancestors did not have voting rights. Even if they could have voted, they wouldn't have the Bible to guide them as we do. Instead, a special Bible, known today as the *Black Bible/Slave Bible*, was developed for African Americans only. This Bible, which is currently available on YouTube and various literary sources,

is incomplete. It includes writings from only 14 Old Testament books. Themes encouraging submissiveness and docility are highlighted. References to freedom and the whole book of Revelation are excluded. Exposure to the liberation and freedom that derives from the ability to explore the whole Bible brings special accountability. Now that we know, what we do with the knowledge should guide us in all walks of life, including our civic engagements.

CASE STUDY

The relationship between Dr. Mary McCleod Bethune and former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt transcended human limitations, including the racial divide in the United States. Dr. Bethune was a highly acclaimed leader before she met Mrs. Roosevelt. Dr. Bethune's accomplishments are too numerous to name. She became known as "First Lady of the Struggle." She also became a member of President Franklin Roosevelt's Black Cabinet and a close friend of his wife, Eleanor.

Through her relationship with the

former First Lady, Dr. Bethune was able to make even greater gains. Mrs. Roosevelt supported her quest to help African Americans gain empowerment through education as well as political and economic endeavors. Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of their relationship was the fact that Mrs. Roosevelt willingly assisted Dr. Bethune with gaining access to President Roosevelt.

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LIFE APPLICATION

Oppression, racism, classism, and lack of regard for immigrants, the poor, and literally all who represent differentness of any kind are antithetical to core Christian values and principles. Yet, election polls show strong racial divides among Christians with regard to whether and

how these issues should inform public policies and laws. It appears that we are all reading the same Bible, but interpreting it differently. Yet, we have a choice and a responsibility to seek God's direction in this election.

Fortunately, Jesus communicated clearly through parables. We don't

need interpretations! For example, *The Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37) challenges us to examine the limits of our love and concern for others. Jesus clarifies the essential requirement to love God and our neighbors as we love ourselves. To illuminate his definition of the word “neighbor,” Jesus included four characters or categories of people: robbers, a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. Notably, neither person gained status, signifying righteousness, based upon the human category or label assigned to them. Instead, righteousness was contingent upon what each person did during their encounter with the same individual. Even today, it is easy for us to determine who demonstrates genuine love, and that our neighbor is anyone who needs help.

QUESTIONS:

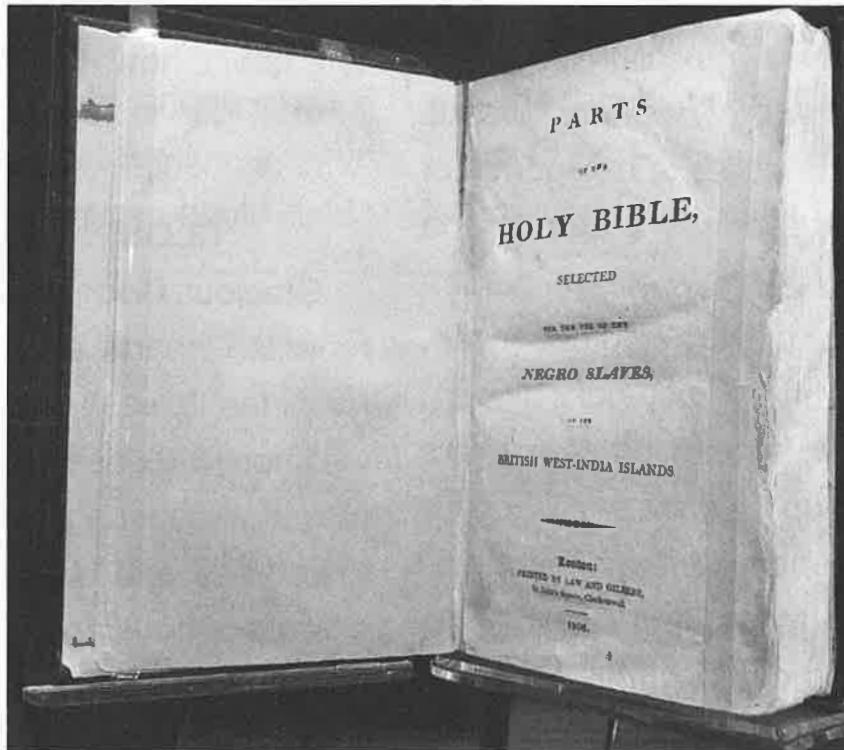
1. How will this lesson impact your spiritual journey?
2. How might Saul have behaved to restore his relationship with God in spite of having his kingship denounced?
3. Explain how you see the presence of God in David and Jonathan’s relationship.

CLOSING DEVOTION

Gracious God in heaven, we come with repentant hearts, asking your forgiveness for all the times we have failed to love as we should. Please cleanse our hearts of all unrighteousness, and please bless us to confess and repent before hate and bitterness develop in us. We long to be disciples who acknowledge you in all our ways, believing that you will direct our paths. In the name of Jesus, we pray and accept your blessings. Amen.

SLAVE BIBLE

CBN (February 18, 2018). *The shocking “Slave Bible.”* Retrieved on December 12, 2019 at <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2018/february/>.



HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

September 28 – October 4

Monday	1 Thessalonians 3:1-6	(Timothy, My Brother and Coworker)
Tuesday	1 Samuel 17:41-51	(David Slays Philistine with a Stone)
Wednesday	1 Samuel 18:1-5	(David and Jonathan Bond Together)
Thursday	1 Samuel 18:12-18	(Saul Jealous of and Fears David)
Friday	1 Samuel 23:14-18	(Jonathan Asserts David as Next King)
Saturday	2 Samuel 9:1-10a	(David Provides for Jonathan's Son Mephibosheth)
Sunday	1 Samuel 19:1-7	(Saul Promises to Preserve David's Life)

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Lesson Scripture: Luke 6:27-36

Focus Scripture: Luke 6:27-36

Key Verses: “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” Luke 6:27-28 (NRSV)

LUKE 6:27-36 (NRSV)

27 “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

LUKE 6:27-36 (KJV)

27 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you.

28 Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

29 And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak forbid not to take thy coat also.

30 Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

31 And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

32 For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

33 And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

34 And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

36 Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

KEY TERM

- **Segregationists** – Supporters of policies and laws that enforce separations of people, based on race, thereby privileging some while depriving and/or oppressing others.

INTRODUCTION

This is the second of three lessons on *Inclusive Love*. Through his ministry, Jesus overturned certain prevailing social and religious traditions that justified stigmatizing and marginalizing certain groups. Jesus introduced his ministry from this perspective by quoting the prophet Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). The same purpose is inferred in Jesus’ descriptions of life in the kingdom of heaven: “So the last will be first and the first will be last” (Matthew

20:16).

Today’s scriptures closely parallel Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). However, unlike Matthew, Luke does not include Jesus’ reference to the law. Luke was speaking to a more diverse audience, comprised of Jews and Gentiles. In essence, Jesus’ message in Luke demonstrates inclusiveness. Jesus presented and explained in detail new living standards to be required of all who would become his disciples, and not Jews only. Hence, parallels between the new standards for living in Luke 6:20-26 and the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) are easily identifiable.

Through his ministry, Jesus overturned certain prevailing social and religious traditions that justified stigmatizing and marginalizing certain groups.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY**Practice Inclusive Love, Luke 6:27-31**

This lesson began shortly after Jesus named his twelve disciples (Luke 6:12-16), and he began to address a large, diverse group of his followers and others who had come to hear him and to be healed. Jesus warned his hearers about

sharply different lifestyles that believers should expect in order to become true disciples. In the process, Jesus used daily life issues to compare and contrast the world's traditions and value systems with the Christian's new life and value system.

Jesus' command to love enemies was obviously a sharp contrast to the worldviews of most of his audience.

Typically, humankind does not respond to enemies with love! Demands to love enemies often conflict with deeply-rooted beliefs that evilness should be confronted. Selfishness and self-centered desires to vindicate ourselves also present significant barriers to loving enemies. As is often stated, even by Christians, "It is just easier to love people who love us, and who treat us how we want to be treated." But Jesus says love "your enemies." This will signify his presence in our lives. Waiting to change after going to heaven is not an option. This is a prerequisite! The time to start practicing Jesus' teachings by

incorporating them into daily life habits is now!

Check Your Motives, Luke 6:32-34

Jesus compared and contrasted typical human motives for benevolent acts with godly motives. He essentially provided a perpetual list that should be frequently consulted for personal assessment purposes. Benevolence should never be given with expectations of earthly rewards or favors in return. Contrary to worldly teachings, Jesus emphatically declares that neither the value nor the size of our benevolence is as important as pure motives and selfless expectations. The Golden Rule is reflected in his command to "love (our) enemies, be good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back."



**Jesus' command
to love enemies
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worldviews of most of
his audience.**

Embrace a New Reward System, Luke 6:35-36

As with vindication, Jesus encouraged believers to look to God, not humankind for rewards. God neither automatically

makes rewards available to everyone nor does he offer "one size fits all" rewards. Faith in God determines our motives and his rewards. "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Reminiscent of Micah 6:8, this lesson's new rules for living include (a) living unselfishly, (b) representing God from pure motives that derive from our love and desires to please him, and (c) extending love to others (whether friend or foe) the kind of mercy God extends to us.

SANKOFA

The life of Elijah Knox, father of noted abolitionist, speaker, and reformer Harriet Jacobs, symbolizes the effects of *non-inclusive* love. Elijah Knox was the bi-racial son of a white farmer and enslaved mother of African descent. Legally, children born under these circumstances were assigned to the same racial category as the mother. So, Elijah was denied acceptance as a

member of his father's race. However, because of his intellect and superior carpentry skills, Elijah enjoyed some unusual personal freedoms. However, because Elijah and his wife, who was Harriet's mother, had different owners, he could never enjoy the privilege of living under one roof with his wife and two children.

Obviously, God's inclusive love was denied this and many other families, despite public claims of discipleship by so many people in power to effect change.

In today's labor market, Elijah would probably be considered a building contractor. He was frequently hired as a lead worker on unusually challenging building projects. As long as he paid his owner \$200.00 a month and supported himself, Elijah was allowed to travel to and from work sites as well as to save some of his

earnings. Sadly, in spite of Elijah's skills and earnings, he was never allowed to purchase freedom for his wife and children. Although he tried many times to pay for their freedom, he was denied the right to do so. Obviously, God's inclusive love was denied this and many other families, despite public claims of

discipleship by so many people in power to effect change.

Ironically, Elijah and his family were not enemies, either. To segregationists, Elijah and his family were considered to be “non persons,” who did not qualify for basic constitutional rights and privileges. God, with his inclusive love, however, viewed them differently. Both of Elijah’s children eventually escaped to freedom in the northern United States. Harriet’s work toward helping others escape from slavery and actively engaging to abolish the institution are well known and celebrated today.

CASE STUDY

The Honorable John Robert Lewis currently serves in the United States House of Representatives. A renowned Civil Rights icon, Congressman Lewis has represented the state of Georgia’s 5th District since 1986. The Congressman’s rise from the “bottom rungs” of America’s economic and social systems to his current status is amazing! Much of his success is obviously attributable to his enormous personal sacrifices and

commitments to justice and equality for all.

As a civil rights activist, Congressman Lewis was jailed 40 times and beaten innumerable times by angry mobs and police. March 7, 1965 is the date of one of his most damaging encounters with antagonists. During this march across the now famous Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, state troopers launched a vicious attack. Congressman

One of his most poignant reflections on his legacy is: “The movement (civil rights) created what I like to call a nonviolent revolution. It was love at its best. It’s one of the highest forms of love.”

Lewis, along with many other marchers, was seriously injured. He was severely beaten, left unconscious, and near death. He also suffered a concussion. Nevertheless, he remains unstoppable. In 2019, he led several United States congressmen and women in a “sit-in” at the U.S. Capitol. Along the way, he has received many honors and awards for his service and activism.

Congressman Lewis attributes his hard work to “deep-seated” religious convictions. One of his most poignant reflections on his legacy is: “The movement (civil rights) created what I like to call a nonviolent revolution. It was love

at its best. It's one of the highest forms of love. That you beat me, you arrest me, you take me to jail, you almost kill me, but in spite of that, I'm going to still love you."

LIFE APPLICATION

Self-esteem, self-interest, self-promotion, and self-love are highly valued in our society. How we adopt and practice inclusive love is challenging and highly impractical from human perspectives. Yet, Jesus commands this transition, despite traditions, customs, and common human behavior/practices. When asked which of the commandments is the greatest, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-39). We know that the transformations necessary to obey this commandment are possible. Otherwise, Jesus would not have commanded it.

We know that the transformations necessary to obey this commandment are possible. Otherwise, Jesus would not have commanded it.

QUESTIONS:

1. How would you rate your progress with inclusive love, especially with loving enemies?
2. What advice would you give others who desire to love inclusively?
3. How can your church help in this regard?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Prayer:
Creator, in the matchless name of Jesus, we present ourselves with gratitude and ask that you would please cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Please continue to grant us mercy as you transform and renew our minds. Please help us to love those who don't respond with love.

Please also bless us to keep our eyes on you, knowing that you will reward our faithfulness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Closing Song: "Only Believe, All Things Are Possible, If You Only Believe," AMEC Hymnal #454

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

October 5-October 11

Monday	Psalm 103:1-14	(The Lord Is Merciful and Gracious)
Tuesday	Matthew 5:38-42	(Responding to Unwanted Demands)
Wednesday	Leviticus 25:35-39	(Handling Family Difficulties)
Thursday	Psalm 128	(Home Life of the Faithful)
Friday	Luke 23:32-36	(Forgiving the Ignorant)
Saturday	Matthew 5:1-12	(Blessed and Rewarded)
Sunday	Luke 6:27-36	(Love and Forgive Your Enemies)

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOR

Lesson Scripture: Leviticus 19:18, 34; Luke 10:25-37

Focus Scripture: Luke 10:25-37

Key Verses: “Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” Luke 10:36-37 (NRSV)

LUKE 10:25-37 (NRSV)

25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

26 He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”

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

28 And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of

LUKE 10:25-37 (KJV)

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?

27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.

28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host,

him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

KEY TERMS

- **Pentateuch** (Pen-ta-teuch) – The first five books of the Bible, given by God to Moses (Exodus 24:12).
- **Talmud** (Tal-mud) – An abstract noun meaning “study” or “learning”; a compilation of Jewish commentaries, opinions, and teachings that are passed from one’s predecessors to successive generations; includes interpretations of legal portions of the Pentateuch; oral teachings of Moses’ written law.
- **Torah** – Hebrew word meaning “teachings” or “instruction”; a Jewish title for the Pentateuch; also referred to as the “Book of the Law” (2 Kings 22:8-13).

INTRODUCTION

Our Key Verse today discloses the fact that Jesus is now extending his lessons on love to include neighbors. Lawyers are well known for tendencies to ask questions for which they believe they

already have the answer. The Jewish lawyer, in this lesson, was no different. His intent was to test Jesus, apparently to see if Jesus might refute or denounce Jewish laws regarding love. Remember, Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). Fulfillment of the law is evident in Jesus’ interactions with the lawyer. By questioning Jesus, the lawyer set himself up for a huge paradigm shift that would challenge, and hopefully transform, his beliefs about how to inherit eternal life.

The Lawyer's Tests for Jesus, Luke 10:25-29

Addressing Jesus as “teacher” (v. 25) was obviously pretentious. The lawyer was more interested in demonstrating his own knowledge and sense of righteousness than learning anything new from Jesus. Jesus astutely switched roles with the lawyer. Jesus became the questioner! He quizzed the lawyer about his own understandings regarding his question. The lawyer sounds quite scholarly as he accurately recalled scriptures from

the Pentateuch (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). Legal aspects of the lawyer's answer were correct, and Jesus confirmed the accuracy. However, the lawyer still "wanted to justify himself," as he apparently felt a need for a legalistic definition of the word "neighbor." So, he asked "and who is my neighbor?"

**The Law of Love Is Fulfilled, Luke
10:30-37**

Although the lawyer's prior answers were correct, they were incomplete! With that answer, legalism took precedence over love for humankind. As was his custom, Jesus did not define "neighbor" for the lawyer. Instead, he used a parable to guide the lawyer through a self-discovery learning process. The lawyer's own analysis resulted in his gaining new insights that would enable him to answer his own question. The lawyer learned that "loving one's neighbor" is infinitely superior to laws that would justify loving and serving predetermined individuals or groups. Because of his encounter with Jesus, the lawyer obviously

experienced an epiphany or revelation. His perceptions of love suddenly aligned with Jesus' teachings. In essence, the lawyer concluded that a neighbor is anyone of any race, creed, religion, or social background who is in need.

SANKOFA

In 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt issued executive orders mandating desegregation in defense programs and the end of discriminatory hiring and promotion practices in all federal agencies. These actions opened doors to new career opportunities for many African Americans. Among them were three African American women: Katherine Johnson, Mary Jackson, and Dorothy Vaughn. Despite these legal

As was his custom, Jesus did not define "neighbor" for the lawyer. Instead, he used a parable to guide the lawyer through a self-discovery learning process.

protections, the movie *Hidden Figures* illuminates various ways in which these women were subjected to exclusionary, racially biased employment practices.

Hidden Figures also highlights the skills and contributions of these three women. They made significant contributions to America's space program. Without the aid

of computers, these women successfully used slide rules, adding machines, and pencils to develop accurate mathematical calculations that were essential to America's successful launch of rockets that propelled astronauts into space. Despite their integral roles, these women were relegated to use separate bathrooms and work in obscure, isolated locations, away from the spotlight and worldwide publicity that celebrated their male colleagues.

They were also never included in our history books. Except for the movie *Hidden Figures*, most Americans would probably have never heard of them. Sadly, they were still omitted from mainstream media attention during the July 2019 celebrations that commemorated the 50th Anniversary of America's inaugural moon landing.

Nevertheless, these trailblazers crashed through barriers that could have prohibited them from using their intellect and superior abilities to influence the origins and successful continuations of contemporary space programs world-wide.

... these trailblazers crashed through barriers that could have prohibited them from using their intellect and superior abilities to influence the origins and successful continuations of contemporary space programs world-wide.

CASE STUDY

The late Dr. Charles Drew (1904-1950) was and continues (posthumously) to be a renowned African American surgeon, physician, and educator, who benefits humankind collectively. Known today as the "Father of Modern Blood Banks," Dr. Drew was also the first African American to earn a Doctor of Science in Medicine Degree. His achievements

are innumerable. However, he pioneered modern methods for processing and storing human blood plasma for transfusions. He created two of the world's first blood banks. He developed the first blood bank for Britain during World War II and saved a lot of lives among their war casualties. Dr. Drew created the second blood bank for the American Red Cross in 1941. Its purpose was to save lives and minimize casualties among U.S. military personnel.

One of Dr. Drew's greatest stances for inclusiveness was expressed in his

protest against the practice of separating African American blood from that of Caucasians. Dr. Drew actually resigned from his prestigious position as director of the first American Red Cross Blood Bank because the agency would not end this discriminatory practice. He proved there was no scientific basis for doing so. Finally, in 1950, the Red Cross ended the practice.

There are unsubstantiated claims that Dr. Drew died because he was denied benefits of his own work with blood transfusions. What we do know is that he died as a result of an automobile accident. Dr. Drew's eulogist memorialized him as "one who had a life which crowds into a handful of years significance so great, men will never be able to forget it." Dr. Drew's posthumous awards include having been featured in the United States Post Office's Great Americans stamp series in 1981, and having several schools in the United States bear his name.

LIFE APPLICATION

"Which of the three, do you think was a neighbor?" This is a part of Jesus'

question to the lawyer. The three to which Jesus referred were a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. The fact that Jews hated Samaritans is well known. Jews generally believed themselves to be "pure" descendants of Abraham, and therefore superior to Samaritans. Samaritans were a "mixed race," descended from interracial marriages between Jews who were not deported to Assyria and other racial groups during Israel's exile. Race was obviously an insignificant factor to Jesus. However, the lawyer most likely viewed the Samaritan through the lens of Jewish traditions that would justify despising Samaritans.

The preposterousness of legalism over the law of love is obvious!

Excuses for loving some people, while rejecting others, vary from one individual to another. For example, the priest and the Levite in Jesus' parable might have said they thought the man was dead. Therefore, they followed the Torah's teachings that prohibited touching dead bodies because "uncleanness" would result. However, the Talmud would have required them to bury the dead body. Hence, they would have realized the man was still alive. The preposterousness of legalism over the law of love is obvious!

The Samaritan, on the other hand, immediately became actively engaged to help the injured man. Asking no questions about the man's background, or whether he deserved special attention and care, the Samaritan was concerned with helping a person in need. The Samaritan even invested his own money to help the man. Which of these three do you identify with most?

The lawyer's self-discovery is richly informative for us. Among many other scriptures, we can also examine ourselves with Matthew 25:31-46, which explains how Jesus will one day judge "all nations." In addition to total devotion to God, we are forewarned to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit those in prison. Again, motives matter! Our actions must emanate from love for God and desires to please God.

QUESTIONS:

1. What evidences of legalistic biblical interpretations do you see in our world today?
2. What encouraging lessons can we take away from the lawyer's encounter with Jesus?
3. How can this lesson be used to promote inclusiveness in our homes, churches, and communities?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: "Is Your All on the Altar?"
AMEC Hymnal #333

Devotion: Close by repeating (in unison) the Summary of the Decalogue.

Closing Prayer: Dear Lord, in the name of Jesus, we ask for your forgiveness, and we pray that you will please bless us to remember your commands. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

October 12-October 18

Monday	Deuteronomy 15:7-11 (Help Your Neighbor in Need)	
Tuesday	1 John 4:16b-21	(Love God and Brothers and Sisters)
Wednesday	Mark 12:28-34	(Adopt the First Commandments)
Thursday	Luke 17:11-19	(Jesus Accepts Thanks from Healed Samaritan)
Friday	Luke 9:51-56	(Samaritan Village Refuses to Welcome Jesus)
Saturday	John 4:1-15	(Jesus Offers Samaritan Woman Living Water)
Sunday	Luke 10:25-37	(Follow the Samaritan's Example)

THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

Lesson Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:27-14:1

Focus Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Key Verse: And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.
1 Corinthians 13:13 (NRSV)

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 (NRSV)

1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant

5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

9 For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;

10 but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

13 And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13 (KJV)

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

KEY TERMS

- **Polytheism** – The practice of believing and/or worshipping more than one god.

INTRODUCTION

This final session on *Inclusive Love* focuses on the Corinthian church, a struggling young church that was located in the Grecian city of Corinth. Corinth was a multicultural “melting pot,” populated by many different cultural groups, including Jews, Greeks, and Italians. Some Jews were members of the Corinthian church, but most of the congregants were Gentiles. Their diversity extended to include males and females, enslaved and free individuals. Unfortunately, collisions between different cultures, values, and religious beliefs created some serious internal conflicts for the church. Polytheism and sexual immorality were among the most significant threats to the church’s viability.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The Corinthian church was founded


**The Corinthian church
was founded by the
Apostle Paul during
his second missionary
journey (Acts 18:1-18).**

by the Apostle Paul during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth before sailing on to Ephesus. While in Ephesus, Paul continued his communications with the Corinthian church by writing letters to them. 1 Corinthians is actually a second letter that Paul wrote to this congregation. The first is believed to have been lost. Because of festering conflicts among the membership, leaders of the Corinthian church turned to Paul for advice. Hence, they sent three men to visit Paul in Ephesus. The men brought Paul a financial gift and a list of questions for Paul to answer. Paul’s answers are incorporated in this second letter. The topics included in the list of questions from the church included marriage, food sacrificed to idols, and disagreements about worship and the resurrection.

Love Is Essential, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The portion of Paul’s letter covered in today’s session presents his perspective and guidance on how the congregation should view and resolve disputes about

Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 13:1-13). Arrogance, envy, and jealousy had apparently crept in, creating divisions within the church as some members began ranking spiritual gifts. Some obviously believed their gifts to be superior to other members. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, Paul used the human body as an analogy for explaining equality within the body of Christ, including the dispensation of spiritual gifts. Paul goes further now, however, to introduce the essentiality of love among all gifts. After declaring equality among gifts, Paul explains that the purpose for all gifts is to glorify God. However, without love, God is not glorified. Therefore, love is an essential additive that enables every gift to fulfill its purpose.

Love's Attributes, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

These newly converted disciples' perceptions of love had obviously been shaped by the world and their lived experiences. But followers of Christ are "new creations," re-born from above and changed internally, with values and

lifestyles that naturally confront and clash with secular world views and moral standards. Paul summarily explained the essential nature of inclusive love as well as what it looks like when it is practiced (vs. 4-8).

Love Is a Symbol of Maturity, 1 Corinthians 13:9-13

Colloquially, Paul's closing message on the subject can be summarized this

After declaring equality among gifts, Paul explains that the purpose for all gifts is to glorify God. However, without love, God is not glorified.

way: "You have been saved and taught the truth. So, it is time to grow up and practice what you have learned. Completeness, as you have been taught, is perfection to be realized upon Christ's return." Paul also wanted the congregation to understand that spiritual gifts are temporal. Their purpose is to be used by humankind (with love) to promote health and wellbeing for the church and Christians. Since they are temporal, it is foolish to fight and argue over them. "Big picture thinking" is what Paul is encouraging. As disciples gain completeness upon Christ's return, the need for spiritual gifts will no longer exist.

Ultimately, the ability to discern how the unity of diverse gifts and abilities will bring perfection/completeness is essential. This discernment comes with spiritual maturity, and it will facilitate disciples' quest for eternal life, and opportunities to eternally praise and worship God, our Father.

SANKOFA

Many of us are familiar with the book entitled *It Takes a Village*. It was written by former First Lady and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 1996. What is much less well-known is the fact that her title was derived from time-honored African proverbs. One, a Nigerian proverb, says, "*It takes a whole village to raise a child.*" A second proverb is Tanzanian: "*One knee does not bring up a child,*" and a third, a Swahili proverb, declares, "*One knee does not nurse a child.*" In all cases and versions of these proverbs, African worldviews regarding children as God's

blessings to whole communities are conveyed and passed on generationally. The responsibility for raising a child extends to everyone – extended family, neighborhoods, and the broader community. Expected outcomes include unselfish perceptions of oneself as part of a whole community, and commitments to promoting unity, cooperativeness, and sharing.

These African worldviews are reflective of biblical worldviews like those espoused by Paul as he nurtured the struggling young congregation at Corinth and others.

Young converts are "babes in Christ," who must be loved, taught, and nurtured into maturity.

These African worldviews are reflective of biblical worldviews like those espoused by Paul as he nurtured the struggling young congregation at Corinth and others. Young converts are "babes in Christ," who must be loved, taught, and nurtured into maturity. The diversity of gifts within a community as well as a church congregation must be combined or unified and fueled by love to

create wholeness. Paul declares, "You are the body of Christ and individually members" (1 Corinthians 12:27). Two Swahili proverbs emphasize the value of

wholeness: “*Unity is strength; division is weakness*” and “*sharing is wealth*.”

CASE STUDY

Appreciations for spiritual gifts continue to be problematic for some disciples. One disciple, who will be referred to as Mrs. Smith, is a prime example. She was gifted with culinary skills and abilities, but did not value them. Like many, she valued more publicly visible skills. Mrs. Smith was called on for special support at a time when her church’s membership was declining. In response, her church decided to engage in an aggressive outreach program, giving special attention to their Sunday church school. The pastor asked Mrs. Smith to lead the culinary ministry. However, she declined. Believing that teachers and others in more visible positions were being appreciated more, Mrs. Smith insisted on being allowed to teach a class. She particularly wanted to teach young people.

To maintain harmony, someone else was assigned to the culinary ministry,

and Mrs. Smith was assigned to teach a youth class. Although she clearly had educational credentials to indicate teaching abilities, it was soon apparent that teaching was not Mrs. Smith’s gift. Several students left the class, and most of the remaining students attended grudgingly. As a consequence, Mrs. Smith and the entire church suffered. Thankfully, Mrs. Smith finally realized the selfishness in her actions and repented. She was welcomed back to the culinary ministry where she again flourished as a contributor to the church’s membership and goals.

Love is patient, kind,
not envious or boastful
or arrogant or rude, and
so forth (1 Corinthians

13:4-7).

LIFE APPLICATION

We can be grateful for this and other lessons Paul sent in his letters to the Corinthian church. His descriptions of inclusive love are particularly helpful. Love is patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude, and so forth (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Unfortunately, temptations to use these scriptures as a metric for measuring the spiritual maturity of others is often so great that it can easily overshadow needs

to measure our own spiritual growth. The reminder that love is the greatest attribute, however, should keep us grounded, and reminded that despite any shortcomings we might experience or see in others, we have to love them. Consequently, as we mature spiritually, we even come to appreciate the commandment to “love those who despitefully use you and persecute you.”

Selfishness fades as our focus on God's favor, mercy, and grace grows! Hence, being sensitive to how God loves and forgives us and knowing that God desires that all humankind should be saved, we must pray for God's will to be done in everyone's life. Let's admit that praying this way is antithetical

to human nature, but we “can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.” Thank God for Holy Spirit guidance and direction available to all of us. James (1:5) teaches that “if any of (us) is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will

be given you.”

QUESTIONS:

1. What impact has this lesson had on your thinking about spiritual gifts?
2. What new or different perspectives do you have regarding inclusiveness?
3. How can this lesson be used to resolve conflicts when role definitions blur, or when envy and jealousy may arise in

ways that threaten the peace and harmony essential to the church's growth and development?

... being sensitive
to how God loves and
forgives us and knowing
that God desires that all
humankind should be
saved, we must pray for
God's will to be done in
everyone's life.

CLOSING DEVOTION

Dear Lord, our cups overflow with gratitude as we consider the diverse ways and methods you use to help us to know you and your will. Thank you for Jesus and his cleansing

blood that continues to wash away our sins. We praise you for your Holy Spirit, who lives with us, guides us, and directs us. To you, we say, hallelujah! We praise you and glorify your name. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

October 19-October 25

Monday	1 Samuel 30:21-25	(Activists and Supporters Share Victories)
Tuesday	Romans 12:1-8	(The New Life in Christ)
Wednesday	Philippians 2:1-11	(Live by the Mind of Christ)
Thursday	Colossians 1:3-8	(Faith, Hope, and Love in Action)
Friday	1 Corinthians 12:4-11	(Gifts for the Good of All)
Saturday	1 Corinthians 14:13-19	(Pray with the Mind and Spirit)
Sunday	1 Corinthians 13	(The Life of Love)

LOVING BY SERVING

Lesson Scripture: John 13:1-35

Focus Scripture: John 13:1-15, 34-35

Key Verse: “*For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*”
John 13:15 (NRSV)

JOHN 13:1-15, 34-35 (NRSV)

John 13:1-15

1 Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper

3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,

4 got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.

5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

8 Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"

10 Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."

11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said

JOHN 13:1-15, 34-35 (KJV)

John 13:1-15

1 Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

2 And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;

3 Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God;

4 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel and girded himself.

5 After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.

6 Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?

7 Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.

10 Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.

11 For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again,

to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am.

14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

34-35

34 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

INTRODUCTION

This is the first of a series of five lessons on *Godly Love Among Believers*. We begin with the familiar story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. While the incident is quite familiar, the context within which it occurred is probably less well-known or considered.

The Last Supper is the setting for this lesson. It begins with Jesus and his disciples seated at the table. Jesus was well aware 3 days before that Judas was about to betray him, Peter would disown him, and

he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.

14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

34-35

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Jesus directed his attention to preparing and encouraging the disciples to continue his mission, without his physical presence.

that other disciples would desert him, at least temporarily. Nevertheless, Jesus showed no fear or preoccupation with the inevitable. Neither did Jesus engage in self-pity. Instead, Jesus directed his attention to preparing and encouraging the disciples to continue his mission, without his physical presence. He "never stopped loving his disciples" (John13:1b). Contrary to the old adage, "Don't do as I do, but do as I say do," Jesus taught by example, and closed

with instructions for disciples to "do likewise" (John 13:15).

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TELLING THE BIBLE STORY**Jesus Teaches Servant Leadership****by Example, John 13:1-5**

The commandment to love others was not new to the disciples (see Leviticus 19:18), but loving others as Jesus taught was revolutionary. The level of sacrifice Jesus required was unprecedented! To create clear understandings, Jesus demonstrated his message. He arose from the table, put a towel around his waist, and began to wash the disciples' feet in a basin, drying them with the towel.

Washing the feet of guests was a common practice as people, wearing sandals and no socks, generally traveled along dirty roads strewn with garbage and waste. What was uncommon was to have someone of Jesus' stature assume the role of "foot washer." This role was usually assigned to the lowest servant in a household. Amazement with Jesus' actions would also have been shaped by many scriptures that present the notion of "being at the feet of another"

as a humiliating experience (Psalm 8:6; Matthew 10:14; Mark 7:25).

Peter Is Convinced, John 13:6-10

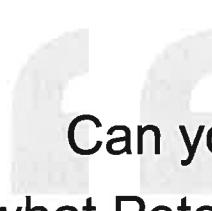
Can you imagine what Peter must have thought as he saw Jesus washing others' feet and moving toward him? Peter's reaction was reminiscent of John the Baptist's reaction to Jesus' request for John to baptize him (Matthew 3:13-15).

When Jesus declared "unless I wash you, you have no share in me," Peter was convinced he needed to submit to Jesus' will. He professed love so strong for Jesus, and was willing (at that moment) to have Jesus wash his hands and head. Whether Jesus was referring to Peter's need to have his sins washed away by his blood on the cross,

or the fact that Peter could learn this lesson on humility only if he submitted, is uncertain. However, Peter got the message!

Jesus Sanctions Servant Leadership, John 13:11-15

We often see leaders pretending to be



Can you imagine
what Peter must have
thought as he saw
Jesus washing others'
feet and moving toward
him?

servants when their interest is really in taking advantage of photo opportunities. Jesus was concerned about transforming the lives of his disciples and empowering them to teach and make new disciples, as they had seen during Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus emphasized the goals of his lesson: "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (v.15).

**A New
Commandment
Seals the Lesson
and Confirms
Discipleship, John
13:34-35**

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." This new commandment is succinct. Jesus prefaced this message by letting the disciples know that his remaining time with them was coming to a close. They would not be able to go with him, but he was giving them a new commandment to model, knowing that this would validate

them as his disciples and become a defining tenet of their ministries.

SANKOFA

Renowned civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer is acclaimed for servant-leadership in her quest for justice and equality for African Americans in the southern United States. Born in 1917 in Montgomery County, Mississippi, Mrs.

**Renowned Civil
Rights activist Fannie
Lou Hamer is acclaimed
for servant-leadership
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Hamer was the daughter of sharecroppers. She began working in the fields at an early age as her family's financial struggles often led to insufficient food. Even after getting married in 1944, Mrs. Hamer continued to work hard, but profited "just enough to get by." In 1962, however, while attending a mass meeting at a local

church, Mrs. Hamer had a life-changing epiphany or revelation! During this meeting, she learned that voting was a constitutional right that should be equally extended to all citizens of the United States, including African Americans. Subsequently, she became a powerful civil rights activist.

Mrs. Hamer worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), an interracial civil rights organization along with other civil rights activist groups. To end Mississippi's custom of sending only Caucasians to the Democratic National Convention, Mrs. Hamer assisted with the founding of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) in 1964. Mrs. Hamer passionately worked with other MFDP members to increase voter registrations for African Americans and to make the Democratic Party practice inclusiveness, especially with African American representation.

In 1964, Mrs. Hamer spoke in Atlantic City, New Jersey, recounting the abuses she'd endured because of her mission. This included having her life and the lives of her loved ones targeted by white supremacists many times, being brutally beaten by police, and having as many as sixteen bullets sprayed into a house she was visiting. Nevertheless, Mrs. Hamer remained resolute to continue her fight

as she continued to encourage others to exercise their own voting rights, and not sit idly by expecting change to come through prayer alone.

Mrs. Hamer died in 1977, having successfully assisted with bringing national attention to Civil rights struggles in Mississippi. Although unsuccessful in her bid, Mrs. Hamer also ran for Congress in Mississippi. Despite the

gigantic demands of her primary mission, Mrs. Hamer also founded organizations to promote minority business opportunities, and to provide child care and other family services. Her legacy of activism and service, in her own words, is enshrined on her tombstone: "I'm sick and tired of being sick

A guiding principle of servant leadership is the desire to serve others, support and encourage their growth and maturation, and applaud their progress.

and tired."

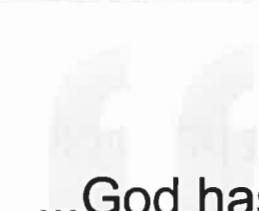
CASE STUDY

A guiding principle of servant leadership is the desire to serve others, support and encourage their growth and maturation, and applaud their progress. This is the spirit demonstrated by Lebron James, a highly successful professional

athlete on and off the basketball court. He has not forgotten "those left behind."

Obviously, Lebron remembers his own childhood in Akron, Ohio. He is reported to have been so poor that he missed 83 days of school as a fourth grader while he and his mother were virtually homeless. Among his many philanthropic ventures, Lebron has opened a public school, the *I Promise School*, through a partnership with the Akron Public School System. Students are offered classes on the elementary school level and GED courses. Parents can also receive job placement services at the school.

For *I Promise* students who graduate high school and want to attend college, Lebron will pay their full tuition at the University of Akron, the local public college. He has also pledged scholarships for as many as 2300 University of Akron students, beginning in 2021. As previously inferred, these are just a few of LeBron James' servant leadership contributions.



...God has gifted each of us with abilities and opportunities to fulfill God's purposes for our lives.

LIFE APPLICATION

It is easy to think people like Fannie Lou Hamer and Lebron James had some extraordinary capacities or opportunities to become servant leaders. But God has gifted each of us with abilities and opportunities to fulfill God's purposes for our lives. "For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for

your welfare and not for harm, to give you a hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). In the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Jesus taught that talents for fulfilling God's plans are granted "to each (of us) according to (our) ability."

Instead of comparing ourselves with others, our most important task is to seek deeper understandings about our own purposes. Of course, we can gain valuable insights and understandings from others, but our greatest source is God. "If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to you" (James 1:5).

QUESTIONS:

1. What signs of servant leadership do you see in your own life?
2. How comfortable are you with knowing your purpose or mission?
3. What thoughts can you use from this lesson to improve your leadership at home? In the church? In your community?
4. November 1 is All Saints Day, when many remember the people of faith who have come before and have passed away. Call the names of those who

have contributed to the development of your faith and who have served in the church.

CLOSING DEVOTION

Lord of lords and king of kings, our heavenly father, to you we owe everything! Please bless us with genuine, inclusive love that will empower us to lead, wherever we are, as Jesus demonstrated. Please strengthen us to let our lights shine as we strive to serve others. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**October 26-November 1**

Monday	Genesis 24:24-33	(Laban Arranges to Wash Servant's Feet)
Tuesday	Genesis 43:20-25	(Brothers Provided Water to Wash Feet)
Wednesday	Ephesians 4:6-9	(Servants and Masters, but Same Lord)
Thursday	John 13:36-38; 18:15-18, 25-27	(Peter Denies Jesus Three Times)
Friday	Psalm 41:8-10; John 13:21-30	(Jesus Betrayed by a Trusted Disciple)
Saturday	John 12:1-7	(Mary Anoints Jesus' Feet with Perfume)
Sunday	John 13:1-15, 34-35	(Jesus Loved Disciples; Washed Their Feet)

ABIDING LOVE

Lesson Scripture: John 15:4-17

Focus Scripture: John 15:4-17

Key Verse: *"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."* John 15:5 (NRSV)

JOHN 15:4-17 (NRSV)

4 "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

6 Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

12 This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

JOHN 15:4-17 (KJV)

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

10 If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen

16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

KEY TERMS

- **Abide in** – To stay in; reside in; conform to, or comply with.
- **Agrarian (a-grar-i-an) Society** –

A society built on farming/agriculture, primarily for producing food.

- **Gethsemane** –

A garden near Jerusalem; referenced in Mark 14, the garden where Jesus was arrested and the agonizing journey to the cross began.

- **Metaphor** – A

word of expression used to describe something with similar characteristics.

Jesus' primary goal was to inspire more vivid illumination of the father and son's roles as connectors for godly love.

now departed from the Upper Room (John 14:31b). They are headed to Gethsemane (John 18:1). Jesus' primary goal was to inspire more vivid illumination

of the father and son's roles as connectors for godly love. Living in an agrarian society provides special insights for the disciples to understand and apply Jesus' metaphorical references to vines, branches, and fruit. In addition to their lifestyles, the disciples could gain additional

illumination from the Old Testament's frequent references to vines and vineyards as symbolic references to the nation of Israel. These include Psalm 80:8, Hosea 10:1, and Isaiah 5:7. Fruitfulness, as a reference to God's people, refers to doing God's work on earth.

INTRODUCTION

This is a continuation of Jesus' final teachings before Jesus was arrested and crucified. Love is still his dominant theme! Jesus and the disciples have

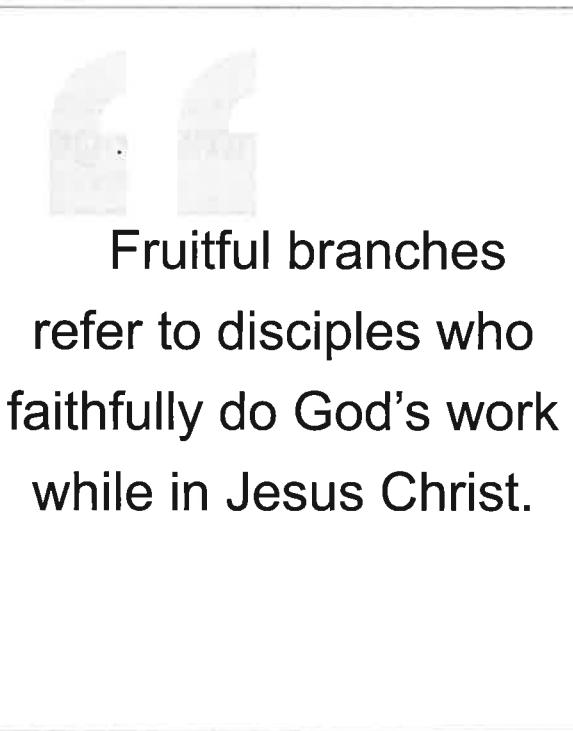
TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Grapevines are prolific intertwining plants. In this environment, the vines were normally tied to posts or trees. Each vine was expected to produce and support many branches from which innumerable grapes would be produced. Consequently, gardeners, also called husbandmen, had to give detailed attention to cultivating and managing the vineyards.

The Father and Son Determine Fruitfulness, John 15:1-5

Jesus describes himself as the true vine, and God as the vine grower or husbandman (v.1). He uses "branches" as a metaphoric reference to all who claim to be disciples and have been "cleansed by" his spoken words (v. 3). Jesus also uses detailed descriptions to explain the pruning process. Fruitful branches refer to disciples who faithfully do God's work while in Jesus Christ. "Branches" that lose their fruitfulness (backsliders) are pruned or separated from the vine. Fruitful branches are also

pruned, but instead of being cut away, they are "cut back." This promotes greater growth for fruitful branches. For humankind, pruning refers to God's discipline, which God employs for teaching and promoting spiritual growth. Jesus stresses the fact that branches cannot bear fruit independently. No matter how prolific a branch may be, to continue bearing fruit, it must remain in (or abide in) the branch.



Rationale for Abiding, John 15:6-8

Jesus apparently realizes the disciples (and others) would wonder "why" as well as "what happens if I don't commit to this teaching"? So, Jesus explains, with greater emphasis, in verses 6-8. Whether or not one abides in

Jesus determines the degree to which fruitfulness is produced. Abiding is like a key that opens the door to God's provisions and protections on earth as well as in eternal life. Jesus explains fruitfulness to be more than soul winning. Jesus includes answered prayers, joy, and love. The greatest benefit to abiding

is empowerment to glorify God and model genuine discipleship for Jesus Christ. Damnation awaits those who deny Jesus or renege on discipleship commitments.

**The Call to Love Is Repeated,
John 15:9-17**

It is important to note that in all of Jesus' teachings, Jesus continues to make "love" top priority. He begins here with God's love toward him (v. 9) and Jesus' love for his disciples as examples to be emulated. Again, Jesus' awareness of human imperfections is inferred. As he is about to leave his earthly ministry, Jesus reminds us to keep his commands and remain in his love. Jesus seeks to ensure that all disciples will know the joy that is to be found in relationship with him.

SANKOFA

Walter Hawkins, a former slave who escaped to live as a free man, was an exemplar love connector. Hawkins experienced godly love connections in powerful ways as many people assisted

him throughout his new life's journey. Walter Hawkins rose from enslavement to become a lay preacher and organizer of an African Methodist Episcopal congregation in Canada. He was later ordained and became the founding pastor of a British Methodist Episcopal Church. The church served many ex-slaves who had reached freedom in Canada through the Underground Railroad. In 1890, at

the age of 82, the British Episcopal Methodist Church of Canada elected Reverend Hawkins to the bishopric for two terms, totaling eight years.

Bishop Hawkins was born into slavery in Georgetown, Maryland and escaped to Philadelphia after being sold to a slave dealer.

As a slave, he had been exposed to the same perverted teachings about Christianity as most slaves. He was also forbidden to travel any distance without special permission. Because of this, Bishop Hawkins explained that he left the plantation without knowing which direction he should flee. However, God blessed him to reach Philadelphia,

**It is important to note
that in all of Jesus'
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and along the way, God provided “connectors” who helped him move from one circumstance and one location to another.

Fortunately, upon his arrival in Philadelphia, Bishop Hawkins met a lay preacher whose name was Walter Procter. Procter gave him refuge in his own home, ministered to him, and mentored him in the ways of free men. Bishop Hawkins credited the love his new-found friend demonstrated, and his teachings, with helping him to know the true and living God. He was convinced to join other Christians, declaring that “this people shall be my people, and their God shall be my God.” Bishop Hawkins devoted the rest of his life to sharing with others the love he had found in God.

Among his innumerable accomplishments, Bishop Hawkins became a highly acclaimed preacher and caring pastor, well-known speaker, and singer. His service and reputation propelled Bishop Hawkins to carry his platform for ending slavery and caring

for the souls of men, as well as the less fortunate, to the highest levels of British society. His memories of life as a slave were indelible. He used them to help the world understand the evilness and inhumanity of the institution. In 1891, with the assistance of journalist Celestine Edwards, Bishop Hawkins wrote his autobiography, *From Slavery to Bishopric*.



Bishop Hawkins credited the love his new-found friend demonstrated, and his teachings, with helping him to know the true and living God.

CASE STUDY

We're all familiar with notions about how “connections” affect our lives. This applies in all phases of life. For example, Mrs. Smith tells about having a “rude awakening” in this regard. She has a freezer in her garage. Mrs. Smith uses it for extra storage space and finds it to be especially

helpful to her efforts to be a great host, who freely shares home-cooked meals with others.

Somewhat embarrassed as well as amused at herself, Mrs. Smith recently told a story about opening her freezer one day to find all of the contents defrosting. Considering her potential losses,

Mrs. Smith panicked and contacted a repairman, who could come the same day. Upon arrival, the repairman began checking the electrical connections. Within five minutes, he apologetically explained that the freezer had somehow become disconnected from the main power source. He plugged it in, and immediately it was working! Unfortunately, Mrs. Smith had to pay for the service call. Still somewhat ashamed, she shared the story to help others avoid similar situations. Her lesson was "always check your power source/connections before reaching out to others to resolve issues."

LIFE APPLICATION

Unfortunately, even in the church, desires to connect with those who seem to have the most power and influence is too great. Likewise, desires to emulate people whom we believe to have power and influence can lead us in directions and pursuits that are contrary to God's plans for our lives. This lesson challenges us to ask ourselves, "Whom am I following, and why? Also, am I struggling because I am

trying to do work of my own choosing?" The joy that Jesus promises comes from fruitfulness that derives from doing God's work, according to his will.

Jesus tells us to abide in him. Unless we abide in him, we can do nothing. Jesus is our power source. He is our connection to the Father. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me" (John



Jesus is our power source. He is our connection to the Father.

14:6). The agrarian metaphors that Jesus used with his disciples are unequivocally as relevant to us today. Questioning our connections should become routinized to the point that we always seek to know why we are doing what we are doing, and most of all, whether we are glorifying God in our

endeavors.

QUESTIONS:

1. What new thoughts or insights do you have regarding "connections?"
2. How do you see this lesson impacting peaceful working relationships among believers?

3. Why do you think Jesus continuously imbedded messages about love in all of his teachings regarding relationships?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Closing Hymn: Close with a focus on God, singing "How Great Thou Art," AMEC Hymnal #68

Closing Prayer: Lord, we thank you for Jesus. Please bless us to never forget the affirmation in Acts 17:28, "For in him we live and move and have our being:" In Jesus' name we pray as we seek to glorify your name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 2-November 8

Monday	Isaiah 5:1-7	(God Is Disappointed with Israel)
Tuesday	Isaiah 27:2-6	(God Will Redeem Israel)
Wednesday	John 14:8-14	(Believers Continue God's Work)
Thursday	John 10:11-18	(Jesus Freely Lays Down His Life)
Friday	John 15:18-25	(Facing the World as Jesus Did)
Saturday	John 15:1-3	(Jesus Tends to His Vineyard)
Sunday	John 15:4-17	(Always Love One Another)

CONFIDENT LOVE

Lesson Scripture: 1 John 3:11-24; 2 John 4-11; 3 John 5-8

Focus Scripture: 1 John 3:11-24

Key Verse: All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us. 1 John 3:24 (NRSV)

1 JOHN 3:11-24 (NRSV)

11 For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

13 Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you.

14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.

15 All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.

16 We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

17 How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

18 Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

19 And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him

20 whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

21 Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God;

22 and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

23 And this is his commandment, that we

1 JOHN 3:11-24 (KJV)

11 For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

12 Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.

13 Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.

14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.

16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

20 For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

21 Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

22 And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

23 And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus

should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.

24 All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

KEY TERM

- **Gnosticism** – A derivative of the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge or insight. Followers of this heretical 2nd Century religious system were known as *Gnostics*. Contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ, Gnostics believed the attainment of special knowledge to be essential for salvation and eternal life. Therefore, faith in Jesus Christ and his resurrection were believed to be insufficient.

He (John) wanted believers to remain confident in the teachings and faith foundations that brought them to believe in Jesus Christ and salvation.

Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

member of Jesus' inner circle, John is also referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). John was the longest surviving apostle, and therefore the last with eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life and earthly ministry.

A admonishing Christians in Asia Minor to be confident and self-assured about the gospel to which they had been converted was John's purpose in writing what is known as *The Love Letters*. *The Love Letters* comprise three books: 1st, 2nd, and

3rd John. John was seriously concerned about the influences of the Gnostics. Therefore, John wrote the letters to reassure believers. He wanted believers to remain confident in the teachings and faith foundations that brought them to believe in Jesus Christ and salvation. John 3:16 capsulizes those beliefs!

INTRODUCTION

The author of today's scriptures is John, the son of Zebedee. John is the author of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, the gospel of John, and the book of Revelation. A

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Hospitality, even for early believers, was a hallmark of Christianity. Therefore, they regularly invited itinerant missionaries and teachers into their home. Unfortunately, false teachers were among their guests, and they took advantage of opportunities to spread false teachings.

Do Not Be Deceived,

1 John 3:11-15

John begins 1st John by laying the foundations for recalling who Jesus is, his divine ministry and mission, and particularly Jesus being the word incarnate as well as our advocate (1 John 1:1-6). Looking at believers as having been adopted into God's

family, John emphasized how love, a new commandment, becomes the seal of each believer's new identity (1 John 2:7-15). He then focuses on alerting believers to the very presence and threats of anti-Christians, and how living as Christians makes us easily identifiable targets for deception. Nevertheless, John closes Chapter two with assurances that

believers have no reason to be deceived, "...the anointing that you received from (Jesus Christ) abides in you and so you do not need anyone to teach you" (1 John 2:27). In essence, "Be confident in what you believe and have been taught."

Love is like cement that bonds believers together in unity – as one in Christ Jesus. This has always been foundational to the growth and development of the church.

Loving one another is John's focus in 1 John 3:11-15. Using Cain and Abel as examples, John encourages believers to understand how hatred and greed, even murder, can overshadow commandments to love.

The Love Test, 1 John 3:16-18

John operationalizes his teaching on love by describing it. In other words, "Here is what love looks like." Unsurprisingly, John uses Jesus as his role-model (v. 16) and encourages believers to demonstrate love likewise. It is a challenge to act on Jesus' command to pattern our love for each other after his love, which he has shown us. John's message is also reflective of Jesus'



**Love is like cement
that bonds believers
together in unity – as
one in Christ Jesus.**

declaration that “no one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:13-14). John also employs the apostle James’ teachings about “faith without works” (James 2:14) to facilitate his desire to emphasize the importance of seeing *godly love* as an action term instead of just a feeling or emotion.

Keep Your Conscience Clear, 1 John 3:19-24

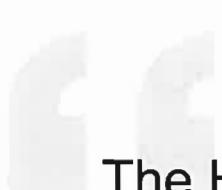
John has reiterated the truth. To do other than what we know to be the will of God is sin. In addition to the word of God, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit convicts us when we deviate from God’s truth.

John uses the word *heart* (v. 21) instead of conscience to emphasize personal responsibility to act in accordance with the leadings of the Holy Spirit as well as the faith God has entrusted us to have. The heart or conscience is like an internal GPS or navigation system that alerts us when we waiver from the truth. When the heart or conscience condemns us, we have two choices: we can either ignore the warning and deceive ourselves, or we

can heed the warning as an impetus for repentance, confession, and restoration to the will of God.

SANKOFA

Sojourner Truth is a noted former slave who became a powerful advocate for human rights, including the abolishment of slavery and women’s rights. She could not find complacency in knowing she had been freed from slavery. Sojourner used



The Holy Spirit
convicts us when we
deviate from God's
truth.

her freedom to change the lives of others who needed to be delivered.

In her own words, Sojourner attributed her transformation to her “religious conversion.” Like many earlier disciples, upon conversion, she changed her name — from Isabella, to Sojourner. Even her

perceptions of life events changed. When the slave master referred to her as a “runaway” slave who gained freedom, Sojourner corrected him! Using her own voice and God-given power, she insisted, “I did not run away, I walked away by daylight.”

As a converted Christian, Sojourner became an itinerant preacher who engaged heavily in the anti-slavery

movement as well as the Women's Rights Movement. Sojourner delivered her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. Thus, promoting equality for all humankind became a life-long ministry for her.

CASE STUDY

These *Love Letters* from John were omitted from the previously discussed "Slave Bible." These teachings would have counter-manded plans to create compliance and subservience among enslaved people. It is important to note, however, that not all majority culture religious people compromised their knowledge and beliefs in God to support the institution of slavery. The Quakers or Society of Friends is a religious group noted for tremendous activism and participation in efforts to abolish slavery in Britain and the United States.

Beliefs in the equality and worthiness of all humankind are major tenets of the Quakers' belief systems. Holding fast to those beliefs, they could not accept the idea that God ordained this dreadful

system. Consistent with the urgings of the apostles James, John, and others, this group was not comfortable with just talking about the issue. They took strong actions and risked dangers for themselves and their loved ones as they helped enslaved people escape to freedom, where they could live as God intended.

... many enslaved
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The Quakers' campaigns against slavery have been traced as far back as the 1600's. Many were significantly engaged in the Underground Railroad. In 1776, all Quakers were forbidden to own slaves, and they later petitioned the United States Congress to abolish slavery nationwide. Notably, they also campaigned

for women's rights. As a result of their work, many lives were saved. Also, many enslaved people and women gained opportunities to know God and to fully benefit from his love, power, and provisions.

LIFE APPLICATION

As with our previous sessions, today's scriptures point to the need for active, liberating faith that is fueled by love. Jesus modeled the highest dimensions

of love and commanded us to love in the same way. Loving this way is neither easy nor normal for humankind. Even as babies, selfishness is present and easily detectable. Selfishness changes only through acceptance and allegiance to the gospel, as we submit to our sovereign God. Conversion leads to our becoming new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17) and adoption into God's family. The transformation is a life-long process, directed by God, to shape us into becoming more and more like Jesus.

John's messages to the churches in Asia Minor are equally as relevant to us today. It is imperative that we know what we believe and why we believe as we do. With modern technology and increasing diversity, we are bombarded with many unorthodox teachings about salvation. Although we might find many to be appealing, it is essential that we determine whether they are consistent with the gospel. Messages change, but neither God nor God's Word will change. Many other scriptures support John's

message. The following by the apostle Paul is one example: "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let everything you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

GG
Jesus modeled the highest dimensions of love and commanded us to love in the same way.

who are different from you?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"

Closing Prayer: Lord, thank you for your patience and kindness with us. Thank you for forgiving our sins and transgressions. Please bless us to forgive and love as you do. We pray for discerning spirits that will enable us to know your truth. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 9-November 15

Monday	1 Thessalonians 2:1-10	(Example of Faith and Obedience)
Tuesday	Ephesians 5:8-16	(Then Darkness, Now Light)
Wednesday	John 3:16-21	(Live by the Light)
Thursday	1 John 2:28–3:10	(Children of God Love One Another)
Friday	3 John 1-4	(Walking Faithfully in the Truth)
Saturday	3 John 9-12	(Imitate What Is Good Not Evil)
Sunday	1 John 3:11-24	(Believe Jesus Christ; Love One Another)

SHARING LOVE

Lesson Scripture: Acts 4:32–5:11

Focus Scripture: Acts 4:32–5:11

Key Verse: Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

Acts 4:32 (NRSV)

ACTS 4:32–5:11 (NRSV)

32 Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.

35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

36 There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement").

37 He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5:1 But a man named Ananias, with the consent of his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property;

2 with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3 "Ananias," Peter asked, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land?"

4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!"

5 Now when Ananias heard these words, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who

ACTS 4:32–5:11 (KJV)

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

heard of it.

6 The young men came and wrapped up his body, then carried him out and buried him.

7 After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

8 Peter said to her, "Tell me whether you and your husband sold the land for such and such a price." And she said, "Yes, that was the price."

9 Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out."

10 Immediately she fell down at his feet and died. When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

11 And great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

KEY TERMS

- **Acts** – Also known as Acts of the Apostles, this book is a sequel to the gospel of Luke. Luke authored both books. Acts begins with the last 40 verses of Luke's gospel and proceeds with historical accountings of the apostles' activities during the 30-year period following Jesus' resurrection.
- **Apostolic Age** – Refers to the ministry periods of the twelve apostles, beginning with the receipt of The Great Commission, and ending upon the death of the last apostle, who is believed to have been John, the son of Zebedee.

6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

INTRODUCTION

This lesson gives significant insights into the kind of love early believers shared in Jerusalem. The events occurred during the beginning stages of the apostolic age. A now diverse body of believers (Jews and Gentiles), who were in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit arrived on the Day of Pentecost, have remained in Jerusalem. We can be certain that a large number of believers were in the city at this time. Without giving an accounting of the original number of original believers, Acts 2:39-41 tells us that three thousand new believers were added on the day of Pentecost.

The formalized church, as we know it, had not been established.

The increasingly diversified Christian community was referred to as *The Way*. Despite their diversity, unity prevailed in this community! Teaching by the apostles, fellowshipping with each other, breaking bread, praying together, and praising God were hallmarks of a new life for the believers (Acts 2:42-47). This new lifestyle contrasted sharply with the believers' pre-conversion lifestyles, and with the lifestyles of other Jerusalem communities.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

New Life in *The Way*, Acts 4:32-37

Our Key Verse (Acts 4:32) describes what happens when God is foremost in our lives, and we commit our lives to sacrifice and service that pleases God. A different mentality about possessions developed. This was not a form of communism! Sacrificing within this community was purely voluntary, and it was expected only as needed to take care of the community's needs. Distribution was open to anyone who had a need. Consequently, everyone's needs were taken care of.

Ananias and Sapphira present serious admonitions about the perils of lying and behaving selfishly and/or hypocritically to present ourselves as models for godly living.

Obviously, some members, like Barnabas (vs. 36-37), gave more than others.

Satan Invades, Acts 5:1-11

The story of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, is indeed sad! Even in the most sacred settings, Satan can find a way to insert himself. Ananias and Sapphira present serious admonitions about the perils of lying and behaving selfishly and/or hypocritically to present ourselves as models for godly living. No one forced either of the two to sell property or to give anything for the community's support. Yet, they conspired together to pretend they were as committed to loving and sharing as everyone else. Even more revealing is Peter's declaration:

"You have not lied just to human beings but to God" (Acts 5:4b). These two were also demonstrating a lack of faith in God to provide for their needs. Satan obviously convinced them that this was acceptable behavior.

SANKOFA

The late Congresswoman Shirley

Chisholm (1924-2005) was noted for speaking the truth, as she understood it, regardless of the potential consequences. Reflecting on her perceptions of prevailing inequality and discriminatory practices, Chisholm told a reporter that she became angry during her college experiences. She noted particular distrust for politicians who claimed to befriend those whom society relegates to lives of disenfranchisement and underprivileged existences. Adopting and using the credo, "Unbought and Unbossed," Mrs. Chisholm, in 1968, became the first African American woman to be elected to the United States Congress. After serving 14 years in Congress, she became the first African American woman to seek a major political party's nomination to become president of the United States.

One of the most revealing examples of Mrs. Chisholm's honesty occurred shortly after she was elected to Congress. She did not accept traditional thinking that new members should be quiet and accept

whatever appointment opportunities might be doled out to them. She vociferously opposed being appointed to a Forestry and Rural Villages Committee because she saw no connections between this appointment and the priorities of her Brooklyn, New York constituents. She was subsequently offered and accepted appointment to the Veterans Affairs Committee. Although she did not succeed with her bid for nomination to become president, Mrs. Chisholm disagreed with many who dismissed her effort as mere fantasy. As we have seen, particularly in recent years, Mrs. Chisholm was a trailblazer for many women and African American males who would seek to become president of the United States.

CASE STUDY

The Chicago Defender gave life to a greater, more complete truth about American society than any previous publication. *The Chicago Defender* was a weekly newspaper that filled a

serious information gap for and about African Americans. It preceded popular publications, such as *Essence*, *Jet*, and *Ebony Magazine*. Founded in 1905 by Robert Abbott, who was the son of slaves, this newspaper was significantly instrumental to the migrations of many African Americans from the south to northern states. For many African Americans, the newspaper inspired broad visions of better life to be attained. It provided invaluable information on improved jobs and living opportunities that existed outside southern states. For obvious reasons, distribution of the newspaper was prohibited in the south. However, special secret networks, similar to the Underground Railroad, were established. Consequently, the publication reached many African

Americans in the south and inspired them to make difficult, often dangerous, journeys to the northern United States and Canada.

For more than a century, the *Defender* covered all aspects of African American life experiences, from the happiest to the ugliest and most painful. The coverage has included births, deaths, weddings, and so forth as well as agonizing, detestable events. The latter included details on lynchings, police brutalities against African Americans, discriminatory educational and housing issues, and so forth. Although Mr. Abbott died in 1940, printing and circulation of the newspaper continued. In July 2019, the current owners announced plans to end the print edition, but to continue with digital operations.



LIFE APPLICATION

The kind of love and unity we see in the community of early believers is unique and definitely not of human design. This was a diverse group of believers – Jews and Gentiles who experienced phenomenal growth. Remember, three thousand were added to the number on the day of Pentecost. This community was experiencing both internal and external threats. Externally, there were continuing threats of persecution and annihilation from Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, and co-conspirators they had influenced (Acts 4:23-28). Internal threats resulted from the unprecedented diversity within the community as well as the sheer numbers and accompanying administrative headaches. Acts 6:1-2 reveals some of the daily living problems that arose.

Obviously being able to persevere while staying focused on fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20), teaching and maintaining harmony within the community, were extraordinary

**Only through the
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challenges for the apostles. This is where we see the Holy Spirit intervene. Only through the works of the Holy Spirit can such an accommodating spirit of love and unity develop so quickly! “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common” (Acts 4:32).

Of course, Ananias and Sapphira were deviants and received the harshest form of punishment. There is not a commandment for Christian life in these scriptures. Instead, we have been provided a prototype to guide us on how we should aspire to live.

Noticeably, prayer preceded the main events in this lesson (Acts 4:23-30). Afterwards, the presence of the Holy Spirit was manifested among them. Since our congregations are becoming increasingly diverse and differences among congregants are not always easily resolved, consider how this lesson might be applied in your church.

QUESTIONS:

1. How does this model differ from the way your church usually resolves differences?
2. What do you believe are the advantages of using this model?
3. What impresses you most about the early church's communal lifestyle?

CLOSING DEVOTION

Dear Lord, in all circumstances your ways are superior. In you, we find security, knowing that you will take care of all our needs. Please forgive us for the times we hold on to possessions instead of sharing. Teach us to be less judgmental about those who may be in need and more eager to be conduits through which you will bestow blessings. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**November 16-November 22**

Monday	1 Timothy 3:8-13	(Preparing to Become a Deacon)
Tuesday	Acts 5:12-16	(Healing Ministry Grows the Church)
Wednesday	Acts 6:1-7	(Church Sharing Plan Enlarged)
Thursday	Acts 1:8-15	(Stephen's Ministry Opposed)
Friday	Acts 2:42-47	(Sharing All of Life Together)
Saturday	Acts 4:23-31	(Prayer for Boldness and Signs)
Sunday	Acts 4:32-5:11	(Sharing All Possessions Challenges the Church)

IMPARTIAL LOVE

Lesson Scripture: James 2

Focus Scripture: James 2:1-13

Key Verse: Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? James 2:5 (NRSV)

JAMES 2:1-13 (NRSV)

1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in,

3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet,"

4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?

7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

11 For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

JAMES 2:1-13 (KJV)

1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall

12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

KEY TERMS

- **Impartial Love** – Love that Jesus commanded (John 13:34); stems from “circumcised” hearts; freedom from biased and/or prejudicial motives. Equality, fairness and justice are manifestations.
- **James** – The brother of Jesus, also known as the apostle James; the name derives from the name, Jacob, a very popular 1st century name.
- **Stephen** – One of the first seven deacons; also known as the first Christian martyr.

James' message contains practical advice on how to live as Christians. His book is like a “how-to” manual.

INTRODUCTION

James is the author of this quarter's final lesson on love. After Jesus' death and resurrection, James became a key leader among the struggling believers in Jerusalem. James' message contains

practical advice on how to live as Christians. His book is like a “how-to” manual. In today's scriptures, James focuses on the essential nature of *Impartiality* in the life of believers.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

First century Jewish Christians, who were living among Gentiles in communities outside of Palestine, are believed to have been the original audience to whom James was speaking. Stephen had been crucified, causing many believers to respond by fleeing Jerusalem to escape persecution (Acts 7–8). Believers from all walks of life were suddenly forming unprecedented communal relationships.

The apostle James proactively attacked emerging conflicts by straightforwardly addressing sins associated with partiality and discrimination. He also reinforced and added emphasis to instructions from Jesus and the Old Testament regarding

God's indisputable love for the poor.

Renounce Favoritism, James 2:1-7

James uses typical human behavior and experiences to magnify the sinful absurdities involved in showing favoritism. Furthermore, 1 Samuel 16:7b tells us that "the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Because of favoritism, biased and improper judgments often occur, resulting in dehumanizing behavior that dishonors Jesus' commandment to love.

James is not suggesting that all poor people will go to heaven. Neither is he suggesting that all rich people will go to hell. His point is that discrimination and bias can cause Christians to sin. Neither wealth nor the lack thereof will determine whose name is written in the Book of Life. Instead, James is pointing to a pathway to eternal life that is marked by allegiance to the teachings of Jesus and conveyed through active faith. Of course, one common attribute for the poor should be an aspiration for all. It is their tendency

to totally submit to reliance on God more readily than others who consider themselves to be self-sufficient.

Obey the Royal Law, James 2:8-13

Demanding obedience to the *Royal Law* is another indication of James' fervent desire to encourage Christians to develop transformed lifestyles. The *Royal Law* is a synonym for Jesus' law as recorded in

John 15:12, to "love one another as I have loved you." This law fulfills Old Testament law (Lev. 19:18), and it informs godly interactions and relationships for believers. Many other scriptures, including Matthew 22:37-40, Romans 13:8, and Galatians 5:14, reinforce James' message on the essentiality of Jesus'



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name is written in the
Book of Life.

law.

Deeds Confirm Faith, James 2:14

James' discussions on "deeds" parallels Jesus' teachings on "fruit bearing" (John 15:5). He reminds us that deeds (or fruits) are manifestations of our allegiance to Jesus Christ. James is not suggesting that salvation is not achieved through faith confessions. Instead, he

encourages believers to see salvation as the beginning of new life in Christ Jesus. True faith is never stagnant! It transforms behavior as well as our minds (intellect, thoughts, etc.). From this perspective, James declares “so, faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17, 26b).

SANKOFA

The Honorable Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, had keen insights into human tendencies toward bias and discrimination. One of his many famous quotes speaks to these tendencies: “In judging our progress as individuals we tend to concentrate on external factors such as one’s social position, influence, and popularity, wealth and standards of education... But internal factors may be even more crucial in assessing one’s development as a human being. Honesty, sincerity, simplicity, humility, pure generosity, absence of vanity, readiness to serve others – qualities which are within easy reach of every soul – are the foundation of one’s spiritual life.”



True faith is never
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The Apostle James addressed bias and discrimination, based on social class issues, such as income, wealth, material possessions, and so forth. While these same issues exist in churches today, bias and discrimination based on race continue to be a long-standing deterrent to unity among Christians in the United States. Lifeway Research (2015) quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from a 1963 speech. Dr. King lamented the fact that “the church is still the most segregated major institution in America.

At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation.”

In a January 12, 2017 research report entitled *Racial Divides in Spiritual Practice*, the Barna Research Group acknowledged that progress toward reconciling racial issues, even in the church, has been slow. They proceeded to identify ways diversity impacts worshippers’ perceptions on how they value and experience spirituality. For example, they identified

racially identifiable variances on how individuals define spiritual progress and the primary goals of discipleship. This could help explain the Lifeway Research finding that 53% of churchgoers in their surveys disagreed with the notion that their church needs to become more ethnically diverse. The need for more research is obviously indicated. However, the need for Christians to become more open and receptive to people different from themselves, with more interracial worship experiences as well as more biblically-based teachings on race, is indicated.

CASE STUDY

Gender-based discrimination and bias also impede expectations of unity among all Christians. One of the most recent prominent protests for gender equality in the church has been voiced by former president Jimmy Carter. In a poignant article entitled, *"Losing My Religion for Equality,"* former President Carter shared his painful experiences with having to take a stand that required him to go in

... the former president found it intolerable to continue worshipping in an environment that endorsed bias and discrimination

a different denominational direction. He identifies himself as having been a life-long practicing Christian, a deacon, and a Bible teacher for many years. True to these experiences and teachings, he was obviously able to discern how "selected" Bible verses were being used to justify decisions that women should be relegated to subservient roles in the home and the church.

Service as deacons, pastors, or military chaplains was to be denied women because of their gender. In fairness, he also noted that practices of viewing women as inferior is

not unique to any one religion. Thus, the former president found it intolerable to continue worshipping in an environment that endorsed bias and discrimination.

LIFE APPLICATION

As we look at other denominations, it is important to revisit our own history. For example, the life and ministry of Jarena Lee are significant tributes to the AME Church's progress toward gender-based equality. According to her autobiography, Jarena Lee was converted during a

sermon by Bishop Richard Allen. She reported having received the call to preach around 1807. However, due to prevailing social, cultural, and religious norms against women preachers, Jarena was denied immediate acceptance as a preacher. She also experienced severe hostility and many demeaning experiences because of her persistence.

In 1819, Bishop Allen authorized Jarena to preach. With Bishop Allen's authorization, Jarena held services in her home, and she worked tirelessly as an itinerant preacher. In one year, she traveled "two thousand three hundred and twenty-five miles, and preached one hundred and seventy-eight sermons." Jarena continued her ministry until her death in 1849, without having been ordained. Fortunately, she was ordained posthumously at the 50th Quadrennial Session of the AME Church's General Conference in 2016.

Bias and discrimination are traits shared by all humanity. How we apply those traits is what matters. From the

scriptures, it is extremely apparent that along with conversion, we should seek to know and live more and more like Jesus. Accordingly, as James taught, how we perceive and treat others should mirror Jesus' ways. James also advises that those of us who lack wisdom should "ask of God" (James 1:5).

QUESTIONS:

1. Are you aware of your own biases and discriminating beliefs and practices?
2. How do you see bias and discrimination impacting relationships with others?
3. When should bias and discrimination be considered positive or negative influences?

... as James taught,
how we perceive and
treat others should
mirror Jesus' ways.

CLOSING DEVOTION

Creator in heaven, you know our hearts better than we do. Please keep us mindful of the fact that those who are the recipients of biased and discriminatory actions must guard against treating

others in biased and discriminatory ways. Please search our hearts and reveal all that is unsatisfactory to you. Bless us to confess and repent while committing to

walk in new revelations to be gained from your interventions. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

November 23-November 29

Monday	Matthew 12:1-8	(Extending Mercy More Important than Sacrifice)
Tuesday	1 Peter 1:17-23	(Love One Another from the Heart)
Wednesday	Galatians 3:6-9, 13-14	(In Christ Gentiles Share Abraham's Faith)
Thursday	Exodus 2:1-10	(Faith of Levite Mother Saves Moses)
Friday	James 2:14-17	(Unexpressed Faith Has No Value)
Saturday	James 2:18-26	(Faith and Works Complement Each Other)
Sunday	James 2:1-13	(Disdain the Practice of Partiality)

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DECALOGUE

Superintendent—And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord hath made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

My soul be on thy guard;
Ten thousand foes arise:
And hosts of sins are pressing hard
To draw thee from the skies.

Superintendent—Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not kill.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not commit adultery.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not steal.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and write these laws upon our hearts.

Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!

Superintendent—Hear what Christ, our Savior, saith: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All—Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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