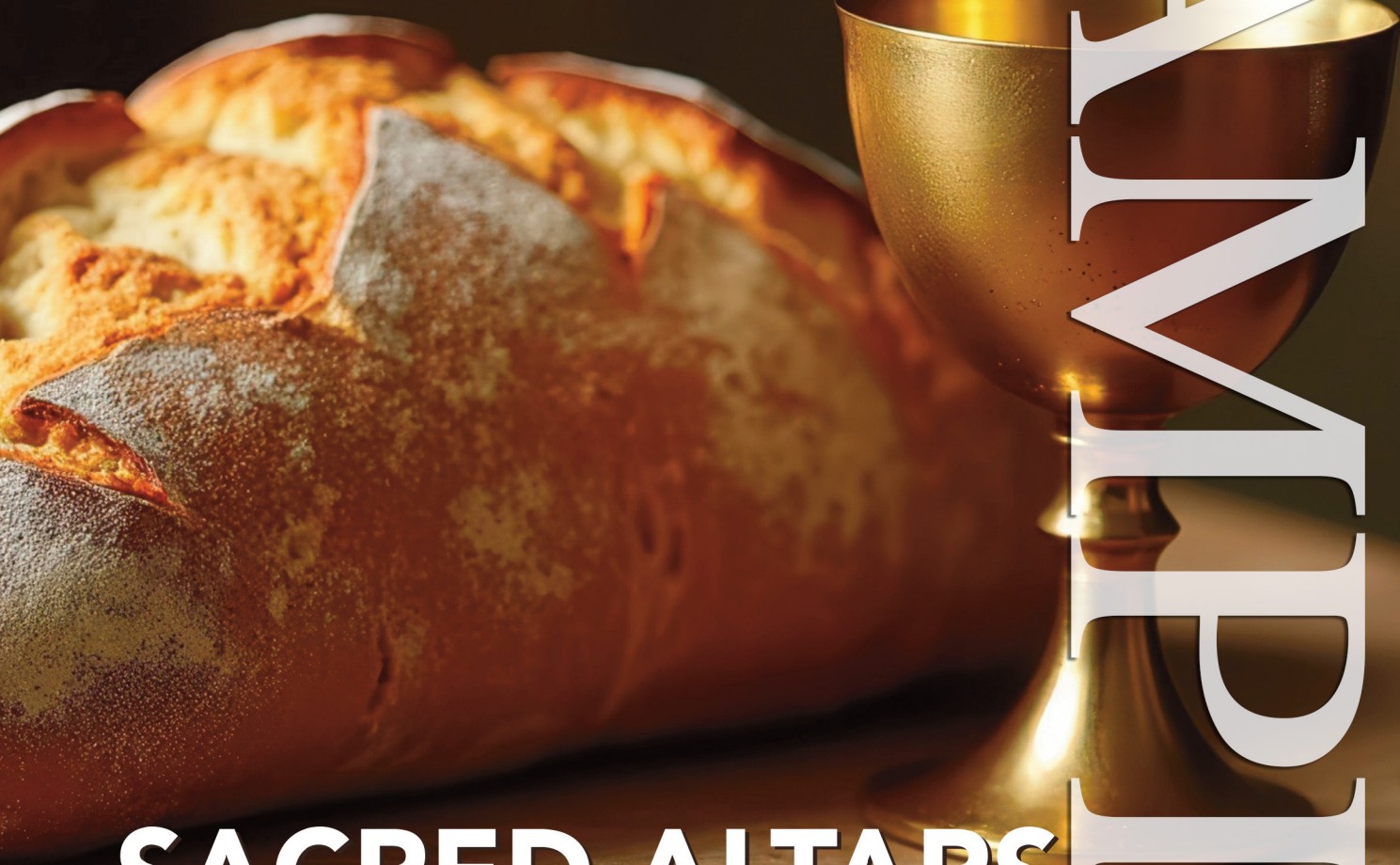




**LIBERATING
FAITH STUDIES**

SACRAMENTS

**SACRED ALTARS
AND
HOLY OFFERINGS**



LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Vol. 62
Summer Quarter 2025

JUNE, JULY, AUGUST

No. 3
Price \$5.50

Ages 18-Up

Roderick D. Belin, President/Publisher

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

Tiffany Gregory, Chief of Operations

Orlando Dotson, Layout and Design

AMEC Publishing. Copyright © 2025 by AMEC Sunday School Union.

LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY – USPS 006 – 820

Volume 62, No. 3, June, July, August 2025. An official quarterly of the African Methodist Episcopal Church prepared by the AMEC Sunday School Union. Published quarterly by the AMEC Sunday School Union, 900 13th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212. Periodicals postage paid at Nashville, Tennessee. Copyright © 2025 by AMEC Sunday School Union.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Liberating Faith Studies Sunday School Quarterly, 900 13th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212.

Liberating Faith Studies Sunday School Quarterly, Volume 62, No. 3, June, July, August 2025 – Lessons based on The International Sunday School Lessons, The International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching. Copyrighted © 2025 by the Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.; AMEC Sunday School Union © 2025.

Used by permission. All rights reserved.

For permission to reproduce any material in this publication call (615) 256-5882 or write the Rights and Permissions Department, the AMEC Sunday School Union, 900 13th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37212.

Entered as Periodicals Postage Paid Matter, March 20, 1942, at the Post Office at Nashville, Tennessee, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

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

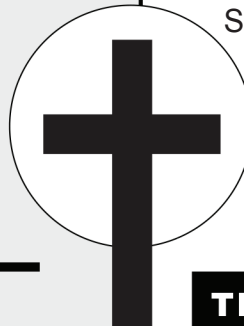
Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Rev. Dr. D. Melynda Clarke

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

May 26–June 1

Monday	Proverbs 3:1-10 (Honor God With Your First Fruits)
Tuesday	Hebrews 10:26-34 (Struggles of Faith)
Wednesday	Hebrews 10:35–11:4 (The Righteous Will Live by Faith)
Thursday	Acts 5:1-11 (Half-hearted Giving)
Friday	Luke 20:45–21:4 (Give Your All)
Saturday	Revelation 6:9-17 (The Martyrs' Cry for Justice)
Sunday	Genesis 4:1-15 (Acceptable and Unacceptable Worship)

Cain and Abel Offer Sacrifices

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 4:1-25

Focus Scripture: Genesis 4:1-16

Key Verses: The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?" Genesis 4:6-7a

GENESIS 4:1-16(NRSV UE)

1 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord."

2 Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

3 In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground,

4 and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering,

5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?"

7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it."

8 Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? Listen, your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!

11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

12 When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is

GENESIS 4:1-16 (KJV)

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

2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.

4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:

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

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

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

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

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

10 And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

11 And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;

12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

13 And Cain said unto the Lord, My punish-

greater than I can bear!

14 Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.”

15 Then the Lord said to him, “Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” And the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.

16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

ment is greater than I can bear.

14 Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.

15 And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

16 And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

KEY TERMS

- **Countenance** – A person’s facial expression.
- **Fugitive** – A person who has escaped from a place or is in hiding, especially to avoid arrest or persecution.
- **Vagabond** – A person who wanders from place to place without a home or job.

INTRODUCTION

Just as God sought to commune with Adam and Eve in the Garden, he desires communion with their children, Cain and Abel. The tale of the two brothers leads to the irony that sin continues to manifest in the next generation with more severe consequences. The relationship that humanity develops with God evolves, leading to the first occurrence of an offering. Based on their unique skills and work, each son presents their gift to

God, possibly a token of gratitude, but also as an appeal for favor. Offerings were unlike burnt sacrifices which would appear later in the historical narratives. But the story of Cain and Abel is the classic saga of sibling rivalry which will reoccur throughout

The sin that besets the characters found in this early historical narrative presents the constant struggle among humans that still besets us to this day.

Israel’s history, including patriarchal heritage and kingships. God’s reaction to Cain’s offering would ignite a vengeful jealousy that can be found even among the disciples in the New Testament. The sin that besets the characters found in this early historical narrative presents the constant struggle among humans that still besets us to this day. It confirms our constant need to pray for

God’s grace and mercy for our sins.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The story begins as an extension of Adam and Eve’s banishment from the Garden of

Eden. Given the responsibility to procreate and build families throughout the earth, the couple experience the blessings of two sons. Cain, the first born, is named to signify and acknowledge God's blessing of a male child, traditionally recognized as confirming the continuance of the family legacy. However, the meaning of Abel's name is not recognized. Most narratives focus on the importance of the first-born son as the key recipient of a larger inheritance, signifying favor and a superior and more promising future. Although this text is presented as the first family of earth, it more accurately reflects the cultural norms and traditions of the writer and the earliest Hebrew beliefs and traditions. Therefore, based on tradition, Cain would be expected to receive the highest honor of the sons, and Abel's destiny would already be questioned simply based on birth order. But the story incorporates a more significant theme, God's sovereignty to determine favor. Cain discovered his gift as a farmer (tilling the land), while Abel herded livestock. The distinction is notable that animal sacrifices would be far more significant in Jewish traditions and rituals. The vocation of shepherd is considered a humble service, requiring love and devotion, as well as

strength and endurance to protect the sheep. God expresses disappointment towards Cain's sacrifice, which does not appear to be unacceptable due simply to the type of the sacrifice (fruit of the ground). Instead, the quality of the sacrifice is questioned. Abel gave his best (firstling), indicating possibly a lamb or other young animal. Cain provided only what was on hand. The lack of diligence and personal effort by Cain was noted by God. Throughout sacred texts, including the book of Proverbs, the lack of personal interest, effort, and diligence into any project will likely lead to failure. The rejection by God led to the sins of envy, jealousy, anger, and, ultimately, the act of violence and murder. God warned Cain to control his emotions of disappointment and frustration which, ultimately, led to hatred for his brother. Cain's feelings of rejection overshadowed any form of repentance, leading him to the fateful act of premeditated murder.

Abel gave his best (firstling), indicating possibly a lamb or other young animal. Cain provided only what was on hand. The lack of diligence and personal effort by Cain was noted by God.

The book of Genesis quickly draws the reader into recognizing the cost of disobedience and failure to heed God's instruction, as was illustrated with the banishment of Adam and Eve. There is a common thread of weakness found in the

next generation. With the story of Cain and Abel, Cain becomes tempted by his own weakness for a need of approval. Like his parents, Cain had everything he needed and was positioned to be favored by God because of his position as the firstborn son. Yet, Cain was not satisfied. Cain experienced the sin of jealousy which turned to a violent rebellion against God. Like his parents, Cain attempts to hide his sin. And just as God sought out his parents in the Garden, God questions Cain about his actions.

He avoids accountability by stating, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The human characteristics demonstrated by Adam to blame Eve, and then Eve to blame the serpent, continue as Cain rejects any need for responsibility for his brother.

Finally, the blood that cries out is also an indication that blood represents a life force, speaking beyond the grave. The theological underpinnings of the shedding of blood becomes the primary component of determining the fate of humankind. Cain's sentence for his crime was reduced, showing God's continued mercy. Yet, he followed his parent's footsteps of being banished. His life was still valuable in the sight of God, thereby, leading God to hear Cain's plea for mercy and mark him as protected from others. This

unknown mark does not suggest a form of a curse or penalty. God continues to offer a form of redemption for God's children, which will be revealed in due season through God's Son.


SANKOFA

"Am I my brother's keeper?" What is understood from the Bible verse is that Cain's question to God was not an inquiry as to what he needed to do in God's eyes. The response is understood as sarcasm and indifference to the thought of caring for someone else, or considering another person's needs over his own.

However, this phrase has become a reminder of every human being's responsibility for the potential welfare of others. The Hebrew translation of Genesis 4:9 is "ha shomer."

This verb's definition is to keep, guard, watch, preserve, protect, or have charge of someone or something.

Traditionally, this phrase suggests that those who have the means and resources that others don't will have some level of responsibility for the safety, health, and benefits of others. It is also a mandate to avoid harming others, such as acts of



God continues to offer a form of redemption for God's children, which will be revealed in due season through God's Son.

exploitation and abuse. It suggests a spirit of compassion and empathy and taking some responsibility for another person's life. Accepting the role of a brother's keeper means to look out for others, even without a personal connection or relationship.

The questions God continues to present to the people of God is the same. Where is your brother? Where is your sister? In today's modern society, there is a call for a more altruistic philosophy that recognizes the need to care for the welfare of others,

whether we have a relationship with them or not, or share a common racial, ethnic, or national bond. The philosophy of all human beings as interconnected and interdependent suggests that the suffering of one person impacts the welfare of the greater body. From a biblical perspective, God did not call Abraham to simply provide a finite blessing to one household. Nor

did Moses select his family and bring them solely out of bondage. The prophets did not speak of one tribe or family to repent back to the law and be made holy. Nor did Jesus come as the Messiah to save only the Jews. The Bible teaches that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. We are reminded that we all must guard, watch, preserve, and protect as many of our brothers and sisters

as we can.

CASE STUDY

There has been a large growth of black Americans living in the United States over the last two decades. The black population in the U.S. has grown by 32% since 2000, rising from 36.2 million to 47.9 million in 2022. Notably, the number of people self-identifying as another race in addition to black has increased nearly 254%. With the increase of black Americans in the U.S., there

remains concerns of racial injustice, bigotry, and inequities particularly with marginalized populations. The primary strategy to overcome these inequities since the time of black emancipation has been educational attainment, community development, business acquisition and sustainment, and community activism. This requires addressing the systemic concerns of the high rate of the

Accepting the role of a brother's keeper means to look out for others, even without a personal connection or relationship.

incarceration of black males. According to the latest research, the large growth of the United States' criminal legal system in the late 20th century brought a widening racial gap in incarceration. By the year 2000, black people made up almost half of the state prison population but only about 13% of the U.S. population. Although a wave of changes to sentencing and corrections policies over the past two decades have

been helpful to lessen disparities in federal and state prisons, in 2020, black adults were still imprisoned at five times the rate than white adults.

Health disparities also still exist among black people. Black women are four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes, such as embolism and pregnancy-related hypertension, than any other racial group. In addition, there needs to be a focus on the health and economic inequities experienced by black people.

However, there have been positive strides in educational and vocational advancements. African American women, who make up 13 percent of the female population in the United States, are making significant strides in education, participation, health, and other areas. The gap still exists with African American female representation in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Recognizing the work that needs to be done to reduce the gap in racial disparities requires advocacy and financial support in the area of education. Many colleges in the U.S. have historically struggled to retain and graduate African American students, especially first-generation students from low-income families. Historically Black Colleges

and Universities (HBCUs), on the other hand, see some of the most impressive numbers when it comes to African American students' success. This shows the importance of HBCUs in the growth and success of future generations. Whether in improving access and success in education or reducing the rate of incarceration, there is a strong need for African Americans to intervene, advocate, and support efforts to promote better outcomes for black people in the U.S.

LIFE APPLICATION

This tale of Adam and Eve's growing family continues to warn the reader of the various emotional responses that can lead down a road of destruction, not simply for the individual, but to the family and community at large.

The book of Genesis is a significant set of chronicles in the Bible. It establishes a set of traditions based on a conceptual historical scenario that leads to the basic theological foundation for Judea-Christian faith. It characterizes an all-powerful and encompassing God of the Jews, who not only is the creator of the universe but the emotionally attached deity of love, who

provides and cares for created beings called humans. This tale of Adam and Eve's growing family continues to warn the reader of the various emotional responses that can lead down a road of destruction, not simply for the individual, but to the family and community at large. Jealousy is a dangerous emotion

that must be curbed and acknowledged as harmful to oneself and others. Another lesson is one of accountability. The benefits of giving your best may not be recognized. However, there are alternative responses to disappointments in life. There are greater consequences to wrongdoing, which are often far more burdensome to marginalized groups. Cain’s story is a reminder that God sees all things. Judgment will occur in God’s time. Showing regret and remorse and showing repentance brings healing and future spiritual growth.

QUESTIONS

1. How can the church help change and/or defy past statistics on incarceration rates or other social concerns.
2. How does the advancement of marginalized groups in your area help to benefit other people like yourself?
3. Discuss with others your feelings about accountability and holding people

responsible for their crimes. How does this align with the word of God?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn or Song of Praise:

“Your Grace and Mercy” – Hymn #270, *African American Heritage Hymnal*

CLOSING PRAYER:

Precious Lord, I am eternally grateful for your continued grace and mercy that gives us the gift of salvation and spares us the condemnation of death for our sins. Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me. Touch me with your love, and remove all malice and envy that I may hold against another. Reveal each opportunity where I am able to show mercy to others. I pray for a sanctified soul that sees the blessing of others as a gift to the entire body of Christ. May my heart be made right through the power of your Spirit. In the precious name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 2-June 8

Monday	Genesis 6:11-22 (Obedience to God’s Command)
Tuesday	John 6:15-20 (Jesus Joins Us in the Storm)
Wednesday	John 14:18-27 (Peace Through the Word)
Thursday	Genesis 7:11-24 (God Protects)
Friday	2 Peter 2:1-9 (A Herald of Righteousness)
Saturday	Psalm 77:1-2, 7-19 (A Cry for Deliverance)
Sunday	Genesis 8:13-22; 9:11-13 (A Covenant of Peace)

Noah Builds an Altar

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 6:1–9: 17

Focus Scripture: Genesis 8:13-22: 9:11-13

Key Verse: (God said,) “I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” Genesis 9:13

GENESIS 8:13-22; 9:11-13 (NRSV UE)

Genesis 8:13-22

13 In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth, and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked and saw that the face of the ground was drying.

14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.

15 Then God said to Noah,

16 “Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons’ wives with you.

17 Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”

18 So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives.

19 And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

21 And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humans, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living

GENESIS 8:13-22; 9:11-13 (KJV)

Genesis 8:13-22

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

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

15 And God spake unto Noah, saying,

16 Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons’ wives with thee.

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

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

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

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

21 And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth;

creature as I have done.

22 As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.”

9:11-13

11 “I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

12 God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:

13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

22 While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

9:11-13

11 And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

12 And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

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

KEY TERMS

- **Altar** – A table or flat-topped block used as the focus for a religious ritual, especially for making sacrifices or offerings to a deity.
- **Covenant** – An agreement; a legal contract.

INTRODUCTION

As the narrative of human history continues to unfold, the common theme is that humanity is evil. There continues to be a lack of respect for God, other humans, and God’s creation. The story of Noah presents the purging of the wicked and a new opportunity for redemption. God selects Noah and his family to survive a cataclysmic natural disaster of a flood. Noah’s assignment is not only to build an ark to save his family,

but a structure large enough to hold vast numbers of animals until the waters have receded. God instructs Noah on the plan, who successfully completes the assignment and, ultimately, is able to step back onto dry land. In an act of gratitude, Noah builds an altar and sacrifices several of the choice animals at his disposal. This is the first mention of an altar in the Bible. Noah’s act of sacrifice is pleasing to God, resulting in a declaration of acceptance and a promise of continued provision and protection for Noah, his family, and the future of humanity.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

At this point of the narrative of Noah’s Ark, there is confirmation that the waters have receded, and it is safe for the occupants to leave the vessel. The realization that their lives have been spared is a reminder of God’s

mercy. God speaks to Noah (Gen. 8:15) as he has spoken to others throughout the history of his people. God is ever present, even in times of storms and crisis. God continues to direct, guide, instruct, protect and provide for his people. Noah listens to God, an act of obedience that is not apparent in the earlier stories of Genesis. Noah honors God through building an altar, a symbol of worship and gratitude. Noah selects only animals that are appropriate for a sacrifice. This act implies Noah's diligence in preparing a sacrifice that will be acceptable, one that expresses tremendous adoration to God. The use of only clean animals (v. 9) can also be found in Leviticus 1:9, as an offering of atonement, a specific act to acknowledge the sinful nature of humanity, and Noah's desire and attempt to move forward with repentance, humility, and obedience.

The Lord smells the aroma of the offering (Gen. 8:21), and it pleases the Lord. The Lord speaks to Noah again and echoes a repeated declaration of humanity's evil ways. Then, God declares a promise, a covenant not to destroy the earth in this way again. This covenant is not simply for Noah but for

all of humankind. God resonates with God's creation, indicating that God has always displayed acceptance and pleasure with God's creation, as found in the first creation narrative, that finds all aspects of creation as "good" (Gen. 1:31). Noah now represents humanity's response to God's mercy and love. Noah is informed that he and future generations will not endure this fate in the future, through the symbol of a rainbow. It represents the promise of God's love despite

human disobedience. Although the rainbow has been accepted and utilized as a symbol for many causes, the biblical theme of God's covenant promise of mercy still remains the antithesis symbol of this tragic narrative. The rainbow becomes a positive proposal of hope for an otherwise fateful demise for humanity. The rainbow intersects with not

The rainbow becomes a positive proposal of hope for an otherwise fateful demise for humanity.

simply the covenant of mercy from natural physical tragedies, but also the covenant of redemption. In addition, the word "covenant" derives from the same root word meaning "to cut." In the Bible and other ancient cultures, a covenant carried weight and was often validated by cutting, and sealed in blood. Noah demonstrated a covenant agreement

with God, sealed in the sacrificial blood of an animal. God will ultimately provide a new covenant for humanity through the blood of Jesus Christ.

SANKOFA

The concept of a rainbow has been embraced by many cultures and beliefs for its beauty, grandeur, and spiritual connectedness. Witnessing a rainbow over

the valleys and plains of Africa can be breathtaking, allowing the viewer to reflect on its meaning. This may be one reason why Bishop Desmond Tutu spoke of South Africans as the "Rainbow People of God." Clearly understanding the biblical meaning, Bishop Tutu also drew on the metaphoric principles of a rainbow as encompassing a diverse spectrum of colors and hues that originate from the heavenly realms. For South Africa to be termed

a rainbow nation is appropriate for a nation of incredibly colorful landscapes, cuisine, culture, racial and ethnic populations, and a rich and historic legacy. Certainly, the rainbows themselves cast magnificent arcs across valleys, mountains, and waterfalls that Since you are not doing this for the

money and justify this meaningful title. It also brings purpose to the South African people. For South African indigenous cultures, the rainbow is associated with hope and a bright future. Since the first post-apartheid children matured, there has been a mixture of a positive response to this label as well as criticism. Despite the need for positive

reflection and outcome to a very dark time, social disparities and economic struggles of South Africans remain. Those who challenge this term feel that it glosses over the historical impact of apartheid, suggesting talks of rainbows as another form of denial and an avoidance of responsibility. Some see it as propaganda which enables people and social leaders to ignore their difficult reality.

Following a turbulent history, forging a new perspective towards living and working together in harmony can be healthy and encouraging, moving South Africa to becoming an even stronger country than before.

However, there are many who see the rainbow metaphor as a positive step. Following a turbulent history, forging a new perspective towards living and working together in harmony can be healthy and encouraging, moving South Africa to becoming an even stronger country than before.

CASE STUDY

Rainbow Africa is a Christian charity committed to supporting communities through the provision of education, healthcare, training, and employment. Rainbow Africa works in partnership with local churches and community groups to present a practical demonstration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in action. Established in 1996 in Livingstone, Zambia, Rainbow Africa is comprised of a team of trustees, workers, and volunteers helping those in need. For over 20 years, the organization has seen tremendous growth for Rainbow Trust Africa, a component that receives donations and gifts, along with an active prayer community. This has allowed them to transform many lives across Zambia. The faith and convictions of the participants is evident in their belief that they will see the goodness of God exemplified through the commitment of their teams and the outcome of transforming lives.

The faith and convictions of the participants is evident in their belief that they will see the goodness of God exemplified through the commitment of their teams and the outcome of transforming lives.

of the fragile existence we have in the world. We are often witnessing natural disasters that adversely affect people of every ethnic background. Yet when the crisis passes, we have an opportunity to come together to rebuild, to express our gratitude for God's mercy, but also to pray for what the future holds. We recognize that the Lord rains on the just and unjust. We no longer can judge

others' fateful tragedies as a result of their own undoing. Instead, we must recognize that we have the ability to have hope in what the future holds and be grateful that we all have a promise of salvation through our relationship with Jesus. Each day allows us to see a rainbow of hope beyond the torrential floods of problems. This biblical narrative reminds us that 1) There is accountability when we sin; 2) God is still merciful; 3) We worship

our God through sacrifice, as a sign of our faith that can bring us through the storms of life.

QUESTIONS

1. Should South Africans embrace the term of being a rainbow nation?

LIFE APPLICATION

The story of Noah and the Ark reminds us

2. The United States was once called a melting pot. Is this term appropriate and what are the challenges this term poses to Americans today?

Praise God all creatures here below. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Lord, with our hearts lifted, we praise you for one more day, one more chance, one more blessing and sign of hope that you have been with us in the past, continue to be with us today, and will continue to sustain and keep us in the days to come. Thank you, Lord, for keeping us and we stand on your promise to never leave us or forsake us. This we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus the Christ. Amen.

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn or Song of Praise

“One More Day” – Hymn #538, *African American Heritage Hymnal*

CLOSING PRAYER:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 9-June 15

Monday	Genesis 17:15-22 (God Promises a Son)
Tuesday	Romans 4:1-15 (Abraham's Righteous Faith)
Wednesday	Romans 4:16-25 (Life Out of Death)
Thursday	Genesis 12:1-7 (A Blessing to the Nations)
Friday	Psalms 125–126 (Joy for Weeping)
Saturday	Hebrews 11:8-12 (Abraham's Courageous Faith)
Sunday	Genesis 22:1-14 (God Will Provide a Lamb)

Abraham Makes an Offering

Lesson Scripture: Genesis 22:1-19

Focus Scripture: Genesis 22:1-14

Key Verse: Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide," as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." Genesis 22:14

GENESIS 22:1-14 (NRSV UE)

1 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

3 So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.

4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.

5 Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you."

6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. And the two of them walked on together.

7 Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

8 Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." And the two of them walked on together.

9 When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac and

GENESIS 22:1-14 (KJV)

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

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

3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

4 Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

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

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

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

9 And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

laid him on the altar on top of the wood.

10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

11 But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

13 And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

14 So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide," as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

11 And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

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

13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

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

KEY TERM

- **Jireh** – Hebrew word that means "to see," "to provide," or "to foresee." Jehovah Jireh, which is often translated as "the Lord will provide" and, when used as a name, "the Lord my provider."

INTRODUCTION

The story of God's people continues with the key Jewish patriarch, Abraham. Leading up to this point, human behavior has wavered and frequently fallen to the temptations of sin. But God continues to speak and chooses Abraham to be the father of God's people. Abraham's select lineage identified by God are promised prosperity that extends

blessings to people beyond their family ties. This evolving monotheistic religion in

The covenant appears to be fulfilled but Abraham must first pass God's test by sacrificing his promised son, Isaac.

one God is also slated to form into a powerful nation, with a promise to occupy their own land. In prior chapters, the reader follows Abram's journey, leaving everything he knew to follow the voice of God. Abram took his wife Sarai, along with all that he owned and set out to receive this promise for himself and for future generations to inherit. Despite the

missteps by Abram and Sarai, God faithfully fulfilled his promise to grant him a son by his wife, now renaming them Abraham and Sarah. The covenant appears to be fulfilled but Abraham must first pass God's test by sacrificing his promised son, Isaac.

This is a story of a man whose faith is so steadfast that he believes God can restore his son from any fate, even death. Abraham discovers that God's test would also reveal God's faithfulness. This sacred story illustrates that when all may appear to be lost, God provides exactly what we need.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Throughout the story, we see God calling Abraham to higher levels of his faith.

Abraham waited his entire life, well into

his advanced years, to enjoy the joy of a son with his wife Sarah. This is abruptly challenged with the ultimate test of obedience by sacrificing what he holds most dear. The ritual of performing a sacrifice is considered a human response to the divine, to acknowledge the blessings of God or to atone for the wrongdoings performed by the people. In this case, there is no obvious reason for a sacrifice of such a high

cost. One can only imagine the unwritten thoughts of Abraham as he made his way to the mountain. There is no dialogue with his wife, nor any opportunity for her to say her last farewell to her son. The narrative leads to the understanding that Abraham was convinced that God would provide an alternative plan (v. 8) when Abraham states "God will provide his lamb." Abraham's

journey to the mount parallels the journey of Christ to Mount Golgotha and reminds us of the three-day wait and Jesus' three-day rest in the grave. However, this innocent promised child will not perish as it may appear. Instead, the story of Abraham must be reflected upon under the premise that Abraham believes in a miracle-working God. This proves to be true through God's voice of mercy to spare Isaac, and redirecting Abraham to a ram trapped in a nearby bush.

One question that is posed is the significance of a ram offering rather than a lamb. A lamb is a young sheep, twelve months old or younger, whereas a ram is an adult male sheep. Leviticus 6:6 states that a ram offering is used for a trespass offering, an egregious act of fraud. To trespass against a neighbor for monetary gain was a highly deviant act, and required a sacrifice of great value. Thus, a

... the story of Abraham must be reflected upon under the premise that Abraham believes in a miracle-working God.

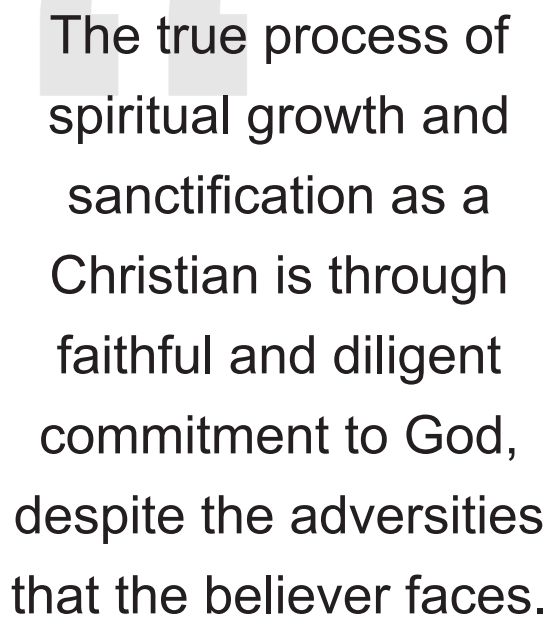
ram without blemish would often be used to procreate the flock. There is no indication that Abraham had committed such a crime. Further, Abraham was a wealthy man, with flocks and herds of his own. But due to its value, the ram was also used in ceremonies of consecration and dedication. A ram was befitting the moment, a time of Abraham's consecration as the father of all nations. In response to his faith in God

and love for him, the ram now symbolizes Abraham's confirmation as the father of God's people. The believed requirement to sacrifice one offspring becomes the catalyst to guarantee innumerable offspring to inherit a predestined future of divine providence. More significantly, Abraham is consecrated as the forefather of the belief in one God, Jehovah, and, ultimately, Jehovah Jireh, the providential and divine caretaker of humanity.

SANKOFA

"It's just a test."

Many times in life we face adversities and various trials. Whether it is through our day-to-day living, working, attending school, paying bills, building healthy families and relationships, or addressing issues in our society. It often feels like we are facing one issue after another. Over the past decades, there have been attempts to present Christianity as a religious belief that guarantees a simple, joyful life, filled with prosperity and blessings. Although that may occur for believers during their lives, it is not biblical. The true process of spiritual growth and sanctification as a Christian is through faithful and diligent commitment to God, despite the adversities that the believer faces. It is also often said that the reason for struggles and trials as a Christian is due



The true process of spiritual growth and sanctification as a Christian is through faithful and diligent commitment to God, despite the adversities that the believer faces.

to attacks by dark forces. Yet, the journey through life does not necessarily completely consist of attacks by the devil. For the Bible reveals various cases where the fears a believer faced were God enabled, to test a believer's faith. Peter's walk on the water in the 14th chapter of Matthew was his opportunity to demonstrate his faith. He was not invited to step out onto the water by the devil. Instead, Jesus called Peter to participate in a miracle that defied nature.

Peter was facing a test. The incident did not lead to Peter's demise, but revealed the infinite possibilities that are open when we trust God. Even throughout history, every move towards social justice and freedom, from Freedom Riders to lunch counter sit-ins, all required a quantum leap of faith. Looking back on the ancestors of our past reminds us that if they could pass the test, so can we.

CASE STUDY

His name is Tendai Chetse. At 30 years old, he started working as a management consultant in London. However, his earlier days were far more challenging. When Tendai Chetse was 22 years old, he struggled to make ends meet while pursuing his postgraduate degree. He recalled he only had a penny to put in the offering on


Sunday. But that would change.

His family moved to the United Kingdom (UK) from Zimbabwe when he was 17. There were limits on how much Tendai could work because he didn't have indefinite leave to remain. As an international student, he didn't qualify for student loans. His mother gave him enough for his tuition, but he had very little left over after that. While attending school, he was living by faith to cover his rent and had to ask his housemates to cover his bills until he got paid. His social life consisted of going to church, but this would be a blessing for him. He gives the testimony that one week, he only had a few cents left in his bank account. Like the story of the widow's mite, he found himself literally with a penny to give in the church offering. He recalled putting it in an envelope because he was ashamed and embarrassed about putting it in the offering bucket. Having limited funds led him to spend most of his time with God, praying. He states he wasn't necessarily asking for anything, but he needed strength while waiting. He no longer worried about what he didn't have because he was grateful to have a relationship with God that brought him a sense of peace.

One day while spending time in prayer,

he heard God's voice instruct him that he would receive a blessing to cover his financial problems. But he was required to share half of it with someone named Sarah. As he shared this story, he recognized that many people would not believe him. But he adamantly stated that the events that followed were nothing short of a miracle. He received a deposit of £800 that very next day, from an unknown donor. What confirmed the miracle is that he met a woman named Sarah, with

whom he obediently shared 50% of the blessing. He knew that this had to be a move of God, Jehovah Jireh. When he shares this testimony, most people question whether it is true. But what is certain, is that God continues to perform miracles. The question is whether we are willing to be obedient and live our lives having faith that God will provide.



While attending school, he was living by faith to cover his rent and had to ask his housemates to cover his bills until he got paid.

LIFE APPLICATION

Life can be interesting and unpredictable at times. Just when things appear to be going in a positive direction, challenges can arise. Adversity has no timetable, and struggles can come at every turn. The difficulties of life can become overwhelming and appear unsolvable. Yet, the Bible reminds us to have faith in God. It is in the most desperate of situations that our faith is tested. The harder

or more impossible the circumstance, the greater the miracle. Whenever you face a daunting situation that seems impossible, have faith and pray. Be open to the test so you are positioned for a testimony. It is only in these cases that we can truly say we have seen a miracle.

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the distractions that prevent you from spending more time with God?
2. What steps will you take to strengthen your faith and be open to seeing miracles in your life and the lives of others?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn or Song of Praise

“I Will Trust in the Lord” – Hymn #391,
African American Heritage Hymnal

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear Lord, thank you for the blessings and the breakthroughs that only you could give. Thank you for the tests that have led to testimonies. Thank you for your patience with me when the test was hard, and I wavered. I pray that you help me with my unbelief. Renew my faith and strengthen my resolve to trust you in all things. Guide me back to the throne of grace, where I may be reminded of your love and your power. I pray for a renewed faith that moves mountains and glorifies your holy name. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 16-June 22

Monday	Leviticus 19:30-37 (Love the Alien as Yourself)
Tuesday	Genesis 25:19-28 (Isaac's Prayer for Rebekah)
Wednesday	Genesis 26:1-11 (Living as an Alien)
Thursday	Philippians 4:10-19 (God Will Supply Every Need)
Friday	Genesis 26:12-23 (God Blesses and Provides)
Saturday	Romans 15:1-13 (Live in Harmony; Welcome One Another)
Sunday	Genesis 26:24-33 (Making Peace With Others)

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.

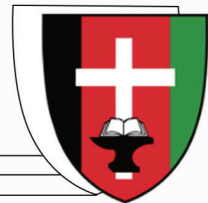
Superintendent—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

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

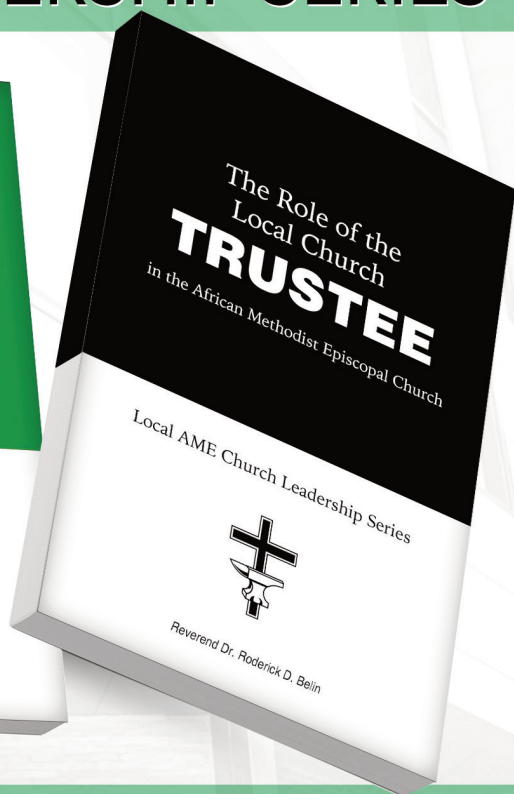
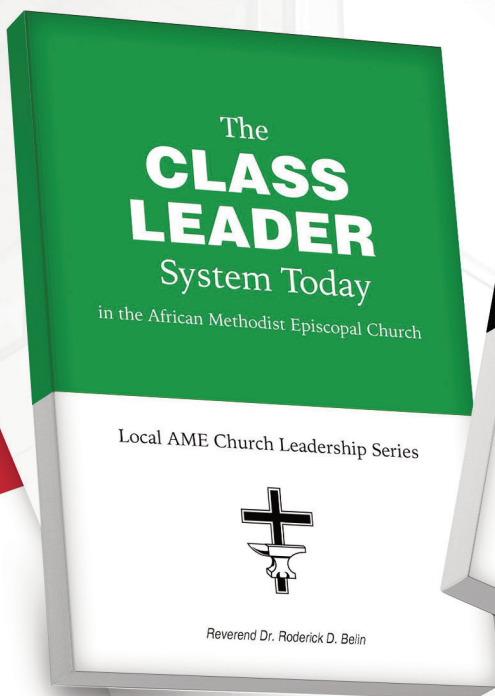
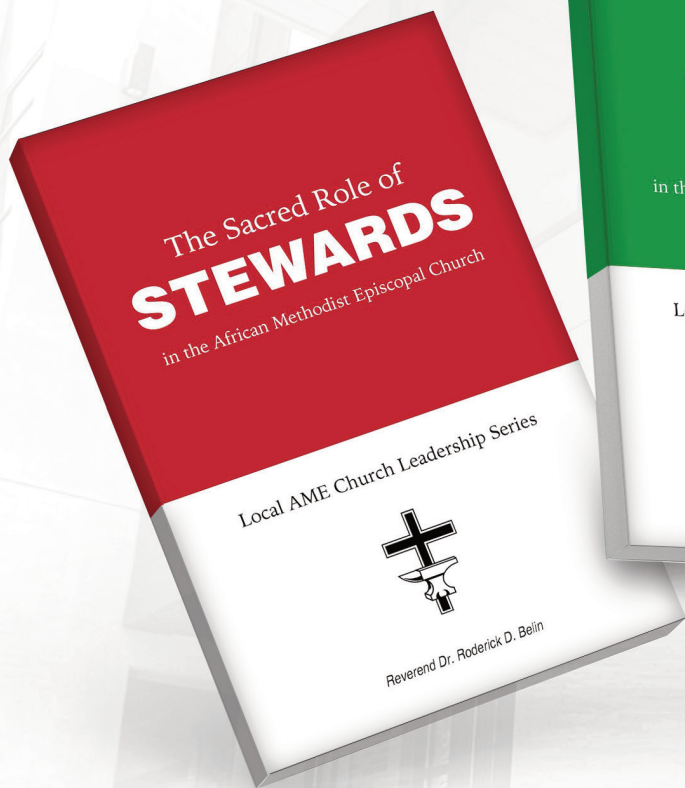
Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!

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.



LOCAL AME CHURCH LEADERSHIP SERIES



Now Available
AMECPUBLISHING.COM
\$15.00 each