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Roderick D. Belin, President/Publisher

Garland F. Pierce, Executive Director, Department of Christian Education

Tiffany Gregory, Chief of Operations

O. Dotson, Layout and Design

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LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY

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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

Editorial Staff

Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

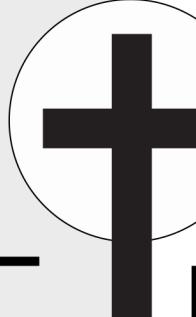
Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Dr. Catherine 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.

A.M.E. Discipline

Hello, AME Church School Member!

Don't Forget to join us on Zoom and Facebook to facilitate our weekly Connectional Church School with teachers (lay and clergy) from around the AME Connection. They generously share their knowledge, talents, and expertise with a weekly average of 500 participants viewing via Zoom and 1500 on Facebook.

The blessings from the teachings of the virtual AME Connectional Church School have been immeasurable. We convene the Connectional Church School on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. EST. Join us! Zoom Meeting ID: 829 9325 1894. Visit our website- www.iamame.org- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

Like our Facebook page so you will be informed about programming and important announcements from the Publishing House and *The Christian Recorder*: www.facebook.com/amecpublishing.

Join our Facebook group to continue conversations after Church School and share ideas, thoughts, and best practices with other AME Church School members and teachers: www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool.

Thank you for purchasing *Liberating Faith Studies*. We are working every day to fulfill our mission to provide high quality resources to empower us to spread Jesus Christ's liberating gospel, pursue justice, and enhance the social development of all people.

And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin
President/Publisher



HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

February 23–March 1

Monday	Nehemiah 4:15-23 (Work Together for the Common Good)
Tuesday	Romans 15:1-17 (Welcome One Another in Christ)
Wednesday	Proverbs 3:27-32 (Do Good Whenever You Can)
Thursday	Ecclesiastes 5:4-8 (Fulfill Your Vows)
Friday	Philemon 10-21 (Bear One Another's Debts)
Saturday	James 2:14-26 (Provide for Others and Demonstrate Faith)
Sunday	Mark 12:28-34 (Love God and Love Your Neighbor)

Recognizing Our Debt to Others

Lesson Scripture: Nehemiah 4:15-23; Mark 12:28-34; Romans 15:1-7; Philippians 2:1-8; Colossians 3:12; 4:1; James 2:14-17

Focus Scripture: Mark 12:28-34; James 2:14-17

Key Verse: (The scribe said to Jesus,) “... ‘to love (God) with all the heart, and with all the understanding and with all the strength’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” Mark 12:33 (NRSV)

MARK 12:28-34; JAMES 2:14-17(NRSV UE)

Mark 12:28-34

28 One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?”

29 Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;

30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

31 The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

32 Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’;

33 and ‘to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

34 When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

James 2:14-17

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it?

15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food

MARK 12:28-34; JAMES 2:14-17 (KJV)

Mark 12:28-34

28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

29 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:

30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:

33 And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.

James 2:14-17

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

KEY TERMS

- **Hosanna (Hebrew: *Hoshia-na*)** – “Save please or save us now.”
- **Immigrant (Hebrew: *Ger*; Greek: *Xenos*)** – Biblically, the term applies to descriptions of foreigners, sojourners, or strangers. In general, the term applies today to people living outside their native country, often in need of hospitality and protection, as well as equity and justice.
- **Immigration** – The act of moving to and settling in a country other than one's native country.
- **Sadducees** – A priestly and aristocratic group that held positions of power in the temple. The sect is known for its strict adherence to the written Torah and for rejecting beliefs in resurrection and life after death.
- **Scribe (Hebrew: *sofer*)** – A highly trained religious scholar, responsible for accurately copying, interpreting, and teaching the Torah (first five books of the Bible).
- **Shema (Hebrew: “*sh'MaH*”)** – A central declaration of faith in Judaism (Deut. 6:4-5), meaning “to hear” or “listen.”

We serve an inclusive God!

INTRODUCTION

Who are your neighbors? Do they all look like you and live nearby? “Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors” is the title of this first unit of study for the quarter. For disciples, connecting the idea of fulfilling our obligations to neighbors

with the social, political, and cultural issues currently present in our world is a complex but necessary task. Jesus has charged us, both individually and collectively, to show genuine love and to take responsibility for the safety and well-being of others. It begins with a divine concept of family that comes not from human DNA but from spiritual DNA, which flows from the blood of Jesus. We serve an inclusive God!

According to Jesus, “neighbors” are not limited to people who live nearby or share our backgrounds and beliefs, but rather anyone who needs compassion and mercy. Jesus clearly illustrated this message in the *Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37). As we study this unit, let us pray for new, powerful insights into what it means to be neighborly and to love our neighbor.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Jesus makes his final entry into Jerusalem riding on an “unused” donkey while the crowds cheer and loudly shout, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David” (Mark 11:10-11). As was his custom, he chose to go to the temple (Luke 4:16). Jewish priests and scribes, who wanted to kill him, but were afraid of him because of his influence with the people, quickly challenged his authority.

The Scribe's Question and Jesus' Response – Mark 12:28-31

A scribe asks Jesus, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus responds by quoting the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-5): “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” With this answer, Jesus first establishes God’s sovereignty as the only one who de-

serves undying loyalty and affection. This is a transformative commitment for disciples, as it influences every aspect of our humanity and is reflected in every part of life, including our thoughts, words, and actions.

Additionally, Jesus added the second most important commandment. He simplified it by telling us to love others as we love ourselves (v. 31). Claiming to love God without loving others is a contradiction.

“Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

The Scribe's Insightful Response and Jesus' Approval – Mark 12:32-34

Jesus never relied on his listeners for approval of his teachings. Neither did he let others dictate what he should say or teach. However, having at least one person in this setting, among hostile adversaries, demonstrate that they listened and understood must have been gratifying. The scribe's response reflected deep spiritual insight as he affirmed that loving God and neighbor is more important than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. Jesus' approval is conveyed through his assessment that the scribe is “not far from the kingdom of God.” Even more impactful is the fact that after this exchange, “no one dared to ask him (Jesus) any questions,”

Faith Without Works Is Dead – James 2:14-17

As noted above, Mark presents love as a central commandment. It is an imperative, not a suggestion or recommendation for discipleship. James, on the other hand, teaches that love must be expressed through practical help and care for others, motivated by genuine love and loyalty to God. Belief and practice are integrated expressions of true faith. Faith without these components is hypocrisy or insincere religiosity. We are challenged to examine ourselves: “what kind of faith do you have, and how is it being manifested in your life?”

SANKOFA

Immigration is a topic that captures our attention as we look toward the future and reflect on the past. King Solomon is known for saying, “there is nothing new under the sun.” Certainly, immigration is an issue that demonstrates the truth of King Solomon’s observation. Throughout biblical times, we see how God has used immigration to fulfill his purposes in powerful ways. Key figures who became immigrants include Abraham, who called himself “a foreigner and a stranger” in the land of Canaan (Genesis 23:4), the Israelite immigrants who were enslaved in Egypt for 430 years (Exodus 1), and Ruth, a Moabite immigrant in Israel who became Jesus’ great-grandmother. A prime example is Jesus and his family, who became refugees in Egypt to escape persecution (Matthew 2:13-15).

Moving forward, we can reflect on how forced immigration negatively affected our African ancestors, our own lives, and more recent immigrants. However, for all followers, the first and second greatest commandments emphasized by Jesus and James’ teachings on “faith without works” provide a unique perspective for examining today’s immigration policies and practices. We are called to welcome immigrants, recognize the reflection of God’s image in all of them, and rejoice as we see the diverse ways in which God fulfills his purposes through



**God continues to call
the faithful to welcome
strangers and show
care and compassion
for all neighbors.**

individuals, regardless of nationality, race, background, or social status. God continues to call the faithful to welcome strangers and show care and compassion for all neighbors. Are you willing to respond to God’s call?

CASE STUDY

“America is a nation of immigrants!” This fact is easily verified. Yet, the contributions of many are often overlooked or undervalued. Fortunately, there are many sources of documented information about contributions from influential mem-

bers of the African diaspora that can be passed down through generations. One such individual is the late Sidney Poitier. We must immediately and loudly assert that he is “only one of many.” There are far too many to celebrate in this space.

Although Sidney Poitier was born in the United States, his citizenship might be challenged along with many others as legal challenges are being waged against “birth-right citizenship,” which is guaranteed by the United States Constitution. Poitier was born in Miami, Florida in 1927 while his parents were visiting from the Bahamas. He spent his childhood years in the Bahamas until he moved to Miami at age 16. His many contributions to American culture include his being the first black man to win the Oscar for best actor, his insistence on starring only in films that addressed racism and justice, while simultane-

ously promoting dignity and equality for black people. From a spiritual perspective, his work has been categorized as being like “a light in dark places” (Matthew 5:14).

LIFE APPLICATION

As you consider the daily news reports, what concerns you about immigration? What does “loving your neighbor as yourself” look like to you? How do you reconcile those images with real-life scenes of families being separated, and people, including American citizens, being apprehended and deported to foreign countries without prior notification or due process? How about images of hardworking immigrants being chased through fields and caught by authorities, often based on their appearances rather than any law violations? An active, liberated faith, as advocated by the apostle James and demonstrated by our founding bishop, Richard Allen, calls for action by disciples.

Immigration policies, in many cases, derive from systems of oppression that privilege some while dehumanizing and marginalizing others. For example, white South Africans, specifically those of Afrikaner descent, are being welcomed as immigrants to the United States. Simultaneously, many black and brown people, who are considered to be immigrants, are being deported without due process. In many cases, the processes for gaining legal status are increasingly inaccessible. In summary, many who have been

traumatized and experienced civil rights violations prior to coming to the United States are now experiencing similar or even more reprehensible treatment.

Questions:

1. As you have reflected on this lesson and considered discriminatory immigration policies and practices, what actions do you believe God is calling you to take?
2. What differences do you see between love, as Jesus taught, and the “whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” that the Scribes and Sadducees valued?
3. How would you explain the kind of love that enables disciples to love others without regard to any differences that may exist between them?

An active, liberated faith, as advocated by the apostle James and demonstrated by our founding bishop, Richard Allen, calls for action by disciples.

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: “Love Lifted Me,” *AME Hymnal* #461

Closing Prayer: Father God, we thank you for this day and all your blessings. We honor you and glorify

your holy name. Thank you for Jesus and the love he showed by suffering and dying on the cross for our sins. We confess our sins, those we have committed by thoughts, words, and deeds, and we ask for forgiveness and transformation that will draw us closer to you. Please bless us to love as Jesus taught us, and to be faithful disciples, who demonstrate active faith that enables us to refuse life as “bystanders” while others suffer, needing love and compassion. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**March 2-8**

Monday	Proverbs 12:1-2, 10-14 (Work and Discipline)
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (The Temple of the Body)
Wednesday	1 Corinthians 9:19-27 (The Discipline of Right Choices)
Thursday	Psalm 139:1-12 (God Is Always With Me)
Friday	Psalm 139:13-24 (Fearfully and Wonderfully Made)
Saturday	1 Timothy 4:7-12 (The Superior Training in Godliness)
Sunday	Daniel 1:8-17 (Pure in Mind and Spirit)

Keeping Fit for the Sake of Others

Lesson Scripture: Daniel 1:8-20; 1 Corinthians 9:19-27; 1 Timothy 4:7-12; 2 Timothy 2:1-5

Focus Scripture: Daniel 1:8-17; 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Key Verses: *Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is one of value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present and the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:7b-8*

DANIEL 1:8-17; 1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8 (NRSV UE)

Daniel 1:8-17

8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine, so he asked the palace master to allow him not to defile himself.

9 Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion from the palace master.

10 The palace master said to Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king; he has appointed your food and your drink. If he should see you in poorer condition than the other young men of your age, you would endanger my head with the king.”

11 Then Daniel asked the guard whom the palace master had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:

12 “Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink.

13 You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations and deal with your servants according to what you observe.”

14 So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days.

15 At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations.

16 So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables.

17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams.

DANIEL 1:8-17; 1 TIMOTHY 4:7-8(KJV)

Daniel 1:8-17

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

7 Have nothing to do with profane and foolish tales. Train yourself in godliness, 8 for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

7 But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

KEY TERMS

- **Assimilation** – A process where individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds adopt the norms, values, behaviors, and social practices of a dominant or host society, ultimately minimizing or eliminating cultural differences.
- **Kosher** – A term from Jewish dietary laws (*kashrut*) that means fit, proper, or permissible to eat.

INTRODUCTION

Being physically and spiritually healthy is crucial for fulfilling our responsibilities to others. As cultural and political pressures are increasingly influential in daily life, how confident are you in your ability to withstand these pressures while showing grace and humility? The books of Daniel and 1 Timothy both highlight the importance of living holistically by encouraging disciples to develop healthy bodies, minds, and spirits. Although Paul recognizes the significance of all three, he uses athleticism as a metaphor to emphasize spiritual fitness as the most import-

... spiritual discernment is crucial for understanding how God guides us through life's difficulties, including opposition to our faith.

ant to God and the most beneficial to others. Additionally, according to the books of Daniel and 1 Timothy, spiritual discernment is crucial for understanding how God guides us through life's difficulties, including opposition to our faith.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Expanding on this unit's theme, "Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors," today's lesson begins with an incident from the early life of the prophet Daniel. Daniel and three of his young friends, along with other Israelites, were forced into captivity in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar chose to have Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah trained to serve in his palace. To prepare for service, Daniel and his

friends became reliant on the king's court and had to complete a three-year "forced assimilation" into Babylonian culture. This process involved carefully planned efforts to strip them of their religious and cultural identities. As a result, they were given names associated with Babylonian deities to replace their original Israelite names, which were linked to their God. Dan-

iel was renamed Belteshazzar, Hananiah was called Shadrach, Mishael was given the name Meshach, and Azariah was called Abednego. Daniel and his friends were expected to eat food and drink wine from the king's royal provisions, which, according to Jewish culture and tradition, involved "unclean" foods. Daniel graciously disagreed.

Daniel Negotiates With Ashpenaz – Daniel 1:8-16

Because of his respectful attitude and calm nature, Daniel impressed Ashpenaz, the king's palace master. Knowing that his life depended on faithfully following Nebuchadnezzar's orders, Daniel asked Ashpenaz to allow him and his friends to engage in a ten-day test to see if the king's expectations could be met with a kosher diet instead. The plan was that Daniel and his friends would eat only vegetables and drink water during the test. After ten days, if they appeared healthier, they could continue the diet. Ten days later, the success of Daniel's plan was clear as he and his friends showed no signs of malnutrition! Instead, they looked healthier and better nourished than the other captives. So, Ashpenaz allowed them to keep eating vegetables and drinking water.

Faithfulness Is Rewarded – Daniel 1:17

Although Daniel was the one who initiated ev-

erything, he and his friends were richly rewarded for their faithfulness to God. As a result, God granted Daniel and his three friends "knowledge and skill in every aspect of literature and wisdom; Daniel also had insight into all visions and dreams" (Daniel 1:17). After completing their three-year training, King Nebuchadnezzar found them to be ten times wiser and more understanding than all the magicians and astrologers in his kingdom. Consequently, they all received roles in the king's court.

The Benefits of Spiritual Discipline – 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Although Daniel was the one who initiated everything, he and his friends were richly rewarded for their faithfulness to God.

Through Timothy and Paul's mentorship experiences, we see why spiritual discipline is the most vital of all disciplines. Timothy, a young man leading the church in Ephesus – a city where pagan worship thrived alongside competing ideas and internal conflicts within the Christian community – faced many challenges. This was a growing church, but like the surrounding community, it was also filled with

conflicts. False teachings, moral and ethical uncertainties, as well as social and cultural clashes, hindered the spiritual growth the church desperately needed. Fortunately, Timothy could rely on Paul for support.

Paul's advice is straightforward but challenging! He told Timothy to ignore distractions and to "train himself in godliness" (4:7). Naturally,

Timothy, who was of Greek descent (Acts 16:1-3), would quickly connect Paul's instruction with athletics. Essentially, Paul was urging Timothy to be more intentional about developing spiritual discipline. This would require whole-hearted commitment to praying, studying, and living a godly life. Paul made it clear that spiritual fitness (or godliness) is more important than physical fitness because it affects both this life and the life to come.

SANKOFA

As we examine the interconnected relationships among healthy minds, bodies, and spirits, the path to strengthening our discipleship becomes clearer. Correlations between our faith and historical African American dietary habits are indeterminate. However, the predominance of chronic illnesses and diseases, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease should be taken seriously, and vigorous efforts should be made toward ameliorating or eliminating them.

Food deserts are significant contributors to chronic illnesses and higher death rates among African Americans. The term "food desert" refers to areas where residents have limited or no access to fresh, healthy foods. Instead of full-service grocery stores, fast food and convenience stores are the dominant food suppliers. Food deserts proliferate in predominantly black or minority communities.

Paul made it clear that spiritual fitness (or godliness) is more important than physical fitness because it affects both this life and the life to come.

We may not be personally affected. However, learning more about the origins and causes of food deserts, as well as the steps that can be taken to help alleviate their prevalence in black communities, is a compassionate goal for all to pursue. More information is available at: <https://www.elevateblackhealth.com/food-deserts-and-health-inequality-in-our-communities/>.

CASE STUDY

The scriptures are full of reminders that we are all gifted by God for his purposes. Dr. Helen Octavia Dickens is remembered for faithfully using her gifts to serve others. She was born in 1909 to a former slave who taught himself to read and a mother with little or no formal education. However, both of her parents instilled in her a strong desire for education and perseverance, which empowered her to succeed academically and professionally.

Despite the challenges she faced, Dr. Dickens, who died in 2001, achieved unprecedented success.

For example, she was the first African American woman admitted to the American College of Surgeons and accomplished many other milestones in the medical field. Dr. Dickens is also recognized for her wisdom in learning from other successful African American women in the field of medicine. She is highly praised for her work in obstetrics and gynecology, as well as her compassionate approach to serving the

underserved and impoverished, especially African American women. Dr. Dickens' impact on reducing cervical cancer rates is her most notable achievement. Because of her work, the pap smear became more acceptable to African American women and positively impacted early detection and survival rates for cervical cancer patients. By the 1950s, Dr. Dickens was also the first African American Board-Certified OB/GYN in Philadelphia. More information is available at https://cfmedicine.nim.nih.gov/physicians/biography_82.html.

LIFE APPLICATION

As pastors, church leaders, and disciples, we must be prepared to face challenges similar to those Timothy faced in Ephesus (1 Timothy 4:7-8). In a world flooded with misinformation – from media, technology, and even within religious groups – we see false teachings that distort key biblical truths, such as salvation through faith in Christ, the prosperity Gospel, and the mixing of Christianity with other religions and cultural practices. These issues aren't new, and the scriptures warn us to expect them. As 2 Timothy 4:3-4 tells us, people will reject sound doctrine and pursue myths. Colossians 2:8 also warns against being misled by

deceptive philosophies.

Questions:

- 1 Peter 3:15 urges disciples to "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." How prepared are you?
- What actions are you taking to avoid being misled by misinformation, gaslighting, and other forms of communication intended to deceive you and others?
- Do you believe Daniel's negotiation techniques might help resolve disputes or disagreements in your church? Explain why!



As 2 Timothy 4:3-4 tells us, people will reject sound doctrine and pursue myths.

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: "I Am Thine, O Lord," *AME Hymnal* #283

Closing Prayer: Father God, we thank you for your grace and mercy, and for teaching us how to be your disciples. Although we face adversity, we will neither

live in fear nor dread because Jesus told us that he will never leave us nor forsake us. As we close today's study, please bless us with stronger commitments and determinations to love as Jesus taught and to serve you with all our hearts, souls, and minds. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 9-15

Monday	Psalm 12 (God Will Defend the Needy)
Tuesday	Luke 12:13-21, 33-34 (Do Not Be Afraid to Give)
Wednesday	Leviticus 19:11-18 (Treat the Neighbor With Justice)
Thursday	James 2:8-13 (The Royal Law of Love)
Friday	Luke 10:25-37 (Everyone is Our Neighbor)
Saturday	Deuteronomy 15:4-11 (Compassion for Those in Need)
Sunday	Matthew 25:41-45 (Seeing Christ in Those Around Us)

Helping Neighbors in Need

Lesson Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:1-11; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-37; James 1:27; 2:14-17

Focus Scripture: Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Matthew 25:42-45

Key Verse: “Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, ‘Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.’” *Deuteronomy 15:11*

DEUTERONOMY 15:4-11; MATTHEW 25:42-45
(NRSV UE)

Deuteronomy 15:4-11

4 “There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy,

5 if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today.

6 When the Lord your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.

7 If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor.

8 You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.

9 Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt.

10 Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake.

11 Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you,

DEUTERONOMY 15:4-11; MATTHEW 25:42-45
(KJV)

Deuteronomy 15:4-11

4 Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the Lord shall greatly bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it:

5 Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day.

6 For the Lord thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee.

7 If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

8 But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.

9 Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee.

10 Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto.

'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."

Matthew 25:42-45

42 "...for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,

43 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.'

44 Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?'

45 Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'

11 For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

Matthew 25:42-45

42 For I was an hungry, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

KEY TERMS

- **Deuteronomy** – The fifth book of the Old Testament; from the Greek translation, it means "the Second law."
- **Economy** – Refers to the systems through which goods and services are produced, distributed, and consumed to meet the needs and wants of people living and working within a specific geographic area.

INTRODUCTION

News reports and credible data on wealth and poverty in the United States reveal deep and growing disparities

aligned with our theme, "Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors," today's lesson challenges believers to move beyond the stages of awareness to act.

among the people. A small percentage of the population holds most of the wealth, while millions struggle with basic needs such as housing, healthcare, and education. These gaps raise serious questions about justice, policy, and equal access to opportunity.

Aligned with our theme, "Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors," today's lesson challenges believers to move beyond the stages of awareness to act. Deuteronomy 15:4-11 and Matthew 25:42 offer a clear view of God's economy.

This economy differs as it is rooted in justice, mercy, policy priorities, and community care,

rather than the pursuit of wealth and power.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

As our story in Deuteronomy begins, the Israelites are on the plains of Moab, across from Jericho, preparing for their second attempt to enter the promised land. After 40 years of wandering due to rebellion and lack of faith, a new generation is ready to cross into Canaan. Since Moses is not permitted to enter, he delivers final instructions on how to live according to God's will. Deuteronomy 15:4-11 reveals God's economy, centered on justice, generosity, and shared responsibility.

Poverty Is Non-Existent – Deuteronomy 15:4-6

Moses explains that, in God's economy, no one should be in need. God will richly bless them, provided Israel obeys him "by diligently observing this entire commandment." His blessings are contingent only upon obedience to God's laws, including the care of one another.

Notably, God's blessings include empowerment to bless others by being lenders instead of being borrowers generously. In essence, God's people are not to be hoarders! Instead, they are to be conduits for sharing God's blessings with others, particularly those who are in need and not likely to be able to repay favors.

God's System Offers Relief – Deuteronomy

15:7-10

Reparations are inherent in God's system. Every seven years, debts were to be forgiven, thereby creating relief from indebtedness and new opportunities for economic growth and movement. Intergenerational debt cycles and life-long poverty are non-existent in this system. Selfishness is not acceptable! There is no need or excuse for greed. Generosity is like a golden thread that describes and binds God's economy. In the New Testament scriptures below, Jesus' teachings link Moses' teachings to the final judgment.



Selfishness is not acceptable! There is no need or excuse for greed.

Punishment for Violators

– Matthew 25:42-45

In this prophetic teaching, Jesus reigns as the king during the second coming. He will judge all nations and separate the people "one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Matt. 25:31-32). Jesus describes the final judgment and explains that, as the judge, he will condemn some people. Jesus also cites specific actions

against him that will be the basis for judgment: "not feeding the hungry, not giving drink, not welcoming strangers, not clothing the naked, and not visiting the sick or imprisoned." Unsurprisingly, those condemned will ask when they have seen Jesus in need and not responded with compassion. Jesus emphasizes that neglecting the needs of the vulnerable is equivalent to ignoring him (Matt. 25:42-45). These scriptures

serve as both warnings and blessings, helping us understand how God's principles relate to kingdom living and our salvation.

SANKOFA

Reparations are not a new idea! In Leviticus 25, the Year of Jubilee brought about social and economic fairness every 50 years – liberating the enslaved, canceling debts, and restoring land ownership. Similarly, when the Israelites left Egypt, they received silver and clothing from the Egyptians because of God's favor (Exodus 12:35-36). These same biblical principles shape today's call for reparations for descendants of the African diaspora. While the United States has provided reparations to some groups for human rights abuses, Africans have largely been excluded. Resources like "The Case for Reparations" by Ta-Nehisi Coates offer valuable insights.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church supports the reparations movement. In August 2024, our church passed a resolution, written by Rev. Dr. Robert Turner, at its 52nd General Conference, affirming this commitment. The resolution also urges the AME Social Action Commission to prioritize reparations over the next four years. This is a clear call to recognize reparations as a biblically based

concept. Understanding God's plan for economic justice – and our church's stance on social justice – requires more than just awareness. It demands action. So, how will you engage?

CASE STUDY

NBA Hall of Famer David Robinson and his wife, Valerie, demonstrate wealth-sharing aligned with God's purposes. In 2001, they founded The Carver Academy to offer quality education for underserved students in East San

Antonio. What started as a private PK–8 school has grown into a tuition-free charter school under the IDEA, now a network with campuses across Texas. Robinson has contributed more than money; he remains actively involved and serves on IDEA's board.

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Along with donating \$9 million to Carver, the Robinsons also provided \$2,000 college scholarships to every fifth grader at Gates Elementary who graduated high school, later increasing it to \$8,000. This is by no means an exhaustive list of their generosity, but the scripture "to whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48) must resonate with the Robinsons – as it should with all disciples.

LIFE APPLICATION

Poverty, as referenced in Matthew 26:11 and John 12:8, remains a persistent reality – but its inevitability does not justify ignoring the poor. Deuteronomy 15:4-11 urges God's people to be generous with each other, especially during the sabbatical year, when debts were forgiven. This passage reminds us to use our blessings to aid others, stay humble, and dedicate all we have to God. Sadly, today's poor are often dehumanized and blamed for their difficulties. Yet Matthew 25:42-45 makes it clear: how we treat the vulnerable reflects how we treat Jesus himself. We must recognize the humanity and the image of God in every person.

Our concern must also extend beyond personal charity to include advocating against systemic injustices such as unfair wealth distribution, tax systems, immigration policies, and other issues covered in this lesson. Awareness is just the beginning; believers are called to act. We must speak out, share our resources, and work to dismantle systems that prevent people from thriving and contributing to the well-being of others.

Questions:

1. What are your thoughts about the enforcement of current immigration laws in this country?
2. Using this lesson as a contextual lens, how much and what actions do you feel should be taken to ensure that we empower others and not enable dependency?
3. How comfortable are you with whether you are exemplifying God's call to be a conduit for his blessing?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Song: "More About Jesus Would I Know," *AME Hymnal* #21

Closing Prayer: Father God, in the name of Jesus, we bow in deepest humility before you, and we praise you because of who you are! Thank you for teaching me how to live in ways that please you. We want to serve and please you, Lord. So, please forgive our sins and transgressions, and continue to bless us with a desire to study and learn more about Jesus, knowing that as we do, we will be increasingly empowered to love and obey you. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 16-22

Monday	1 Samuel 18:1-5 (Souls Bound Together)
Tuesday	1 John 4:7-16 (Abide in God's Love)
Wednesday	1 John 4:17-21 (Loving God and Each Other)
Thursday	Isaiah 56:3-8 (All Peoples Will Worship God)
Friday	Psalm 133-134 (Living Together in Unity)
Saturday	Galatians 3:25-29 (Children of God Through Faith)
Sunday	Acts 10:9-15, 30-35 (God Accepts Us All)

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.

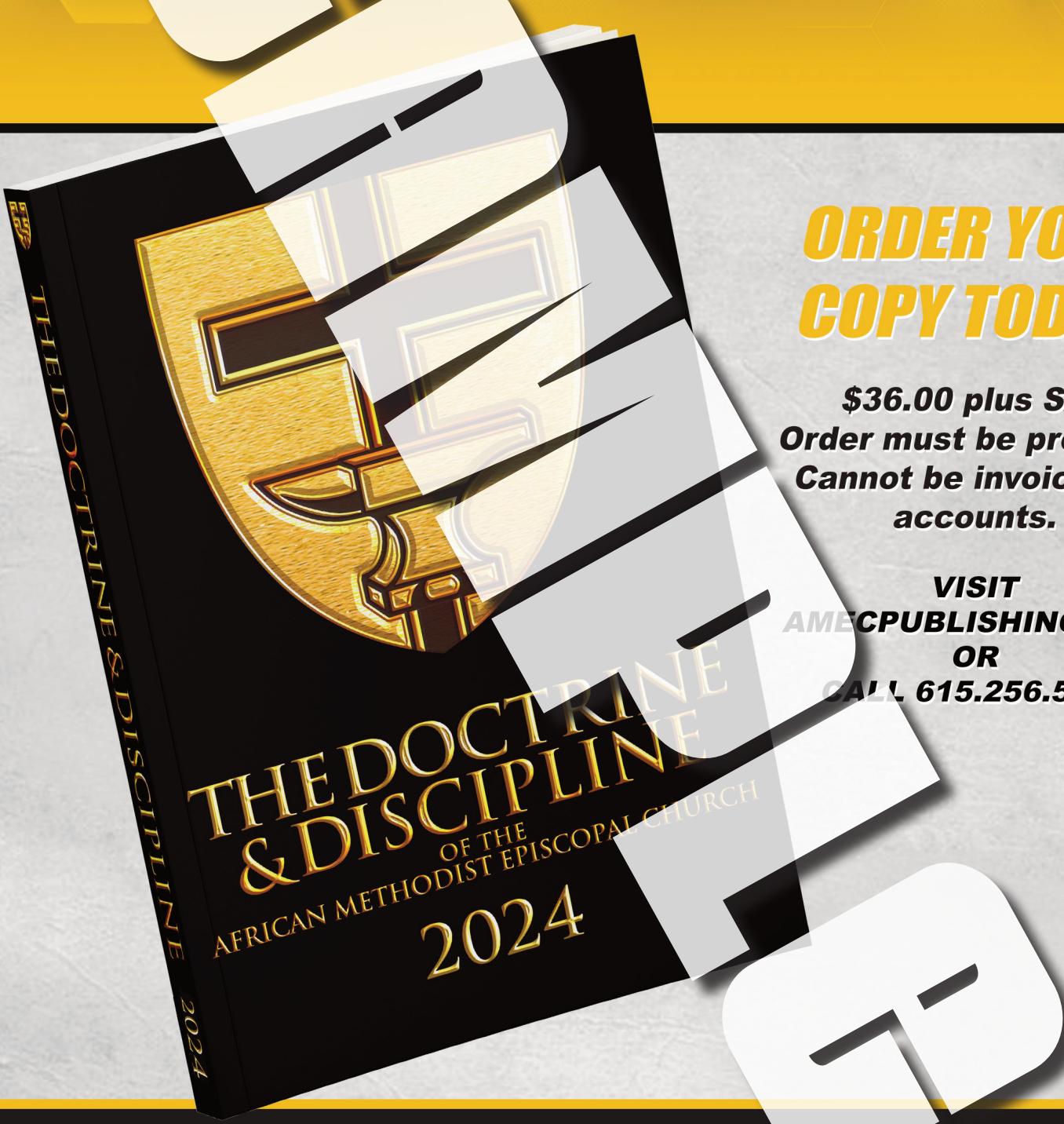
School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and write these laws upon our hearts.

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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