

# ***EXAMINING OUR FAITH***



# 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

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## 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 AME 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.



# Sustaining Our Faith

Lesson Scripture: Jude  
Focus Scripture: Jude 17-25

**KEY VERSES:** Beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. Jude 20-21

## WORDS TO KNOW

**APOSTLES** – the chief disciples of Jesus Christ

**SCOFFERS** – people who voice ridicule of those who choose to believe God and his Word

**DEVOID** – entirely lacking the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

**MERCY** – undeserved compassion or forgiveness from God

**DEFILED** – to spoil something

**BLEMISH** – a small mark or flaw

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE: JUDE 17-25**

- 17** But you, beloved, must remember the words previously spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 18** for they said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts.”
- 19** It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.
- 20** But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit;
- 21** keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.
- 22** And have mercy on some who are wavering;
- 23** save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies.
- 24** Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing,
- 25** to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

**INTRODUCTION**

During this spring quarter, we will focus on *Examining Our Faith*. We explore the fullness of faith as a response to God’s desire to be in a relationship with us. To be faithless is to turn away from God and to put trust in something, or someone, other than God. In the Old and New Testaments, there are examples of spiritual faithfulness and unfaithfulness. The lessons of the spring quarter guide us into a reaffirmation of our confidence in God because “without faith, it is impossible to please God.”

The first five lessons focusing on “Faith-FULL Versus Faith-LESS” are drawn from Jude, Second Corinthians, First Peter, Acts, and Mark and they invite us to turn the challenges of life into opportunities for nurturing our faith instead of giving up, turning away from God, or rejecting faith. In today’s lesson, Jude appeals to us to strive for the same faith that was once entrusted to the saints.

*Discuss an occasion when unbelievers challenged your faith. How does*

*one maintain their faith in God while living in a world that opposes all we view as sacred?*

## BIBLE STORY

The author, Jude, was the brother of James, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church and writer of the Epistle of James (Jas. 1:1; Mk. 6:3). And also, the half-brother of Jesus. At first, Jude was an unbeliever (Jn. 7:3 – 5). Ultimately, he became convinced of Jesus' deity (Acts 1:14). The letter is dated about A.D. 65. Jude desired to remind the church of the need for constant vigilance to keep strong in the faith and to defend it against heresy. From the first century on, the church has been threatened by heresy and false teaching. We must always be on our guard.

Jude's message to Jewish Christians and believers everywhere was the same. We have to expect opposition to come and godless teachers to arise, but Christians should "contend for the faith" by rejecting all falsehood and immorality (v. 3; vv. 4 – 19). We must remember God's mighty acts of rescue and punishment and the warnings of the apostles (vv. 5 – 11, 14 – 16, 17 – 19). Jude gives us instructions on how to take a stance against false teachers and remain faithful to God.

Christians must fight for God's truth. The apostles of Christ, as well as other apostles, warned the believers about false teachers who would seek to turn them away from the truth of the Gospel (vv. 17 – 18; Acts 20:29; 1 Tim. 4:1 – 6; 2 Tim. 3:1 – 10; 2 Peter 2:1 – 22). We must evaluate and be careful about whom we choose as our spiritual leaders. If they are false teachers, we are to make it known that the person "divides," and "follows mere instincts," without being new creations in Christ, and does not have the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:8 – 9). This simply means they are unsaved.

First, believers are to cultivate their spiritual growth by having an intimate prayer life with God (v. 20). We need to pray in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit knowing he intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26 – 27). Moreover, the Holy Spirit opens our minds to Jesus and teaches us about him (Jn. 14:26; 15:26). This results in a more intimate relationship with Christ. Second, we are urged to keep close to Christ (v. 21). This means we are to live in a close relationship with God as



well as other believers. If we do, false teachers cannot lead us away from God (Jn. 15:9 – 10). Third, we have to witness to others about Christ to save them from God’s judgment (vv. 22 – 23). Witnessing can come through our actions of kindness and compassion. And we are to love the sinners but hate the sin. Jude closes the letter with a glorious benediction of praise to God (vv. 24 – 25).

*What is the warning that Jude is giving to the Christians? How can we fight for God’s truth?*

## **SANKOFA**

Ronald McNair (1950 – 1986)

Ronald McNair was 9 years old when a South Carolina librarian told him he could not check out books from a segregated library in 1959. Refusing to leave, a determined McNair sat on the counter while the librarian called the police, as well as McNair’s mother. The police arrived and told the librarian to let the young boy have his books, and McNair walked out alongside his mother and brother.

McNair went on to earn his Ph.D. in physics at MIT and became one of the first black Americans selected as an astronaut by NASA, alongside Guion S. Bluford, Jr. and Frederick Gregory.

McNair’s first spaceflight was the STS-41B mission, aboard the Challenger shuttle. He successfully maneuvered the robotic arm, which allowed astronaut Bruce McCandless to perform the first space walk without being tethered to the spacecraft.

The second space flight for McNair would be his last. He, along with six other NASA astronauts, were aboard the Space Shuttle Challenger when it exploded one minute and 53 seconds after takeoff in 1986. Everyone on board the shuttle was killed. This included McNair along with Michael J. Smith, Judith Resnick, Francis “Dick” Scobee, Ellison Onizuka, Christa McAuliffe, and Gregory Jarvis.

Today, the library in South Carolina where McNair was refused books is named after the heroic boy determined to make a difference. In honor of Dr. McNair, Congress provided funding for the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. It encourages



minorities from low-income families and first-generation college students to pursue graduate studies. Dr. McNair was survived by his wife, Cheryl, and their two children.

*What did Ronald McNair do to protest against segregation? How do you think his actions impacted others?*

Sources: Jackson, J. (2011, May 21). Ronald E. McNair (1950-1986). BlackPast.org. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/mcnair-ronald-e-1950-1986/>

"Astronaut Bio: Ronald E. McNair 12/03." NASA – Johnson Space Center. National Aeronautics Space Administration, Dec. 2003. <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/mcnair.html>; "Ronald E. McNair's Bio." The University of Arizona Graduate College. Arizona Board of Regents. <http://grad.arizona.edu/mcnair/mcnair-bio>.

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

Silently read Jude 5 through 16. Write down the conflicting values that Jude mentions which demonstrate rebellion against God. The false teachers had influenced the believers to disobey God. Identify the conflicting values that can be seen in today's society.

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Social media influencers have millions of followers on Instagram; TikTok; X (formerly known as Twitter); and YouTube. People buy clothes and products advertised or used by the influencer. The influencer can make millions of dollars. Who influences you? Using your cell phone, scroll to the sites of people you follow. They have the power to change who you are based on what they say and do. You desire to be like them, so you compromise a little to do so. Then you continue to compromise your faith a little more. Eventually, you completely abandon your faith. There will be consequences for your disobedience. How can other believers influence those who have strayed away from God? Name three ways to be an influencer for Christ.

## SUMMARY

God's Word and the gift of eternal life have infinite value and have been entrusted to Christ's faithful followers. Many people live in opposition to God and his followers. They twist God's truth, seeking to deceive and destroy the unwary. But God is depending on us to tell the world about the truths contained in his Word. Most importantly, they can be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. We must share the Word and defend its truths. This may result in beatings, imprisonment, rejection, and other suffering. It is worth enduring because Jesus died on the cross for us.

How important is prayer in your daily routine? Think about who you can join together with to start a prayer group. How can you be an agent of change in the AME Church, in your neighborhood, in the world, or your own life?

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: God, give me wisdom as I pray and read your Word. Give me the strength to not compromise my faith for the temporary pleasures of the world. My faith is in you. Amen.*

*Hymn: "My Faith Looks Up to Thee"*

# Testing Our Faith

Lesson Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11

Focus Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:5-11

**KEY VERSE:** Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? 2 Corinthians 13:5b, c

## WORDS TO KNOW

**EXAMINE** – to inspect in detail to determine their nature or condition

**TRUTH** – agreeing with fact or reality; steadfastness

**AUTHORITY** – the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience

**APPEAL** – to make a serious or urgent request to others

**PEACE** – a state of security and tranquility

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE: 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-11**

- 5** Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test!
- 6** I hope you will find out that we have not failed.
- 7** But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed.
- 8** For we cannot do anything against the truth but only for the truth.
- 9** For we rejoice when we are weak but you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may be restored.
- 10** So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.
- 11** Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Be restored; listen to my appeal; agree with one another; live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

**INTRODUCTION**

Tests are given as a part of school grading systems. We have to take a test to get our driver's licenses. If we go to the doctor, they question and examine us. Friends often test our loyalty. Our lives are full of tests and examinations. It can be difficult to meet all the standard requirements and maintain our principles.

Everyone has principles they are challenged to uphold. In today's lesson, the apostle Paul challenges believers to examine themselves as they rely on the power of Christ in keeping the faith imparted to them.

*How does it feel if you do not meet the standards of others? How and where do we find the courage to live authentically, keeping true to our ideals?*

**BIBLE STORY**

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians about A.D. 55 – 57, from Macedonia. He was writing to the church in Corinth, and Christians

everywhere. Paul had written three letters to the Corinthians, but two had been lost. In 1 Corinthians (the second letter), he used strong words to correct and teach the believers. Most responded in the right manner. But there were a few who denied Paul's authority and questioned his motives. Paul's letter provides a defense of his life and ministry (Chs. 1 – 7). In chapters 8 and 9, Paul's focus is on the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem. He also gave instructions on proper giving. Chapters 10 – 13 are dedicated to Paul's further defense of his apostleship and authority against false legalistic teachers.

As we look at chapter 13 for today's lesson, this is Paul's final advice to the believers in Corinth. Paul reminded them that his upcoming visit would be his third. A true minister, Paul was not a coward. He was ready to fight against sin. Paul stood firm against the false teachers and did not back down. Anyone who charged Paul with sin had to have two or three witnesses to confirm their accusations (v. 1; Deut. 19:15).

When Paul arrived for his third visit, he would act against the sinners. Paul had the option to 1) publicly confront the sinners and denounce their behavior; 2) call the sinners before the church leaders for discipline; or 3) excommunicate them from the church. Paul strongly hoped that the false teachers would cease their spreading of falsehoods and turn towards repentance. But if they did not, Paul would act. Paul had proven that Christ spoke through him and that the power of God operated in him (vv. 3 – 4).

Paul pleaded for the people to do a self-examination (v. 5). This means to take stock of one's spiritual condition. Believers can fail the test in the race before them (vv. 5 – 6; 1 Cor. 9:27). What is the outcome of failing? A believer can face the loss of a reward or possible physical death (1 Cor. 3:14 – 15). Paul desired the Corinthians to grow into mature believers whose faith increased daily. Spiritual maturity can help us avoid the pitfalls of the enemy. He closes the letter with a sense of hope that the Corinthians will respond to his appeal and live in peace (v. 11).

*Why does Paul urge the Corinthians to do a self-examination? Do self-examinations lead to lasting transformations? What can those*

*in positions of authority do to assist us in our spiritual growth and development?*

## **SANKOFA**

(1875) John Wesley Cromwell, *“Address on the Difficulties of the Colored Youth, in Obtaining An Education in The Virginias”*

Twenty-nine-year-old John Wesley Cromwell, born into slavery in 1846, was by 1875 an attorney, politician, educator, newspaper editor, and a rising leader in Virginia’s Reconstruction-era African American community. On August 23, 1875, he addressed the Colored Educational Convention meeting in Richmond. His reflections come after a close examination of the education system for colored youth.

Please take a moment to review the article and pay attention to John Wesley Cromwell’s concerns regarding the education of colored youth. It is crucial to understand his perspective and consider his suggestions for improving the education system for this demographic. To what extent has the education of minority and disadvantaged students evolved since 1875? What can you do to enact change?

*Source: <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1875-john-wesley-cromwell-address-difficulties-colored-youth-obtaining-education-virginias/>*

## **REAL TALK, FAITH WALK**

We have to do a self-examination to see if we are living according to God’s standards. For this part of the lesson, look at yourself on your cell phone. Take a selfie and add a filter of a facial mask, and then take a selfie without it. Ask yourself, “What do I look like with a mask on? Do I hide behind a mask so no one will know I’m a Christian? Do I act like my friends so I can fit in?”

Look at your selfie without your mask on. It’s always good to reflect on who you are and how you present yourself to the world. When in the company of others, ask yourself if your life reflects Christ. What does God see? How can one align their actions and beliefs with Christian values?

## SUMMARY

Completing a self-examination is not easy, but necessary for our spiritual growth. We may have past failures (sins) that need to be dealt with through prayer and repentance. It is only then that we can begin to transform into the person God desires us to be. We can maintain and continue our spiritual growth by seeking God daily.

*Is there a way for mature Christians to assist you in conducting a self-examination? Moreover, what steps are necessary for spiritual growth?*

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: God, let me see myself as you see me. Every day guide me so I can reflect godliness in all I do. Amen.*

*Hymn: "Down at the Cross"*



# Defending Our Faith

Lesson Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

Focus Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

**KEY VERSE:** Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 1 Peter 3:13

## WORDS TO KNOW

**HUMBLE** – to be meek, not proud

**DECEIT** – the practice of concealing or misrepresenting the truth

**RIGHTEOUS** – to act morally and by God's commands

**PEACE** – a state of security and tranquility

**INTIMIDATE** – to make someone feel frightened to coerce them to do what one wants

**SANCTIFY** – to dedicate, make holy

**MALIGNED** – to be spoken about in a spitefully critical manner

*FOCUS SCRIPTURE: 1 PETER 3:8-17*

- 8 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.
- 9 Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.
- 10 For “Those who desire to love life and to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit;
- 11 let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.
- 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”
- 13 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?
- 14 But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,
- 15 but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you,
- 16 yet do it with gentleness and respect. Maintain a good conscience so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.
- 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil.

**INTRODUCTION**

Peter was a fisherman whom Jesus called to be his disciple (Matt. 4:18 – 19). Peter became a part of his inner group. He often spoke without thinking and was aggressive and impulsive. During Jesus’ trial, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. Later, Jesus demonstrated love and forgiveness towards him. Peter became the first great voice of the Gospel during and after Pentecost (Acts 2). He wrote 1 and 2 Peter.

The first letter of Peter was written about A.D. 62 – 64 from Rome. The Jewish Christians had been forced out of Jerusalem due to persecution. Peter desired to encourage suffering Christians during that period. But his words can also provide comfort for persecuted believers today. There are believers all around the world suffering for

their faith. Today's lesson explains how Christians should live and conduct themselves during times of suffering.

*What challenges do you face as a Christian? What's your typical response when faced with abuse and bullying from others?*

## **BIBLE STORY**

Peter encouraged the believers to live in harmony, especially when suffering (3:8). Harmony is necessary when pursuing to live for Christ and do his will. Moreover, we have to be sympathetic in our attitudes toward one another. Our actions demonstrate our love for one another just as Christ loves us. This can be seen as we show loving sensitivity to all. And when we humbly encourage one another and rejoice in each other's successes, we cannot act like the world and enact vengeance against those who mistreat us. Nor are we to hurl insults at those who persecute us. We should prioritize praying for others, as encouraged by Jesus (v. 9; Matt. 5:39). In this way, God will grant us personal blessings.

Peter quotes Psalm 34:15 – 16 in verses 10 through 12. When living in a non-Christian environment, we have to treat our enemies with kindness. This means controlling our tongues and not speaking evil of others. It is very easy to spread lies about those who despise us. But God desires for us to “seek peace and pursue it.” A person who wants peace cannot be argumentative and combative. Since peaceful relationships come from our efforts at peacemaking, work hard at living in peace with others each day. God sees us and hears our prayers. We have the Lord's special attention.

Verse 13 states, “Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?” We want other people to like us, and sometimes we will do almost anything to win their approval. But God tells us to put our energy into pleasing him instead. Our efforts to be peacemakers will usually make us more attractive to those around us, even our enemies. But even if it does not, we are still pleasing God.

We have to have a proper attitude toward suffering righteously and facing persecution fearlessly (v. 14). Each day quietly trust in God as Lord. Jesus is in control of all events, so there is no need to worry

about anything our enemies do. A good conscience will put our persecutors to shame. It will prompt us into good behavior. And it will give those who are persecuted the full understanding of the value of suffering as a follower of Christ (v. 17).

*How can we maintain a good mindset towards others, even if they mistreat us? Do you have anyone in mind who sets a good example for maintaining peaceful relationships?*

## SANKOFA

Alberta King (1904 – 1974)

There are various ways in which someone may express hatred. But no matter the method, hatred is still evil. Alberta King, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King’s mother, was murdered in church by someone who hated Christians. Despite his actions of killing Alberta King as well as a deacon, the family asked the court to spare his life.

Read the article and discuss the actions of the murderer versus the response of the family of Alberta King. *How was their faith tested? Do you feel your response would be similar?*

Article: <https://www.atlantamagazine.com/civilrights/the-murder-of-alberta-king/>

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

Because we come from different ethnic groups, families, and communities, our everyday lives are not the same. Using the posterboard or construction paper you were given, create a collage of a typical day. At the top write in capital letters, “My Typical Day.” You can draw or cut out pictures to symbolize your typical day. After completing your collage, use a black marker to circle the places you have the greatest challenges in. Share with the class what your pictures symbolize and what daily challenges you face. Ask the class: “How can I maintain my faith while enduring these challenges?”

## SUMMARY

Observing societal norms is a safe and convenient way to live. But when we voice objections to these norms, we are inviting conflict. Peter encourages Christians to defend their faith through righteous and humble actions even if they are persecuted. Persecution for doing good enables us to share in the suffering of Christ. Jesus obeyed the Father and suffered death on the cross. We can expect trials and suffering as his sons and daughters. However, blessings will come to us from God for our obedience and faithfulness.

*When we get angry and enact vengeance upon our enemies, how can Peter's life and ministry offer hope? What steps can Christians take to ensure we are ready for the daily battles?*

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: God, strengthen and enable me to love my enemies as I faithfully obey you. Amen.*

*Hymn: "Order My Steps in Your Word"*

# Living in Faith

Lesson Scripture: Acts 6

Focus Scripture: Acts 6:7-15

**KEY VERSE:** They could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Acts 6:10

## WORDS TO KNOW

*GRACE – undeserved favor from God, who pardons our sins*

*WONDERS – miracles; acts of God*

*SYNAGOGUE – a place where Jews assemble for worship and teaching the law*

*BLASPHEMOUS – to utter slanderous or profane words against God*

*CYRENIANS – pronounced: sai – REE – nih – uns*

*CILICIA – pronounced: sih – LIHSH – ee – uh*

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE: ACTS 6:7-15**

- 7** The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.
- 8** Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.
- 9** Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen.
- 10** But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.
- 11** Then they secretly instigated some men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”
- 12** They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council.
- 13** They set up false witnesses who said, “This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law,
- 14** for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us.”
- 15** And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

**INTRODUCTION**

The book of Acts was written by Luke as the second part of a two-volume work. Acts is considered the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. It gives an account of the birth and growth of the Christian church. Acts is the connecting link between Christ's life and the life of the church.

Life is full of choices, good and bad. And every choice has consequences. Therefore, we have to be able to take a stand for what we believe and not waver. How many of you are willing to die for Christ? In today's lesson, we delve into the life of Stephen who lived by faith, no matter the outcome.

*How do you respond to those who slander your name? What sustains you in the face of trials and persecution?*



## BIBLE STORY

After the Day of Pentecost, the believers came together and formed the first church (Acts 2). The apostles not only preached and taught the Word, but many miracles were performed through the power of the Holy Spirit. The church grew in numbers daily. The miracles confirmed the truth of the apostle's teaching. And the miracles demonstrated that the power of the Messiah who had been crucified and risen was now with his followers. This brought with it suffering and persecution for the apostles and all believers.

The religious leaders were very jealous over the fact that Peter and the apostles had gained more respect than they had. The apostles were respected not because they demanded it, like the religious leaders, but because they deserved it. The apostles experienced being arrested and put in jail, beaten, and slandered by community leaders (5:17 – 18). Faith in God does not make our troubles disappear; it makes trouble appear less fearsome because it puts them in the right perspective.

As the early church increased in size, so did their needs. This gave rise to problems. There were two groups of Jews within the fellowship: Hebrews, native Jewish Christians who spoke Aramaic; and the Hellenists, Greek-speaking Christians who came from other lands but converted during Pentecost. The widows needed help because they had no one to care for them. Therefore, they became the church's responsibility (6:1). But some felt the widows were being neglected and not given adequate daily food.

The twelve called a community church meeting to resolve the conflict. "The twelve" are the original 11 disciples and Matthias, who was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot (1:26). Seven men of good character, filled with the Holy Spirit and wise, were appointed to oversee the food distribution (v. 3). This included Stephen and six other men. The twelve "prayed and laid their hands on them" (v. 6). Laying hands on someone was a way to set a person apart for special service (Deut. 34:9).

After the laying on of the apostles' hands, Stephen, too, is reported as working miraculous signs. The Freedmen were a group of Jewish slaves who had been freed by Rome and had formed their synagogue

in Jerusalem. The Freedmen came from different areas such as Cyrene (North Africa); Alexandria (Egypt); Cilicia (N.W. Syria); and Asia (W. Asia Minor). They lied about Stephen using blaspheming words against the names of Moses and God so that he would be arrested (v. 11). False witnesses told the Jewish Council that Stephen had spoken against the holy place and the law (v. 13). Do you recall a time when someone falsely accused you?

Stephen was full of the power of the Holy Spirit. So, the Sanhedrin and all the others could see the Holy Spirit shine all around Stephen (v. 15). God promised to always be with us. This simply means no matter where we find ourselves, God is present. We can be assured that even while suffering and persecuted, he is with us! Stephen taught about the life of Jesus before the Sanhedrin and accused the religious leaders of disobeying God's laws (7:2 – 53). The leaders were enraged. But Stephen had a clear view of God in heaven and of Jesus standing on the right hand of God (v. 56). Before the people stoned Stephen to death, he cried out to God to forgive them (v. 60).

*How did Stephen's faith help sustain him? What response can you imagine the people had when Stephen cried out to God to forgive them?*

## SANKOFA

### Laos: Faithful Witness Loses Livelihood

Jai and Tai have been rejected by their village in Laos because they decided to follow Christ. In 2019, 80 Christians lived in the Laotian village where Jai and his wife, Tai, lived. But when Jai, who served on the village council, placed his faith in Christ, he was removed from his role on the council. Christians in Laos encounter persecution from the Communist government, the Buddhist and animist religious establishments, and their own families. Often they are isolated, cut off from community services, and expelled from their homes or villages. After Jai became a Christian, persecution throughout the village increased, and children under 18 were no longer allowed to attend church with their parents.

In addition, the police threatened to kill Jai's animals if he would not recant. But he still stood firm in his faith. On Jan. 5, 2023, local authorities killed all of his animals: 4 pigs, 16 ducks, and 20 chickens.

The couple have two children, ages 7 and 3, and the loss is financially devastating. “Please pray for him,” a front-line worker said.

*How did Jai lean on his faith despite threats? How can we assist believers who are persecuted for their faith?*

Source: *The Voice of the Martyrs*  
<https://www.persecution.com/stories/livestock-slaughtered-after-christian-remains-faithful/>

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

What role did the Holy Spirit occupy in Stephen’s life? What did the Holy Spirit empower Stephen to do? How do you see the Holy Spirit working in your life?

Today is Palm Sunday. This day we recall and celebrate Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The crowds laid palms on the road as Jesus rode by on a donkey and shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven” (Matt. 21:1 – 11).

View this YouTube video: *Palm Sunday and the Triumphant Entry*  
<https://youtu.be/MXTklao1ZJM?si=Bp8YZfEE9alepgiA>

How did the Father’s presence with Jesus, the Son, prepare him for the sacrifice made on the Cross? What do the actions of Jesus during Holy Week tell us about suffering on behalf of God?

## SUMMARY

Stephen was a man “full of grace and power and did great wonders and signs amongst the people.” He had a leadership role in caring for the widows. Stephen ministered under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. He did nothing wrong. But Stephen became a martyr for his faith. The Holy Spirit that Stephen had within him is the same Holy Spirit we have dwelling in us as Christians. God is aware of our struggles and stands with us. We can give thanks to God for the Holy Spirit that empowers us through his presence and strength. Everyone should have an attitude of gratitude for God’s saving grace and love.

*When you witness for Christ, what can you do in the face of threats and danger? How is God's grace, power, and wisdom evident in our daily lives?*

## **CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

*Prayer: (Create a prayer circle so each person can express gratitude for the Holy Spirit's presence and empowerment in their lives.)*

Hymn: "Hosanna!"

# The Resurrection: Key to Faith

Lesson Scripture: Mark 16

Focus Scripture: Mark 16:1-8

**KEY VERSE:** “Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here.”  
Mark 16:6

## WORDS TO KNOW

**SABBATH** – *the Jewish day on which labor ceased and rest prevailed*

**ANOINT** – *to put oil or water on a part of the body, usually for religious reasons*

**ALARMED** – *to be frightened or concerned that one may be in danger or that something undesirable may happen*

**CRUCIFIED** – *to be put to death on a cross*

**SALOME** – *pronounced: suh – LO – mee*

**NAZARETH** – *pronounced: NAZ – uh – rehth*

**GALILEE** – *pronounced: GAL – ih – lee*

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE: MARK 16:1-8**

- 1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.
- 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.
- 3 They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?"
- 4 When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back.
- 5 As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.
- 6 But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him.
- 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you."
- 8 So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

**INTRODUCTION**

The world is a place of goodness and love but also evilness and hatred. People commit random evil acts against others. It destroys lives and many are left traumatized. It is happening more and more each day. These events can leave us feeling hopeless and discouraged. The great news is that God has given us hope through the sacrifice of Christ.

On this resurrection Sunday, we are taking an in-depth look at the story of the women who became witnesses to the fact that Christ had been resurrected. We are viewing this story through the lens of Mark's Gospel. John Mark is the author. It was the first Gospel written. He was not one of the twelve disciples, but he accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:13).

*When was the last time you felt hopeless and discouraged? How did you overcome those feelings?*

## BIBLE STORY

For today's lesson, we are going to re-enact the Gospel story. We need volunteers for the following roles: narrator; Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James; Salome; and an angel.

We are going to use props, clothes, and jars of spices. Let's take five minutes and silently read our scripture (Mark 16:1 – 8). Think about how they felt about what they had experienced. Each character needs to demonstrate their feelings and emotions as you imagine yourself in this story. It is permissible for the character to improvise during the re-enactment.

## SANKOFA

God is still saving souls through the testimonies of those whose lives have been transformed. Here is a testimony of a former Muslim whom God saved. View this testimony on YouTube.

*Shocking Story of Redemption:*

<https://youtu.be/mtjMANw2hCA?si=OZlIE-ltMqYx7v2s>

What influence did the young man who was beaten and left for dead have on Zachariah's life when they reconnected? How did this man from his past impact who Zachariah is today?

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

The Gospel of Mark ends at 16:8. In this version, the women (and the disciples in their absence) are trusted with the narrative of the resurrection, but the women are overcome with their fear, and they do not share the good news. Where were the men? Why weren't they at the tomb too?

We may find ourselves facing the same doubts and fears that the women displayed. But we know that Jesus was resurrected by God and sits on the right hand of God the Father. Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit to guide, strengthen, and comfort us. Therefore, we do not have to be afraid. He is always present with us.

God needs us to be his witnesses. Think about four ways you can



share the resurrection story with others:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

## SUMMARY

The resurrection is such a powerful event that many cannot understand it. Some believe Jesus' body was stolen by the disciples. Some think Jesus was a good man but not the Messiah. Whatever you believe is a personal choice. But Jesus' body was not stolen. And he is the Messiah. Read the Gospels of Matthew and Luke for additional insight on the death and resurrection of Christ. He is alive!

*What evidence do you have that Jesus is alive? What are the signs of Jesus' resurrection that are visible to us day to day? How can you effectively explain and defend your belief in the resurrection to someone who is not a believer?*

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: Thank you, God, for sacrificing your Son, Jesus, on our behalf. We know Jesus is alive because we can feel his presence. Help the unbelievers to open their hearts to you. Amen.*

Hymn: AMECH #170, "He Arose"

# Faith of Four Friends

Lesson Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

Focus Scripture: Luke 5:17-26

**KEY VERSE:** When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” Luke 5:20

## WORDS TO KNOW

*PARALYZED – to have a partial or whole body that is incapable of moving*

*FAITH – to put complete trust in God*

*FORGIVEN – to have sins pardoned*

*BLASPHEMIES – slanderous or profane words against God*

*GLORIFYING – to honor and magnify God*

*PHARISEES – pronounced: FEHR – ih – seez*

*JUDEA – pronounced: jhou – DE – uh*

*GALILEE – pronounced: GAL – ih – lee*

***FOCUS SCRIPTURE: LUKE 5:17-26***

- 17** One day while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem were sitting nearby, and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.
- 18** Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus,
- 19** but, finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.
- 20** When he saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”
- 21** Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, “Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”
- 22** When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, “Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?
- 23** Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and walk’?
- 24** But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the one who was paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your stretcher and go to your home.”
- 25** Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God.
- 26** Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen incredible things today.”

**INTRODUCTION**

Unit two of the spring quarter is called, “The Measure of Faith.” This unit has four lessons taken from Luke and Matthew to discuss the scope of Christian faith. We are going to examine the level of faith people have in Jesus. Each of us has a different measure of faith. By examining the faith of those in Luke and Matthew, we can gain insight and strength to trust God more.

Luke was a Greek and Gentile Christian. He was a physician. Luke wrote in about A.D. 60 to present an accurate account of the life of Christ and to present Christ as the perfect man and Savior. He was the only known Greek author in the New Testament. Luke was a close friend and companion of the apostle Paul. He also wrote Acts, and

the two books go together. Today's lesson in Luke takes us to the story of four friends who overcame obstacles to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus so he could be healed.

*What characterizes a good friend? How do your friends respond when you are in need?*

## BIBLE STORY

Luke 4:14 through 21:38 contains the message and ministry of Jesus, our Savior. Luke accurately records the ministry and teachings of Christ, helping us to understand the way of salvation. Jesus' parables teach us great truths. He ministered in Galilee; on the way to Jerusalem; and in Jerusalem.

Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee (4:14 – 44). This included Jesus' rejection in Nazareth (4:16 – 30); the healing of a demoniac (4:31 – 37); and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (4:38 – 40). In chapter 5, we have Jesus performing miracles and teaching in Galilee. Jesus called Peter, James, and John to be his disciples (5:1 – 11). They were fishermen. Jesus performed a miraculous catch of fish on Lake Gennesaret. They accepted Jesus' call to be his disciples. In verses 12 through 16, we are taken to the story of the man with leprosy that Jesus healed. Jesus' fame spread and crowds gathered wherever he traveled. All wanted to hear Jesus and be healed of diseases.

Since people from faraway places had heard about Jesus' power to heal, Jesus was constantly sought out for help. This day was no different. The crowds were listening to Jesus teach; and the religious leaders, who came from great distances, were interested to hear what he was saying. God's power was manifested through Jesus' healing of the sick (5:17). The house Jesus was visiting could not hold all the people who desired to be near him. The crowds were surely spilling out around the house.

There was a group of friends desperate to get help for their paralyzed friend. We can assume that they had heard about Jesus' power to heal. They had great faith that Jesus could help him. So, they went into action. They determined where Jesus was located and carried the paralyzed man to the location. But they could not gain entrance

into the house because the crowds blocked it. The friends had to think of another plan quickly. They looked around and decided the straw and mud roof was their only option!

These men carried their friend up the outdoor stairs to the roof where they tore away the mud mixture and straw. Once they looked down and saw Jesus, the friends carefully lowered the man who was still lying in his bed. We can only imagine what the paralyzed man was thinking about during this ordeal. Especially since they lowered him right in front of Jesus. Jesus immediately responded to the friends' faith by declaring the paralyzed man's sins were forgiven (5:20).

The religious leaders accused Jesus of speaking blasphemy (5:21). The sin of blasphemy is claiming to be God and applying his characteristics to yourself. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah and have majesty and authority belonging to God. Therefore, his violation of the law meant he was to be punished by death by stoning (Lev. 24:16). Jesus heard the religious leaders' questions and answered them. Jesus questioned the religious leaders about what was easier to do, forgive sins or heal the paralyzed man. They did not understand that Jesus is God and that he has the power to heal the body and soul. Jesus told the paralyzed man, "I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home" (5:24). Immediately the man was healed. He glorified God for all that was done. Those gathered were amazed and glorified God as well.

*How did the paralyzed man's friend's faith impact his life? How did Jesus demonstrate he is God?*

## **SANKOFA**

Anyone who trusts you and offers you what is needed to accomplish God's plan is a friend. Benjamin Banneker was an African American astronomer, clockmaker, and publisher who was instrumental in surveying the District of Columbia. Read the article and note when his life changed and how a friend made a difference.

Article: <https://ame-sac.org/ames-in-history/benjamin-banneker/>

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

True friends love us and desire the best for our lives. How can we trust if a friend is giving us the best advice? Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for your true friends. Pray asking God to give you the wisdom and compassion to be a true friend to another.

As a Christian, it can be a struggle to choose friends. How can one know who to trust? Kindly take a moment to check out this YouTube video and share any additional tips you may have.

### Godly Friendships | Being Set Apart | How to Choose Better Friends | Christian Friendship Advice

YouTube: [https://youtu.be/jbF-lf\\_3mQ?si=h068z2HMYW4cQXNJ](https://youtu.be/jbF-lf_3mQ?si=h068z2HMYW4cQXNJ)

## SUMMARY

Friends can impact our lives in positive and/or negative ways. We have to choose who we allow to become a part of our inner circle. The key is to discover if they have faith in God. Faith in God can lead to amazing friendships. No friendships are perfect; but if Christ is the focus, it will be okay. We need friends like the paralyzed man had in our lesson. They demonstrated awe-inspiring faith in Jesus. Jesus claimed his divine identity by forgiving the man's sins and healing him of paralysis. The man and those assembled glorified God for what they had experienced. We, too, must express gratitude and thanksgiving to God for all he has done.

*How has Jesus changed your life through the people you associate with?  
How have you influenced your friends for Christ?*

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: Jesus, let your light shine through me so I can spiritually impact my friends by what I say and do.  
Amen.*

*Hymn: AMECH #251, "I Surrender All"*

# Faith of a Centurion

Lesson Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

Focus Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

**KEY VERSE:** [The centurion said] “I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.” Luke 7:7

## *WORDS TO KNOW*

**CENTURION** – Roman military officer in charge of 100 men

**APPEALED** – to make a serious or urgent request

**WORTHY** – having or showing the qualities or abilities that merit recognition in a specified way

**PRESUME** – be daring or courageous enough to do something:

**AMAZED** – to be astonished, awed

**CAPERNAUM** – pronounced: kuh – PERR – nay – uhm



*FOCUS SCRIPTURE: LUKE 7:1-10*

- 1 After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.
- 2 A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly and who was ill and close to death.
- 3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave.
- 4 When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him,
- 5 for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us."
- 6 And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof;
- 7 therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.
- 8 For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it."
- 9 When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and, turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."
- 10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

**INTRODUCTION**

Life is full of experiences, some good and some bad. When experiencing difficult times, it is always good to have someone to lean on for support. If you are struggling to find support, you can feel desperate. When you become desperate, you will take drastic steps to get relief.

Today's lesson comes from the Gospel of Luke. A centurion seeks help from Jesus for his nearly dead slave. Jesus responded with compassion.

*Do you recall an occasion when you needed help, but no one offered to give support? How did it affect the way you supported others?*

## BIBLE STORY

Jesus had just finished teaching the people and then entered Capernaum. This is when Luke takes us to the centurion's desperate situation. This centurion was a career military officer who had control over 100 soldiers. Roman soldiers were hated by the Jews for their oppression, control, and ridicule. The centurion's slave was sick and close to death. But he had heard about Jesus' power to heal and decided to act.

This centurion could have let many obstacles hinder him from seeking help from Jesus, but he did not. No barriers of pride, doubt, money, language, distance, or race could keep him from getting Jesus to help his favored slave. The centurion commanded several Jewish elders to see Jesus. Maybe the centurion did not want to disrupt a Jewish gathering, especially since Jews hated Romans. Moreover, every day the centurion delegated jobs so this was the normal way to get a mission accomplished.

The Jewish elders explained to Jesus that the centurion had a good relationship with the Jews. The centurion loved them so much that he was instrumental in building their synagogue. The Jewish elders may not have been rulers of the synagogue but they were still highly respected in the community. Jesus took the time to go with the elders. But before they reached the centurion's house, he sent his friends to give a message to Jesus. The centurion did not feel worthy of Jesus' presence in his house. Yet, he believed if Jesus just spoke a word the slave would be healed.

Jesus felt amazed at the centurion's faith. Jesus said to the crowd, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." The centurion was a Gentile who never heard about a loving God. When the friends returned to the centurion's house, they discovered the slave had been healed. Jesus demonstrated compassion and healed the servant.

*How should or do we respond to seemingly impossible problems? Why did Jesus think the centurion's faith was so amazing?*

## SANKOFA

Individuals may find themselves in dire circumstances even though

they are not responsible for the situation.

### Contraband Relief Association (1862-1865)

At the beginning of the Civil War, there were approximately two million enslaved women. An estimated 500,000 of these women fled from slavery as soon as white men left their plantations and homes to join the Confederate army. Those fleeing from slavery escaped to Union-occupied areas or to Union encampments, where they were referred to as “contraband.” As a result, many large Union encampments had higher populations of African American women than white women. Following complaints from white Union soldiers about the presence of slavery refugees in Union encampments, the federal government quickly crowded African American men, women, and children into what were known as contraband camps. These camps were overcrowded, overrun with disease, and provided the refugees with little to no sanitation or clothing.

In response to the dire need of the people surviving in contraband camps, Elizabeth Keckley, a dressmaker to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, and a former enslaved person, founded the Contraband Relief Association (CRA) along with 40 African American women from her church, Union Bethel Church in Washington, D.C. The purpose of the CRA was to provide relief, resources, and guidance to slavery refugees.

*Read the complete article: Hudson, C. (2022, March 27). Contraband Relief Association (1862-1865). BlackPast.org. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/contraband-relief-association-1862-1865/>*

*Discuss how Elizabeth Keckley was instrumental in helping those in the contraband camps. What can you do to help others?*

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

The centurion’s servant needed a miracle that could only come from God. A family on a leisurely boat ride found themselves in a dangerous situation and only Jesus could save them.

“I Need a Miracle, Not an Ambulance!”

YouTube: [https://youtu.be/AvEzu-Ej00g?si=n9Ue1YHh-l\\_7poJg](https://youtu.be/AvEzu-Ej00g?si=n9Ue1YHh-l_7poJg)

## SUMMARY

Jesus exhibited compassion on the slave because of the faith of the centurion. Jesus can help those who are in dire circumstances. Jesus can just speak a word and heal. He also uses ordinary people who have faith to do the miraculous. The centurion had faith and acted on that faith. This displays complete faith in God. When we have faith, we also act on it. Our actions can cause miraculous things to happen. We must make ourselves available to help others. The same compassion you show others will be shown towards you.

*What is the last act of compassion you displayed? How can you be more compassionate towards those in your school, community, and family?*

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: God, give me a compassionate heart for those in need. I will show godly love towards all. Amen.*

*Hymn: "If I Can Help Somebody"*

# Faith of a Woman Who Loved Jesus

Lesson Scripture: Luke 7:36-50

Focus Scripture: Luke 7:36-39, 44-50

**KEY VERSE:** “Hence she has shown great love.” Luke 7:47

## WORDS TO KNOW

*ALABASTER JAR* – a pink-colored soft mineral made into cups or boxes for holding expensive perfume

*ANOINT* – to pour oil upon one in appointing him or her to a particular office

*FORGIVEN* – to be pardoned of sins

*PEACE* – a state of security and tranquility

*PHARISEES* – pronounced: FEHR – ih – seez

*FOCUS SCRIPTURE: LUKE 7:36-39, 44-50*

- 36** One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and when he went into the Pharisee's house he reclined to dine.
- 37** And a woman in the city who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment.
- 38** She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair, kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.
- 39** Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner."
- 
- 44** Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair.
- 45** You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet.
- 46** You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.
- 47** Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little."
- 48** Then he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."
- 49** But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"
- 50** But he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

**INTRODUCTION**

What is shame? Shame is a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior. We can experience shame that affects our lives forever. And unfortunately, social media keeps our acts of shame on public display for infinity. What can we do to overcome our shame?

In today's lesson, we will examine how a sinful woman rises above her shame to give honor to Jesus and be forgiven in the Gospel of Luke.

*Can you remember a time when your actions made you feel ashamed? How did you overcome your feelings of shame?*

## BIBLE STORY

The Pharisees and other religious leaders constantly tried to find fault with Jesus and his ministry. Our lesson today is a typical example. At the invitation of a Pharisee, Jesus dined at his house. It was customary to recline while eating. The guests lay on the couches with their heads near the table, propping themselves up on one elbow and stretching their feet out behind them. Jesus was reclining at the table when the sinful woman entered the house uninvited. She had brought with her an alabaster jar filled with ointment (7:37).

We do not know the identity of the woman. This woman was neither Mary of Bethany nor Mary Magdelene (Jn. 12:1 – 8). The only identifying factor we have is that she was a well-known sinner from the city. Maybe a prostitute who likely converted under John's or Jesus' ministry. Nevertheless, she had brought probably her most valuable possession, an alabaster jar, to make publicly evident her gratitude for being saved.

The woman's actions of standing behind Jesus and washing his feet with her tears then drying them with her hair, was considered proper hospitality. Guests' sandaled feet were very dirty from walking, so it was proper for the owner to make sure their feet were washed. The woman had humbly served Jesus. In addition, she kissed his feet and used her valuable ointment to anoint Jesus' feet (v. 38). Her Savior was worthy!

The Pharisee passed judgment on her, deeming her unworthy to even touch Jesus (v. 39). She did not care about others' opinions of her life. The woman understood who had transformed her into a new creation, Jesus! Jesus informed the religious leader that he did not extend hospitality, which was the norm, in contrast to the woman (vv. 44 – 46). Her love was evidence of her forgiveness, but not the basis for it. Verse 50 clearly states that she was saved by faith. Her sins were forgiven, and now she could live in God's peace.

*Compare and contrast the behavior of the Pharisee versus the sinful*

woman. Who do you identify with the most? Why?

## SANKOFA

Marie-Joseph Dite Angelique (1700-1734)

Marie-Joseph Dite Angelique was born in Portugal and enslaved. Angelique was sold twice after leaving Portugal. She asked for her freedom but was denied that right. Angelique became very rebellious and often threatened to burn down her master's house. She and her lover escaped but were caught and returned to Montreal. Angelique continued to threaten to burn down her master's house.

In April 1734, a large fire broke out in Montreal destroying many buildings. Rumors started and Angelique was accused of starting the fire. There was no evidence of her guilt. She was tortured into confessing. Before they set her on fire, she was told to beg for forgiveness. Angelique did not do it. She was burned alive. Her ashes were tossed into the wind.

*If Angelique had asked them to forgive her, would the outcome have been different? What happens when we pre-judge others? Who can release us from the bondage of our sins?*

Source: Nielsen, E. (2020, June 03). Marie-Joseph Dite Angelique (1700-1734). BlackPast.org. <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/people-global-african-history/marie-joseph-dite-angelique-1700-1734/>

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

The class will be performing two role-plays. The first act is composed of three characters: a pastor; a teenager (17 years old); and a police officer. The teenager was caught breaking into the church at night and stealing food as well as a flat screen television. The police officer wants to put the teenager in jail. The pastor agrees even after the teenager shares why he/she committed burglary. The second act is composed of the same three characters and scenarios. However, this time the pastor and police officer agree to forgive the teenager. They see regret and sorrow within the teenager. So, the pastor does not press charges and agrees to help the teenager receive his/her diploma, counseling, and job training.



*Compare and contrast the outcomes from the first versus the second act. How does extending love and forgiveness toward those who have sinned create an opportunity for transformation?*

## SUMMARY

The woman in today's lesson is no different from us. She had sinned and the community knew all about it. They judged her based on her sins. But her actions demonstrated humility and gratefulness toward Jesus. He had given her a new life by extending love and forgiveness. Jesus did not desire for her to live in shame for her past. Jesus is offering us the same opportunity to live free from our past sins and not feel ashamed. Salvation comes from faith in him. Faith, love, and forgiveness are the keys to peace. Not only for us but for all who sin. We can show gratitude to God for our new lives by extending love and forgiveness to others.

*Why is forgiveness sometimes difficult? How can we extend hospitality towards those who sin against us?*

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: Jesus, thanks to your love and forgiveness all my shame is gone. I will live in peace and be grateful all my life. Amen.*

Hymn: AMECH #448, "It Is Well With My Soul"

# Faith of a Canaanite Woman

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

Focus Scripture: Matthew 15:21-28

**KEY VERSE:** Jesus answered [the Canaanite woman], “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed from that moment. Matthew 15:28

## WORDS TO KNOW

**MERCY** – compassion or forgiveness shown by God toward someone within God’s power to punish or harm

**TORMENTED** – experiencing or characterized by severe physical or mental suffering

**FAITH** – complete trust in God

**TYRE** – pronounced: TAI – er

**SIDON** – pronounced: SAI – duhn

**CANAANITE** – pronounced: KAY – nuh – nait

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 15:21-28**

- 21** Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.
- 22** Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."
- 23** But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us."
- 24** He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
- 25** But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me."
- 26** He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."
- 27** She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."
- 28** Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed from that moment.

**INTRODUCTION**

There are divisions in society and as a result, there are power dynamics that exist because of these divisions. Divisions exist within politics, communities, sports, schools, families, churches, denominations, nations, ethnic groups, cultures, sexes, etc. God desires for us to live in peace and harmony with one another. How can divisions be eliminated?

In today's lesson from the Gospel of Matthew, we encounter the story of a Canaanite woman who has great faith and teaches us God's love has no boundaries.

*Why are there divisions among believers? Do you think you have personal biases?*

**BIBLE STORY**

The Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew (Levi) around A.D. 60 – 65 to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the eternal king. Matthew wrote specifically to the Jews. In chapters 4 through 25, Matthew gives the message and ministry of Jesus, the king. Today's lesson is

drawn from chapter 15 after Jesus' teachings on inner purity. Jesus left Galilee for Phoenicia, where he preached in Tyre and Sidon. As soon as Jesus arrived, a Canaanite woman began shouting for help on behalf of her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus did not respond.

The Canaanites were Israel's enemies (Deut. 7:1f). The disciples were irritated and wanted Jesus to send her away. They had no compassion for her. She was a part of a despised and hated group. Even religious people can be prejudiced and ignore the needs of others. It was possibly a missed opportunity.

Jesus' response in verse 24 was informing the woman that his ministry was first to the Jews. Jesus came first to the Jews to accept him as the Messiah. God wanted them to present the message of salvation to the world (Gen. 12:3). But this does not mean Jesus had rejected her request. Maybe it was a test of her faith or a lesson to show that faith is possible for all people.

Jesus had not discouraged her. The woman humbly knelt before Jesus and asked for help again as she addressed him as "Lord" (v. 25). Jesus mentioned "dogs" as he spoke to her because Jews considered Gentiles no more likely than dogs to receive God's blessings. The attitude was that of the Jews, not Jesus. This did not matter to the Canaanite woman. She accepted the label as long as Jesus healed her daughter. Jesus stated, "Woman, great is your faith!" Then she obtained her request. Her daughter was healed (v. 28).

*How did the Canaanite woman show humility? What can we do if Jesus does not answer our prayers?*

## SANKOFA

### Bible for New Believer Transforms Family

Pema Ongmo, 27, was raised in an animist family and had never heard about Christ until a friend shared the Gospel and invited her to church. Her father, a village leader, found out and forbade her to read the Bible the pastor had given her. But she started reading the Bible secretly and began to follow Christ. Her mother became ill, and her father spent all the family's resources looking for a cure. Pema told her father that the Jesus she read about in the Bible healed many

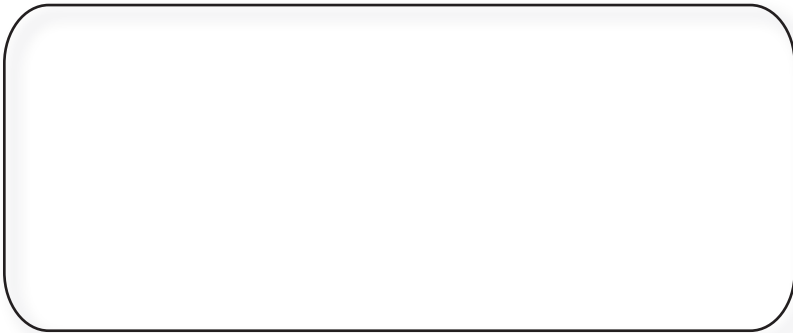
people. Her father agreed to let his wife go to the church, where she was healed. The whole family eventually placed their trust in Christ. “Thank you for the wonderful Bibles you freely gave us,” Pema said. “I thank you and ask the Lord to bless you richly!”

*How did the faith of Pema lead to the healing of her mother? What impact did the healing have on her family? How can our steadfast faith cause nonbelievers to seek salvation?*

Source: <https://www.persecution.com/stories/bible-for-new-believer-transforms-family/>

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

Research on your cell phones the location of Tyre, Sidon, Canaan, and Jerusalem on a map. Draw the map and place the names on it. Using the GPS on your phone, research the distance between Tyre, Sidon, and Canaan from Jerusalem. Write the miles on your map.



Divide into two groups. Using your phones and the Bible commentaries, research background info on the Canaanites (commentaries can be found on Bible Gateway, Study Light, and Crosswalk websites). Have one person take notes on the info to give a summary in ten–fifteen minutes. Afterwards, we will discuss the basis of the Jews’ animosity against the Canaanites.

## SUMMARY

Individuals have personal biases for various reasons. Sometimes the bias is passed down from previous generations without knowledge about the root cause. The Canaanite woman understood the reasons

for the Jews' dislike of her people. But that did not hinder her from seeking out Jesus for help. And because of her humility and faith, Jesus granted her plea. How often do you miss opportunities to show compassion towards those in need due to personal biases? God's love extends to all. This week pray about your personal biases and ask God to remove them from your heart. Only then will you be able to freely serve God and others.

*Think about one person or group in your church you dislike and why. Then ask God to help you to remove those negative feelings and treat them as a part of God's family.*

## **CLOSING DEVOTIONS**

*Prayer: God, help me to love those you love and treat them as equals. Amen.*

Hymn: AMECH #461, "Love Lifted Me"

# Justified by Faith in Jesus

Lesson Scripture: Romans 3:21-30

Focus Scripture: Romans 3:21-30

**KEY VERSES:** For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:22b-24

## WORDS TO KNOW

**RIGHTEOUSNESS** – *being and doing right*

**JUSTIFIED** – *to be just in God's sight by receiving mercy and forgiveness of sins by having faith in Christ*

**GRACE** – *the kindness by which God bestows favors and blessings upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their sins*

**ATONEMENT** – *the process by which God and humans can once again become "at one"*

**FORBEARANCE** – *to hold back*

*FOCUS SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 3:21-30*

- 21** But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets,
- 22** the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,
- 23** since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
- 24** they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
- 25** whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;
- 26** it was to demonstrate at the present time his own righteousness, so that he is righteous and he justifies the one who has the faith of Jesus.
- 27** Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. Through what kind of law? That of works? No, rather through the law of faith.
- 28** For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.
- 29** Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of gentiles also? Yes, of gentiles also,
- 30** since God is one, and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

**INTRODUCTION**

In school, there is a feeling of competitiveness amongst the students and staff. Students try to attain the highest grades, be the star on the sports team, wear the most expensive clothing and newest sneakers, date the most popular person, etc. Staff compete to win special awards for best attendance, highest number of books read by class, highest test scores, etc. The same competitiveness flows over into our families, churches, colleges, communities, friendships, and so much more. Why? It offers bragging rights. “Look at what I did!”

The third unit of the spring quarter is “Standing in the Faith.” It has four lessons taken from Paul’s Letter to the Romans that encourage believers to continue standing in the faith. The lesson for today indicates that the righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus



Christ for all who believe. God does not measure our worth based on what we achieve or do.

*How often do you compete against others to prove your self-worth? Do you ever measure up to others' standards?*

## BIBLE STORY

The letter of Paul to the Romans was written about A.D. 57 from Corinth, as Paul was preparing for his visit to Jerusalem. The letter introduces Paul to the Romans and gives a sample of his message before he arrived in Rome. He writes with the intent to give a clear statement of his faith. The Roman church was composed mostly of Jews, but also a great number of Gentiles.

In the first and second chapters of Romans, Paul gives statements on the sinfulness of all humanity and explains how forgiveness is available through faith in Christ. Faith is the core requirement to become a Christian. God's judgment of sin will occur when God's law is broken. Chapter three offers encouragement that God remains faithful even when we sin.

God's law serves two purposes. First, the law exposes our wrongdoing. And second, it serves as a guide for our actions by holding up God's moral standards. The righteousness God's holiness requires is apart from the law (v. 21). It is only by grace. In the Old Testament scriptures, the grace of Christ is foreshadowed by symbols, sacrifices, promises, and prophecies. This righteousness is not only apart from the law of Moses, but also made available to all, and needed by all (vv. 22 – 23).

Justification is God's act of declaring the sinner righteous so that the divine righteousness is sensibly deemed as his doing. This divine transaction is based on grace. Grace is the unmerited favor of God the Father revealed in Christ, which provides it (v. 24). The death of Christ and his shed blood secured it. And faith which is produced in humans by the Spirit takes over it. The all-sufficient basis for sinners' being justified strips away all grounds for human boasting of works done (v. 27). Justification is a universal remedy for sin. God justifies all, both Jew and Gentile (vv. 29 – 30). We can have peace with God

through justification by grace through faith.

*What did God do to ensure our justification? How can we be saved?*

## SANKOFA

Faith in Christ can and will change your life. All because of what God did on our behalf.

Listen to this salvation by faith testimony. Discuss the impact Christ made in her life.

YouTube: <https://youtube.com/shorts/aklDSKagqJk?si=-sjSlxAARHvG2Og>

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

Divide into three groups. Discuss how to commit to spiritual practices that can be done in gratitude to God regularly. The spiritual practices can be observed individually and/or in groups.

Spiritual Practices:

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## SUMMARY

No one can take credit for what God has done through the sacrifice of Christ. It does not matter how many trophies you have won or the places you volunteer. We are justified by faith through grace. Faith alone is the key to salvation. Do not get caught up in competitions to earn favor with God. It will not work. Just believe and seek a closer relationship with God through spiritual practices.

*What is a factor that hinders people from having faith in God? How can you show appreciation for God's unconditional love?*

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: God, I am grateful for being saved and loved by you. Guide me through your Word so I can grow stronger in my relationship with you. Amen.*

Hymn: AMECH #226, "Amazing Grace"

# Reckoned as Righteous

Lesson Scripture: Romans 4

Focus Scripture: Romans 4:13-25

**KEY VERSES:** [Abraham] grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Romans 4:20-21

## WORDS TO KNOW

**RIGHTEOUSNESS** – being morally correct and justifiable

**JUSTIFICATION** – to be just in God's sight by receiving mercy and forgiveness of sins by having faith in Christ

**GRACE** – the kindness by which God bestows favors and blessings upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their sins

**ADHERENTS** – people who support a particular person, group, or religion

**BARRENNESS** – to be infertile

**RECKONED** – to number, to account

*FOCUS SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 4:13-25*

- 13** For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.
- 14** For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.
- 15** For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.
- 16** For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us,
- 17** as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.
- 18** Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So shall your descendants be.”
- 19** He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.
- 20** No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,
- 21** being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.
- 22** Therefore “it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”
- 23** Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone
- 24** but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,
- 25** who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

**INTRODUCTION**

We learn who we can trust based on if they keep their promises. There are some people no matter the circumstances they are facing who will always come through for us. They are trustworthy. But other people make a lot of promises but do nothing. So, we know not to depend on or trust them.

In today's lesson, we explore Abraham's justification by faith. Abraham trusted God.

*Do others view you as trustworthy? How has God proven to be trustworthy in your life?*

## **BIBLE STORY**

Paul explains that Abraham pleased God through his faith, not the law. Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised (4:9 – 10). God called Abraham when he was 75 years old (Gen. 12:1 – 4). The circumcision ceremony was introduced when he was 99 years old (Gen. 17:1 – 14). His circumcision was indicative of the acceptance of God he already enjoyed so that he might be “the father of all who believe” (vv. 11 – 12). Abraham was justified by faith, not by legal observances. The promise given to him was long before the giving of the law. This was a necessity because of the intent and the effect of the law. And the law was only delivered to the nation of Israel. But the promise given of faith through Abraham extends to all believers (vv. 16 – 21).

The promise God gave Abraham stated Abraham would be the father of many nations and the entire world would be blessed through him (Gen. 17:2 – 4). Through Isaac, the child of faith, came Christ, the Justifier. Christ was born from Abraham's line. Jesus was sacrificed for our sins and “raised to life for our justification” (v. 25). His resurrection, ascension, and present intercession at God's right hand are proof that our sins are canceled (Heb. 9:24). Jesus' work is accepted by the Father which means we stand fully acquitted in him.

*How was Abraham's faith rewarded by God? How can we inherit the blessings of Abraham?*

## **SANKOFA**

Richard Allen's faith and actions benefited all of the members of the AME Church. We are the benefactors of God's blessings in his life. Read about the history and/or view the video of the AME Church and Richard Allen at: <https://www.ame-church.com/our-church/our-history/#video>.

Discuss the blessings we inherited because of Richard Allen's faith and obedience.

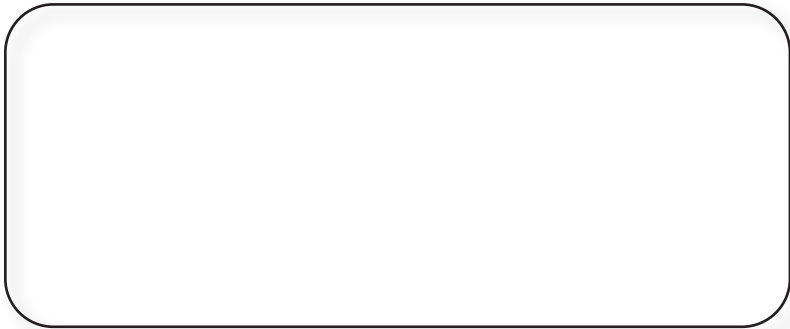
## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

Do you know much about Abraham's life story? We can gain valuable insights by revisiting the lives of others. Look at this five-minute video to learn more about Abraham:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/torah-genesis-2/>

How do you explain Abraham's faith? Do you think Abraham's faith was always strong, or did he waver sometimes? When does your faith seem to waver? How do you strengthen your faith? What blessings can we expect from God for remaining faithful?

Create a psalm of praise to God. If you need inspiration, look in the book of Psalms. This is a personal psalm that you will write on posterboard and keep with you. Use the space below to write a rough draft in pencil before transcribing it on the posterboard with markers.



## SUMMARY

Abraham was justified by faith, not works. He believed in God and it was "reckoned to him as righteousness." It happened before he was circumcised. God's promise given to Abraham and his descendants to inherit the world came through faith. He committed his share of mistakes and sins, but Abraham also demonstrated wisdom in completely trusting God. Do you completely trust God? God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and made him "a father of many nations." We are heirs to the Abrahamic

covenant and blessings. Continually offer praise to God for making us righteous through Jesus' sacrifice and our faith.

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: God, we praise you for fulfilling your promises to Abraham. We are the righteousness of God by faith. Amen.*

*Hymn: AMECH #450, "Blessed Assurance"*



# Reconciled to God

Lesson Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

Focus Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

**KEY VERSE:** Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

## WORDS TO KNOW

**RIGHTEOUS** – *to act morally and by God's commands*

**JUSTIFIED** – *to be just in God's sight by receiving mercy and forgiveness of sins by having faith in Christ*

**GRACE** – *the kindness by which God bestows favors and blessings upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their sins*

**WRATH** – *violent anger*

**RECONCILED** – *to restore good relations between two people or groups*

***FOCUS SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 5:1-11***

- 1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
- 2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.
- 3 And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance,
- 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,
- 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.
- 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
- 7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.
- 8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.
- 9 Much more surely, therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.
- 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.
- 11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Being successful in all we strive to do is a great accomplishment. However, life has a way of throwing stumbling blocks on our road to success. It is how we handle our challenges that can be the determining factor to our success or failure. What is the greatest roadblock you are currently facing in your life?

For today's lesson, we continue in Romans and examine Paul's faith as he endured weaknesses, challenges, and failures.

**BIBLE STORY**

We have been justified by faith and now have peace with God. We

are in a state of harmony with God. Our access comes by faith in his grace. We stand in a place of the highest privilege as believers. God has drawn us closer to him and acquitted us of our wrongdoing. We are friends with God, and also his children. Our joyful “hope of the glory of God” is based on what God has done for us, not what we may or may not do for him. This certainty of our destiny in Christ gives us spiritual strength when we suffer. We realize that tribulation for Christ cannot be futile in the life to come, or unrewarding in its beneficial effects in this life.

Our justification gives us security. It gives assurance of salvation by contrasting what we were before being justified with what we are after being justified (vv. 9 – 11). Paul emphasizes we are “saved from God’s wrath” through Jesus’ life. We have been saved to a life of holiness and power through the manifestation of his resurrection life in us (8:11). Reconciliation is toward humanity and removes our enmity toward God. It is that which we need and receive in justification.

*What blessings do we have as God’s friends and children? How is suffering beneficial?*

## SANKOFA

### Evangelist Beaten for Testimony at Rally

During an Islamist gathering denouncing Christianity and encouraging anti-Christian activity, Juhel stood up and shared his testimony about his faith in Christ. Some in the crowd listened with interest because of his reasonable and gentle approach, while others expressed opposition and anger. Some in the group invited Juhel to speak again in the mosque, planning to attack him there. When he turned them down, they planned an ambush instead. Eight men attacked him in the street with sticks and machetes but ran away when a crowd of witnesses gathered. Juhel needed several surgeries for the injuries inflicted in the attack. “I am cautious, but I’m not going to flee or hide,” Juhel said. “As followers of Jesus, we need to stand for what we believe.”

*How did Juhel respond to the persecution he endured? What is the source of his strength and tenacity?*

Source: <https://www.persecution.com/stories/evangelist-beaten-for-testimony-at-rally/>

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

“Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint” (5:3-5). Dissect these verses into four parts. Define each word and find the connection between the two words. Then explore the connection with the next section, until you complete all four parts.

Suffering produces endurance: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Endurance produces character: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Character produces hope: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Hope does not disappoint: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## SUMMARY

God’s children are blessed. Believers have been rescued. We are righteous because of Jesus’ sacrifice. Our destiny of eternal life is guaranteed. We have been reconciled with God. Peace with God through Jesus Christ is our promise. God has delivered us from his wrath. All of these blessings flow from God’s grace. Our faith brings joy. No matter our weaknesses, challenges, and failures we can be encouraged by God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The Day of Pentecost came with the gift of the Holy Spirit being poured out on all believers (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit empowers and strengthens us

to endure all things for Christ. We are one body with Christ as the head.

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: God, empower us through your Spirit to remain faithful. Amen.*

*Hymn: "We Are One in the Spirit"*

# Who Has Believed?

Lesson Scripture: Romans 10:1-21

Focus Scripture: Romans 10:1-17

**KEY VERSE:** If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

## WORDS TO KNOW

***RIGHTEOUSNESS** – to be morally correct and justified*

***ZEAL** – passionate and active interest*

***ABYSS** – a deep gulf, a chasm*

***CONFESS** – admit to committing sin*

***SHAME** – dishonor, disgrace*

*FOCUS SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 10:1-17*

- 1 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.
- 2 For I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not based on knowledge.
- 3 Not knowing the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness.
- 4 For Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.
- 5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them."
- 6 But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down)
- 7 "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).
- 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim),
- 9 because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
- 10 For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation.
- 11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."
- 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.
- 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."
- 14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?
- 15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"
- 16 But not all have obeyed the good news, for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"
- 17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

## INTRODUCTION

Summertime is upon us and soon many people will have graduation parties, birthday celebrations, family reunions, etc. The warmer weather is perfect for barbeques, fire pits, camping, and all sorts of other outdoor activities. It is wonderful to be amongst family and friends. However, any gathering can quickly turn sour if the topic of politics and religion comes up. Why? People are passionate about what they believe is the right way to lead the country and which political party can do a better job. Then, many believe Jesus is the only way to heaven. While others disagree because they are Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, atheists, Buddhists, etc., they feel offended if their religious beliefs are disrespected. God loves all of us, but it is time for Christians to be bold witnesses of the truth.

In today's lesson, Paul traces faith that comes from what is heard through the Word of Christ. Thus, those who are called by Christ's name are encouraged to confess with their lips, believe in their hearts, and stand in faith daily.

*Do you recall meeting people who believe they are going to heaven without a relationship with Jesus? How do you respond? How often do you pray for the unsaved?*

## BIBLE STORY

The people of Israel believe in God, but not in Christ. Since they were God's chosen people, does a lack of faith in Christ still enable them to be saved? No! Paul spent a lot of time teaching about the righteousness of God and the plan of salvation. We cannot have a full relationship with God except through a connection with Jesus Christ. God sent his Son so humanity could be reconciled with the Father.

We cannot obtain righteousness through obeying the law. Why? No one can completely abide by the laws of Moses. If we could, Jesus' death and resurrection would be null and void. The Jews, along with the rest of humanity, can only be saved through Jesus Christ. And salvation only requires we "believe," "confess," and "call on the name of the Lord" (vv. 9 – 13). Salvation is available to the Jews and Gentiles. God does not exhibit favoritism.



The message of salvation that we have received must be shared with the world. If we remain silent others may never have the opportunity to hear the Word and respond. God is calling men, women, youth, and children to preach and teach (vv. 14 – 15). What is holding you back from being God’s spokesperson? Hearing God’s Word produces faith. The Word is for “all the earth.”

*Explore the lives of AME missionaries who serve overseas. If possible, invite a missionary to speak to the class. What effect are they having on the kingdom of God? What can be done to assist those who answer the call of God?*

## SANKOFA

Bishop Henry McNeil Turner was a wise, educated minister. His impact on the AME Church is legendary. Rev. Turner served in the military as a chaplain. He was deeply involved in the political arena of that time. Bishop Turner was the first to ordain a woman, Sarah Ann Hughes, to the office of deacon. In 1876, Turner was selected to be the president of Morris Brown College. And four years later he was elected and consecrated a bishop.

Bishop Turner also promoted the AME Church abroad. Between 1891 and 1898 he traveled to Africa four times to promote the church in West and South Africa. He also sent AME missionaries to Cuba and Mexico. Bishop Turner believed in spreading the Gospel “to all the earth.”

*What can we learn from Bishop Turner’s life and ministry? How did his faith empower him to accomplish so much?*

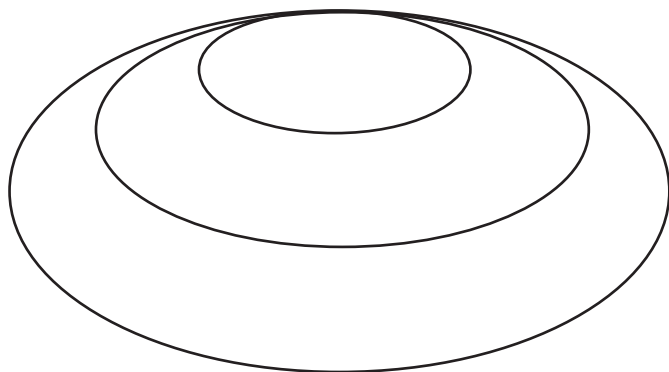
Source: Spigner, C. (2007, January 17). Henry McNeal Turner (1834-1915). BlackPast.org. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/people-african-american-history/turner-henry-mcneal-1834-1915/>

## REAL TALK, FAITH WALK

Salvation is available to the world. But we can start sharing our faith right where we are. In a small circle, place the names of the family members who are not saved. In the next largest circle place the names

of friends who are not saved. And in the largest circle place the names of groups and/or people in the community and world that need salvation.

Starting today, pray for each individual or group that God will open up the opportunity for you to witness to them.



## SUMMARY

We can be blessed with a gift (salvation) from an unexpected source (God). Once the gift is opened, its beauty overwhelms you. The gift was exactly what you needed. You let the family see your gift, and some are excited and in awe. You wholeheartedly desire to share it with them, so you give them a part of your gift. You are so willing to share with others that you call friends over to hear about and see the gift. Sadly, none of them liked the gift and called it “useless.” Your friends left without receiving the gift.

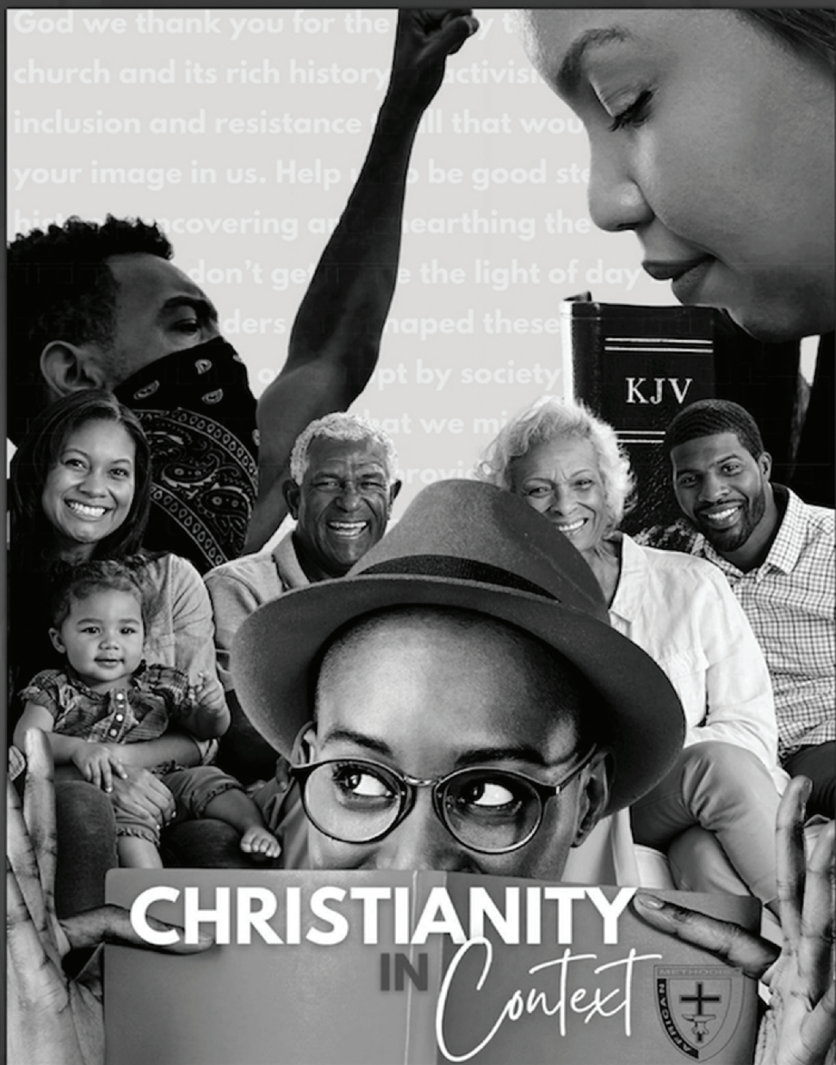
We can only share the *Good News* with people. Whether they want to hear and receive it or not is their personal decision. God is the ultimate judge.

## CLOSING DEVOTIONS

*Prayer: God, thanks for opening the door of salvation for Jews and Gentiles. Your daughters and sons need you to go with us as we go out into the world with your message of love and salvation. Thank you for never leaving us alone. Amen.*

*Hymn: “Lord, I Am Available to You”*

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