

## The Spirit Comes

Lesson	Date	Page
Editor's Page		5

### Unit I — The Pledge of God's Presence

1. The Lamb of God	<i>John 1:29–34</i>	Feb. 28	6
2. Jesus Promises an Advocate	<i>John 14:15–26</i>	March 7	12
3. The Spirit of Truth	<i>John 16:4b–15</i>	March 14	18
4. Receive the Holy Spirit	<i>John 20:19–23</i>	March 21	24
5. The One Who Comes	<i>Mark 11:1–11</i>	March 28	30

### Unit II — The Community of the Beloved Disciple

6. Resurrection Guaranteed	<i>1 Corinthians 15:1–11, 20–22</i>	April 4	36
7. Love One Another	<i>1 John 3:11–24</i>	April 11	42
8. Believe God's Love	<i>1 John 4:13–5:5</i>	April 18	48
9. Watch Out for Deceivers!	<i>2 John 1–13</i>	April 25	54
10. Coworkers with the Truth	<i>3 John 1–15</i>	May 2	60

### Unit III — One in the Bond of Love

11. Gifts of the Spirit	<i>1 Corinthians 12:1–11</i>	May 9	66
12. The Spirit Creates One Body	<i>1 Corinthians 12:14–31</i>	May 16	72
13. Gift of Languages	<i>Acts 2:1–7, 12; 1 Corinthians 14:13–19</i>	May 23	78
14. The Greatest Gift Is Love	<i>1 Corinthians 13</i>	May 30	84
Works Cited & Bible Copyright Notices			90
Contributors			91
Next Quarter's Lessons			92

**The purposes of *The Helping Hand in Bible Study* are:**

- to provide for adults and older youth a quarterly for personal or group use in gaining a continually renewed knowledge of the Bible, Christian beliefs and church life, particularly that characteristic of Seventh Day Baptists.
- to enable such study of Christian convictions as will develop the students' abilities to share their faith.
- to strengthen appreciation of Seventh Day Baptist heritage and conviction of the Sabbath's truths.
- to nurture moral and spiritual aspects of daily living and decision-making.
- to provide resources for daily devotions.
- to encourage the educational ministry of Seventh Day Baptists around the world.

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## Editor's Page

I am more convinced than ever that learning how to “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16) is one of the most vital lessons for the Christian who desires to honor God with his or her life. Sadly, subjects surrounding the Holy Spirit and His work have also been some of the most common arguments used to divide churches and believers over the centuries. How one of God’s greatest gifts to His children, the gift of His very presence in their lives, could become such a point of contention is almost beyond the imagination.

Jesus was SO excited to give us this great gift that He indicated to His disciples that it was actually a good thing that He was leaving them because unless He left, he could not send the Holy Spirit to be with them. Why? Because the Spirit could be with us all the time in ways that Jesus in the flesh never could. We must learn to embrace the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives with the same enthusiasm with which Jesus sent Him to us.

This quarter’s lessons study important aspects of the person, purpose, and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and in the life of the Church with a heavy emphasis on the writings of John and Paul on the subject. Unit 1 reviews what Jesus taught and promised about the Holy Spirit; Unit 2 focuses on the vital role the Holy Spirit plays in the community of our churches; Unit 3 celebrates the importance of love in incorporating the Spirit’s ministries into the life of the church.

As always, I pray that these lessons will be a blessing to you as you strive to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit guide you as you study God’s Word and open up your life to the power for living that only He can offer.

To God be the glory,

Steve

# 1. The Lamb of God

John 1:29–34

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jennifer Lewis-Berg

### Sunday

### Genesis 41:38–43

God placed Joseph at the center of His work in Egypt. Everything that had happened to Joseph clearly pointed to his being exactly where God, as well as all of mankind, needed him. Joseph was able to understand Pharaoh's deepest dreams and figure out what was best for Egypt. Pharaoh recognized the Spirit of God within Joseph. That same Spirit worked through Joseph on Pharaoh, encouraging him to trust Joseph and depend on him completely. We can recognize the Spirit in ourselves and others—a Spirit that is always at work. God's Spirit uses our relationships, the respect and connections we have with other believers, to place us right where He wants us.

### Monday

### Exodus 31:1–6

God was working with the Israelites to move them forward as His people. The tasks were enormous and the former slaves were not prepared to do the great work. The Spirit began to work through the talents and gifts that God had given the people. The Spirit of God was beginning to be associated with empowerment. God was developing in His people the ability to do His good work. The Spirit places wisdom and understanding within believers. Our talents and abilities are gifts from God. It is important to recognize that knowledge, abilities, and skills are not anything we crafted ourselves but come directly from our Heavenly Father through His Spirit.

### Tuesday

### Numbers 11:11–25

Moses' responsibilities were overwhelming. He begged God for some relief—even the relief of death. God heard Moses' plea. He instructed Moses to find seventy wise and responsible elders. God took some of the great power of His Spirit that He had poured out on Moses and gave it to these elders so that they could help with the work. God continued to empower His people. Today, God is at work everywhere and He appoints believers to help in the work. God knows our capabilities and, if we trust His Spirit, He will empower us and strengthen us with the wisdom to do what He wants us to do.

### Wednesday

### Numbers 11:26–30

Moses knew that great trust and understanding came with the indwelling of God's Spirit. He must have wished that everyone could

share not only the responsibilities of that gift, but the blessings and the honor that God had bestowed on him. Moses knew that only good could come from God's Spirit. The relationship that he had shared with God could have been such a blessing for everyone else. By asking the Spirit of God to reside within us, we will be blessed as well. God will not give us more than we can handle and we will be supported by the community of believers.

### **Thursday**

### **John 1:19–23**

From before his birth, John had been filled with the Spirit of God for one purpose: preparing the way for Jesus. Up to now, the way to God had been messy and crooked. The Jews had complicated their religion so much that it was difficult to see a Savior at the end of the "way." John spoke in clear and simple terms, revealing the Messiah to the children of Israel. Just as armies went ahead of a King to straighten out the route the King would follow, John emphasized all that had been said before about the coming of the Messiah. For us, the way to Jesus is still a straight line.

### **Friday**

### **John 1:24–28**

John baptized with water to symbolize the washing by the Spirit of God. It was a preparation and a clearing away of obstacles before Jesus Himself came. Baptism got people thinking about their readiness for God to show up. Jesus was actually going to arrive in their neighborhood. All the prophesying had led to this moment in time. John's baptizing was an actual physical occurrence that symbolized a spiritual one. For believers today, the sacrament of baptism represents the washing away of the old life and the birth of the new life in Christ. By participating in such a public act, we tell others that we are leaving our old selves beneath the water and coming out clean.

### **Sabbath**

### **John 1:29–34**

Even John the Baptist did not know that Jesus was the One. God revealed the outward sign of the Spirit as a dove. There had never been such tangible evidence of the Holy Spirit. The dove was a gentle confirmation that this was God's Son. As the dove descended from Heaven onto Jesus, God's Spirit dwelled in Jesus. Jesus had come down to earth to bring mankind the gift of the Holy Spirit. And because of that, believers continue to experience the sacred "passage" of baptism. Our own experience is far less dramatic, but no less significant. Christ came and lived among man to draw us closer to the Father. He left the Holy Spirit to remain and dwell within us.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Devotional</b>
John 1:29–34	John 1:29–34	Joel 2:23–27

## Key Verse

“I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

## Heart of the Lesson

In a world of competing religious and political values, people are not always clear that one system is of any greater value than another is. How can Christians know which set of beliefs carries more weight than all others do? John testified that the baptism of the Holy Spirit surpasses water baptism and that the Spirit bears witness that Jesus is God’s Son.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. What do you think of when you hear the words “witness” or “testimony”? What expectations do we have of a witness? What was John the Baptist’s testimony about Jesus? What value can we place in his testimony?
2. Discuss the “Lamb of God” imagery used by John. What does this picture help us to understand about Jesus and His ministry? How does the Old Testament symbolism of a sacrificial lamb fit with this (see Leviticus 1-5; Hebrews 10)? What does it mean that Jesus, “takes away the sin of the world” (v.29)?
3. Review Revelation 5:6-13; 7:17; 21:22-23; and 22:1-3. What does John’s later picture of a victorious, warrior Lamb at the end of time contribute to our further understanding of Jesus as the Lamb of God?
4. What emotions do you experience when observing the baptism of another? How did the baptism of John prepare the way for the revelation of Jesus (v.31)? Why did this event take place at the time of Jesus’ baptism?
5. What was the significance of the Spirit descending and remaining upon Jesus here (see Isaiah 11:2; 61:1)? In what ways did this represent a turning point in God’s presence with His people?

## Understanding and Living

Norman Fearon

### *Baptism Like No Other*

I have witnessed quite a few baptisms and have even had the privilege of performing a few of them myself. Each baptism service is unique, yet special. It is always a wonderful feeling to share in the joy and celebration that comes with a baptism. This feeling of joy is not about adding another member to the church rolls, but rather about being able to witness others making a public declaration that Jesus is Savior and Lord of their lives. Everyone who believes in Jesus and has been immersed is following the example of Jesus, seen in John 1:29-34 and the other Gospels (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21-22).

Although Jesus had no sins to repent from; had no need of salvation for Himself; or not even any personal need to be baptized, He submitted Himself to be baptized so that He set the stage for those who desire to follow Him. At one point it seems as though John wanted to change his mind about baptizing Jesus, sighting his unworthiness to be Jesus' baptizer (Matthew 3:14). As soon as Jesus was baptized, there was an immediate approval from heaven (Matthew 3:16-17). There has never been

another baptism like this one, which confirms how truly special it was.

In John's account of Jesus' baptism, some of the details are different from that of the other accounts. John did not record the approval that came from heaven which occurred after Jesus' baptism. However, he included details that none of the other writers included in their accounts. John seems to have focused more on giving an explanation rather than just telling about the events.

### *An Introduction of the Christ*

According to Luke, other individuals came to John and were baptized (Luke 3:21). However, John did not make a special introduction for any of them in the way that he did for Jesus: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (v.29, NIV). This strongly suggests that this was not just another of those individuals who merely came to be baptized without the fruit of repentance (Luke 3:7-14). John's announcement also suggested that Jesus was far superior to John and the other individuals who came to be baptized (v).

Jesus was introduced as the "Lamb of God" (v.29) or the Lamb chosen by God to take away the sin of the world.

Although regular sacrifice was made before the Son of God came to earth in the person of Jesus, the blood of those animals sacrificed could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:3-4). But Jesus, the perfect Lamb chosen by God, has defeated sin once and for all (Hebrews 7:27).

### ***A Reason for His Mission***

Although John the Baptist and Jesus were related (Luke 1:36), there is no indication that John was acquainted with Jesus. John said, “I myself did not know Him” (v. 31, NIV). John might not have been acquainted with Jesus but John was sent on a mission. He told his audience that the reason for his mission (baptizing with water) was with the intent of revealing the Christ to Israel (v.31). Israel already knew that the Christ would come to deliver them. I would imagine that they anxiously awaited His coming to drive the Romans out of their land once and for all. But how would they know Him without having someone to tell them who He was?

This was a part of the mission John was sent to accomplish—to reveal the Christ to Israel (v.31, NIV). It is always important that we remain with the task that God gives us and keep focus. John knew

that Jesus would show up for baptism. However, he was not aware of exactly when this would happen. So he ensured that he was in his position at all times and sure enough, one day, at a time unknown to him, Jesus showed up.

### ***John’s Testimony:***

John’s testimony served two purposes: First, his testimony provided his audience with the information on how he was able to identify the Christ. For him, identifying the Christ was not such a hard job. All he has to do was look out for the one upon whom the Spirit would come from heaven in the form of a dove and remain on Him (v.32). Thank God that the Spirit still plays a major role in our lives today. Without the Holy Spirit, we lack the ability to discern between the things that are true and the things that are not—especially in a time like this when there are so many impostors parading as genuine.

Second, John’s testimony also provided proof that he was not acting on his own. He told his audience that his actions were in accordance with the thing he was told to do: “The one who sent me to baptize with water told me” (v. 33, NIV). Although everyone does not usually



have an identical experience, nevertheless every Christian should have a testimony. Having a testimony means that one knows something from a personal encounter. This is how the true witness is determined. This reminds me of the fact that salvation is about relationship—a personal relationship with God. This relationship is absolutely necessary for a successful Christian life. There is absolutely no doubt that John had a relationship with God. How else could he have known what he was supposed to do? How could he have known who the Christ was? Or how could he have given a testimony?

### ***More than a Ritual***

Baptism is seen by many as merely a ritual that qualifies an individual for church membership. However, there is much more to baptism than just a church membership. A person's baptism serves as a witness to the commitment he has made to devote his entire life to Christ. But have we been true to that commitment? We must remember that baptism may be a onetime event for us but it affects our lives forever. Therefore, we must ensure that we are faithful to that which we have promised—Jesus expects nothing less from us.

## **Hints for Teaching**

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Explore John's account of Jesus' baptism.
2. Relive emotions felt while observing or participating in a baptism.
3. Assess how Christians live out their baptismal covenant.

### *Teaching Activity*

Have participants share their baptism experiences and the emotions they have felt when being baptized or observing another's baptism. What symbolism is presented in the act of baptism. As a group, come up with a definition of "baptismal covenant" and discuss the following questions: What promises does one make at baptism? What promises does God make to the one being baptized? What does it mean to be faithful to that covenant?

### **Looking Forward**

Having considered the importance of the presence of the Holy Spirit at Jesus' baptism, we turn next to Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit to help His followers.

## 2. Jesus Promises an Advocate

John 14:15–26

### Daily Bible Meditations

Jennifer Lewis-Berg

#### Sunday

#### Jeremiah 8:18–22

Jeremiah was deeply troubled by Judah's captivity and the sinful waywardness of God's people. God had basically declared His complete frustration with Israel. The prophets, the priests, all of them, did not know how to behave because it seems they did not understand what God required of them. Jeremiah could find no comfort from their seemingly hopeless situation. Once again, God saw their miserable idolatry and unfaithfulness. And God, through Jeremiah, wondered if there could be anything to soothe, to heal, and, ultimately, to cure Israel of their sin.

#### Monday

#### Lamentations 1:17–21

Israel was lamenting her suffering. She was reaping the consequences of her actions that had so disturbed and frustrated God. Now His people were perishing. God had commanded that Israel's enemies surround her, attack her, and bring her great misery. And God's people knew that they were getting what they deserved. But they still cried for relief from their distress. In their complete alienation, Israel wondered who would come to their aid and comfort. If we got what we deserved, God would turn His back on us forever. It is our great blessing that God has sent His Comforter to us and that, in our alienation, we are not alone.

#### Tuesday

#### Isaiah 40:1–10

And now for the good news: God was declaring to His people that their comfort was finally coming. What followed is poetic and essential. After all the sin and all the punishment, God was giving His people not what they deserved, but what His love for them meant to Him—a clean slate, stamped “paid in full,” from God's own hands, doubly generous and gracious. The crookedness of their sins were being made straight, the roughness of their sinful lives would be made smooth. And, best of all, the glory of God would be shown to all His people. Despite the death, the frailty, and the inconsistencies of man, God and His promises go on forever. God wants His power, His mercy, and His love to be declared from the top of every mountain.

**Wednesday****Psalm 119:49–64**

There is great comfort in living within the guidelines of God's law. God clearly shows His love for us through His law and His commands. The great desire of our hearts must be to follow Him. The world tries to tear us away from God's desires for us, so it is essential that we keep our focus on God and promise to obey His words. It really does take conscious and deliberate practice to keep obeying God—to keep our attention directly on Him. As long as we live, we must keep learning how to follow God—always walking the straight path that He has set for us.

**Thursday****Psalm 23**

The metaphor of God as a shepherd is a perfect fit. David's poem reached out directly from his own experience and the life he knew. What better picture could come from that world—the Great Shepherd caring for the lowly sheep? David's words painted a clear picture that we can identify with today. God is our shepherd and He protects us, provides everything for us, brings us to calm and still rest, and even restores and heals us. No matter what may come into our lives, God protects us from all evil. God's commands and words comfort us and guard us. God has chosen us as His special people and His goodness and mercy towards us know no limits.

**Friday****John 15:18–26**

God sent Jesus to us to prepare us for a relationship in eternity with the Father. Likewise, Jesus came to show the world that He was the only Way. By denying Jesus, the world has been made aware of its sinfulness. By hating Jesus, the world has also hated God. So we are to choose God and not the world. By following God, we have to turn away from the world. Fortunately, God sent His Spirit to us when Jesus ascended into heaven. The Spirit advocates for us in a way that the human Jesus could not.

**Sabbath****John 14:15–26**

It is still essential that we keep God's commands. Thankfully, God has sent His Holy Spirit to be with us forever. The Holy Spirit comforts and guides us from within. Because we love God, we want to follow His teachings and obey Him. God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit. Because of the Spirit, believers have God the Father and Jesus the Son living within them. Imagine God making a home within every individual believer! Fortunately, the Spirit will continue to teach us about God's love and His desires for us.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Devotional</b>
John 14:15–26	John 14:15–26	Psalm 23

## Key Verse

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26).

## Heart of the Lesson

There are times when people know what is right, but they struggle to follow through as they should. What motivates one to make the right choices? Jesus said that He would send the Holy Spirit to help His followers love God and live according to God’s commandments.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. What causes us sometimes to choose the wrong when we know what is right? What motivation do we as Christians have to make choices we know that God wants us to make?
2. Based on the teaching in this passage (v.15,21,23,24), what is the relationship between love and obedience? How can we justify Jesus’ teaching here about keeping commandments with Paul’s teaching that we are no longer under the law (Romans 6:14; Galatians 5:18)?
3. How does the Holy Spirit help God’s followers to love and obey Him? Describe, from this passage, how the significance, power, and guidance of the Holy Spirit in the area of obedience impacts our discipleship. In what specific ways has the Holy Spirit impacted your obedience?
4. The Greek word “parakletos” is translated, “Helper” in the New American Standard Version. How do other Bible versions translate this word? Now read the other “Paraclete Sayings” of Jesus (John 15:26-27; 16:7-11, 12-15). What do these verses and titles teach us about the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers?
5. How are believers described as being different from the world? In what ways should we strive to stand out? Are there ways of being different that hinder rather than enhance our witness? How can the Holy Spirit help?

## Understanding and Living

Norman Fearon

### *What next*

After spending approximately thirty three and a half years on earth, it was now time for Jesus to return to His Father in Heaven. The last three and a half years of His earthly life were spent preparing twelve men who would later continue the mission that He had started. On several occasions, He tried to explain His mission to them, but they were unable to understand what it was about because they had other things on their minds. Finally the reality hit them—Jesus' mission on earth was coming to an end; He would be leaving soon; "My children, I will be with you only a little longer" (John 13:33, NIV). Their world seemed like it was about to turn upside down. What would they do? What would become of their dreams? Would the mission that was started end here?

In an effort to console His troubled disciples, Jesus, in John 14 started to pour out words of comfort and hope upon them. This was needed encouragement for these men as they would be relied on to continue the mission when Jesus went back to heaven. His very first words of comfort were, "Do not let

your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me" (v.1, NIV). Jesus continued to comfort them with words of assurance. This time He told them about His plan to prepare a place for them so that they could be with Him (v. 3). All of that was wonderful, but what should they expect in the time when He would be away? Would they be left alone or would there be a support system for them?

Jesus knew these men well enough to know that, although they seemed willing and sometimes very zealous, they would never make it on their own. The mission, on the other hand, was one that surpassed their ability. In fact, this mission was one that required much more than human muscle and ingenuity. This called for real help and, sure enough, Jesus promised to send them the help they needed—the Holy Spirit.

### *Receiving the Helper*

In the lesson this week, Jesus promised to send another Helper (v.16) to assist His disciples in accomplishing the mission He left for them to complete. However, Jesus also made it clear that the promise of the other Helper would be fulfilled only if they kept

His commandments (v15). It was also important that the disciples understood that keeping the commandments of Jesus was their proof that they loved Him. This, I believe, is an appropriate message for Christians of this age. If we consider ourselves disciples of Jesus, we should be willing to adhere to His commandments.

Adherence to His commandments will foster a healthy relationship with Jesus. We can never truly say we love Jesus while we blatantly ignore His commandments. I think it is also ironic when Christians claim to be filled with the Holy Spirit but refuse to live by Jesus' commandments. Whoever claims to be a disciple of Jesus must live by His commandments—they are not optional or negotiable. It is easy for us to say we have the Holy Spirit, but where is the proof? Is our claim supported with the evidence of fruit?

How often do we get upset with the world for not recognizing how important we are? We are “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-14). How often do we get frustrated because the world does not understand our purpose? God has called us to be “instruments of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians

5:18-20). It does not matter what role we play; the world cannot see our significance because the world does not have the Holy Spirit. It will take the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual to accept the ways of God or to live the way God wants him to live.

Jesus made it clear that the Holy Spirit would be with His disciples because they knew Him. But the world cannot accept Him (the Holy Spirit) because the world “neither sees Him nor knows Him” (v. 17, NIV). Often times we value ourselves according to what the world has that we may never have, but I believe it should be the other way around. We should value ourselves according to what we have that the world can never have—that is the Holy Spirit.

### ***Role of the Helper***

We are privileged to live in an era where we have technology on our side. We have all sorts of electronic gadgets, tools, and machines to help us do our work. Sometimes this makes us feel like we really did a great job all by ourselves, when in truth we would have messed up if we did not have the appropriate help. The disciples really did not have a clue what this mission would be throwing at them.

They could not even begin to imagine the various challenges that would come their way. But those challenges ahead served as reminders that they had to rely on their “Helper,” the Holy Spirit, to carry them to the end of their mission.

Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things (v.26). There were a few instances when some of Jesus’ teachings were not understood instantly but were later explained to them (Mark 4:14; 9:32; Luke 2:50). I imagine there were other times that the understanding came later through the Holy Spirit’s teaching. The Holy Spirit would also teach them things they did not know before (John 16:12-13). In addition to teaching, the Holy Spirit would remind them of everything Jesus had already told them (v.26).

It seems to me that Jesus’ intent was that the disciples would be in total reliance on the Holy Spirit. Should it be any different today? How much do we really rely on the Holy Spirit? So many times we are guilty of going through our church rituals that fail to produce the desired results because we refuse to receive the help of the “Helper”—the Holy Spirit.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Understand the significance of the Holy Spirit.
2. Recognize the power available through the Holy Spirit.
3. Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in decision making.

### *Teaching Activity*

Have groups of 2 or 3 role play one or more occasions when it is good to have someone “at your side” (i.e. a time of grief, a major decision, etc.). Compare these occasions with the role of the Holy Spirit as Advocate, Counselor, etc. Brainstorm various ways the Holy Spirit guides believers. Are some of these ways more customary than others are? Develop a checklist or other instrument by which the participants can ensure they are leaving room for the Spirit to work in their decision-making process.

### **Looking Forward**

Having studied the role of the Holy Spirit as our Advocate, we next examine Jesus’ promise that the Spirit of Truth would be present with His followers in His absence.

# 3. The Spirit of Truth

John 16:4b–15

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jennifer Lewis-Berg

### Sunday

### Proverbs 29:12–18

The essential thread that connects the Old Testament with the New Testament is prophecy. The prophecies that told what would happen for Israel culminated in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of God's Son. Through the prophets, God made mankind aware of His plan for them. Prophets came forward at times when Israel needed discipline and consequences for their sins. Otherwise, they would never have been drawn closer to God and would never have seen how essential God's restraints were. Prophecies brought hope for righteousness just as the Holy Spirit brings it for us today.

### Monday

### Isaiah 29:8–14

God was speaking to Jerusalem through Isaiah. The people had become unfaithful to God, turning away from Him and becoming blind to what He wanted for them. They had kept the outward signs of religious living, but had lost their desire for holiness and piety. Because of the lives they were living, their thirst and hunger for God could not be satisfied. In a time when the prophecies were so important, God's people would not be able to see what was essential for them. Our own lives have to connect with God at the deepest level. We need to concentrate fully on what the Holy Spirit is showing us that He wants for us.

### Tuesday

### 1 Samuel 3:1–10

Samuel was chosen by God to be His servant—the essential prophet for God's people. Despite his young age, God purposed Samuel's vocation and the seriousness of Samuel's connection to prophecy. It must have been remarkable for this young child to be literally "called" by God to be His voice on earth. Samuel did not yet know what God had planned for him. Yet God continued to call Samuel by name until he recognized what was happening. We may not have a helper like Eli to let us know that it is God calling to us. But we need to be open and ready to hear His voice. We want God to know that we, too, are listening when He calls to us.

### Wednesday

### 1 Samuel 3:11–21

God used Samuel to fill the gap that would be left when Eli's sons were punished for their sins. In Samuel, God was restoring His



confidence in His prophets. It was essential for God to speak to Israel through someone He trusted. Samuel opened himself up completely to being a true prophet for God. He dedicated his life to God's work. Samuel would speak the words that were necessary for Israel to be able to follow God's desires for them. The prophecies would once again be entrusted to someone of integrity. God wants us to be people of our word and to be open to His desires for us. God wants to place us at the center of His work here on earth. He needs us to focus on Him and to be attentive to His guidance.

### **Thursday**

### **Psalm 31:1–8**

Since we cannot get through this life without God, it is vital, and also reassuring, that we can take refuge in Him. Not only should we depend completely on His righteousness, but we can be sure that He will give us His complete attention and protection. That is the marvelous solution to all our problems as human beings. The snares and traps of our enemies will always be there. But if we commit ourselves to God and depend completely on Him, He will rescue us and stabilize us. We can trust God in all things. He sees everything and will always remain faithful.

### **Friday**

### **John 4:21–26**

The time of which Jesus spoke to the woman at the well—time for believers to worship God in spirit and in truth—has already come. God has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and to bring His truth to our lives. There is no longer a need for a holy temple or a holy mountain for worshipping God. Worship does not require certain rituals and ceremonies. Our relationship with God, drawing ourselves close to God, and drawing God close to the spirit within us is now the true worship.

### **Sabbath**

### **John 16:4b–15**

Jesus had to die and leave His earthly life so that He could send us the "Advocate." The Spirit is that part of God who "stands in" for Jesus' personal presence. There are many aspects and functions within God: God the Father is the beginning of all of it; Jesus the Son was sent to us by the Father; Jesus sent the Spirit to us so that He could be powerfully present with us. Jesus has sent the Spirit as our Guide to all the truth about God. The Spirit honors the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is now our delivery system of all that God wants us to know.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Devotional</b>
John 16:4b–15	John 16:4b–15	1 Samuel 3:1–10

## Key Verse

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you” (John 16:7).

## Heart of the Lesson

It may be difficult to maintain a direction in life when a mentor is lost. How do people find the resources to carry on when the strength and vision of someone close to them is no longer available? Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be as real a presence to them as His physical presence was while He lived with them on earth.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. Describe a time when someone you looked to for guidance was removed from your life. What emotions did you experience? Where did you notice it impacting your life? In what ways did you appreciate any support you received during this time? What helped you to move forward?
2. What negative impact would Jesus' departure have on them? What did Jesus promise would be advantageous about His departure? What benefits do we reap today from the fulfillment of that promise?
3. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit would convict the world concerning sin? Righteousness? Judgment? How do you see these things happening today? How do these convictions provide direction and encouragement for us as believers?
4. Describe the Spirit's role in term of being “the Spirit of truth” (v.13). What confidence do you receive from knowing you are being guided “into all the truth?” In what practical ways does this impact your life?
5. Compare and contrast the presence of God the Son (in the flesh) with the presence of God the Holy Spirit. If you had to choose one or the other, which would you choose and why?

## Understanding and Living

Norman Fearon

### *Dealing With Sad News*

In last week's lesson, we looked at Jesus' promise to give the Holy Spirit to His disciples. This week, focuses more on how the Holy Spirit would work on behalf of the disciples. It is a wonderful thing to be informed of such an offer, but it is also important to be informed of the pros and cons—how will it work on my behalf.

Jesus went into more details of the Holy Spirit's ministry so that the disciples would know exactly what to expect. After promising His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit, He admonished them to remain in Him (15:4) because they could not bear fruit on their own. He also told them about the challenges they were going to face as they continued to bear witness for Him (15:18-25; 16:2-3). This now laid the foundation to other important information regarding the Holy Spirit's role.

Our lesson today begins with Jesus' reason for not telling His disciples before, the things He was telling them now. I can only imagine how surprised they were to be hearing all this disturbing information: "You mean we are going to be persecuted

and even killed? Why were we not told this before?" Jesus' response was, "I was with you" (v.4). Whenever one is working on a project, certain details, though pertinent, may not be helpful at certain stages of that project. But eventually there comes that stage when those details cannot be avoided.

This information Jesus was now giving to his disciples would not have been helpful to them before. But now that Jesus was about to leave them, it become necessary for them to know. This served two purposes: 1) that Jesus told them before it happened meant when they witnessed the fulfillment, their faith would become stronger; 2) the information of those troubling times ahead would help the disciples to see their constant need for the Holy Spirit.

Although Jesus told His disciples He was going away, none of them asked him, "Where are you going?" (v.5). Their grief was so overwhelming that they did not care to know where He was going. It is usually very difficult to let go of someone we have become attached to. Therefore, the knowledge of losing them before it happens is tormenting. Christians and non-Christians

alike have to face the grief of losing the ones they love, but the Christian has the help of the Holy Spirit to take them through that time of grief.

Jesus understood their grief, so instead of rebuking them, He explained how important it was for Him to go: “[F]or if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you” (v.7, ESV). It is not certain whether this explanation was sufficient to calm their grief or not but it was sure helpful as they anticipated the future.

### *The Holy Spirit's Effect on the World*

The Holy Spirit, as promised, would be sent to the disciples to help them carry out their mission effectively (v. 8). However, the Holy Spirit would not only affect the lives of Jesus' disciples, He would also have an effect on the world (v.8-11)—though not in the same way as the disciples. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would “convict the world” (v.8, ESV) when He came. The word convict is about declaring someone guilty or showing that someone is wrong. It takes more than persuasive arguments to prove the world guilty of breaking God's perfect law (Psalm 19:7).

The age we live in is probably not much different from

the ages past. People find it so easy to determine their own truth to live by and become totally numb to the absolute truth of God. So many are becoming convinced that “truth is relative” as they unapologetically defy God in just about everything. But it does not matter how much they barricade themselves in unbelief, the Holy Spirit never fails to bring about their conviction; “[H]e will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness” (v.8, ESV).

I often wonder about the motivation behind the various non-Biblical apocalyptic movies that have been filmed over the years. All of them seem to agree on one thing—the earth is about to experience such destruction that will greatly diminish the life forms that exist. Could it be that this is a distorted version of God's judgment of which the Holy Spirit has been convicting the world?

It is so easy to be frustrated, especially when we are putting out every effort to convince a world in total defiance to its Creator. But dead or alive at His appearance, the world will face His Judgment. We should never feel like we have failed once we do what God wants us to do. We are not alone—the Holy Spirit is

with us and He is effectively accomplishing His job of convicting the world.

### ***Not for Himself***

Information, though important, can sometimes be overwhelming. Jesus had a lot of things to tell His disciples, but He also knew that they could not “bear them now” (v.12, ESV). But there was no need to be concerned that He would leave with the information He wanted to give the disciples because the Holy Spirit would be guiding them into all truth (v.13). It must be noted that Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “the Spirit of truth” (v.13; 14:17; 15:26). This means the Spirit cannot present anything but the truth. Not the truth of man but the truth of God.

This leads to another important point: the Spirit did not come in His own authority (v.13, ESV) and He will bring glory to Jesus (v.14). Our ultimate aim as Christians is to faithfully serve our Lord Jesus in an environment that is ever hostile to God’s divine plan for mankind. The only way we can be faithful to our call is to follow the guide of the Holy Spirit, who will lead us to bring honor to our Lord Jesus Christ and not our selves.

## **Hints for Teaching**

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Learn what Jesus says about how the Holy Spirit works on their behalf.
2. Express feelings about the loss of those close to them and the subsequent support received.
3. Find ways to tell others about how the Holy Spirit works on their behalf.

### *Teaching Activity*

List all the things Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do when He came. Discuss each item and its significance for believers today. Design a worship service that gives thanks and praise for the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers.

### **Looking Forward**

Having evaluated the presence of the Spirit of Truth in our lives, we next consider the power provided by the Spirit to enable us to fulfill our mission.

# 4. Receive the Holy Spirit

John 20:19–23

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jennifer Lewis-Berg

### Sunday

**Mark 13:5–11**

Can we listen to the words that Jesus said to His beloved disciples and take them to heart? Across the centuries, is Jesus not warning us and admonishing us just as He did His chosen followers? In their time, He was predicting the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem, which represented the earthly power and strength that the Jews had come to depend on completely. He wanted them to know that they would have to rest on the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. We are also to depend only on the authority and guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

### Monday

**Acts 10:39–48**

How do you tell the Jews God is now accepting Gentiles and Jews alike on the basis of their acceptance of Christ? God sent His Spirit to testify that He was accepting Gentiles as members of His family. We may have certain ideas of how things should be, even within the community of believers. Just as the Jewish believers were shocked and uneasy about those they perceived as unacceptable being accepted into the family of God, we may have prejudices that are difficult to give up. But God is sovereign and His terms are simple: believe in Jesus Christ, accept the Holy Spirit into your life, and you are a suitable part of the community of God.

### Tuesday

**Acts 11:19–26**

The persecution of those who preached the Word of God after Jesus' ascension was meant to destroy the Christian church. Instead, it helped it by scattering those who preached Christ's message and story far away from Jerusalem. God's hand was in the work. Not only were Jews turning from ceremonial worship to worshipping "in Spirit and in truth," but Gentiles were also receiving the gospel of Jesus Christ and turning from their pagan ways. Those men who made it their life's work to spread Christ's message were indeed full of God's Spirit and the faith it would take to begin this great work.

### Wednesday

**Romans 14:13–19**

There was a great difference between the legalism of the Jewish faith and the freedom that Christians could enjoy. The powers of God were no longer present in rituals and laws, "but righteous-

ness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (v.17). However, it was important for believers to stop passing judgment on those believers who did see significance in certain laws. The freedom in Christ does not give us the right to see ourselves as superior to another believer, but to act in love and set a good example. We need to be models of righteousness, peace, and joy.

### **Thursday**

### **Acts 1:4–8**

The disciples were chosen by God to be witnesses of Christ’s life and work here on earth. They were able to share that first-hand experience with others. Jesus came to bear witness and now they would take what He had given them not only to their own country, but to the farthest parts of the world. Jesus was instructing them on what they should do and not do after He left them. They would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. God’s power would be bestowed on them. They would understand things that had been unclear and interpret Scriptures that had been a mystery. They would tell of the works and teachings of Jesus—especially of His resurrection and God’s messages that Jesus had brought to the world.

### **Friday**

### **Ephesians 5:15–21**

The way we behave does matter. Our lives reflect how we relate to the love of God, His will for us, and what choices we make. It is important that we are careful and wise. Each decision we make impacts each opportunity we have. God wants us to take advantage of wise choices. Likewise, we lose advantage with careless choices. If God’s will for us is to center our lives on Him and reflect His love for us to others, then we have to allow our hearts to be filled with His Spirit. Our lives and actions are going to be filled with something. If it is not God, then it will be sin.

### **Sabbath**

### **John 20:19–23**

Remember when you accepted Jesus as your Savior? It was then that God breathed His Spirit into your soul and into your life. Breath is essential and the idea of God breathing the Spirit, which cannot be seen or felt, into our hearts is something to which we can definitely relate. The breath of the Spirit of God is as critical to our spiritual lives as is the breath we take into our lungs is to our physical lives. God’s impact and influence on us should be seen as vital every moment of our lives. We need to depend completely on the Holy Spirit to control and guide our lives as we depend on the breath of life to keep our hearts beating and our lives going.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Devotional</b>
John 20:19–23	John/Acts 20:19–23/1:4–8; 2:1–4	Romans 14:13–19

## Key Verse

And when [Jesus] had said this, He breathed on [the disciples] and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22).

## Heart of the Lesson

A charismatic speaker can often lift and inspire an attentive audience. What is done and said to bring about such an effect? Jesus spoke peace to and empowered the disciples with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. What does it take for someone to lift the spirits of a group that has just had their dreams crushed and is fearful for their lives? How did Jesus accomplish this in the lives of His disciples in this passage? Why was this post-resurrection appearance important to the disciples and the future of the Christian Church?
2. Compare and contrast this passage with its parallel in Luke 24:36-49. What was each author trying to convey in recording this event? How did their purpose affect the details they chose to include?
3. What two gifts did Jesus give to His disciples in this passage? Why was each of these gifts important for them at the time? What was the mission Jesus gave them? How would these gifts empower the disciples to carry out their mission?
4. How is our mission related to the mission of the disciples? Why must we rely on the Holy Spirit to help us pursue this mission? What do you believe to be your specific role within this mission? In what ways has the Holy Spirit helped you with this mission in the past?
5. Discuss the relevance in verse 21 of the Sent One (John 3:17) becoming the Sender (John 17:18). What role does each person in the God-head play here in the sending mission of God?



## Understanding and Living

Jerry Johnson

### *Jesus Appeared*

Biblical commentators throughout the centuries have concluded that the appearances of the resurrected Jesus to the disciples in John 20 is the same event as recorded in Luke 24:36-48—although there are some differences in incidental details due to the authors' perspectives. Looking at the timelines in both John 20 and Luke 24, it is probable that the reference to the "first day of the week" indicates the appearance is on a Sunday evening.

All told, John recorded three appearances—the others being 20:26-29 (with Thomas present) and by the Sea of Galilee in John 21:1-14 (seven disciples present). In *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John, Volume 2*, William Barclay set the tone for the disciples' mindset:

It is most likely that the disciples continued to meet in the upper room where the Last Supper had been held. But they met in something very like terror. They were afraid; they knew the envenomed bitterness of the Jews; the Jews had compassed the death of Jesus, and the disciples were afraid that their turn might come next. So they were meeting in terror, listening fearfully for every step on the stair and for every knock at the door, lest

the emissaries of the Sanhedrin should come to arrest them too (p.316).

### *Jesus Offered Peace*

In the midst of their fears, Jesus entered the disciples' presence and offered the standard greeting of, "Peace be with you"—one that He did not directly use in the Gospels before this occasion, but one He certainly referenced in John 14:27. He told them before going to the cross, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

In John 14, Jesus offered them a different type of peace than what they might have been expecting—predicated upon his suffering to bring them into a reconciled relationship with God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Now He had fulfilled His mission and was about to give them their own, more directly. In order to authenticate Himself to them, Jesus allowed them to see and touch the flesh that had suffered in agony. F. F. Bruce helpfully noted in his commentary, *The Gospel of John*:

And yet it was in bodily form that he was there: the nail-pierced hands and the wounded side identified him unmistakably as the crucified

one. Seeing and recognizing him, the disciples, no longer fearful, were filled with joy. “I will see you again,” [H]e had said in the upper room, “and your hearts will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you” (John 16:22, Bruce’s translation from the Greek). His promise was now fulfilled (p.391).

### ***Jesus Sent Them Out***

So now John had offered a flashback to the promise of both peace and joy. But there was a third one, from John 17:18 during Jesus’ prayer in the upper room: “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” The disciples were sent out, indicated by the Greek verb *apostello*. And just as Jesus had been equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit (see John 1:32-34; 3:34), they would be as well. He breathed on them and commanded them to receive the Holy Spirit, a part of the so-called “Johannine Great Commission.”

In light of the fact that Pentecost was 50 days in the future, scholars have debated what is meant here since Acts 1:8 and 2:1-3 seem to indicate the Spirit’s fullness had not yet arrived. Most contemporary evangelical study Bibles argue that this is a foretaste, or foreshadowing of the universal unveiling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Barclay (The

Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of John, Volume 2) saw an allusion to creation in Genesis 2:7 and the regeneration of Israel in Ezekiel 37:9 (p.318). No matter how this area is reconciled, make no mistake—the connection between the work of the Holy Spirit and the disciples’ ability to complete the mission was intertwined in the same way as it was according to Luke’s narrative in Acts. Without power there would be no success.

### ***Forgiving and Retaining Sins***

The final element in this passage has also created no small controversy. What does this formula for forgiving and retaining sins (ESV uses “withhold forgiveness”) that Jesus used in verse 23 mean? There is a similar issue in Matthew 16:19 (binding and loosing on earth and in heaven). One key is to note that the Greek verb tense is the perfect, indicating a completed past action that has continuing results in the present. It is also essential to use the principle of allowing clear passages in Scripture to shed light on those that might not be so clear. Applying these two principles, the ESV Study Bible helpfully deduced:

The idea is not that individual Christians or churches have authority on their own to forgive or not forgive people, but rather that as the church proclaims the

gospel message of forgiveness of sins in the power of the Holy Spirit (see v.22), it proclaims that those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven, and that those who do not believe in him do not have their sins forgiven—which simply reflects what God in heaven has already done (Study Bible entry on John 20:23).

### ***Living Witnesses***

So we serve a risen Savior who has commissioned us to be free from fear because of the peace that He offers us. How many times in your daily lives have you been afraid of what people might say or do because of your allegiance to Christ? In my job as a hospital chaplain I often have “cold calls” where I knock on a door of a patient for a visit and do not know what to expect. If my faith is weak and halting I might just want to talk about the weather or sports. It takes boldness to share Christ (of course in a respectful and appropriate way). Do we shy away from opportunities to be living witnesses because of our fears?

As a result of the joy we have, we are to go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to spread the message of salvation and forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ alone. That is our job, our mission! As they say in the Army, “Do you know have your marching orders?”

## **Hints for Teaching**

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Explore the importance of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples.
2. Describe feelings from times when the words of others calmed our fears.
3. Encourage students to perform the mission God has for their lives as empowered by the Holy Spirit.

### *Teaching Activity*

Write the words fear and fire on the board where all can see. Leave plenty of space under the word fear before writing fire under it. Change one letter of fear to form a new word, and then change that word by one letter, and so on until the last one-letter change produces the word fire. How did the disciples go from being full of fear (v. 19) to being on fire for the Lord (cf. Acts 2)? What is God’s role in this transformation? What is the disciples’ role? How can believers go from being full of fear to being on fire for the Lord?

### **Looking Forward**

From the coming of the Holy Spirit in power, we next go back and link the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem to the coming of God’s Kingdom.

# 5. The One Who Comes

Mark 11:1–11

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jennifer Lewis-Berg

### Sunday

### Psalm 67

We are so blessed. God has created this great earth for us and takes care of all our needs. His love for us is shown by the grace he bestows on all of us. In spite of all our wrongs, He continues to shower us with blessings. And He judges each person fairly—certainly more fairly than we deserve. So all mankind should be joyful and thankful and realize the blessings that God has granted in His justice and mercy. Let us also continue to praise God because His blessings will never stop.

### Monday

### Isaiah 45:20–25

Regardless of the idols we may raise up to take God's place, there is no other God apart from Him. Throughout all our lives, God continues to draw us to Himself for the only true safety and stability that we can ever know. The reason why we must return to God is simple: only He can deliver us from sin and only He is strong enough to protect us and shelter us. When we bow down to Him, we are separating ourselves from the world and closing off everything but Him. When we pledge ourselves to Him, again and again, we are declaring to the world that our confidence is in Him.

### Tuesday

### Philippians 2:9–16

Every person must bow down with respect and awe to worship Jesus because God raised Him up to the highest place in heaven. Likewise, we should hold Jesus up as an example for our lives. The reason for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was so that God could redeem His children and, living within them, can be their Lord. We must continue to work out our salvation because God is working in us. God's work goes on and we are to be a part of that work because God dwells in us. Our goal is to reach out to others with the love that God has put into us.

### Wednesday

### Mark 13:30–37

Jesus is the Truth. All the words that He said came directly from the Father. Everything that Jesus ever said or did would never pass away. The world of the people of His time would go away. Within their lifetime, Jerusalem would be destroyed. Everything of our world will also pass away. There is nothing here on earth that we can cling

to except the Truth of Jesus. Because we cannot predict when Jesus will return, it is essential that we be at the ready. We need to live our lives as if He is coming now! If we put all our energies and focus into this world, we will not be watching out for Him and we will not be prepared. We need to live in readiness and watch for His return.

### **Thursday**

**Mark 14:55–62**

Jesus was condemned before He had even been tried. Every witness against Him was a liar. The most respected elders of His society treated Him as a common criminal. And yet, He remained dignified and respectful of their honored positions. When He finally decided to answer the leading and trick question, He spoke calmly, with respect. In language they could understand, He told a simple truth: though He was now being condemned and led towards the crucifixion on the cross, there would come a time when He would sit in judgment over all of them. His position would be above all others: seated at the right hand of His Father and coming to earth “with the clouds of heaven” (v.62).

### **Friday**

**John 12:14–19**

During His short time on earth, Jesus touched the lives of many, attracting throngs of people. He spoke of God and love rather than violence, revolt, and insurrection. His words spoke with deepest meaning to a culture that was hungry for a savior. His miracles and other acts were shocking and amazing. When Jesus succeeded in raising Lazarus from the dead, the multitudes were inspired to create a grand procession to honor Him. It was the last straw for the Pharisees who realized what an impact His ministry was having. His control of their world meant a loss of their control. With the tide turning toward the Son of God, His enemies had finally had enough.

### **Sabbath**

**Mark 11:1–11**

We are fortunate to know that Jesus is the Son of God—the answer for the lost world in which we live. During His lifetime, even though people were fortunate enough to see and hear Him firsthand, it was a struggle to believe that He was the Savior. The people yearned for the answer to the prophecies of old and longed for release from their cultural and societal bondage. Imagine, then, the grand drama that played out as Jesus fulfilled another prophecy, sat upon a donkey, and rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. Those people were excited and finally convinced that He was indeed the Savior. They celebrated the coming of the promised kingdom.

**Study**

Mark  
11:1–11

**Background**

Mark  
11:1–11

**Devotional**

Isaiah  
45:20–25

**Key Verse**

Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: “Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD” (Mark 11:9).

**Heart of the Lesson**

People want to be in the presence of and pay homage to important people. Why are celebrity events important to us? The people celebrated Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem as the coming of God’s kingdom.

**Questions for Studying the Text**

1. If you have ever attended or observed a “victory parade,” describe what you saw there? What was the mood of the people? What actions did they perform to communicate their mood? What is the purpose of such a celebration?
2. How would you compare this event from the life of Jesus to those celebrations? What was being celebrated here? In what ways did they pay homage to Jesus? What special things can you do today to pay homage to Jesus?
3. What was the significance of the people laying coats and branches in the road (v.8) ahead of Jesus? What about the song they sang (v.9-10; see also Psalm 118:25)? What does “Hosanna” mean? What did the crowd demonstrate they understood about Jesus?
4. What was Jesus trying to accomplish by doing riding into Jerusalem on a colt (see Zechariah 9:9)? What do you think of the obedience of the owners—allowing the colt to be taken because “the Lord has need of it” (v.3)? What things might the Lord have need of in your life to help usher in His Kingdom?
5. What feelings do you or others experience when thinking or talking about the Kingdom of God? In what ways did Jesus usher in the Kingdom of God in this event? What things can you do in your life to help prepare for the coming Kingdom?

## Understanding and Living

Jerry Johnson

### *Different Views, One King*

The account of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is recorded in all four Gospels (see Matthew 21:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; and John 12:12-19). As we study the four accounts, we can notice some subtle differences in details that likely relate to the individual author's point of view. According to the Reformation Study Bible, in Matthew, the mother of the colt was mentioned "because the quotation from Zechariah 9:9 prophesies that the coming king would ride on 'a colt, the foal of a donkey' (ESV). Jesus chooses to make the fulfillment of prophecy unmistakable" (p.1394). Matthew also mentioned how the crowds were stirred up by Jesus' presence in order to show that Christ indeed was "the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Luke noted the owners of the colt apparently granted permission, either in a spontaneous act of submission or from a pre-arranged authorization. He also added that the crowd cried, "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest," in addition to the familiar, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord." There is an element of doxology which has a familiar overtone to the angel's appearance before the shepherds in Luke 2:14, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with

whom He is pleased." He selected a quote from Psalm 118:26 instead of "Hosanna" ("Save us") from Psalm 118:25 that was more familiar to a Jewish audience. Moreover, Luke noted the Pharisees attempted to get Jesus to silence things. Jesus told them, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!" (v.39).

For his part, John offered a shortened version of the event that connected Jesus' entrance with the just-completed raising of Lazarus from the dead and the future recollection the disciples would have about their Lord's true identity as crucified and risen savior.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus' entry was the culmination of a journey that was intentional. Back in 8:31, Mark related, "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again." Jesus' ministry in Caesarea Philippi, the transfiguration, and other teachings and healings in the region of Capernaum and Judea pointed to the final destination. Based upon their actions and reactions to Him, neither the disciples nor the multitudes likely understood this ultimate purpose. In *The Gospel According to Mark*, G. Campbell

Morgan offered a glimpse of Jesus' unique royal declaration:

Here [H]e was seen, the Servant of Jehovah, coming to establish His Kingdom; the Kingdom described by Himself when He said [H]e came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; the Kingdom of service, in which positions of greatness were those won by lowliness of service rendered; the Kingdom which was to be founded upon that to which He did in mystery refer, the giving of His own life, as a ransom (p.255).

Concerning the entry point, William Barclay noted in *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Mark*:

Bethpage and Bethany were villages near Jerusalem. Very probably Bethpage means house of figs and Bethany means house of dates. They must have been very close because we know from the Jewish law that Bethpage was one of the circle of villages which marked the limit of a Sabbath's day journey, that is, less than a mile, while Bethany was one of the recognized lodging places for pilgrims to the Passover when Jerusalem was full. (p.263-264).

### ***A Peaceful King?***

Christians through the centuries have attempted to understand the meaning behind Jesus' manner of entry into the city. Most

have centered on the paradox of claiming to be a king, without retaining the trappings of earthly victory and celebration. The Romans would execute their prisoners of war; ironically this procession led to the execution of the ultimate victor. Morgan (*The Gospel According to Mark*) observed the "absurdity" of this "pageant of poverty."

A procession of poverty, the scattering of the clothes the people wore, the broken branches of the trees, and the shouting of the Galilean mob! So [H]e rode in the dignity of a great meekness, divested of all the things that humanity had for so long associated with Kingship. It was a pageant of poverty" (p.256).

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, they set out their coats on the road, signifying their recognition of worship for a king. But this king was riding upon an animal of peace, whereas most of the people were singing Psalm 118 as a way of thanking God for victory over physical, national enemies. Jesus knew the people were expecting "a king who would shatter and smash and break... and he came meek and lowly" (Barclay, p. 265).

According to 1 Maccabees 13:51 in the Apocrypha, Simon Maccabaeus entered Jerusalem about 150 years earlier "with thanksgiving and branches of



palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and viols, and hymns and songs, because there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel.” This was the feast of Hanukkah. In 2 Kings 13:9 the people spread their garments on the ground for Jehu. This is what the people were looking for in Jesus, a victorious king. Instead they received a suffering servant. But how could they know at this stage?

### *Save Us*

Their shout, “Hosanna,” was simply a transliteration of the Aramaic words for “Save us... O LORD” from Psalm 118:25 (Reformation Study Bible, p.1436). They were crying for help; again, it is likely the help they were looking for was in the form of a conquering earthly king rather than a suffering savior. The people wanted another David, and yes they had received David, but in a different manner. We can see this as we read further in Mark. The very next day (Matthew does not include the stop in Bethany) Jesus cursed the fig tree and cleansed the temple, demonstrating judgment upon the nation and its entire accompanying religious infrastructure. All of these events would unfold in accordance to divine planning, in conformity to His timeline, with definite victory the end state. But at this point the people were still very confused.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Survey the story of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
2. Discuss their feelings about the kingdom of God.
3. Find creative ways to pay homage to Jesus.

### *Teaching Activity*

Compare and contrast the four Gospel accounts of the triumphal entry. Then retell the story using information from all four. In what ways did the people pay homage to Jesus? List the talents, gifts, and abilities of the participants. Discuss creative ways of paying homage to Jesus today that would incorporate the different talents, gifts, and abilities listed.

### **Looking Back**

In this unit we have celebrated ways that God has fulfilled His pledge to be present with His people through Jesus’ ushering in God’s Kingdom and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

# 6. Resurrection Guaranteed

1 Corinthians 15:1–11, 20–22

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jasmine Lynch

### Sunday

**Matthew 27:45–50**

Place yourself among the crowd watching Jesus hanging on the cross. The one whom you thought had come to save you is now crying to His God whom He thinks has forsaken Him. Others are mocking Him. Your hopes are dashed. It is noon—the sun stops shining, darkness covers the land, the earth begins to shake, rocks split open, graves open, and individuals are walking out. You stumble in the darkness to take shelter in the temple, only to find the veil rent from top to bottom. What are your emotions now? Is there hope that He is the promised Messiah?

### Monday

**Matthew 28:1–8**

There was an earthquake when Jesus gave up His spirit on the cross and the grave gave up the righteous dead. Three days later, there was another earthquake as the angel announced Jesus' resurrection. Individuals were afraid at the resurrection of the righteous dead, but the angel told Mary Magdalene and the other women not to be afraid at Jesus' resurrection. Jesus appeared and showed the proof of His resurrection and sent His followers to tell others. We too have seen evidence of His resurrection and must tell others if we believe.

### Tuesday

**1 Thessalonians 4:13–18**

What an encouraging and comforting passage of Scripture. It gives us hope of uniting with our loved ones who have died and it assures us that Christ is coming back for those who remain faithful. The passage paints a vivid picture of a grand reunion, one more spectacular than we have ever experienced, with Jesus leading the way. Loving families look forward to planning and attending family reunions. Church members attend General Conference and Association to experience the joy of fellowshiping with friends they have made over the years. What a glorious reunion that will be. Will you be there? I know I will be there.

### Wednesday

**John 11:20–27**

Jesus' words completely eluded Martha. She had seen Jesus heal the sick and had confidence in His healing power. But she did not believe Jesus could raise her brother from the dead after

he had been buried four days. Jesus' words in verse 25 went right over her head. She confessed her belief that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the living God, but not that He was the resurrection and the life. If we depend only on our experience, we will limit God. Jesus demonstrated that nothing is impossible with God and that if we believe in Him, we too will be resurrected.

### **Thursday**

### **Titus 3:1–7**

What a difference the love of God makes in a believer's life. Look at the things we once did or are capable of doing without His transforming power (listed in v.3). Paul did not want us to become self-righteous. We must remember that our righteousness is not by our own works, but according to God's mercy through Jesus Christ. Our hope of eternal life rests on us becoming heirs of His Kingdom. As heirs of His Kingdom, we must "malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men" ( v.2). What a contrast to the kingdoms of this world. Can others tell to which "world" you belong by your actions?

### **Friday**

### **1 Corinthians 15:12–19**

Paul left no doubt in our minds as to the foundation of our eternal destiny. It lies in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without His resurrection, we do not have hope of eternal life—of seeing our loved ones who have died. The preaching and teachings of the Apostles is empty and our faith is empty. That is how important the resurrection of Jesus is. This is a litmus test of Christianity. You cannot call yourself a Christian if you do not believe in Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of the saints—not to mention the fact that you make God a liar.

### **Sabbath**

### **1 Corinthians 15:1–11, 20–22**

World Christian Encyclopedia cites 19 major religions. Each religion has a god or gods. However, only Christianity has a God who loves us so much that He came as our Savior. Jesus Christ, God's only Son, was crucified not because of what He did, but what we did. He is the only Savior who rose from the dead. The evidence of His resurrection is based on the testimony of over 500 people. The law at that time only required two witness to corroborate one's testimony. Yet, there were those who did not believe. Believe that one man caused the death of mankind and by one man came the resurrection of the dead, and you will live in Christ (v.21, 22).

<b>Study</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Devotional</b>
1 Corinthians 15:1–11, 20–22	1 Corinthians 15:1–22	John 11:20–27

## Key Verse

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22).

## Heart of the Lesson

People need to be reminded of important events that shape their identities and actions. What kind of event can make such an influence on their lives? Jesus' resurrection provided tangible evidence of the possibility of resurrection for those whose identity is formed by Christ Jesus.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. What events have had a major impact on shaping your life? What do you do to help remind yourself of these events? How much of your identity is rooted in Jesus Christ? How does remembering His resurrection help you to move forward in that identity?
2. What is the typical response of people towards death? What emotions and experiences are usually attached to it? How is our experience with Jesus' death different?
3. To what "Scriptures" (v.3) was Paul referring? What was the Old Testament teaching on death and resurrection? How can passages like Isaiah 53:3-12 help us to understand the role that Jesus' death played in God's plan?
3. Why did Paul list all the witnesses to the resurrected Christ? What did they help to verify? Why was it important that Jesus actually rose from the dead? Even though we have not seen Him physically, how can we serve as witnesses to the resurrected Christ?
4. If the "first fruits" (v.20) were supposed to represent the nature and quality of the crop, how does Christ represent the first fruits of believers who have died? What meaning does this contribute to our hope of resurrection?
5. What does "in Christ all will be made alive" (v.22) mean to you? In what specific ways will you commit to living out this reality?

## Understanding and Living

Nathan Crandall

### ***Hold on to What You Believe***

As the spiritual father to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul's long letter to his brothers and sisters in Christ is full of both encouragement and correction. Having addressed behaviors that needed changing in the first part of his letter, Paul, in chapter 15, now turned his attention to a misunderstanding that had arisen concerning the gospel message itself. Some in the church were saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. This greatly concerned the apostle since the resurrection of Jesus was the cornerstone of their faith. Having the need to reinforce in their minds the truth of the resurrection, Paul also took the opportunity to share with them again the most important aspects of the gospel.

The Corinthians had already received and taken their stand on the gospel which Paul had preached (15:1). They were not hearing the message for the first time. However, Paul emphasized that they needed to "hold firmly to the word" (v.2) which they had come to believe. What exactly had they believed? The following four parts of the message are what he called "of first importance" (v.3). Namely, that Christ died for sins; He was buried; He rose on the third day; and He appeared to the

apostles and over five hundred disciples afterwards. Each part was important and, according to Paul's teaching, could not be left out or changed without disastrous consequences. If they did not have a firm grip on these central truths, their faith would become meaningless.

### ***To Rise or Not to Rise***

Unfortunately, word had gotten back to Paul that some of the people were holding on to the truth of the resurrection too loosely. Paul asked them this question, "How can some of you say that there is no resurrection from the dead?" (1 Corinthians 15:12). He did not ask this question because he was surprised that this false belief had turned up. On the contrary, Paul would have been very familiar with the theological and philosophical views of his time, and this teaching was not new.

One of the branches of Judaism, the Sadducees, taught that there is no such thing as an afterlife. Paul used this knowledge in his defense before the Sanhedrin (the ruling of council of Jewish elders) by firmly stating his belief in the resurrection (Acts 23:6). This caused a heated debate in the court because the other main sect of Judaism, the Pharisees, held to the belief in the resurrection of the dead into the afterlife.

### ***Hard to Raise What You Do Not Have***

In addition to the idea that there is no resurrection coming from Judaism, it also could have originated from the heretical ideas of Docetism or Gnosticism. Both of these belief systems denied the reality that Jesus came in the flesh as a human being and was resurrected in body. The Gnostic believed that the material world was imperfect and evil. As a result the goal was to reach “knowledge” which was a combination of philosophy, metaphysics, culture, and the secrets of the universe. Therefore, the concept of resurrection was understood to be a kind of spiritual transformation where the resurrection of the body was rejected.

It is this thinking to which Paul was most likely responding and to which he was vehemently opposed. Instead of attaining to some kind of “secret knowledge” which allowed a person to know God, Paul immediately countered this line of thought in the first verse of chapter 15. “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you.” This was no secret knowledge of the inner workings of the universe. It was a reminder of the simple facts and truths which Paul had already shared with them. There was no super-spiritual

level for them to strive for in order to leave the material world behind. Jesus died, was buried, rose on the third day, and showed Himself, in bodily form, to His disciples. Simple faith in the gospel was what was needed.

### ***Why is it Important?***

Why did Paul teach that the resurrection was so crucial to the faith of these believers? Paul stated his argument this way, “If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is vain, your faith is also vain” (15:13-14). Christ’s resurrection was proof that the power of sin had been defeated. Since “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), the only way for eternal life to be possible (i.e. the resurrection) was for the consequences of sin to be reversed. Paul’s logical conclusion for the Corinthians if Christ had not been raised from the dead was, “Your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (15:14, ESV).

Perhaps the group of believers in Corinth who were saying that there is no resurrection did not realize what that meant for their faith. Paul’s hope was firmly fixed on the resurrection of those who had placed their faith in Christ. At the Lord’s return, Paul wrote, “the

dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). For the dead in Christ to rise meant first that Christ had risen and would come back to preside over their resurrection. Whether or not they clearly understood it, these believers were calling Paul and the apostles “liars” for telling others that Christ rose from the dead. They were in serious danger not only of placing their faith in something other than Christ, they were also in danger of leading others astray.

Jesus was not an idea or spiritual being only. He was a man who lived and who died. On the third day, He came back to life and ascended into heaven. A man, Adam, was responsible for the curse of sin being transferred to the human race. The man, Jesus Christ, was also responsible for the lifting the curse of sin and giving life to all who trust him to save them from the consequences of their sins. Jesus was the first one to experience the resurrection to eternal life. We do not need greater understanding or knowledge. We need resurrection! We need our sins to be forgiven through the power of the cross. As the Lord said, “Whoever believes in [Me] shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This is why we must believe in the resurrection.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Explore the meaning of Christ’s resurrection.
2. Value and appreciate our identity in Jesus Christ.
3. Witness personally and corporately to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### *Teaching Activity*

Discuss the logical argument of verse 17. What difference does it make for our lives as Christians, our beliefs, and our witness that Christ rose from the dead? Discuss evidences for the validity of Christ’s resurrection and make plans to incorporate those evidences and the importance of Christ’s resurrection into their personal testimony. Have participants practice giving their testimonies to each other.

### **Looking Forward**

Having begun our study of community by linking our identity to the resurrection of Christ, we next turn to our love for one another as a crucial measure of community.

# 7. Love One Another

1 John 3:11–24

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jasmine Lynch

### Sunday

John 3:16–21

To perish is to go out of existence (cease to exist). As humans, when someone has wronged us, we tend to want them out of our sight—but not so with God. He wants us always *in* His sight. Rather than condemning us, abandoning us, or letting us perish, He sent His only Son to bring us back to Him. That is what love looks like. God’s Son lights the way for us. We must reject evil to follow the light. The Light exposes and repels evil deeds. Truth embraces the Light. Are you drawing close to Jesus, the Light, or moving away from Him? How do you go about getting closer to Jesus?

### Monday

1 John 3:1–5

How awesome to know that I am the child of the One who knows everything, who owns everything, who exists everywhere, who is all powerful! The world is jealous of my relationship with Him. It disowns Him and His children. We too must disown the world and all its evil. To be like Him is the hope of His children. How can you purify yourself, just as He is pure (v.3)? The hope of being like Him should motivate us to do what it takes to purify ourselves. Our Father made the ultimate sacrifice to rid us of sin. What will you sacrifice?

### Tuesday

John 13:1–15

Although Jesus knew that He would be betrayed, that those whom He loved would deny Him, “He loved them to the end” (v.1b). He had one last lesson to be taught—a lesson of humility. Humility has to be demonstrated. Do not *tell* me you are humble. *Show* me. That is what Jesus did. We too must follow His example. Some churches practice foot washing as part of the Communion Service. Do you think washing someone’s feet in a society where everyone wears socks and shoes and travels in air-conditioned vehicles is a demonstration of humility? How can you show humility today?

### Wednesday

Luke 7:44–48

One cannot help but question Simon’s motive in inviting Jesus to dinner, seeing that he did not provide Jesus with any of the usual courtesies, not even the minimal gesture of Jewish hospitality—water to wash His feet. A public kiss in New Testament was also a



sign of devotion. Greeting Jesus with a kiss might be mistaken for devotion. The woman's actions: kissing Jesus' feet, washing them with her tears, drying them with her hair, and anointing them with the only bottle of oil she had, demonstrated great love. Jesus' forgiveness of her sins, was the ultimate demonstration of love.

### **Thursday**

### **1 John 3:6–10**

Jesus came as a man to demonstrate that *it is possible* to live a righteous life if we are born of God. It is possible to remove sin from our lives if we abide in Him (v.6). We often hear that we are human and not perfect. Jesus was human. He could have sinned, but He did not because He stayed in close contact with the Father through prayer and meditation and resolve. When we are born again we do not have to sin. In fact, John said we “cannot sin” (v.9, NKJV). We may commit a sin, but as believers, this cannot be our lifestyle. Sin is of the devil. He lies to the believer: “it is impossible not to sin.”

### **Friday**

### **John 13:31–35**

Jesus exposed what Judas was about to do, but that did not persuade Judas to change his mind from betraying Jesus. Jesus' work with the disciples was now finished. His disciples must have been very confused. They were expecting Jesus to overthrow the Roman government when He issued the startling statement that where He was going they could not go. Next, He left them with a “new” application of love. The Ten Commandments are based on love for God and love for your fellowman. Jesus set the standard for love—not that of the law. Discipleship is demonstrated by our love for our brethren.

### **Sabbath**

### **1 John 3:11–24**

John explained the “New Commandment” that Jesus gave us. Love was there at Creation. God demonstrated it when Adam and Eve sinned. Cain failed to demonstrate it to his brother. He committed murder because he had hatred in his heart for his brother's righteous living. Hatred in the heart precedes the outward act of murder. Spoken love is not enough. It must be demonstrated daily in practical ways. The condition to receiving from God depends on keeping His commandments, believing in Jesus, and loving one another (v. 23). Was John referring to the Ten Commandments or the “New Commandment?”

**Study**

1 John  
3:11–24

**Background**

1 John  
3:11–24

**Devotional**

John  
13:31–35

**Key Verse**

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another (1 John 3:11).

**Heart of the Lesson**

People wonder whether life is a random sequence of events or has an ordered purpose. How do believers measure meaning in life? John's letter indicates that the measure of people's lives is calculated by their faith in Christ and their love for one another.

**Questions for Studying the Text**

1. In what ways do you see people expressing love in the world around you? Why do you think people make such a big deal about love? Why do you think John makes such a big deal out of love in today's passage?
2. Why did John use Cain as an example of how not to love? Do you think it is true that "everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (v.15)? Why or why not? How does this match with Jesus' teaching (Matthew 5:22)?
3. Based on this passage (especially v.14-15), what did John see as the middle ground between love and hatred? Can you list people who, although you do not feel you have hated them, perhaps you have not loved them the way you should? What actions do you need to take in your relationships based on this charge?
4. What did John say about the person who has the ability to help his brother and does not do it (v.17)? What other Scriptures can you identify that support this teaching? How does this make you feel? What specific ways can you love with deeds and truth instead of words only?
5. How do we know love? How did Jesus demonstrate the life we are called to live out toward our brothers and sisters in Christ? How can we "lay down our lives for the brethren" (v16)?

## Understanding and Living

Steven Graffius

### *The Message*

In 1967, John Lennon penned the song, “All You Need Is Love.” In that song, he purported that virtually anything is possible—all you need is love. On this matter, I think he may be right... with a caveat. I think that most good and important things are possible with love if we have a proper, Biblical understanding of what love is.

Three years later, C.S. Lewis wrote, “Love is not affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person’s ultimate good as far as it can be obtained” ([www.goodreads.com/quotes](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes)). In other words, the expectation for love is that we, the lovers, are to do all that is in our power to achieve what we believe is the lovee’s best possible life situation. For clarification, I want to point out that John’s use of the words, “we” and “one another” (v.11) seems to indicate that the love of which he was talking in this passage is love within the body of Christ.

### *We Know Because We Love (v.12-15)*

After reiterating the command to love each other, John went on to describe that there are a couple things that can be known because of the love believers have for each other. First, we know that love is better than any alternative. The command

that John repeated is from God. And we know that anything God gives is good—in fact it is the best. So we know that if what God commands is good and we know that God commands us to love each other, then we know that to love each other is good.

Second, by love we can know who believes and follows Jesus. And, third, we can know that God’s people are different than the rest of the world. This difference is grounded in love. Lastly, John pointed to the fact that we love each other and that the love of God is in us to serve as the evidence upon which is grounded our knowledge that we have eternal life.

John also defined what love looks like by means of comparing it to an alternative. Many times a good way to define something is by articulating what it is *not*. In our passage, John contrasted love with hate. Love is not hate. In the arena of life, the enemy tries to convince us we can have it both ways, that what we give with the one hand we can take back with the other. In verses 12 and 15, John reminded us that this is not so. According to John, one cannot love if she or he has hatred in the heart for another, especially another member of the body of Christ. To be a part of the body is to love, and love is not hate.

Many people consider hate to be the opposite of love. I have heard it said that the opposite of love is not hate, but apathy. How can one claim to be a Christian and yet show little concern for the lost and hurting of the world? To place this within the context of our passage, to have the means and ability to advance someone closer to their ultimate good, and to withhold them from those who do not have them simply because of a lack of passionate concern begins very quickly to look like hate.

One of the struggles I find often within the body of Christ is this: love is not necessarily kindness. If I gave popsicles to my kids and let them watch TV every time they asked, would it be kind of me? Yes, absolutely. Would it be loving? No. I steadily wish for their ultimate good and those things, while nice treats from time to time, do not always contribute to that end. In our churches, many times we are experts at kindness and at times, unfortunately, mistake that kindness for love. Love is not necessarily kindness.

Often we subconsciously think of love as a spectrum between perfect love and devilish hatred. But what John seems to be teaching about love is that there is love and then there is anything else. There is the steady wishing for the ultimate good

of our brothers and sisters, and there is anything that falls short.

***We Love Because We Know  
(v.16-18)***

Here, John, repeated the lesson found in James 2:14-26, that love is not heard about, it is experienced. You do not love with your words, you love with your actions. You cannot claim to steadily wish for your own brother's or sister's ultimate good if you have the means to help them obtain it and withhold those means. Love without action really is not love at all.

In verse 16, John explained that we know how to love because Jesus Christ showed us what love looks like. Jesus, by example, drew the standard for the extent to which we can help others obtain their ultimate good. The standard is the forfeit of our very lives. So long as we have breath in our lungs, we have something to offer those who are in need in order to help them take another step toward their ultimate good. This standard fills our hearts with the courage and our heads with the knowledge of how to love like Christ.

***We Belong Because We Love  
& Know (v.19-22)***

This knowledge led John to address a potential threat to our faith—the problem of guilt. Here I would like to draw a distinction, the distinction between guilt and conviction. The

difference is simple: conviction comes from the Holy Spirit and is meant to help; while guilt comes from the enemy and is meant to hurt. It is of the latter that John spoke. Hearts are where emotions reside and are especially susceptible to lies and attack. John anticipated this and encouraged us to remember that we have a defense against these attacks—namely the knowledge of the love we have for each other and the source of that love. When it comes down to the knowledge of the head versus the tempted and possibly corrupt feelings of the heart, we can have faith because we know that the head trumps the heart.

As though the knowledge of our belonging because of the evidence of the love we have for each other may not be enough, John also reminded us of what Paul told us in Ephesians 1:13, that if the heart is under attack, and even our knowledge falters within our souls, we still have the seal of the Holy Spirit guaranteeing our sure place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The bottom line is this: you have heard it before, but it bears repeating, we believers are to steadily wish, and act upon that wish, for the ultimate good of each other with everything we have, even to the extent of the very blood in our hearts and breath in our lungs.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Understand John's message about loving one another.
2. Affirm the fundamental discipleship principle of love for God and others.
3. Express unconditional love to others.

### *Teaching Activity*

Compare and contrast John 3:16 with 1 John 3:16. What do we learn about love from these verses that comes to bear on the subject of community in the Body of Christ? Brainstorm ways to put unconditional love into action in their community. Choose one of these ideas and make specific plans to carry this idea out as a group. Report the results of your project to the rest of the church.

### **Looking Forward**

Love for one another is a key measure of community in the Body of Christ. Next we will observe how abiding in God's love promotes unity in the Body.

# 8. Believe God's Love

1 John 4:13—5:5

## Daily Bible Meditations

Jasmine Lynch

### Sunday

**1 Peter 1:8–12**

Do you consider yourself blessed to have the testimony of eye witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ? The Prophets of old, endowed by the Holy Spirit, had hope for the coming Messiah. They died before their prophecy was fulfilled. Peter witnessed the resurrection. To him the experience was a glorious one and even those who did not witness it, but face persecution, should rejoice because in His resurrection rests our faith and the salvation of our soul. We look forward to the glory of His return in the same way the Prophets of old looked forward to His coming.

### Monday

**1 Peter 3:8–12**

Peter addressed Christians on the subject of godly living at home and at church. In verses 1-7, he discussed husband and wife relationship and the believer winning over the non-believer. Pagan rituals allowed for more than one wife, but Peter, like Paul (Ephesians 5:22), was telling the Christian wife to be submissive to her *own* husband. Many preachers overlook the word “own” and focus on the word submissive. Likewise, they overlook that the husband is to honor his wife. More importantly (v. 8), Christians are to be of one mind to inherit a blessing. In marriage, two become one. In oneness there is no room for evil.

### Tuesday

**Romans 12:9–18**

The book of Romans gives practical aspects of Christian living expounded in Gospel truths. In these few verses Paul tells us how to demonstrate love in the good times and in the bad times. We must be steadfast in prayer and in supplying the needs of others; not only to our brethren but also to our persecutors. We must be humble, listen to the opinions of others, seek good and not evil, and let the Lord be our avenger. Being steadfast in the Spirit will enable us to live this life. Let us be unwavering in love and doing good deeds.

### Wednesday

**Romans 8:31–39**

“Wow!”—is the only expression I can make when I read these verses. What confidence we can place in our Heavenly Father, as is summed up here in verses 32 and 37. We have nothing

to fear. “We are more than conquerors.” So why do Christians walk around with sad faces, complaining, and fearing what lies ahead? Paul and the other disciples faced persecution and death, yet their faith and confidence never wavered. What do we need to persuade us of the love of God? Is our conviction lacking? Is life too easy for us?

### **Thursday**

### **1 John 4:1–6**

There is a lot of talk in the Christian community about the coming antichrist. Many are expecting a world leader to be the antichrist. Others have said that a religious movement is the antichrist. Over two thousand years ago, John declared that the spirit of the antichrist was already in the world. Satan is the antichrist, and we can overcome him because Christ overcame him. Christ now lives in us and He is greater than the antichrist. We must test the spirits using the right test. If they do not confess that “Christ has come in the flesh,” they are not of God.

### **Friday**

### **1 John 4:7–12**

How do we know if we are loved, and how do we know if we truly love others? Many confuse infatuation with love and build their relationship on it—until it crumbles. Relationships built on infatuation typically last only for a short time because they have a weak foundation. You can love without knowing God, but you cannot know God and not love because God is love. He sets the standard for love and we ought to demonstrate love according to His standard by loving even those who do not love us. Our demonstration of love allows others to see how much God loves us.

### **Sabbath**

### **1 John 4:13—5:5**

Only in preparing this devotion did I realize the number of tests John gave to determine truth from falsehood. In 1 John 4:7, John gave us a test to prove if someone loves God. In verses 12-15, he gave a test to prove if God abides in us. We must testify “that the Father sent the Son as Savior in the world,” that Jesus is the Son of God, believe that God loves us, and abides in us and in Jesus. We must not be fearful, and we must keep His commandments and love others to pass the test. What is your score? Do you pass the test?

**Study**

1 John  
4:13—5:5

**Background**

1 John  
4—5

**Devotional**

Romans  
8:31—39

**Key Verse**

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the *child* born of Him (1 John 5:1).

**Heart of the Lesson**

Community is built on unity and mutuality. What holds the members of a community together? The writer of First John says believers are made complete when as a community they abide in God's love and the Spirit of God's love abides in them.

**Questions for Studying the Text**

1. What have been your best experiences with community? What key characteristics of the community made those experiences possible? What things are required for members of a community to live in unity with one another?
2. How do we come to know and believe the love that God has for us (v.16)? How has love been "perfected with us" (v.17)? What benefits and responsibilities come from these two truths?
3. How does perfect love cast out fear (v.18)? When have you experienced this to be true in your life? How does it make you feel to know we do not have to fear eternal punishment because God loves you?
4. Do you agree that a person who does not love others cannot love God (v.20)? Why or why not? How would you use this knowledge to confront a fellow Christian who is acting with hatred toward another?
5. What relationship did John describe between love and obeying the commandments? How is this different from legalism? How can we as the church community support and encourage each other in this?



## Understanding and Living

Steven Graffius

### *The Greatest Commandments*

In Mark 12:28-31, our Lord was questioned concerning the greatest commandment of all time. In short, He answered that the greatest commandment of all time is for vertical love—the commandment to love God. This love manifests itself in the form of obedience. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). I love my wife by continually working to find out what she likes and does not like and I act accordingly. We love our God in the same way.

As an added bonus, Jesus mentioned that the second greatest commandment is for love in a horizontal direction—our love for others. This love manifests itself in the form of concern. In this passage, John described the context of community by offering and explaining the exact same two commandments: love God and love each other.

### *Community With God*

We are first and foremost in community with God. John said that we abide in God and God in us (v.16). It does not get much more intimate than that. One of the things I love about John is his way of maintaining the balance between the heart and the head. Throughout his writings we see a fairly consistent alternating between “we love” and

“we know.” In verses 13-18, he explained that we know that we are in community with God. He offered evidence for that knowledge—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, His eyewitness testimony of the unity between the Son and the Father, and the love of the Father that is evident in His own.

When Christ gave us the gift of the constant companionship of the Holy Spirit, He was giving us constant community with God. We teach our children, and in doing so we remind ourselves, that we are never alone. Our Counselor, Comforter, and Keeper is always within us to carry us through our darkest hours of need and helplessness.

John was right there. He saw Jesus. He walked with Him and talked with Him. He was the disciple Jesus loved! So he, more than most, was in a position to testify to the community the Son has with the Father. Through belief in the Son and being joined through baptism, we are one with Christ. And when we are one with the Son, we are one with the Father.

Arguably, one of the most important words in the entirety of Scripture is the Hebrew word *chesed*. This word is nearly impossible to fully comprehend even in the Hebrew language, let alone any translation. I think the most accurate way to convey the

idea of chesed can be found in the Jesus Storybook Bible where they describe God's "Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love" (from the description). We have confidence in our community with God because of His love so real and so tangible in our lives.

John told us that community with God makes a major difference in two ways. First, we have no reason to fear His wrath (v.17-18). Second, this love of God in us ushers us into community with the body of Christ (v.19). And if that is not enough, we are also commanded to be in community with the body of Christ (v.21).

### ***Community With the Body***

How do we know that we are to be in community with the body of Christ? Because we are commanded to be. The second greatest commandment is a call to community. The way that God's love works is that if we love Him, we love what He loves. And He loves His kids! So we are in community with the rest of the body of Christ. At this point we might again ask, "So what?" My family's motto is, "I'm number 3." In all we do, we are to think of God first, of other people second, and consider our own desires third. This is how God designed community: love God with all you have got; and love others the same way you love

yourself, with the steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good.

There are a few practical things that can and should be done simply because we are in community, the least of which is to pray. I do not say that prayer is the least in the respect that prayer is a trifling matter. Quite to the contrary! I say prayer is the least because of its price tag. The only two things prayer costs is time and thoughtfulness. When you consider the power of prayer compared to the cost, why do we not do it more!

Beyond that, our being in community with others is a call and expectation to give. The steady wish for others' ultimate good comes with an expectation of action. We can always give. We have time, talent, resources, and words of encouragement and affirmation to offer and build up those with whom we are in community.

### ***The Costs & Gains***

Let us weigh the costs and gains of living in community. One cost of community is *humility*. Simple to understand, hard to do. Community, as previously noted, is considering the needs of others above your own. It is making yourself number 3. There is simply no room for ego and self-centeredness in the context of community with others and especially with God. Another cost is *depth* that comes with being

vulnerable. When you go to the doctor to discuss a private matter, the doctor's ability to help is limited only by the extent in which you are willing to divulge sometimes very personal information. The same is true with the body of believers. There are many great benefits to living in community. But those benefits can only help and heal the parts of the heart that you allow them into. Is it safe? No. We are in community with other fallen humans. But bonding and healing at the deepest levels of intimacy are always worth it!

What about the gain? Here you find real joy. What a wonderful feeling it is to experience the excitement of simply being in the presence of people who love you and to know that they are experiencing the same joy because of your love for them! Community also provides accountability that leads to godliness. And community provides protection. When faced with trials, it is so great to know that there is an entire body supporting us.

We are one with God—vertical community. We are united with our brothers and sisters—horizontal community. There is certainly cost and risk. But considering the cost and risk of trying to do life without these communities is enough in itself to send us running into the ever-loving arms of Jesus.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Comprehend what is required to live with unity in community.
2. Talk about experiences of love within the community that exemplify faith and love in God.
3. Celebrate the community's contribution to their formation as disciples of Jesus.

### *Teaching Activity*

Using a thesaurus, research synonyms of love; create a list of these and distribute copies. Have small groups suggest which synonyms are closest to John's meaning. Compare and contrast secular and Christian definitions of love. Discuss experiences your church has had or could have that would exemplify abiding in God's love together.

### **Looking Forward**

As much as abiding in God's love provides crucial unity for our community, deceptive teaching within the Body threatens to destroy community.

# 9. Watch Out for Deceivers!

2 John

**Daily Bible Meditations** Marc-Antonio Downes

**Sunday**

**Jeremiah 9:1–7**

We live in a world where existence of God has become a concept. “Men” have become engrossed in themselves and have dissected the word to suit their own pleasures. Jeremiah 8 details the sin and punishment that God’s people endured due to blatant violation of His ways. As Christians we need to realize how often we delay our own blessings due to disobedience. The author asked, “Is there no balm in Gilead?...Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people” (8:22, NIV). We have a duty to share the Good News in a self-gratifying world.

**Monday**

**Acts 15:22–35**

Paul’s message was simple—salvation is by faith alone. He insisted that people were saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone, not by faith combined with pious activities. God validated the Gentiles’ faith by giving them the Holy Spirit. It is important that we surround ourselves with like-minded believers who have grounded themselves in the Word of God. Realizing the moral conflict, the elders in Jerusalem sent reinforcements to the Gentile congregations to reinforce the message that Jesus was the culmination of the Law of Moses. Believing and having faith in Him was all that was required. We should shut out the “noise” and engender the immigration of lost souls to Christ.

**Tuesday**

**Matthew 24:3–14**

The Bible continues to be the world’s best seller and is translated in over one hundred languages, distributed to all the continents. The Bible has accurately foretold our current world situation and events yet to come. However, the only date that is not identified is the coming of Christ. Jesus, in verse 4, gave a stern warning: “Watch out that no one deceives you” (NIV). It is a timely reminder of the false teachers and prophets today proclaiming the date of Christ’s return (e.g. David Koresh in Waco, Texas). We need to study our Bibles and be able to discern the false teachers when they present themselves.

**Wednesday**

**Romans 16:16–20**

Christianity is a relationship with Jesus, our Savior. Christ’s challenge is all encompassing that we believers must feeding the

spiritually lost. We are the salt of this world bringing forth the Good News of eternal life to those who have never heard of it. Paul, in his greeting, encouraged us to entreat our brothers with respect and not with criticism. He urged the congregations to watch out (v. 17)—to be cognizant about those who create divisions in the church by their speech and flattery to deceive the minds of the naïve. Paul charged us, and I underscore, to be strong and to stay focused.

### **Thursday**

### **1 John 5:6–15**

Being born into monarchy gives access to hierarchal privileges. For example, one day you will ascend to the leadership of that royal family. This behavior is prevalent in today's social media landscape too. If you have a considerable Twitter following, you are considered "A-list" in that community. In this portion of study, we are privileged to know that we have a divine appointment to look forward to—eternal life. We have no need to walk this earth feeling defeated. When we engage in devotion and in the Word of God, we should be reminded that we serve a risen Savior. We belong to a royal priesthood.

### **Friday**

### **1 John 5:16–21**

We exist in a world that is controlled by the evil one—Satan. We are bombarded by the news and social media of incidents of violence, unstable communities, and the persecutions of global citizens on varying continents of our world. In the midst of this God still protects his own. Today's Scripture encourages us to pray for our brothers who commit sin. But as Christians, we should be always praying. We should pray for health, protection, and clarity of mind that we do not become ensnared by the wiles of the devil. Pray without ceasing and for each other.

### **Sabbath**

### **2 John 1–13**

How can we be on our guard at all times? We attend universities to study in our various career disciplines for the acquisition of a reasonable compensation and knowledge to be considered as experts in our field. As Christians we should aspire to do the same. Our spiritual goal is eternal life, our text, the Bible which is inspired by God. Our salvation is faith based and chronicled in the Bible—a fact. Deceivers will misconstrue this fact and lead vulnerable believers astray. The Word says you are to reject them, do not invite them in your home. We must study to show ourselves approved.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Devotional</b>
2 John	1 John/2 John 5:6-12, 18-20/1-13	Galatians 6:6-10

## Key Verse

Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward (2 John 1:8).

## Heart of the Lesson

People who do not participate in their community's life-sustaining beliefs are a threat to the community. How does the community deal with this threat? First John suggests that those who remain faithful in their belief in Christ will have eternal life; Second John warns them to beware of deceivers lest they corrupt the community of believers.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. Discuss the significance of the prominence of the word "truth" at the beginning of John's letter? Why is truth so important to the Christian church? How does Jesus' teaching on truth (John 14:6) factor into that?
2. In verse 2, John said the truth "abides in *us* and will be with *us* forever." Why is it important that our beliefs are a shared conviction rather than individual? What do we do in church when we discover a belief on which members differ? What Biblical precedence do we have for this?
3. How does this passage connect belief to behavior? What does this teach us about the importance of right teaching? How does your church evaluate its teachers and any curriculum that is used in teaching?
4. What warnings did John give about false teachers (v.7-11)? What is the danger of false teachers? Why is it important to be careful about what kind of teachers we welcome or follow (v.10-11)? How can doctrinal confusion threaten congregational integrity?
5. What specific truth was being denied in the church to which John wrote (v.7)? Why is believing and teaching this truth so important? What false teachings are prevalent among churches today? What dangers do these teachings pose?

## Understanding and Living

Steven Graffius

When I was a senior in college, I was part of a class in which we were taught that believers, subconsciously or consciously, divide the various elements of their faith and belief into three categories: opinion, doctrine, and dogma. Opinion is exactly as it seems. Two may disagree in matters of opinion and that is okay. Doctrine is concerned with essential matters of faith and practice. To break doctrine and to promote the same is to commit heresy. Dogma is the highest and most concrete level of belief. Elements of belief that we would place in the dogmatic category are elements essential to salvation. To believe something contrary to a dogmatic element would be to commit apostasy.

It is concerning this third category of belief, the category of dogma, that John wrote in his second letter. He had previously drawn the distinction between doctrine and dogma in saying that there are sins that lead to death and there are sins that do not (1 John 5:16-17). In this letter, he wrote concerning a particular element of belief, countering the attacks of the gnostics, that Jesus had actually come in the flesh, a belief most certainly belonging in the category of dogma.

In this second letter of John, he wrote to make one point: in

the community of the body of Christ, there is absolutely neither room nor tolerance for any teaching contrary to dogmatic elements of belief. Any such teaching is to be considered poison and is to be dealt with just as seriously. And in the same manner in which we deal with a literal poisoning, John teaches that we also deal with poison within the body of Christ. There are ways the body can protect itself from poison. There are also prescribed ways to deal with poisonous people, those who would threaten explicitly or implicitly to poison the body with apostate ideas.

### *How The Body Protects Itself*

The human body has ways to protect itself from toxins that would threaten and attack it. It also has ways to deal with a poison that slips past the defenses and is introduced into the system. In the same way, there are ways for the body of Christ to protect itself from the introduction and the effect of toxic beliefs.

First, the body of Christ can get back to the fundamentals. On one occasion, under the leadership of Vince Lombardi, the Green Bay Packers lost a game they had no business losing. At practice the following day, he held a football high for the entire team to see and said,

“Gentlemen, this is a football.” You see, it is easy to get so caught up in doing church, in living the Christian life, in discovering and experiencing the next trend in Christianity, that a lot of times we forget the basics. Are you able to articulate what elements of belief are essential and dogmatic? Can you clearly communicate the gospel message to someone who has not heard it before? What is essential? Get back to the basics.

Second, the body can protect itself from the poisons through the private training and devotion of each individual member. The strength, wisdom, and boldness to do what it takes to protect the body is elevated and amplified when each individual member diligently and daily spends time with the LORD, spends time in His Word, and spends time in meditation, worship, and communion with Him.

When each individual member continually does due diligence in training, the third way the body protects itself is by being a body. Hebrews 10:25 is not just a call not to skip church. It is a command to avoid denying oneself all the rights, privileges, opportunities, and protection that come with being part of a community. It is not just church once a week. It is also Wednesday night Bible study; men’s breakfast; choir practice; youth group; children’s church; camp. It is

calling your accountability partner at 10:00 at night asking for prayer and help.

Finally, in addition to the gathering of the body, it is often helpful to review the commonly held beliefs and practices of the body; the review of church documents. Many churches regularly recite creeds and review statements of belief and church covenants. This is a great way to inform the new and remind the seasoned what a particular local body is all about. And it is a great way to establish the standard against which other teachings can be measured.

### *How the Body Deals With the Poisonous*

Within the first four six verses, he used the word *truth* five times and *love* four times. These are two key elements in dealing with problematic ideas promoted within the body. Love without truth quickly turns simply to kindness. When dealing with poisonous teaching within the body, kindness can prove to be spiritually deadly. Conversely, truth without love turns judgmental and fails to represent Christ to those who clearly need His love and grace most.

It is important to remember that there is a difference between the heretic and the apostate and they are to be dealt with differently. When there is heretical teaching being promoted in the



body, the principles outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 can and should be invoked. The primary and chief goal of this order of operations given by our Lord is the restoration of our struggling sister or brother. And the secondary goal is the protection of the body.

The apostate teacher, however is a different matter. When it comes to the poison of apostate teachings within the body, there can be absolutely no tolerance. They are to be offered what my dad would call the left foot of fellowship. You do not talk to them. You do not look at them. When they call, you do not answer. Why such violent aggression against our fellow man? For the same reason the Ebola virus is such a big deal right now: it is prevalent, easily transmitted, not easily treated, AND IT KILLS! When John said in his first letter that “there is a sin that leads to death,” (1 John 5:16) that is a big deal. We have to take that warning seriously.

Poisonous people are to be shown the door in no uncertain terms. The cost of not doing so is simply too great. It is a matter of spiritual life and death. Is it going to be easy? No, it is quite uncomfortable. Fortunately you have a full body of believers behind you to support and minister to you. That is what they are there for.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Research John’s caution to beware of those who do not abide in Christ’s teachings.
2. Reflect on the emotional response to teachings that are contrary to what they have been previously taught.
3. Testify that walking in Jesus’ commandment to love protects the faith community from deceivers and corruption.

### *Teaching Activity*

Compile a list of potential negative effects of having false teaching in the church. Prepare ahead of time a list of questionable teachings. Read from your list, one teaching at a time, and have the class vote on whether they would consider this teaching to be important enough to take the action of removing the teacher from fellowship. Discuss the reasons for their feelings on these subjects.

### **Looking Forward**

Having studied the risk that false teachers pose to the community of the Body of Christ, we next are challenged with the positive impact that hospitality can have on that community.

# 10. Coworkers with the Truth

3 John

**Daily Bible Meditations** Marc-Antonio Downes

**Sunday**

**Daniel 4:34–37**

Of all the “gods” of this world, our God stands true. His name has withstood the false prophets of our time and His Word continues to be unchallenged. If a census was conducted on what God has done for us, every single Christian can give individual accounts of miracles. We can confess that He is a provider in times of no tangible resources. Daniel’s interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was fulfilled. In the study text, the king had to give praise and honor to God: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything [H]e does is right” (v.37, NIV). Has the One true God been truth in your life?

**Monday**

**1 Kings 2:1–4**

The dictionary defines *faithfulness* as being reliable, trusted, and steady in allegiance or affection to a deity. The fatherly advice from David to Solomon here contains five elements. The verbs in verses 2 and 3 tell the story: be—character; show—reputation; observe—respectfully notice; walk—daily conduct; keep—a will to obey (from NIV, 1984 edition). Walking before God in faithfulness is not just being obedient but it is a guarantee of the Lord’s blessing on your future generations. The Lord told Moses that his children would be as numerous as the sand. Are you willing to walk before God in faithfulness?

**Tuesday**

**Ephesians 4:17–25**

As Christians we belong to an elite spiritual task force—The Army of God. We are called to come to Christ just as we are—born into sin and sharpened by iniquity. As we go through basic training, we begin to learn about our leader; the process of shedding our old man and put *HIM* on. We begin to understand the truths of our Savior and recognize that our old man’s “righteousness” was filthy rags. We slowly begin to change our mindset and adopt God’s ways and our speech becomes more righteous. Are you ready to serve in the Lord’s Army?

**Wednesday**

**Hebrews 10:23–27**

The passage of study hints at preserving the truth. This truth is not isolated to only one, but is available to all believers who have

become workers of the truth. There are three illuminations here about the knowledge of the truth: 1) the truth brings hope—“for [H]e who promised is faithful” (v.23, NIV); 2) the truth fosters God’s community of believers—“not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing” (v.25, NIV); and 3) the truth makes us accountable (v.26). We must be steadfast as believers, continuing in faith until the *day* of His appearance comes.

### **Thursday**

### **2 Timothy 2:14–19**

“The devil finds work for idle hands.” This is a statement I heard from my parents during my early childhood years. Paul here encouraged Timothy to keep busy doing the Lord’s work. The text relates our status as workmen approved by God to our handling of His truth. Verse 16 compares godless chatter to gangrene. Gangrene is caused by a fracture not properly healed being infected by bacteria in the blood vessel preventing circulation to that part of the body. The end result is usually amputation, to avoid infection spreading to the rest of the body. If we are not careful with the truth, we can compromise the entire Body.

### **Friday**

### **1 Timothy 2:1–7**

As Christians, we have been entrusted with God’s truth and the task of spreading the good news of salvation across every corner of the world. Christians are considered “salt” (a mineral that enhances flavor in food) for this earth. Paul encourages us to make requests and intercede on behalf of everybody. Our God wants all men to be saved and have knowledge of His truth. Paul urges us to pray for nations’ leaders and those who have been placed in authority. The Bible reminds us that our prayers avail much and that as Christian and teachers of the faith, our place must be on our knees for our nation.

### **Sabbath**

### **3 John**

In this letter, John called his readers to be hospitable people. Being hospitable means demonstrating love for strangers. Service is at the core of our relationship with Christ and should be practiced daily towards all kinds of people. Many churches have had humble beginnings. Families would open their hearts and their homes to strangers and share a meal while sharing the gospel with them. This type of interaction was intimate and encourages us as brethren to serve. These actions bear witness to the Great Commission (Matthew 28: 19-20) and the Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-31) in action. How hospitable are you as a coworker of the truth?

**Study**

3 John

**Background**

3 John

**Devotional**

2 Timothy

2:14–19

**Key Verse**

Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth (3 John 1:8).

**Heart of the Lesson**

Most people really appreciate the kindness and generosity they have experienced because of good hospitality. What is it about receiving hospitality that makes it so important? Third John says that hospitality is one way that Christians express their faith in Christ to others, making the faithful coworkers with the truth.

**Questions for Studying the Text**

1. How would you define the word “hospitality”? Though it is not used here, the Greek word literally means, “love of a stranger.” How does this definition help to describe the hospitality John encouraged here?
2. Why was Paul’s first focus in the letter prayers for Gaius’ health—both physical and spiritual (v.2)? How was this related to truth (mentioned again four times in the first four verses)? How was this related to Gaius’ ministry of hospitality? What can we learn from this about praying for others?
3. What words in verses 6-8 promote a missionary attitude? Why was missions so crucial to the survival of the church? How does this tie in with the general “sending” theme that represents God’s mission throughout Scripture?
4. Why did those who “went out” (v.7) accept nothing from the Gentiles? Why was hospitality necessary to support missions in the New Testament? In what ways can hospitality help support missions today?
5. In what ways have you seen ministry accomplished through the practice of hospitality? In what ways does hospitality helps us express our faith to others? In what ways can hospitality make us co-workers with the truth?

## Understanding and Living

Steven Graffius

### *Service with a Smile*

On our honeymoon, my wife and I visited two bed and breakfasts. We discovered that we absolutely love them. We love the warm feel of a home; the amenities frequently provided; the exemplary service one often finds there. We especially love getting to know the host families and hearing their stories. Staying in a bed and breakfast has never failed to be the most pleasant of lodging experiences. I think that the institute of the bed and breakfast serves as a prime example of John's idea of hospitality in his third letter. He encouraged each individual member of the body of Christ to welcome the other members of the body. He encouraged each person to give of themselves with joy in order to make the lives of those around them, particularly those in need, a little easier and a little better.

In his book, *How Full Is Your Bucket?*, Tom Rath explained that every person goes through life with a bucket of joy and satisfaction over their heads and a dipper in their hand. With every human interaction you either add to someone else's bucket or take away. From the heart-to-heart conversation with a close friend to the person at the bank you happened to hold the door for, every interchange is either adding or subtracting from that

person's quality of life. John encouraged the church to use their dippers for good to the greatest extent possible at all times.

### *Be Famous for Hospitality*

John actually named some characters. The first was Gaius, who was famous. Even John, who was not part of that community, had heard of him. By encouraging the body to be like Gaius, John was encouraging us to be famous for hospitality. When someone asks others in your community to think of someone who is particularly hospitable, that person could be thinking of you!

There are a few ways you can become famous for hospitality, but there is one way that will absolutely not work: self-promotion. If you feel as though you need to work to make sure others know how hospitable you are, to make announcements and bring it up in conversation every time you let someone into your house, you probably need to rethink some things. You probably need to spend some time with the Lord addressing either your perspective of yourself or the quality of your hospitality or both.

What does work? The answer is simple. Serve in a way that people talk about. There are three particular qualities that are common among people famous for hospitality: good quality, consistency, and a joyful heart.

When serving, do not go half way. Give it all you have got to make sure your guest has the best experience possible. And not just from time to time. It has to be top quality every time. And (this is probably the hardest part) it has to be done with a smile on your face, a spring in your step, and a song in your heart.

The fact is, hospitality is pure selflessness. Rather than being self-promoting, when being hospitable, you consider the needs of others above your own at all times. You serve until expectations are exceeded. People famous for being hospitable do not *try* to be hospitable. They simply serve until the joy they have is experienced by their brothers and sisters. They steadily wish for the loved person's ultimate good and they work hard to move that person closer to that ultimate good. Hospitality is simply selflessness manifested.

### ***If You Don't Got It, Fake It***

Some may say that hospitality simply is not your gift. Well, I have some bad news from the good news. Passages like 1 Peter 4:9-10, Romans 12:13, Matthew 25:34-46 and Luke 14:12-14 tell us that not being hospitable simply is not an option. We are commanded by the Lord several times to show hospitality to our brothers and sisters.

So how does one do it if it does not always come naturally?

Two ways come to mind. The first is meant to be a short-term fix. C.S. Lewis proposes that if you are not feeling particularly hospitable, fake it. Pretend to be hospitable. Now, this is not pretense to deceive—to make others think you are something you are not. This is pretense with another goal. You see, if you are not feeling hospitable and you start acting hospitable, you will find that the feeling will most likely soon follow.

The second is more of a long-term fix: be a disciple. Find someone who is great at hospitality and spend absolutely as much time with them as possible. Do the things they do. Say the things they say. Spend your time the way they spend their time. Eat, drink, walk, talk, look, and think like that person. Before long, you will be the person people come to for some good hospitality.

### ***Watch Out For Diotrepthes!***

Unfortunately there are some who have no desire to be hospitable. John warned us of such people. These people, whether they see it or not, are absolutely against hospitality, and that makes them against Christ Himself. That makes them teachers of a false gospel. The true gospel message is a message of peace and love, of grace and truth—characteristics that describe and promote hospitality.

John raised some red flags when it comes to these people: the first is self-promotion—people who work harder to convince others that they are hospitable than they do to actually be hospitable; second is recruiting for their anti-hospitality team. Maybe they understand that being the only one not showing hospitality does not look so good. Maybe misery just loves company. But these people, like Diotrefes, do not like to be alone in their cause.

As a parent, one of the things I work hardest at with my kids is sharing. I constantly remind them that play time is more fun when everyone is sharing what they have. As a parent, I often find that the things I am trying to teach my kids are often the things I need to be teaching myself. Sharing is fun. Giving top quality service consistently and with a joyful heart not only brightens the lives of others, but you will find it brightens yours as well.

Rath asks the question, “How full is your bucket?” But I ask, how full is your neighbor’s bucket? How full is your pastor’s bucket? How full are the buckets of those in your community? How full are the buckets of those just passing through, dedicating their lives in service to others, the teachers, preachers, and missionaries? And what is in your power to do about it?

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Learn the importance of hospitality as written in Third John.
2. Tell of experiences of hospitality and the reactions to it.
3. Practice acts of hospitality.

### *Teaching Activity*

Explore Third John’s call to extend hospitality to believers in conjunction with Jesus’ story about the good Samaritan. How do they inform one another? Share stories of experiences class members have had with hospitality and discuss the impact these experiences can have on the community of the church. Identify one or two individuals from your congregation who excel at showing hospitality and invite them to come share principles of hospitality with the group.

### **Looking Back**

In this unit we have observed a variety of factors that can impact the community within the Body of Christ, either positively or negatively, including love, doctrine, and hospitality.

# 11. Gifts of the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:1–11

## Daily Bible Meditations

Gretchen Zwiebel

### Sunday

### Deuteronomy 17:14–20

Through the years we have heard a lot about being “servant leaders” and today’s Scripture clearly defines that term for us. We need to be aware of the concerns when we step into leadership in our Christian community. One concern is the need for significance. Do we seek significance in our service to God and His church and do we take personal pleasure in being recognized for those efforts? It is easy to say that all of the glory goes to God—giving the appearance that our hearts are humbled—but I find the Holy Spirit teaching me to look for my motivations so that the glory really does always go to God.

### Monday

### Romans 11:25–32

How glorious is our God! His plans are perfect and sometimes seemingly impossible to believe with our limited sight. The tragedies we experience in our lives often bring feelings of hopelessness, which can leave us with depression and despair. We need to be quick to remember that God will never leave us and that He will never go back on a promise. Develop the habit of reminding yourself of this hope through Scripture during times of stress. If we believe God is who He says He is, then we can rest in His arms with confidence that He is in control and cares for us.

### Tuesday

### Hebrews 2:1–9

It may sound simplistic to state that God placed us here for a purpose, but do our actions indicate that we know what we are supposed to be doing? Realizing that He is the Author of our salvation and that we are the intended recipients of His salvation, we need to be living what we believe. It is not simple to live what we believe, yet it is doable when we have experienced His salvation and understand that from that moment on we are a witness in everything we do. Have confidence in the gifts God provides so that you may tell others of His salvation.

### Wednesday

### Romans 12:1–8

When we see how we can be useful in service to God, it is important that we realize that this ability is from God and not



from our own efforts. The world might talk about how “talented” we are, but we should be quick to remember that we are attached to His body (the Church) through our dedication to Him and the importance of our actions are to bring glory to God. We know this because we place our lives before God and He guides our every step. I shudder to think where we would be without His grace.

### **Thursday**

### **1 Corinthians 2:11–16**

Trying to talk with an unsaved person about God can be a fruitless and discouraging conversation if when we use “churchy” expressions. We need to remember our own way of thinking prior to salvation. We did not use spiritual expressions that we only understood after God taught them to us, so why would be speaking in spiritual terms to someone who has yet to be taught those meanings? If you are trying to talk with someone about their need for salvation, speak in terms that are culturally current so that they may know what you are saying and not be confused by post-salvation terminology.

### **Friday**

### **1 Corinthians 14:1–5**

It is important that we seek God and experience His love. When our first goal of each day is to seek a relationship with God, it is a natural progression to share that with our church family. It is important to love each other as God has shown His love to us, using mercy and grace. Do you want a strong spiritual growth atmosphere in your church? Then do not be stingy with your love for your church family. Promote and engage in showing God’s love to your brothers and sisters. Be His hands and feet.

### **Sabbath**

### **1 Corinthians 12:1–11**

We have seen the phrase, “One Size Fits All” in various advertisements and it is clear that whatever the product is, it may or may not “fit all.” But with confidence, Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit is capable of “fitting” us with His gifts and that they are perfectly assigned. We need to be confident that every person has a gift that is to be used for God’s glory and that through His will, we can enjoy dedicating them to Him. A young man that I know has always given his gift of running fast and winning many races to God’s glory. This has allowed him to truly enjoy developing this gift.

**Study**

1 Corinthians  
12:1–11

**Background**

1 Corinthians  
12:1–11

**Devotional**

Romans  
12:1–8

**Key Verse**

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7).

**Heart of the Lesson**

Most humans seek opportunities to become loyal contributing members of their societies. What motivates and empowers them to work together? Paul said that because one person does not possess all of the spiritual gifts, believers must work together for the church's common good.

**Questions for Studying the Text**

1. Other than the church, of which groups have you been a contributing member? What dynamics were crucial to the success of the group? In what ways do you see or not see these same dynamics at work in our churches today?
2. According to this passage, what is the purpose of spiritual gifts? Where do they come from and how do we determine who gets which gifts? How can a diversity of gifts promote unity within the church? What could cause gifts to promote disunity instead? How do we guard against that?
3. Compile a list of spiritual gifts from this passage and those in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:28-30; and Ephesians 4:11-13. Why are these lists not all the same? Can you think of other spiritual gifts not included on any of these lists? How do spiritual gifts differ from natural abilities?
4. What tests for the authenticity of spiritual gifts can you find in this passage? What reasons can you think of that someone might pretend to have a particular gift? What should the church do if they witness this behavior?
5. What spiritual gift(s) has the Spirit distributed to you? In what ways do you use your gift(s) for the common good? Can you think of different ways that you would like to use them in the future?

## Understanding and Living

David Fox

### *A Starting Point*

This passage is one of the more noteworthy in the New Testament as it contains one of the listings of spiritual gifts. While the gifts are given for the encouragement of the Christian community and the glorifying of God, they have often come as a point of division or controversy within the church. Some have a tendency to underemphasize the gifts of the Spirit, creating arguments as to why, “God does not work like that anymore.” Others, on the other hand, overemphasize the gifts, chasing the gifts themselves more than the Giver of the spiritual gifts. To go to either of these extremes is to miss what Paul was expressing to the church in Corinth.

God gives spiritual gifts for the mutual encouragement of the church. As the church is encouraged, it is better able to worship God, glorifying Him and enjoying fellowship with Him. This is what the gifts are all about; they are given to God’s children so that they may better glorify and enjoy Him. They are a means to an end, not an end themselves.

### *The First Spiritual Gift*

The first and foremost gift of God is the gift of salvation. In one sense, this is the first spiritual gift that every believer receives. When Paul wrote, “No

one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (v.3), he stressed that having the indwelling Holy Spirit is a precursor to salvation. One of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit is the regenerating of human hearts. When Paul spoke of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), he mentioned evidence that a heart has been regenerated by the Spirit and redeemed by Christ. Similarly, the gifts of the Spirit he listed come only after God’s saving work has taken place. The regenerating work of the Spirit is a prerequisite to the gifting of the Spirit.

### *Gifts from the Godhead*

Paul offered solid Trinitarian theology, demonstrating the interconnected activity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit in both the saving and the living out of that salvation among God’s people (v.4-6). Verse 4 mentions the variety of gifts given by one Spirit; verse 5 the variety of service to one Lord; verse 6 the variety of activities under one God.

Though there is a distinction between Father, Son, and Spirit within the Godhead, there is only one God that is perfect in Unity. Paul drew upon this perfect picture of unity and implied that even though there are differences in

the gifts, activities, and types of service among believers, they are also to have unity amongst themselves. Thus the unity and diversity within the Trinity is to be a perfect picture of the unity and diversity that ought to exist in the church.

### ***Taking Inventory***

Verses 8-10, a relatively small portion of this passage, contain a listing of some of the spiritual gifts. This list of gifts is one of several in the New Testament. Other lists, such as those in Ephesians 4 and Romans 12, offer similar inventories of gifts. Paul did not state in this passage that this was to be an exhaustive list, and indeed his mention of other gifts elsewhere suggests that this list represents something like categories of gifts. The general categories he mentions here are Wisdom, Knowledge, Faith, Healing, Working of Miracles, Prophecy, Discernment of Spirits, Tongues, and Interpretation of Tongues. Even within this listing, Paul may be dividing up the gifts into some sort of grouping of categories.

Digging into the Greek text provides another layer for understating Paul's list of gifts. There are two Greek words at play in this text, both translated "another" in English. The word *allō* means "another of a same

kind" while *hiterō* means "another of a different kind." The use of these two Greek words sets off this listing into sub-categories, grouping wisdom and knowledge together, tongues and interpretation of tongues in a different group, and leaving the five remaining gifts in yet another grouping. These groupings could represent some of the divisions that were taking place in the church at Corinth, as those with similar groupings of gifts gravitated toward one another, forming cliques within the church. Though the gifts were given to edify one another, they had become a source of division within the church.

Verse 7 offers a direct reason as to why God gives spiritual gifts to His people. Spiritual gifts, which are themselves a manifestation of God's Spirit, are given for "common good." Paul placed this explanation of the gifts immediately prior to the inventory of gifts. It is as if Paul was offering a warning or a disclaimer—maybe something like "proper usage" on the side of a medicine bottle. Paul wanted there to be no question as to the purpose of the gifts and their proper usage within the church.

### ***The Sovereign Giver***

Armed with the knowledge of what the gifts are, how they were given, and what they are

for, verse 11 offers a final helpful reminder about spiritual gifts. Though the term “gifts of the Spirit” should make this truth self-evident, the spiritual gifts are under the sovereign control of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who decides what believer gets what gift, and even how each gift is to be used for the encouragement of the church. The gifts of the Spirit are a product of divine will, not human will, and are selected and sustained as such. We as God’s children do not get to pick our own gifts! They are given to us at His discretion.

Just like the church in Corinth, we in today’s church can either use spiritual gifts to encourage one another and glorify God—or we can let them divide us. As we live in a fallen world, sins such as envy over others’ gifts or pride in our own gifts can lead to divisions. When we keep in mind that we did not pick our own gifts, nor earn them, yet received them graciously from the Holy Spirit, we should remember why God gave these gifts, and how we ought to use them to glorify and enjoy Him while encouraging each other.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Outline the purpose of spiritual gifts according to 1 Corinthians 12:1–11.
2. Appreciate individual spiritual gifts and the ways they are used.
3. Uncover the spiritual gifts of the faith community and the ways they can be used for its benefit.

### *Teaching Activity*

Distribute a two-column handout with a list of spiritual gifts in the left column and a list of church ministries in the right column. Use study teams to match gifts with the ministries that are most appropriate for exercising those gifts. Discuss the results. How can we determine what spiritual gifts God has given to us? How do our own unique personalities, natural abilities, and experiences contribute to our use of spiritual gifts?

### **Looking Forward**

Having reviewed the purpose for and need to work together regarding spiritual gifts, we next will be reminded of the necessity of utilizing all spiritual gifts for the effective functioning of the church.

# 12. The Spirit Creates One Body

1 Corinthians 12:14–31

## Daily Bible Meditations

Gretchen Zwiebel

### Sunday

**Exodus 19:1–8**

When the people of Israel were three months out from, and still very aware of, the drama from their experience of leaving Egypt, they agreed to keep God's covenant. In return, God would treasure them above all peoples. As you know, they disobeyed God's covenant. We have experienced the same drama when we asked for salvation and agreed to belong to God and serve Him forever. A decision we will never forget. How long did it take for you to disobey the covenant God made with you? Because of this common experience, seek ways to come together with your church family and always be a peacemaker.

### Monday

**Exodus 24:1–7**

Imagine being one of the Israelites at the foot of the mountain and with all of the sincerity you had, agreeing to the obedience requested. You might wonder why God kept asking you to agree to the same rule of obedience. As always, when God repeats His requests, He was telling us to understand that this is important and we should be learning to discern His will and only follow Him. Thank our Father for His mercy and grace. We are deeply loved and deeply undeserving.

### Tuesday

**2 Corinthians 11:1–5**

Remember that first glimpse of freedom from worldly chains? Remember that moment when you realized how much God's love for you was expressed through Christ's resurrection? That moment needs to be repeated in your memory instead of the hurt from abuse or neglect. Terrible things can be done to you in this world, but Christ's payment covers it all. If you keep choosing to harbor the past, you will lose focus on the one being that makes all the difference in your present and future. Never forget who your Creator is and seek to be in His presence in all that you say, do, and think.

### Wednesday

**Romans 15:1–7**

Are there seasons that you consider the idea that it is not possible to live in harmony with your church family? Or maybe it is just one or two people that get under your skin? Can you

say that you have done everything you can to build relationships with those people? If we look to the example of Jesus, His concern was not with Himself but with others. One thing to consider is that the evil one has capitalized on your aggravations and is constantly trying to put a wedge between you and the ones you care about. You must stand against the evil one's attempts to manipulate your thinking before you will be able to truly love others.

### **Thursday**

### **Philippians 1:21–30**

At the time of this writing, we have just experienced the first beheading of an American on this soil by what appears to have been a terrorist sympathizer in Oklahoma. What a sad and pathetic situation this world is experiencing at the hands of those who believe that God would send them out to kill innocent people, many of whom are Christians. If there was ever a time that we need to understand how critical it is to love one another in a way that creates a holy bond that remains loyal to Scripture and true to our God, now is that time.

### **Friday**

### **Galatians 3:23–29**

I look at our church family today and I understand that even though we are bonded, our commitment to each other has to be deep and mature. But I also understand that all souls were standing at that cross as Christ died and that fact bonds all people, no matter what our differences. We need to take the strength of our church family bond and relate the truth of what Christ did for us to other souls that do not understand what happened that day, so long ago. If you know what Christ did for you on that day, you need to find someone who will listen to your story. It is that simple.

### **Sabbath**

### **1 Corinthians 12:14–31**

How many times have you seen a member of your church struggle with a chronic problem only to ignore it and hope they will get over it, because they always do. If we truly are one body, should we not try to understand and be that person's advocate? We cannot be all things for all people, but we need to make sure that all members realize that they are a significant part of the church body by asking ourselves if there is anything we can do to help. We *are* one in the bond of love.

**Study**

1 Corinthians  
12:14–31

**Background**

1 Corinthians  
12:12–31

**Devotional**

Galatians  
3:23–29

**Key Verse**

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

**Heart of the Lesson**

Organizations are composed of several interrelated, interdependent, functional parts. Why is it important to value all the parts? In his letter, Paul told the Corinthian church that all spiritual gifts are necessary for its efficient operation.

**Questions for Studying the Text**

1. Why is it important to value all the parts of an organization? What happens when some parts do not appreciate or value other parts? Based on what Paul wrote in this passage, what would you guess was causing division within the church? Have you ever experienced anything similar in your church?
2. How do our spiritual gifts reflect God's sovereignty? How does knowing this help you to accept your church and its ministries?
3. Why is the human body such an appropriate picture of the church? Review other New Testament uses of "body" to describe the church and piece together a fuller explanation of how the church is like a body? Can you think of ways that the church is *not* like a body?
4. Why did Paul not allow for the elevation of one gift above another in the church? What would be the danger in allowing this to go on? Based on this passage, which gift would you guess was being elevated above the others? Which gifts do we tend to elevate in the church today? Why? What can be done to avoid this?
5. Why do you think God makes sure that no one has all the gifts and that no single gift is given to everyone? How does this diversity make the church stronger?



## Understanding and Living

David Fox

### *Unity in the Spirit*

Verses 12-13 really say it all. These two verses provide the foundation for the rest of the passage. All that comes afterward is a fleshing out (the pun was irresistible!) of what it means to be the body of Christ. But what is this foundation? Paul began by going back to the gospel message—reminding the Corinthians that the terms of their very salvation were equal terms.

All are that are saved are saved by one Spirit. All that are saved are baptized with one baptism. Though gifts, abilities, and roles within the church may vary, the way we get into the church and stay in the church does not vary. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Spirit changes our hearts, and the same Spirit continues to work out salvation in us all the remaining days of our lives. This is what Paul meant when he reminded the Corinthians of their baptism and drinking of the Spirit.

### *Diversity in the Spirit*

It was only after Paul had established a foundation of unity in the Spirit that he went on to discuss the diversity in the Spirit. Indeed, though there is one Spirit, there are many different ways that the

Spirit works in and through the lives of believers. Paul's chief analogy was that of a body. Indeed he clarified that the church is not just a body but the body of Christ (v. 27). Though Christians are all individuals, they are a body as well.

The problem with diversity is that each person cannot have every gift. In the Corinthian church, just like any church today, people struggled with envy and pride. While some became proud, thinking their gift was better than others, others felt inferior and were envious of others' gifts. In both cases, the individual lacked the perspective that all gifts are given by the Spirit of God. God is sovereign over the gifts that He gives, knowing what gift is needed for each person. Paul made this clear, stating, "God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as He chose" (v. 18, ESV). In a very real sense, a rejection of one's own gift is a rejection of God and His sovereignty.

Even as God directs who is to have each gift, He has also designed what the gifts are and how each gift ought to be used. Hands are not designed to hear. Though ears and hands both pick up

vibrations, there is quite a difference in what they do with that data. Similarly, a hand is not best equipped for sight or for smell. Surely, the hand is a powerful sensory tool. It is, however, not an all-inclusive tool, and functions much more efficiently when it relies on and cooperates with the other senses. A hand is interdependent with the ear. Just as an ear can hear, a hand is able to respond appropriately. If someone yells for help, a hand may reach out to save that person. The ear itself cannot reach out for help, nor can the hand identify a need. Both are needed in cooperation together in order to be effective.

Paul went on to point out that the body must work together (v.25). Additionally, when one member of the body suffers, the entire body suffers (v.26). But, when part of the body rejoices, the rest of the body should celebrate as well (v.26). Again, the idea of interconnectivity among the body resounds from this passage.

### *Implications in the Spirit*

This passage has vast and reaching implications for the area of study known as Ecclesiology, which is a big word for a “Theology of Church Stuff.” This is one the areas of study that is

much neglected, sometimes even shunned, especially in Evangelical America. We have an increasing tendency to overemphasize Christianity as “a personal relationship with God” and to overlook some of the implications of that personal relationship. In other words, we talk a lot about loving Jesus, but not always about loving His Bride and His Body, the Church. Though it may be a bit of a stretch, I think it is safe to say that just like any man, Christ does not take it lightly when we claim to love Him, but do not love His Bride (with our words, works, and heart).

Active participation in the body of Christ is part of what it means to be a Christian. There is nowhere in the New Testament that Christians are encouraged to live life apart from the community. To return to Paul’s metaphor of the Church as a body, a lone Christian may be compared to a hand cut off from a body. Its warmth and function will quickly fade. It will not have any support and will eventually be lifeless and dead. Though it may be a stretch of the analogy, it is doubtful that any doctor would routinely make it a habit of cutting off a hand and attaching it to a different body on a weekly or

monthly basis as well. A hand is best functioning when it stays attached to its body and functions in the capacity that God designed it to function.

Though this view may seem narrow, it is actually good news! We will fail miserably if we as individuals try to take on tasks that God designed the Church to accomplish. It is like a hand trying to accomplish what an entire body is designed to do. While our sinful pride tells us we can do anything and do not need others, God humbles us by placing us in the context of a Body of believers where we must rely on each other as we collectively rely on God. We must rest in each other as Christians. This brings us back to the good news, the gospel, that we cannot and do not need to save ourselves, but must be humbled and rest and rely on the works of Christ on the cross as the basis for our salvation.

We can no more be the entire body when we are mere individuals than we can save ourselves when we are mere sinful creatures. Just as it takes a sinless God-Man (Jesus) to save us from our sins, it takes a Body and not just scattered individuals to accomplish God's plans.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Learn how each member of the body supports the other members.
2. Value the different gifts operating within the church.
3. Use spiritual gifts in cooperation with others for building up the body of Christ.

### *Teaching Activity*

Display a picture or simple drawing of the human body for the class to see. Have class members suggest spiritual gifts that might correspond to different parts of the body (i.e. eyes, hands, feet, etc.). Discuss the way that different spiritual gifts complement each other in helping the church to be all that it can be.

### **Looking Forward**

Having reviewed the necessity of valuing all the spiritual gifts in the church, we next look at one specific gift and the role it can play in communication within the body.

# 13. Gift of Languages

Acts 2:1–7, 12; 1 Corinthians 14:13–19

## Daily Bible Meditations

Gretchen Zwiebel

### Sunday

### Deuteronomy 4:32–40

Have you looked at people that just cannot seem to function in society and wondered why they cannot pull themselves together? Have you ever wondered about the reason behind their deviant behavior? Perhaps you have been looking at things from the wrong perspective. Have you ever wondered if the parents of these people were obedient to God and lived by His rules? When the example of seeking God is not the usual practice in a person's home, then how can you expect the children to honor and obey an authority that gives rules they were never taught to honor?

### Monday

### James 3:1–5

There are many clichés about the tongue and the power of the spoken word. Some examples: Cat got your tongue; tongue tied; trip over your tongue; bite your tongue. All of these examples prove that people are listening to what you say, because they point out your incorrect word usage or they admonish you for not having anything to say. There is no doubt that what we say effects ourselves and others who hear. I know that I have hurt people by careless talk and I have felt the regret deeply for doing so. Make sure that your words are purposeful, helpful, and without any hint of boasting.

### Tuesday

### Revelation 7:9–12

When we repeat the words, “On earth, as it is in heaven,” we may be claiming that we want our earthly life to experience the perfection of heaven. To truly have that perfection would mean we would have to drop all of our prejudices and assumptions about those that are different from us. How many of us are ready for the total unity of what is to come in heaven, while we are still on earth. It would have to be miraculous, which is possible, but not what we will see here. Only in heaven will we experience such unity and equality without condition. Come Lord Jesus.

### Wednesday

### Acts 2:8–13

I recently viewed a video of someone who knows 20 languages and listened (while reading the English translation) as he told about the experiences he was having, switching from one language

to another as he spoke. He explained the difficulty that came from dealing with the differing sentence structures and grammar. He also commented on the varying degrees of complexity in the languages, with some being more simple and others being more elaborate. When picturing the scene in today's Scripture of the amazement that all could hear in their native tongue, one can only be amazed at God's gloriously powerful and dynamic ways of intervention into our lives.

### **Thursday**

### **Acts 2:14–21**

Do you recognize God's voice when He speaks to you? Do you listen for it? So many of us do not recognize God's voice because we are not listening, then we wonder why we cannot see God's will for us. It is easy to stay in our routines and focus on what is next on the schedule, but God's will goes before your schedule. I believe that God needs to hear the desperation in your voice when you pray to Him. He wants to hear that you are passionate about speaking with Him and about doing His will. When we keep close to God, His will becomes our priority in everything we do.

### **Friday**

### **1 Corinthians 14:6–12**

We should all agree that our gifts are for the advancement of God's Kingdom and should be put to use. If you have doubts as to what your gifts are, ask your Pastor or Deacons to help you discern what gifts they believe you have. Even if you do not see what they see as God's gifts, be faithful to apply those gifts to whatever helps the church. Have confidence that God will develop those gifts for His service. Have confidence that God knows what He is doing even if you do not know what you are doing!

### **Sabbath**

### **Acts 2:1–7, 12; 1 Corinthians 14:13–19**

Have you ever attended a public worship service that included prayer language? How did it make you feel? Did you feel left out or embarrassed to be hearing a prayer language that you did not understand? Or did you feel edified and encouraged that the Spirit was praying through this person? Whether or not you have experienced this, it is good for the worship leaders to be mindful of the group that is being led in worship. Each one is to be given the opportunity to come to the Lord in worship and to be led in song and word to come into His presence.

**Study**

Acts/1 Cor.  
2:1–7,12/14:13–19

**Background**

Acts/1 Cor.  
2:1–21/14:1–25

**Devotional**

Deuteronomy  
4:32–40

**Key Verse**

What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also (1 Corinthians 14:15).

**Heart of the Lesson**

Communication is important as groups implement programs that will affect the lives of others. What is needed to achieve the best communication possible? The need for finding a common understanding is necessary whether people are speaking in different native languages as in Acts 2 or unknown spiritual languages as in 1 Corinthians 14.

**Questions for Studying the Text**

1. What is the goal of good communication? What are its key characteristics? How can effective communication help any group or organization to function?
2. Why is communication so important in the church? In what ways does the Holy Spirit help us to communicate well? Who are some of the most effective communicators in your church and how does God use them?
3. Describe the miracle of communication that took place at the beginning of Acts 2. Do you feel it was more a miracle of speaking or a miracle of hearing? What evidence from the text supports your opinion? Why was this miracle so necessary at this time and place?
4. How were the experiences with speaking in tongues of Cornelius' house (Acts 10:45-46) and John's disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:6) similar and different from the Acts 2 experience? What purpose does the speaking in tongues seem to serve in each?
5. In 1 Corinthians 14, what were some of the limitations of uninterpreted tongues mentioned by Paul? How would this hinder rather than help communication? Why is it important to pray and praise with both our spirit and our mind, especially when we are together with others?

## Understanding and Living

Nathan Crandall

### ***What IS Speaking in Tongues?***

Before He ascended into heaven, the Lord told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. On that day of Pentecost they were all together when suddenly a sound like a violent blowing wind filled the house where they were gathered. Then they saw what appeared to be tongues of fire which separated and touched each of them. Immediately, each one of them began to speak in a different language.

Due to the loud sound, a crowd gathered, comprised of Jews who were from all over the known world. They had come to celebrate the feast of weeks (a.k.a. Pentecost) in Jerusalem. Yet when they heard the disciples speaking their own languages, they were astonished. “Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:7, NIV). In the 2000 years since this event, countless other people have asked this same sort of question. What is *speaking in tongues* and what is its purpose?

### ***A Sign of the End Times***

First, *tongues* is a sign of the end times. In Peter’s message to the crowd which had gathered, he quoted a prophecy from the book of Joel. “‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind’” (Acts 2:17). As

a manifestation of the Spirit, tongues was evidence that Joel’s prophecy had been fulfilled.

Although Pentecostal theology states that tongues is the *initial evidence* of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the balance of Scripture shows that while tongues gives evidence of Spirit’s presence, it is not essential to speak in tongues in order to have the indwelling of the Spirit. The point is that the coming of the Spirit signified the beginning of the end times and tongues was a sign of the coming of the Spirit.

### ***A Sign of Gathered Nations***

Second, tongues are a sign that God is gathering the nations together in Christ. Many have attempted to divide up history into different eras. If we look at Biblical history, certain watershed moments stand out. One of these historic moments was certainly the tower of Babel and the creation of different languages (Genesis 11). Up until this time, the whole earth spoke the same language. From that time until the day of Pentecost, communication across so many different languages would have been nearly impossible. At Babel, the nations were divided. At Pentecost, the nations, in a prophetic way of speaking, were gathered together again.

This sign points to the unity that comes from the Spirit—a

unity greater than the divisions which language and culture bring. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13, NIV).

### ***A Sign of the Power of God***

Third, tongues are a sign of God’s power working through His people. “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:7,10). It is the Spirit who causes tongues to be present for the good of the church.

Tongues are not special human ability to learn different languages quickly. They are a result of the Spirit’s power. Paul clarified this, writing, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful” (1 Corinthians 14:14).

From this it is clear that the one who speaks in tongues does not understand what they are saying, unless of course they are also given the gift of interpreting. This interpretation, however, is also not the same as an interpreter who knows both languages. It is the work of the Spirit. Understanding is given not due to human knowledge but due to the manifest power of the Spirit.

### ***A Means for Personal Edification***

Fourth, tongues are a means for personal strengthening or edification. “One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself” (1 Corinthians 14:4). Although tongues is mysterious, especially to those who are unfamiliar with it, the essence of it is conversation between ourselves and the Lord. By the power of the Holy Spirit, our spirit, which once was dead, was made alive when we believed.

Through tongues our spirit can therefore speak directly with the Holy Spirit. “For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries” (1 Corinthians 14:2). For all of us, there are times when we come to the Lord and do not know how to pray. At these times, praying in the Spirit (i.e. tongues) is a way to communicate with God when regular words just do not capture the meaning we are trying to convey.

### ***A Reminder of Interdependence***

Fifth, and finally, tongues are a reminder that we need a diversity of gifts and abilities in the church. The Corinthians were zealous for spiritual gifts. Paul reminded them that the gifts were intended to build up the whole church and urged them to



focus on each other's edification. "Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret" (1 Corinthians 14:13).

The purpose of this is so that everyone may benefit. Instead of using a special ability or spiritual gift to exalt oneself or to create cliques which exclude others, our attitude should be to use our gift to serve one another. In the case of tongues, it would be easy to put others into the position of an outsider without this attitude.

When we gather as a church, we cannot say, "Amen" or come into agreement unless we know what it is that we are agreeing to. Tongues without interpretation has the same effect as if the preacher mumbled so badly that no one could understand. Paul clarified just how important this is when he concluded with, "In the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Corinthians 14:19).

Tongues reminds us that not everyone understands in the same way we do or has the same experiences that we have had. We must think of others first and foremost above ourselves in the church. For this reason and all of the ones above, we must continue to embrace all the spiritual gifts—including the gift of tongues.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Discover how the Holy Spirit helped people communicate in both different native and different spiritual languages.
2. Empathize with persons in situations in which language inhibits communication.
3. Find ways to communicate with diverse people and have common understanding.

### *Teaching Activity*

Compare and contrast what happened on the Day of Pentecost with what happened at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44–48; 11:15–16) to observe the different ways that tongues and languages are used in Christian Scriptures. Have participants share experiences they have had with speaking in tongues and discuss the impact that tongues can have on the congregation.

### **Looking Forward**

Having studied the role that the gift of tongues can play within the church, we turn last to the vital role that love plays in the implementation of all the spiritual gifts.

# 14. The Greatest Gift Is Love

1 Corinthians 13

## Daily Bible Meditations

Gretchen Zwiebel

### Sunday

**Hosea 6:1–6**

Is it possible that you can start your day with words of love and adoration to God and then disappoint Him by that night? I believe that it is more than possible. I believe that it is probable. We need to realize that if we are not living what we believe, then we may not be placing the value we think we are in our belief? It may be common practice to do things like fake records for tax purposes or lie about something that will keep you from looking bad, but how do you answer to God at the end of such a day? There are no excuses or reasons that justify falling short of our beliefs. Honor God by living what you believe.

### Monday

**Jonah 3:10—4:11**

Have you felt the pain of knowingly doing something that you knew displeased God? I say pain because of the overwhelming guilt that you feel from dishonoring God is immense and sobering. At this point you have two choices. You can either run from Him or drop to your knees and confess your heart and repent. If we choose the second option, God will bring peace to your heart and you can calm down and listen to His words and begin to heal and learn and become a new person. And all because He has the patience, power, mercy, and love to do such things—all because He is capable of responding to your repentance and forgiving you.

### Tuesday

**Galatians 5:19–26**

A life that is not guided by the Spirit is left open and vulnerable to all that the world has available. This can, and often does, result in losing focus on God and His will. Losing our focus on God is like walking down a street and window shopping. Somehow we think that just looking at things that are available will not tempt us to go in and buy. Yet that is exactly what happens. Whether it is a work, home, or church situation, keep the door locked that gives you access to the worldly emotions that always come with addictions that can threaten your very soul.

### Wednesday

**2 Thessalonians 1:1–5**

There is a stark reality that is difficult to deal with in today's Scripture reading, and that is the fact that everyone we love

may not be in Heaven with us. God's words to us are not to be taken lightly. When Christians read about how just God is, we know the power behind those words. God cannot tolerate sin and even though we have claimed our salvation through Christ's resurrection, we shudder at the thought of answering to Him on Judgment Day. But we also know that this process is necessary because God can have no one that is not perfect and righteous in His Heaven. Pray diligently that all will come to know God's saving grace through Christ.

### **Thursday**

### **2 Thessalonians 3:1–5**

It is irritating how often I have to remind myself that God has won the victory over evil. I know that when I am in Heaven I will never have to battle the evil one again. But while on this earth, I must continue to endure more lies and attempts to pull my focus away from God. It is critical that we are diligent to seek ways to serve and worship God, lest we become lazy and leave our minds open for evil influence. Thank God for His provision and worship Him non-stop.

### **Friday**

### **Ephesians 3:14–21**

What percentage would you say that you are “filled with the fullness of God?” Does it vary from day to day? There is no doubt that, if given the chance, God's fullness is capable of filling you 24 hours a day and 7 days per week. If you are not experiencing a constant presence of God, ask Him to make Himself known to you in a way that will help you to recognize this fullness. His willingness to be present within us is what makes this life profoundly joyful.

### **Sabbath**

### **1 Corinthians 13**

Today's Scripture makes it clear that “love” is the essence of our faith. I see many people that do not seem to care about anything in their lives: things such as where they live, their job, their neighbors, their bosses, and even their relatives. How can we read this Scripture and not understand that love is not an option but rather the expectation of God. If we are to have all that God wants us to experience, then love needs to be the basis of our actions: actions such as how we treat each person with whom we speak, the care we put into performing our job to the best of our ability, the respect given those in authority over us, and especially our actions toward those to whom we are related.

<b>Study</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Devotional</b>
1 Corinthians 13	1 Corinthians 13	Ephesians 3:14–21

## Key Verse

But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

## Heart of the Lesson

Love is the primary requirement for societies attempting to make a dramatic influence on the world around them. What is it about love that is so indispensable? In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul said that love is needed to achieve fully the benefit of all spiritual gifts.

## Questions for Studying the Text

1. How would you define “love”? Why did Paul spend a whole chapter emphasizing the importance of demonstrating love in the Body of Christ? How can living in love enhance our possibilities for making a deep and lasting impact on the world around us?
2. Why did Paul insist that the spiritual gifts must be carried out in love? Do you agree with him that the gifts are useless in the absence of love? Why or why not? How does the context of the chapters of 1 Corinthians leading up to chapter 13 help us to understand Paul’s perspective on love?
3. List the characteristics of love given by Paul in verses 4-7. Describe how your life has been impacted by love in each of those ways. What characteristics would you add?
4. Is love a characteristic you either have or do not have or can you grow into it? If we can grow into love, what strategies would help? Is it right to call love the primary mark of Christian maturity?
5. How do faith, hope, and love (v.13) work together (see also 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8)? Why did Paul call love the “greatest” of the three? What teachings of Jesus would support this premise?
6. What people or in what circumstances do you struggle to demonstrate love? How could your Christian witness improve with an increase in love in your life?

## Understanding and Living

Nathan Crandall

### *The Context is Spiritual Gifts*

In the middle of his classic discussion on the types and varieties of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14), the apostle Paul wrote what has become one of the best known sections of the Bible. The “love chapter” is often read at weddings, but it is usually read without any reference to spiritual gifts. Unless we keep this context, however, we miss Paul’s purpose in writing about love.

In chapter 12 Paul stated that the gifts are given by the Spirit for the good of the whole church. Although there are different kinds of gifts and different uses for those gifts, these differences are designed by God and are necessary for the church to function properly. Paul’s example of the human body is a picture of how the church needs to operate. Different parts with different functions, like the foot and the eye, must work together because they belong to the same body.

### *Gifts Gone Wrong*

Then Paul told the Corinthians to “earnestly desire the greater [spiritual] gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31). The greater gifts are not to be desired for the purpose of having a greater status in the church but to be of greater help and service to the church. They are not meant to

be focused on as the goal of the Christian life. Rather they are tools for building each other up.

The Corinthians had gotten this wrong. They had mistakenly placed too much importance on the spiritual gifts and not enough importance on what was truly the greatest part of life in Christ. They needed “a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). So Paul had to bring correction to them with two foundational truths which he shared in chapter 13: First, that nothing is greater than love; second, that spiritual gifts, without love, are worthless.

### *Love is Greater*

Love is the nature of God. As God is eternal, love is also eternal. Paul described it this way, “Love never fails” (v.8). God’s love is greater than spiritual gifts because the gifts will not continue to exist forever. Their use is temporary because the need for them is temporary. Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are needed now because we have partial knowledge and understanding. However, when this life is over and we experience the presence of God in all His glory, our knowledge and understanding will be complete. There will no longer be any need for the spiritual gifts, and they will “be done away” (v.8).

To avoid any confusion about the nature of love, Paul went into great detail to describe it. On the positive side, love is patience and kind. Since these are two parts of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), it is easy to see that love is the core virtue of God and all others flow out of it. Love's greatness flows from the fact that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and because of that, it will always remain. Nothing can overcome it. As important as hope and faith are, they cannot compare to the greatness of love (v.13). This is because love does not look to itself but to others. Even faith and hope can be self-seeking without the nature of love to guide them in the right direction. Love, however, always focuses outside of itself.

### ***Gifts Without Love***

Without love the temptation arises to use the spiritual gifts in a selfish manner. This is what happened in Corinth. They had not yet matured to the point where they understood the place of spiritual gifts because they lacked love. The spiritual gifts are actually called "the manifestation of the Spirit" (12:7). The Spirit works through His people in various ways to bring knowledge, encouragement, healing, etc. This same Spirit is the one that grows the fruit of love.

It is a strange thing, therefore, to have the manifestation of the Spirit without the character of the Spirit also present. In fact, it is beyond strange. To use the gifts of the Spirit without having the character or the nature of the Spirit makes them completely ineffective and worthless. Paul compared the act of speaking in human or angelic tongues to a resounding gong or a clanging symbol when love is not present. The gift of prophecy or knowledge and the kind of faith that can move mountains, when not moved by love, is of no value. The ability to give sacrificially of finances and of oneself accomplishes nothing at all without love. Without love, Paul wrote, "I am nothing...I gain nothing" (v.2-3, NIV).

### ***Growing in Love***

Spiritual gifts are worthless without the love of God to guide their use. This does not mean, however, that we should wait until our love is perfect before we begin to use our spiritual gifts. We should not replace selfishness with perfectionism. Instead, as the Spirit reveals to us our lack of love, we should confess our sin, turn to God, and humbly ask for more of His love in our lives. Then we can do as Paul said and seek the greater gifts with a spirit of love to guide us.

We must learn to cultivate love and to nurture it. Jesus is our example. Based on the Father's command, He humbled himself and came to live on earth as a man. What is more, at the Father's command He sacrificed himself on the cross. If we are to truly become Christ-followers, we must learn to obey our heavenly Father and do whatever it is He commands us to do. This is where we first learn to take our eyes off of ourselves. As we learn to obey the Lord in everything, keeping our eyes focused on Him, we will grow in love.

Since love flows from God, we must not base our definition of love on our own will but instead on God's will. Love is not self-seeking. Any direction or command which the Father gives us will therefore not be self-seeking. He cannot go against His own nature. If envy or jealousy is your enemy, do not deny it or avoid it. Instead, ask the Lord for something to do which will work against your enemy. In this way you will gain confidence that you are growing in love. When you use your spiritual gifts to minister to others you can rejoice that their impact and effectiveness is increasing—all because your love is growing.

## Hints for Teaching

### *Lesson Goals*

1. Explore the meaning of love as seen in 1 Corinthians 13.
2. Appreciate one another in love.
3. Find a variety of ways to express love.

### *Teaching Activity*

Form two teams to debate the statement "Love never fails"; one team will affirm the statement while the other team will deny the statement. Give examples of ways in which love (or lack thereof) can impact the effectiveness of various spiritual gifts. Develop strategies for learning to grow in love as you utilize the gifts God has given you.

### **Looking Back**

In this unit we have been challenged to know and use our spiritual gifts in conjunction with each other's gifts as empowered by the Spirit and guided by love.

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## Next Quarter's Lessons

June - August 2015

# God's Prophets Demand Justice

### Unit I – Amos Rails Against Injustice

1. Judgment on Israel and Judah *Amos 2:4–8* June 6
2. God Is Not Fooled *Amos 5:14–15, 18–27* June 13
3. Rebuked for Selfishness  
*Amos 6:4–8, 11–14* June 20
4. God Will Never Forget *Amos 8:1–6, 9–10* June 27

### Unit II – Micah Calls for Justice Among Unjust People

5. No Rest for the Wicked *Micah 2:4–11* July 4
6. No Tolerance for Corrupt Leaders and Prophets  
*Micah 3:5–12* July 11
7. Justice, Love, and Humility *Micah 6:3–8* July 18
8. God Shows Clemency *Micah 7:14–20* July 25

### Unit III – Advocates of Justice for All

9. Our Redeemer Comes *Isaiah 59:15–21* Aug. 1
10. A Choice to Be Just *Jeremiah 7:1–15* Aug. 8
11. A Call for Repentance  
*Ezekiel 18:1–13, 31–32* Aug. 15
12. God Demands Justice *Zechariah 7:8–14* Aug. 22
13. Return to a Just God *Malachi 3:1–10* Aug. 29