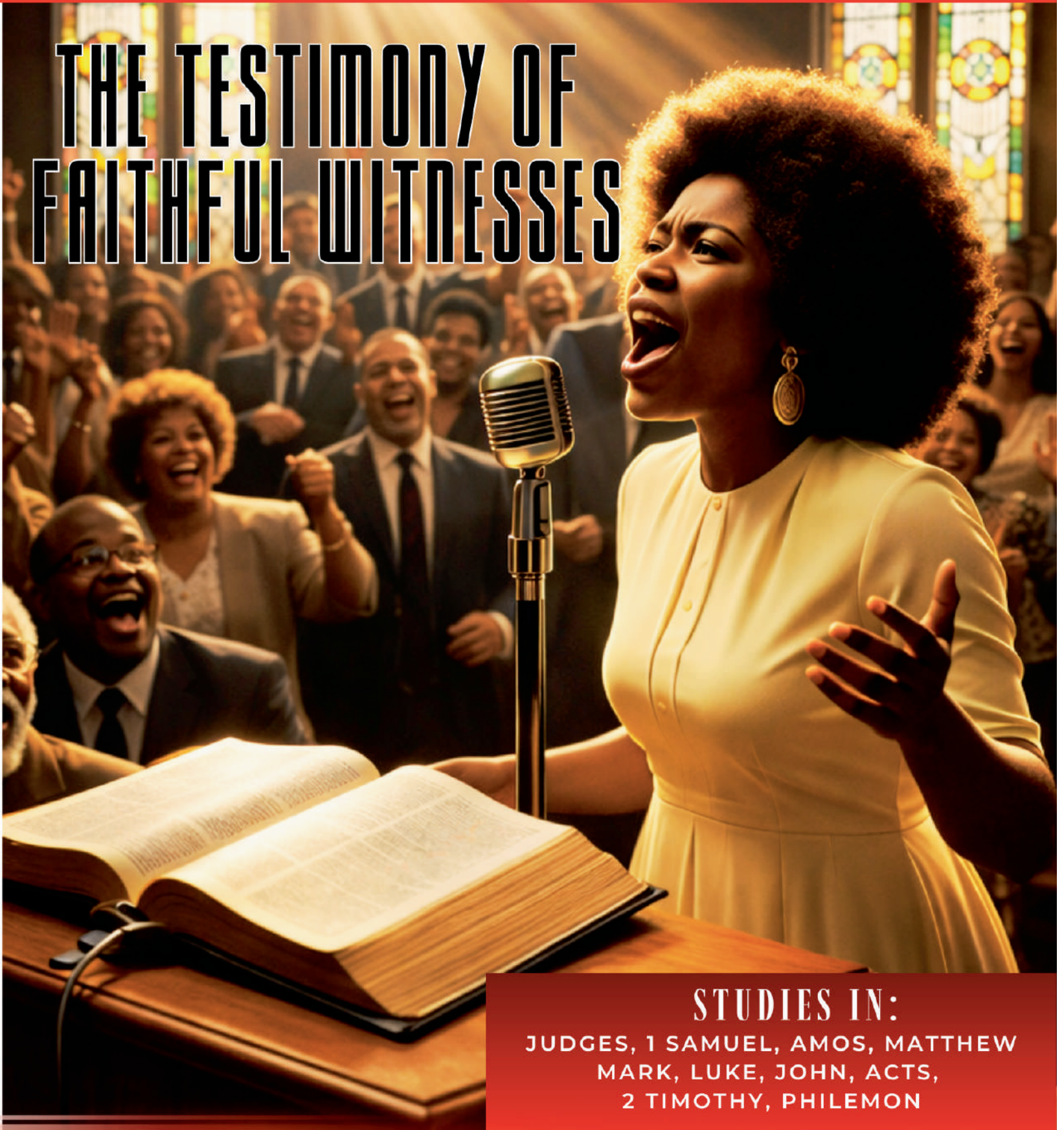


CHURCH SCHOOL HERALD-JOURNAL

THE TESTIMONY OF FAITHFUL WITNESSES



STUDIES IN:

JUDGES, 1 SAMUEL, AMOS, MATTHEW
MARK, LUKE, JOHN, ACTS,
2 TIMOTHY, PHILEMON

JUNE-JULY AUGUST 2026

FOURTH QUARTER



CHURCH SCHOOL Herald-Journal

Developed By
The Department of Church School Literature
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
3225 West Sugar Creek Road, Charlotte, NC 28269

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IN THIS ISSUE

PENTECOST is the birthday of the Christian Church and reveals the descent or outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the believers in the Upper Room (Acts 2:1-4.) Pentecost is sometimes referred to as Whitsunday referring either to the wearing of white robes by candidates for baptism or to the old Anglo Saxon word "wit" meaning wisdom-an illusion to the outpouring of the Spirit of Wisdom (Ephesians 1:17.) To the Christian, PENTECOST means the Church's birthday that is celebrated on the fiftieth day after Easter. Acts 2 gives the record of the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the Disciples and they began to speak in tongues preaching Christ as the risen Lord. Three thousand persons were baptized into the Christian faith at that time. The liturgical color is red which is symbolic for the Holy Spirit, witness, zeal, power, loyalty, and love. Prominent symbols include the cloven tongues of fire, the descending dove and a downward arrow.

Learning Through Symbols and Celebrations,
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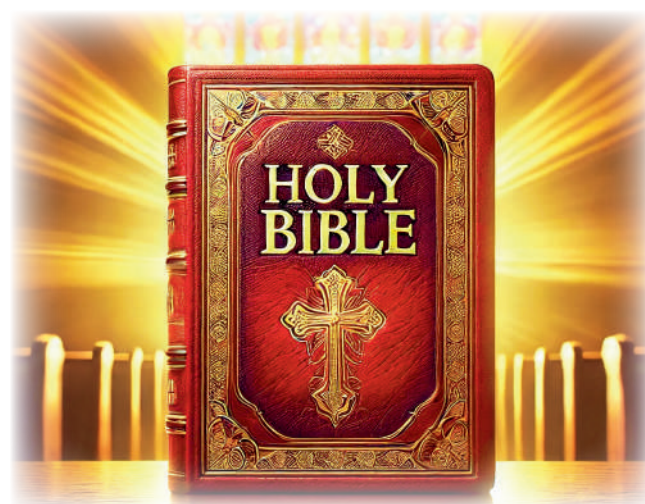
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SUMMER QUARTER

THE TESTIMONY OF A FAITHFUL WITNESS

JUNE - JULY - AUGUST 2026

UNIT ONE

FAITHFUL WITNESSES TESTIFY TO GOD'S PROMISE

1. JUNE 7 DEBORAH, A LEADER IN A NATIONAL EMERGENCY BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: JUDGES 4:1-24

KEY VERSES: *At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. Judges 4:4-5.*

June 1	M	1 Timothy 3:1-7	A Leader Who Sets an Example
June 2	T	Acts 9:36-42	A Leader Who Cares
June 3	W	Acts 18:24-28	Leaders Who Build Other Leaders
June 4	Th	Nehemiah 2:1-8	A Leader Who Listens
June 5	F	Nehemiah 4:1-6	A Leader Who Intercedes
June 6	Sa	John 13:3-17	Jesus, the Pattern for Leaders
June 7	Su	Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22	A Leader Who Inspires

2. JUNE 14 HANNAH, A GODLY MOTHER BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 SAMUEL 1:1-28; 2:1-11, 18-19; 3:1-18

KEY VERSE: *In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord." 1 Samuel 1:20.*

June 8	M	Ezekiel 18:5-9	Leading a Life of Righteousness
June 9	T	Genesis 16:1, 4-16	Trusting in a God Who Sees
June 10	W	Proverbs 6:20-22	Do Not Forsake Your Mother's Teaching
June 11	Th	Psalms 113	Praising God for Home and Family
June 12	F	Isaiah 66:9-13	A Mother Who Comforts Her Child
June 13	Sa	Luke 1:46-56	Rejoicing in God's Deliverance
June 14	Su	1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25	Seeking God's Blessing

3. JUNE 21 JONATHAN AND DAVID, A NOBLE FRIENDSHIP BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 SAMUEL 18:1-4; 19:1-7; 20:1-42; 2 SAMUEL

KEY VERSE: *Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" 1 Samuel 20:42.*

June 15	M	Romans 1:8-12	Encouraging Each Other's Faith
June 16	T	1 Corinthians 15:30-34	Choose Your Friends Wisely
June 17	W	Proverbs 18:19-24	A Friend Closer than a Brother
June 18	Th	Ruth 1:11-18	Friends When All Is Lost
June 19	F	John 15:9-17	The Greatest Love
June 20	Sa	1 Samuel 20:16-17, 32-34, 42	Fierce and Faithful Friends
June 21	Su	2 Samuel 1:17, 19-27	A Death in the Family

4. JUNE 28 AMOS, A HERDSMAN CALLED OF GOD TO BE A PROPHET BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: AMOS 1:1; 2:11-12; 3:7-8; 7:10-15

KEY VERSE: *"The Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'" Amos 7:15.*

June 22	M	Isaiah 61:4-9	The Lord Loves Justice
June 23	T	Luke 15:1-7	A Shepherd Who Seeks the Lost
June 24	W	Amos 5:16-20	The Lord's Day Is Coming
June 25	Th	Amos 5:21-27	Let Justice Roll Down like Water
June 26	F	John 10:1-9	Good and Safe Pastures
June 27	Sa	John 10:10-18	Jesus Is the Good Shepherd
June 28	Su	Amos 7:10-15	Chosen by God



UNIT TWO

FAITHFUL WITNESSES SAY YES TO JESUS CHRIST

5. JULY 5 THE BELIEVING CENTURION, A GENTILE WHOSE FAITH JESUS COMMENDED

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: MATTHEW 8:5-13

KEY VERSE: When Jesus heard him [the centurion], he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith." Matthew 8:10.

June 29	M	Isaiah 49:1-6	A Light to the Nations
June 30	T	Psalm 72:1-13	May All Nations Serve the Lord
July 1	W	Ephesians 2:1-10	God Makes Us Alive through Christ
July 2	Th	Ephesians 2:11-22	Strangers Brought Near through Christ
July 3	F	Isaiah 60:1-8	Arise, Shine; Your Light Has Come
July 4	Sa	Isaiah 60:9-14	The Coastlands Await God's Light
July 5	Su	Matthew 8:5-13	A Banquet Spread for All

6. JULY 12 SIMON PETER, FROM WEAKNESS TO STRENGTH

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: MARK 8:27-29; LUKE 22:31-34; JOHN 18:25-27; 21:15-17

KEY VERSE: He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." John 21:17.

July 6	M	Acts 2:14-21	Filled with the Spirit's Boldness
July 7	T	Psalm 34:1-9	God Delivers from All Fear
July 8	W	Psalm 34:10-22	God Is Near the Brokenhearted
July 9	Th	Mark 8:27-33	Imperfect Understanding
July 10	F	Isaiah 41:8-13	Fear Not; God Is with You
July 11	Sa	Mark 14:55-72	Crumbling under Pressure
July 12	Su	John 21:15-19	Called to Feed Christ's Flock

7. JULY 19 ZACCHAEUS, THE PUBLICAN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: LUKE 19:1-10

KEY VERSE: When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." Luke 19:5.

July 13	M	Exodus 22:1-6	God Calls for Restitution
July 14	T	Isaiah 58:3-7	God Desires Justice for the Oppressed
July 15	W	Luke 6:20-26	Blessings and Woes
July 16	Th	Hebrews 13:1-6	Love, Hospitality, and Contentment
July 17	F	1 John 3:14-18	Meeting Needs through God's Love
July 18	Sa	Psalm 37:1-5, 18-22	The Righteous Are Generous Givers
July 19	Su	Luke 19:1-10	Salvation Has Come to This House

8. JULY 26 MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: LUKE 2:15-19; JOHN 2:1-5; 19:25-27

KEY VERSE: Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:19.

July 20	M	Genesis 3:14-20	The Woman and Her Offspring
July 21	T	Mark 3:31-35; Luke 11:27-28	Doing the Will of God
July 22	W	Psalm 119:97-104	Meditating on God's Law
July 23	Th	Luke 1:26-38	Mary Affirms God's Will
July 24	F	Luke 2:15-19	Mary Contemplates What God Has Done
July 25	Sa	Isaiah 9:3-7	Rejoice in the Newborn King
July 26	Su	John 2:1-5	Mary Points Others to Jesus

9. AUG. 2 THOMAS, THE HONEST DOUBTER

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: JOHN 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2

KEY VERSE: [Jesus] said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." John 20:27.

July 27	M	Isaiah 55:6-11	Seek the Lord; Call on God
July 28	T	Jude 20-25	Have Mercy on Those Who Doubt
July 29	W	John 14:1-7	How Can We Know the Way?
July 30	Th	Psalm 50:7-15	Call on the Lord
July 31	F	Deuteronomy 4:27-31	Seek God with Heart and Soul
Aug. 1	Sa	John 20:19-23	So I Send You
Aug. 2	Su	John 20:24-29	My Lord and My God!

UNIT THREE

FAITHFUL WITNESSES SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

10.AUG. 9 STEPHEN, AN EARLY INTERPRETER OF CHRISTIANITY

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: ACTS 6:1-7:60

KEY VERSE: Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Acts 6:8.

Aug. 3	M	Revelation 7:9-10, 13-17	Witness around the Throne
Aug. 4	T	Revelation 12:7-11	Overcoming Witness
Aug. 5	W	Acts 6:7-14	Spirit-filled Witness
Aug. 6	Th	Psalms 116:1-9	Grateful Witness
Aug. 7	F	Psalms 116:10-19	Steadfast Witness
Aug. 8	Sa	Acts 7:1, 44-53	Courageous Witness
Aug. 9	Su	Acts 7:54-60	The Witness of Martyrdom

11.AUG. 16 SAUL OF TARSUS, HOW A PHARISEE BECAME A CHRISTIAN

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: ACTS 22:3-15

KEY VERSES: [Ananias] said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard." Acts 22:14-15.

Aug. 10	M	Psalms 36:1-9	The Fountain of Life
Aug. 11	T	Galatians 1:13-24	Proclaiming the Faith
Aug. 12	W	Philippians 3:3-9	Losing All to Gain Christ
Aug. 13	Th	Exodus 34:5-9	A Merciful and Gracious God
Aug. 14	F	2 Corinthians 5:17-21	A New Creation in Christ
Aug. 15	Sa	Psalms 32	Rejoicing in God's Forgiveness
Aug. 16	Su	Acts 22:3-15	Sent to All the World

12.AUG. 23 TIMOTHY, THE INFLUENCE OF HOME TRAINING

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: ACTS 16:1-3;
PHILIPPIANS 2:19-22; 2 TIMOTHY 1:1-6; 3:14-16

KEY VERSE: I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. 2 Timothy 1:5.

Aug. 17	M	Acts 16:1-5	A Protégé with Promise
Aug. 18	T	Proverbs 1:1-9	Listen to Wise Instruction
Aug. 19	W	Proverbs 23:22-26	Learn from Father and Mother
Aug. 20	Th	Philippians 2:19-24	A Worthy and Trusted Minister
Aug. 21	F	Deuteronomy 4:9-13	Make God Known to Future Generations
Aug. 22	Sa	2 Timothy 1:1-16	Thankful for Established Faith
Aug. 23	Su	2 Timothy 3:10-11, 14-16	Continue in What You Have Learned

13.AUG. 30 LYDIA, JUDGED TO BE FAITHFUL

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: ACTS 16:11-40

KEY VERSE: When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us. Acts 16:15.

Aug. 24	M	1 Peter 4:7-11	Stewards of God's Good Gifts
Aug. 25	T	2 Kings 4:8-17	God Sees and Rewards Hospitality
Aug. 26	W	Proverbs 31:10-22	A Capable, Entrepreneurial Woman
Aug. 27	Th	Matthew 25:14-23	Good and Trustworthy Servants
Aug. 28	F	Matthew 25:24-30	Blessed Are the Risk-takers
Aug. 29	Sa	Job 31:16-28	The Righteous Provide to Others
Aug. 30	Su	Acts 16:11-15, 40	An Eager, Hospitable Disciple



Seasons and Special Days

DAY OF PENTECOST: MAY 24, 2026

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST
LITURGICAL COLOR: RED
MAY 25-AUGUST 29, 2026

KINGDOMTIDE
LITURGICAL COLOR: GREEN
AUGUST 30-NOVEMBER 28, 2026

JUNE

- 14** National Children's Day
- 14** Flag Day
- 19** Juneteenth
- 21** Father's Day

JULY

- 4** Independence Day
- 15-19** Connectional Council Meeting

AUGUST

- Florence Randolph Day
- Back to School Sunday



Father's Day
JUNE 21
2026



THE DEPARTMENT OF CHURCH SCHOOL LITERATURE

REV. DR. ADRIAN V. NELSON, II, D.MIN., J.D., EDITOR

A DIVISION OF THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH



June 1, 2026

Dear Subscriber,

Greetings, in the name of Jesus, who is the Christ! We hope this edition of the *Church School Herald-Journal* finds you well and prospering in the work of the Lord.

In terms of the summer cycle, it is entitled "The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses." This theme introduces women and men in the Bible who heard the call of God, responded in faith, and through their words and deeds, spread the good news. More specifically:

- Unit I, entitled "Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises," introduces four stories of Old Testament women and men who by their words and actions offer us an opportunity to name, describe, and deepen our experience of God's grace, love, forgiveness, and provision.
- Unit II, themed "Faithful Witnesses Say "Yes" to Jesus Christ," brings into view four persons who when confronted by the person and power of Jesus, revealed the truth of who they were, including the Centurion, Peter, Zacchaeus, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. These stories invite us to learn the truth about ourselves in relation to Jesus Christ.
- Unit III, styled "Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News," sheds a light on five famous disciples who are remembered for their bold testimony, including Thomas, Stephen, Saul, Timothy, and Lydia. These stories of Jesus' disciples standing up for what is right, repenting of their past lives, offering kindness to strangers in Christ's name, and accepting the call of God to serve Christ and his church inspire us to grow deeper in faith and to share our faith in Christ with those who have no faith.

Intrigued by this quarter's theme, you will find three related articles, including: "The Promises of God: Can I Get a Witness," by Rev. Tasharah Person, "The Power of God: Can I Get a Witness?" by yours truly, and "The Proclamation of God: Can I Get a Witness?" by Rev. Dr. Richard Gadzekpo. Also, for your use some 2026 Connectional Children's Day/Weekend information is included in this edition. Of course, this edition has our regular features, including, but not limited to, our three unit-focused Theological Insights. We hope that you are blessed and positively impacted by the spring *Church School Herald-Journal*.

In His Service,

Rev. Dr. Adrian V. Nelson, II, Editor

COMMITTED TO LIFTING MINDS THROUGH CHRISTIAN NURTURE

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CHURCH SCHOOL HERALD-JOURNAL || JUNE, JULY, AUGUST 2026

JUNE- JULY - AUGUST 2026

TEACHER BIFOLDS

THE TESTIMONY OF FAITHFUL WITNESSES

This quarter introduces women and men in the Bible who heard the call of God, responded in faith, and through their words and deeds, spread the good news.

UNIT I: HEAR GOD'S PROMISE

Learn It!

The first unit introduces four stories of Old Testament women and men who by their words and actions offer us an opportunity to name, describe, and deepen our experience of God's grace, love, forgiveness, and provision. Deborah, a faithful judge, Hannah, an unfailing servant, Jonathan and David, fast friends and colleagues and Amos, the shepherd from Tekoa.

By the end of these lessons students will be able to:

- Appreciate God's purpose for entrusting important tasks to them.
- Desire to approach God through heartfelt and sincere prayer.
- Cherish being called by God for carrying out God's will.
- Look for and take opportunities to advocate for God's will to be carried out.

Teach It!

DATE	LESSON	LESSON TITLE	KEY VERSE
June 7	1	Deborah: Empowered to Deliver	Judges 4:9
June 14	2	Hannah Petitions for God's Favor	1 Samuel 1:27
June 21	3	The Bond Between David and Jonathan	1 Samuel 18:3
June 28	4	God Calls Amos to Champion Truth	Amos 7:15

Live It:

 Outline the qualities that made Deborah a faithful witness and leader.

- Describe the promises Hannah made to God to receive her heart's desire.
- Identify the aspects (conditions and benefits) of the friendship between David and Jonathan.
- List the sequence of events of God's calling of Amos to be God's champion of truth.



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CHURCH SCHOOL HERALD-JOURNAL | JUNE, JULY, AUGUST 2026



UNIT II: SAY “YES” TO JESUS

Learn It! This unit brings into view four persons who when confronted by the person and power of Jesus, revealed the truth of who they were. These stories invite us to learn the truth about ourselves in relation to Jesus Christ. The Centurion who demonstrated great faith in entrusting the health of his servant to Jesus. Impetuous Simon Peter, the rock, could also be a stumbling block and sink like a stone in the sea when challenged. Even through his rebuke of Peter, Jesus shows that even when we falter God’s gracious call to us is always within the possibility of rehabilitation. Zacchaeus, the hated tax collector of Jericho, becomes like a little child when he climbs the tree to see Jesus. Mary, the mother of Jesus, makes the boldest testimony of all, saying, “yes” by giving her life to bearing the Son of God.

By the end of this unit students would have learned to:

- Feel joy that no matter what is going on, their faith can bring about Jesus’s help.
- Value the grace given by God and Jesus to believers who are sometimes on shaky ground in their faith or their demonstration of it.
- Cherish the transformation that occurs after experiencing Jesus firsthand.
- Grow in their relationships with God and others.

Teach It!

DATE	LESSON	LESSON TITLE	KEY VERSE
July 5	5	The Amazing Faith of the Centurion	Matthew 8:13
July 12	6	Jesus Forgives Simon Peter’s Fear	John 21:15
July 19	7	Zacchaeus: From “Change” Agent	Luke 19:9
July 26	8	Mary and Jesus All the Way	John 2:5

Live It:

- Name the circumstances and results of the centurion’s request for help from Jesus. Outline the chronology of events that depict Peter’s faith, then his fear, and then his acceptance of Jesus’s commission.
- Describe how Zacchaeus’s encounter with Jesus left Zacchaeus a changed man
- List the instances of Mary’s and Jesus’ devotion to and admiration of each other.



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UNIT III: SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS

Learn It! This unit sheds a light on five famous disciples who are remembered for their bold testimony. Thomas, Stephen, Saul, Timothy, and Lydia exemplify the words of Romans 10:9: “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

By the end of the these lesson, students would have learned to:

- Practice relating to others (confidently and without doubt) the fact that Jesus lives.
- Feel confident in their calling to speak truth in any situation.
- Recognize and appreciate their own change in the Lord.
- Follow in the footsteps of those who model right and godly living.
- Practice showing hospitality to others as a demonstration of their faithfulness to God.

Teach It!

DATE	LESSON	LESSON TITLE	KEY VERSE
August 2	9	Thomas Requires Physical Proof	John 20:29
August 9	10	Stephen Risks His Life for God’s Truth	Acts 6:8-10
August 16	11	Paul Testifies to His Conversion	Acts 22:14-15
August 23	12	Timothy’s Nurtured Faith	2 Timothy 3:14
August 30	12	Lydia: A Genuine Believer	Acts 16:15

Live It:

- Identify the doubt that Thomas had in Jesus’s resurrection until seeing Jesus in the flesh.
- Trace the series of events that led to Stephen’s noble demise.
- Summarize Paul’s conversion story—from his persecution of believers to his fellowship with them.
- Name the aspects of Timothy’s faith and character that were nurtured by his mother and grandmother.
- Label the different parts of Lydia’s conversion story, including her hospitality.

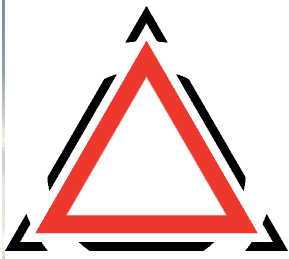


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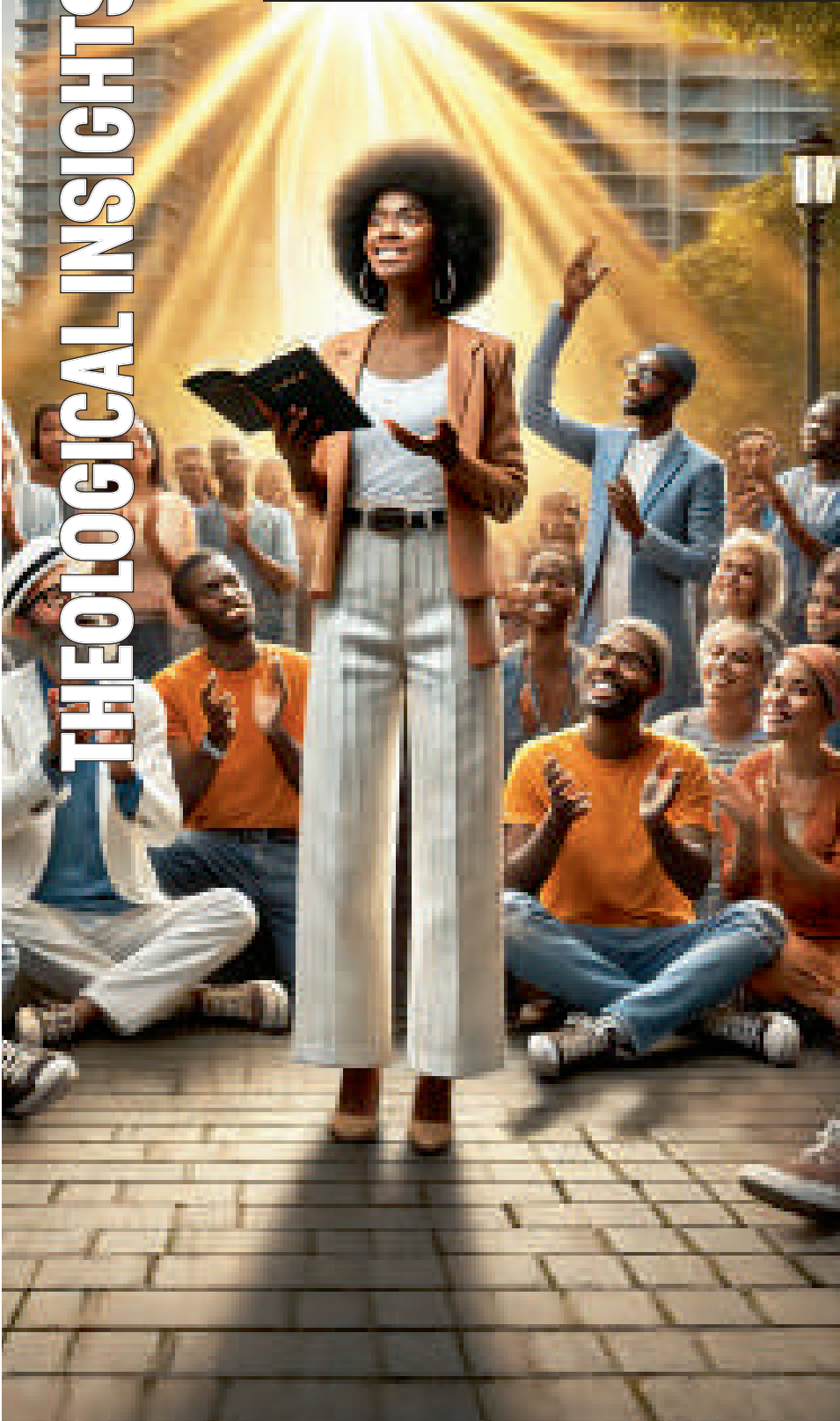


UNIT ONE

Faithful Witnesses Testify To God's Promises

Mozella G. Mitchell Ph.D.

THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS



The Summer Quarter introduces women and men in the Bible who heard the call of God, responded in faith, and through their words and deeds, spread the good news.

UNIT I: FAITHFUL WITNESSES TESTIFY TO GOD'S PROMISES, introduces four stories of Old Testament women and men who by their words and actions offer us an opportunity to name, describe, and deepen our experience of God's grace, love, forgiveness, and provision. Deborah, a faithful judge, lays claim to God's promised freedom from Israel's enemy and employs the fine leadership trait of delegation. Hannah, an unfailing servant, implores the Lord for a child and dedicates her promised son to the service of YHWH. Jonathan and David, fast friends and colleagues, make covenant together, pledging their steadfast love and loyalty to one another. Amos, the shepherd from Tekoa, testifies to the justice and righteousness of God in condemning the people for their unjust practices. Our bad choices can land us into a hole out of which we find it impossible to climb. Where can we find rescue when our troubles are too big to manage on our own? God empowered Judge Deborah to deliver Israel when they called on God for rescue from the grips of an oppressive foreign power.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Before the rise of kings in Israel, God called temporary warriors called "judges" to rescue a loose coalition of Israelite tribes from a series of enemies. "The Book of Judges opens with the news that Joshua, Moses' successor, has died. His death signals a transition to what we now call 'the period of the judges' (about 1373-1043 BC). The firm, centralized leadership that nomadic Israel knew under Moses and Joshua is gone. A theocracy remains in its place—a rule by God... A cyclical pattern characterizes the Book of



God who is in control" (Ibid., p. 349). We may benefit much from the fact of Deborah's giving consistent credit to God for her success which can inform our attitude when given a prominent role or an important task.

WISHING AND HOPING AND PRAYING

Everyone has experienced fears that their dreams and hopes for the future may not be realized. How do we seek reassurance that our hopes and dreams may yet come true? Hannah turned to prayer, confident that the Lord would fulfill her hopes for conceiving a child. "The events of today's text [from 1 Samuel 1] occurred late in the period of the judges, perhaps, around 1100 BC. In 1 Samuel 1:1-8, Elkanah is introduced with two wives: Peninnah and Hannah. Elkanah may have been an important individual of the priestly Levitical tribe (1 Chronicle 6:23). Although Elkanah loved Hannah very much, she was unable to bear children (1 Samuel 1:8). Peninnah mocked Hannah, perhaps jealous that Elkanah gave her a greater share of their family's annual sacrifice (1:5-6). Even though Hannah was childless, Elkanah gave her a 'double portion,' the amount typically given to a firstborn son and heir (1:5 see Deuteronomy 21:15-17)" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, p. 354). The barren woman was normally an object of pity; the inability to conceive and bear children, particularly sons, was assumed to be the fault of the woman. (See Genesis 25:21; 30:1; Psalm 113:7-8a, 9a.). Scholars believe that the annual pilgrimage was the yearly Feast of Tabernacles that occurred at harvest time. Hannah's barrenness stands in ironic contrast to the celebration of the harvest and the land's fruitfulness. Mention of "the temple of the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:9) is an anachronism. Solomon's temple in Jerusalem would not be built until more than seventy years later. Second Samuel 7:6 indicates the Lord's house before King David's time was a tent. Hannah makes a vow to the Lord resembling the Nazirite vow. The vow includes (1) abstaining from the use of grapes in any form, (2) not shaving the hair on one's head, and (3) avoiding dead bodies (Numbers 6:3-7). Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2; compare Mary's Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55) links the prayers of a barren woman to the reversal of the spiritual and political fortunes of the nation. Through Hannah and her son, Samuel, God would impeach the spiritually imperceptive Eli and the morally corrupt Hophni and Phinehas, and secure an honorable king to unify the kingdom of Israel.

Notice the parallel between the witness of Hannah and those gathered on Pentecost. Both stories occur during a time of barrenness and grief; the disciples are without their Lord, waiting for the promised Spirit. As Hannah prays "remember me" and the disciples speak in other languages, "declaring the wonders of God" (Acts 2:11), onlookers presume that they are drunk (1:12-14; Acts 2:13)! When the faithful pour out their hearts to God, resulting exultation may look and sound inappropriate to onlookers. "Hannah continues praying in her heart, or, in other words, in silence. It is important to note that

Judges [as described in Judges 3:7-12, a pattern of sin, punishment, crying out, and rescue by YHWH's judge]" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, p. 346). Deborah (4:4), the Bible's only female judge, means "bee" or "leader." "Wife of Lappidoth" could be "woman of Lappidoth," referring to her home of origin. The word lappidoth means "torch" or "lightning"; so, Deborah could be a "fiery woman." She is the agent through whom the people expect a divine word regarding their present crisis—a familiar role of prophets. "When Deborah succeeded Ehud as judge, she found herself in the same situation as her predecessor: 'Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord' (Judges 4:1). Because of their desire to do evil, God allowed Jabin, the king of Canaan, to oppress Israel for 20 years (4:2-3)" (Ibid., p. 347).

Jael (Judges 4:17 and following) is a non-Israelite, wife of Heber the "Kenite," an ethnic designation as well as a word meaning "smith" or worker of iron (Judges 4:11). Jael's husband helped craft hundreds of iron chariots for Sisera's army. That connection may explain why Sisera went into Jael's tent with such confidence seeking security as he fled from his defeated army. In killing Sisera, who had sought hospitality and protection in her house, Jael violates the fundamental rights of guests. Nonetheless, God used such actions to accomplish God's objectives. The work of delivering Israel was shared between Deborah, Barak, and Jael. Judges 4 encourages interdependence and shared responsibility to accomplish the purposes of God. Deborah was not only a judge but also a prophet. When Barak declares that he will go as God had called him to only if she would go with him, "Deborah agrees to go with [him], though she warns that there is a consequence for his doubt: the journey will not result in Barak's honor; Sisera will be sold in the hands of a woman. The deliverance and consequence come from the Lord. Deborah emphasizes that it is

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ancient people usually prayed aloud. In fact, this is the only time that silent prayer is explicitly mentioned in Scripture (contrast with the Spirit's 'wordless groans' in Romans 8:26) Eli's insensitivity is [partly] the result of deliberate blindness. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are widely known for scandalously stealing from the Lord's sacrifices (1 Samuel 2:12-17). Eli rebukes his sons privately but does not remove them (2:22-25). Ironically, Eli himself will receive the Lord's rebuke and judgment from the mouth of Hannah's son-to-be (3:11-18: compare 2:27-36; 4:11-18) Hannah faithfully approached God with her grief, desire, and need. Because she did, God allowed her to play a role in the grand narrative of God's design. Hannah's fidelity to her vow put her son in the right place at the right time to lead Israel as priest, judge, and prophet" (Ibid., pp. 356, 357, and 359).

A FOREVER BOND

Amid danger and troubles, we may desire support from a trustworthy friend. How does a friend prove trustworthy in a difficult situation? Jonathan proved a trustworthy friend to David despite the paranoia of his father, King Saul, and David honored their friendship by providing for his son, Mephibosheth, after Jonathan's death. 1 Samuel 18 and 20 and 2 Samuel 1 and 21 contain central issues regarding David and Jonathan. Saul, Israel's first king, was rejected as king due to his disobedience to God, and David has been anointed king of Israel as successor to Saul. "Before Saul's disastrous rule ended, God prepared David to take over as leader in Saul's place. The secret anointing of David and plan to make him king created a potential conflict with Saul and his household, especially with Saul's firstborn son and heir, Jonathan, [who] had the most to lose and could have easily rejected God's choice of king" (*Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026*, Large Print Edition, p. 362). Over several chapters, however, the shift in succession is characterized by Jonathan and Michal's shifting love and loyalty from their father, Saul, to David. The terms of the covenant involve a pledge of mutual loyalty and friendship. Jonathan accepts David as his equal. Although Jonathan holds the hereditary right to the throne of Israel, he recognizes that God has chosen David to be Israel's next king and affirms God's choice by giving his clothing and armor to David. The story helped to disprove any later rumors that David had been a hated rival of Jonathan. Jonathan's love and devotion to David is considered unique in that Jonathan is "Saul's own son from the royal household! If David can win the support of Jonathan, he must be a charismatic and compelling figure, capable of winning people over with the wisdom of his words" (Ibid., p. 363).

Jonathan aligns himself completely with David, calling for the destruction of his enemies, even if that should in-

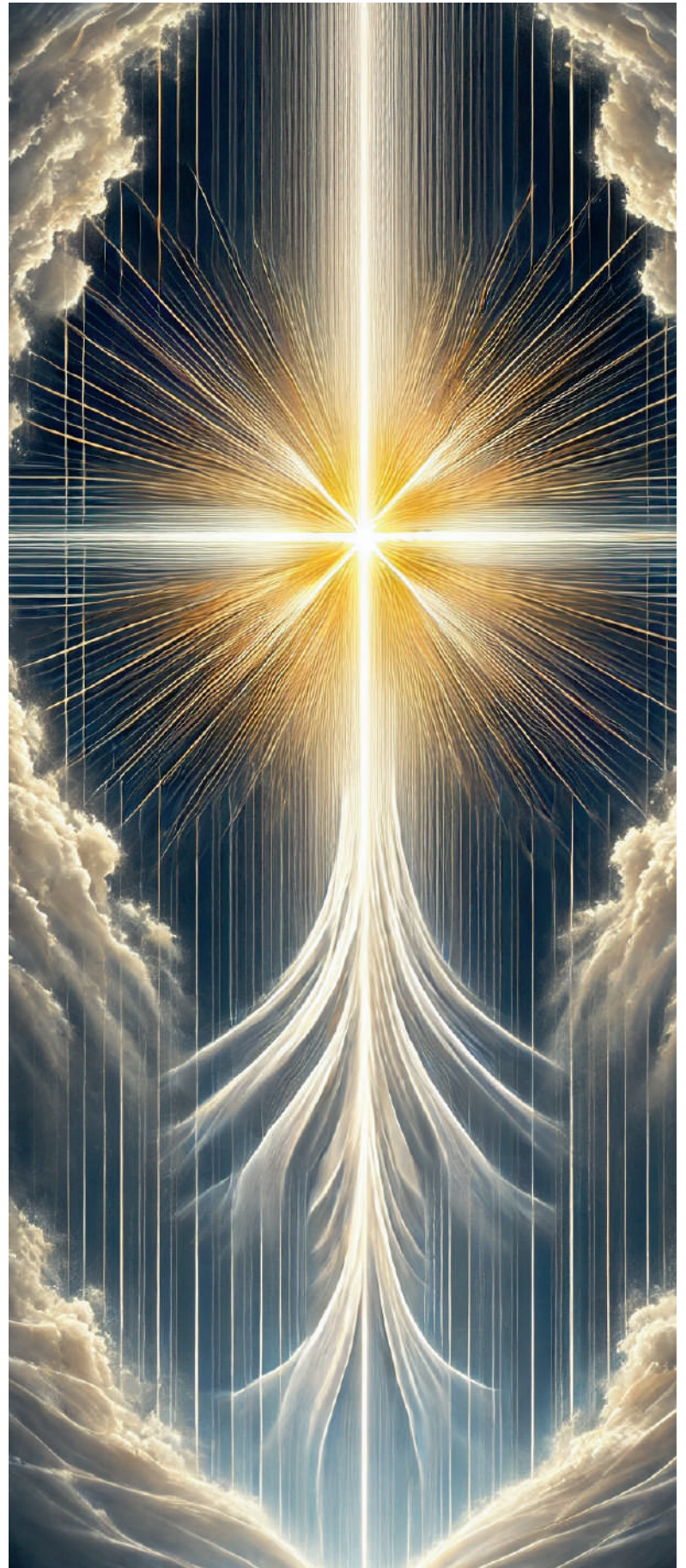
clude his father, Saul (1 Samuel 20:16). Jonathan is praised for his self-denying commitment to David (2 Samuel 1:26). The Hebrew word *hesed* is used in reference to the relationship between David and Jonathan throughout 1 and 2 Samuel. *Hesed* is not translated easily by a single English word. It is defined by a covenantal love that drives overabundant expressions of generosity and care. *Hesed* is also used in Scripture to indicate loyalty in political alliances. "The remaining chapters of 1 Samuel record Saul's pursuit of David, David's sparing of Saul's life (twice), the death of Samuel, David's hiding among the Philistines, and the eventual death of Saul and his sons in battle—including Jonathan (1 Samuel 31:1-2). The Book of 2 Samuel covers David's 48-year reign, but it begins with a time of mourning.... After Jonathan's death, David composes a lament for both the fallen prince and his father (2 Samuel 1:19-27). A lament is a song that expresses pain, loss, and uncertainty (compare Psalm 6). This response is consistent with David's honorable treatment of God's anointed—even when the king tried to kill David (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:11)" (Ibid., p. 366). The final verse of the poetic section says, "How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" (2 Samuel 1:27). We can understand both phrases, "the mighty" and "weapons of war" as referring metaphorical to Saul and Jonathan. "After ascending to the throne, David, the king, honors his covenant with his now deceased friend. Details of David's kindness to Mephibosheth son of Jonathan are recounted in 2 Samuel 9. This graciousness toward Jonathan's disabled son is even more remarkable given that the rest of Saul's house has been at war with David (2 Samuel 3:1). Even after Jonathan's death, David remembers and honors his commitments" (Ibid., p. 367).

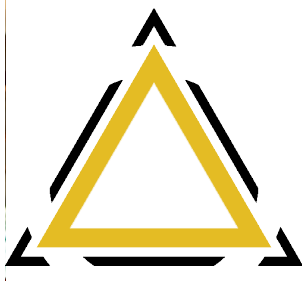
STANDING UP TO THE POWERFUL

Amos (derived from a Hebrew verb meaning "to lift a burden"), originating from Tekoa in Judah, accused Israel's religious leaders of sanctioning false worship and a political and economic status quo that exploited the weak. "Shepherd" or "sheep breeder" (1:1, from *noqed*) indicates that Amos was a person of means and status, the owner of the flocks, not a lower status shepherd. *Ro'eh* is a more common Hebrew word for "shepherd" in the Old Testament. Amos also was a "dresser of sycamore trees" (7:14). This involves scraping or piercing the figs to hasten their growth and repel insects. He probably owned sycamore groves. "He preached in the northern kingdom of Israel in about 755 BC He ministered during a period of economic prosperity (3:15; 6:4-6). The national borders had been extended significantly through military campaigns (2 Kings 14:23-28). All this resulted in excessive pride and injustice among the people (Amos 6:8, 12-13). Despite material wealth, the kingdom was in spiritual decline. The people practiced idolatrous worship at national shrines in the cities of Dan, Bethel, and Gilgal (Amos 4:4; 5:5, 26; 8:14;

compare 1 Kings 12:28-30). The people silenced voices that challenged their practices (Amos 2:11)" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, pp. 370-371). But Amos refused to be silenced, as 3:7-8 declares. God has spoken through him, and he considers it an urgency to speak the words of the Lord to the people, endangering his safety from persecution by the ruling powers. Martin Luther King, Jr., relied upon the words and character of the prophet Amos in his fight for justice in America and the world. He often quoted in his many speeches, sermons, essays, and books the words of Amos to the Israelites, found in Amos 5:24). Amos refers to the Nazarites as a divine calling like that of a prophet. Perhaps Nazarites flourished for a short period in his day due to the corruption of society that Amos denounces. He uses two titles for God in his book, Lord God and Lord. Lord God literally means "Lord Yahweh" (Hebrew Adonay YHWH). The NIV translates the phrase as "Sovereign God."

Concerning Amaziah's rebuke of Amos: Throughout the ancient world, it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but also, in the process, unleashed the divine action. "Word" and "deed" were the same word in Hebrew (*dabar*). Amaziah accuses (7:12) Amos of being a professional ("for hire") prophet. Amos responds by declaring that he is a farmer called by God for a specific prophetic mission. Amos had a clear sense of divine call, which is in sharp contrast to Amaziah. "The most important aspect of both Amaziah's report to Jeroboam [the king of Israel] and his challenge to Amos is the absence of any mention of God. Amaziah does not challenge Amos's interpretation of God's message or his role as a divine spokesperson. He does not contradict Amos's accusations of sin. Instead, Amaziah is interested only in countering threats to the vested interest" (*Ibid.*, p. 373). The king and Amaziah did not heed the words of Amos and other prophets of God and were conquered and exiled by the Assyrians nearly 40 years later. "Because of their nation's relative prosperity and religious fervor, Jeroboam and Amaziah assumed God was on their side. Amos challenged this assumption, warned of judgment, encouraged repentance, and offered hope for the future.... For modern readers, the account of Amos also encourages us to reflect on how we hear the word of God today. Are we willing to listen? Will we accept God's challenge? Are we so committed to our religious, economic, and political status quo that we become unwilling to give an ear to anything that questions it? The fact that God speaks is a sign of God's grace. He wants to communicate with us. Will we have ears to hear?" (*Ibid.*, p. 375).





UNIT TWO

Saying Yes to Jesus

Rev. Dr. Jonathon D. Counts

THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS



Sandra Crouch penned these words, “Yes, Lord! Yes, Lord! From the bottom of my heart, to the depths of my soul. Yes, Lord, completely Yes! My soul says yes!” This particular song is a classic that provides a meaningful declaration. A complete “yes” to Jesus includes the mind, body, and the spirit. Unit II calls us to reflect upon our own “yes” to Jesus as we explore the four lessons. The Centurion, Simon Peter, Zacchaeus, and Mary, the Mother of Jesus, each had their own unique experiences saying “yes” to Jesus. Reflect upon your own “yes” to Jesus. What happened, how did you feel, what thoughts came to mind?

A RADICAL YES

The word radical is a buzz word that often gets misinterpreted. The word radical often refers to something very different from the usual or traditional way of doing things. However, when it relates to our “yes” to Jesus, have we every considered the radical nature of it?! In the Gospel of Matthew 8:5–13, the centurion embodies what can be called a radical yes to Jesus. This act is revealed when the centurion declares, “Lord, my servant[a] is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.”(Matthew 8:6, NRSV), and when Jesus offers to come and heal him, the centurion responds, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my servant[b] will be healed.” (Matthew 8:8, NRSV) The centurion’s “yes” is radical because it is based upon both humility and authority. Being a Roman officer, he had a sense of authority based upon his context, but he also understood the need for being under authority. So, essentially, he understood structure and order within his interaction with Christ.

The centurion recognizes that Jesus operates with heavenly authority, and therefore a spoken word would bring the resolution to the issue at hand. His “yes” was not based upon proximity, but it was based upon proclamation. It is a radical dimension of faith that trusts Christ’s word without demanding Christ’s physical presence to aid the situation. The power of Jesus Christ has the ability to change situations at all costs. That is the belief that we must have as believ-



ers in Christ. There are situations that appear to be extremely impossible; but the power of Christ causes possibility in the midst of impossibility. Displaying a radical “yes” suggests that you truly believe that Jesus can move in unconventional ways. You are not fixated on one particular way for the miracle to be demonstrated, but you are open to how Jesus will handle the situation—even if it appears to be radical.

The centurion’s “yes” teaches us that radical faith has the ability to expand the Kingdom. Jesus concludes, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.” And the servant was healed in that hour (Matthew 8:13, NRSV). The healing was a response to a radical “yes”. Faith is what provides an open door into the Kingdom of God. The centurion’s “yes” demonstrates that radical trust has the ability to move Heaven and shift narratives. It is revealed that the centurion experienced a powerful dimension of discipleship and became a Kingdom citizen by way of his faith. The centurion displays a deep surrender to Christ because even in his unworthiness, he still believed that Jesus had the answer to the problem that his servant was facing. This act of radical faith and submission encourages us to strengthen our belief in Christ where we can believe beyond what is presented in front of us—while trusting the mechanism that Christ seeks to use.

A RISKY YES

Saying “yes” to Jesus is extremely risky business based upon the liberative nature and Kingdom focused attributes of the Savior. Jesus’ character was not always understood in the biblical context as we know it. So, when someone surrendered to Christ, it was quite risky. Simon Peter displayed that risk in Mark 8:27–29. Simon Peter offers his first risky yes when he

declares, “You are the Messiah”. This was extremely risky and dangerous where there were so many questions concerning the validity of Christ in this context. Peter named what so many others around him were actually questioning; but it definitely leads to the cost of discipleship. A risky “yes” begins with a revelation of who Jesus is, but it does not always understand the weight of suffering that stems from that revelation. Peter says “yes” to who Jesus is before he fully comprehends what following Christ will require. Have you ever been there?

That tension deepens in Luke 22:31–34 and John 18:25–27, where Peter’s devotion becomes fickle. In Luke, Peter expresses loyalty after Jesus warns him that the devil wanted to have ownership over Peter. Then according to John’s account, Peter denies Christ. “Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, “You are not also one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” (John 18:25, NRSV) It causes us to think, what happened? It appeared that Peter was full of devotion on the one hand, but now we see inconsistency. The risky “yes” presents here as fragile because Peter’s initial “yes” was sincere; but it had not been tested. Therefore, at times—under pressure, fear overwhelms and causes one to falter. A risky “yes” is not the absence of failure, which is a liberating thought; but having the willingness to remain in relationship with Christ even after failure is more important. Jesus’ intercession sustains Peter when Peter’s courage collapses in the moment. There are times when we falter, but Jesus continues to intercede for us and continues to call us into a deeper relationship. A risky “yes” is not perfect but it is receiving the grace even in imperfections to continue to say “yes” to Jesus.

John 21:15–17 presents restoration, and we will highlight verse 17: “He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.” (John 21:17, NRSV) This opportunity reverses Peter’s previous denial. This “yes” is different from the earlier one because it has been tested and purified. Jesus also commissions him to “feed my sheep” which solidifies the restoration. A risky “yes” counts the cost of discipleship and allows the process to mature. The beauty is that when we fall short, the grace of Jesus provides restoration. So, the risk includes a proclamation, even a falling away, but it then includes a time to put the pieces back together again.

A TRANSFORMATIVE YES

When we say “yes” to Jesus, it is imperative that transformation also takes place in that moment. In Luke 19:1–10, Zacchaeus shows a transformative yes because it begins with curiosity; but it ends up with conversion. The text introduces him as “a chief tax collector and was rich” (Luke 19:2, NRSV), a man who had power within a system that benefited from exploitation. Yet, “He was trying to see who Jesus was” (Luke

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19:3, NRSV). So, when he climbed the sycamore tree, it was not just a physical act—but it also had spiritual implications because Zacchaeus was open to Christ before they even had an encounter. Therefore, when Jesus looked up and saw him and made a request, Zacchaeus was open to the opportunity to host Jesus. Transformation starts with welcoming Christ into a space. The question that we must ask ourselves is, have we truly welcomed Christ into our lives?

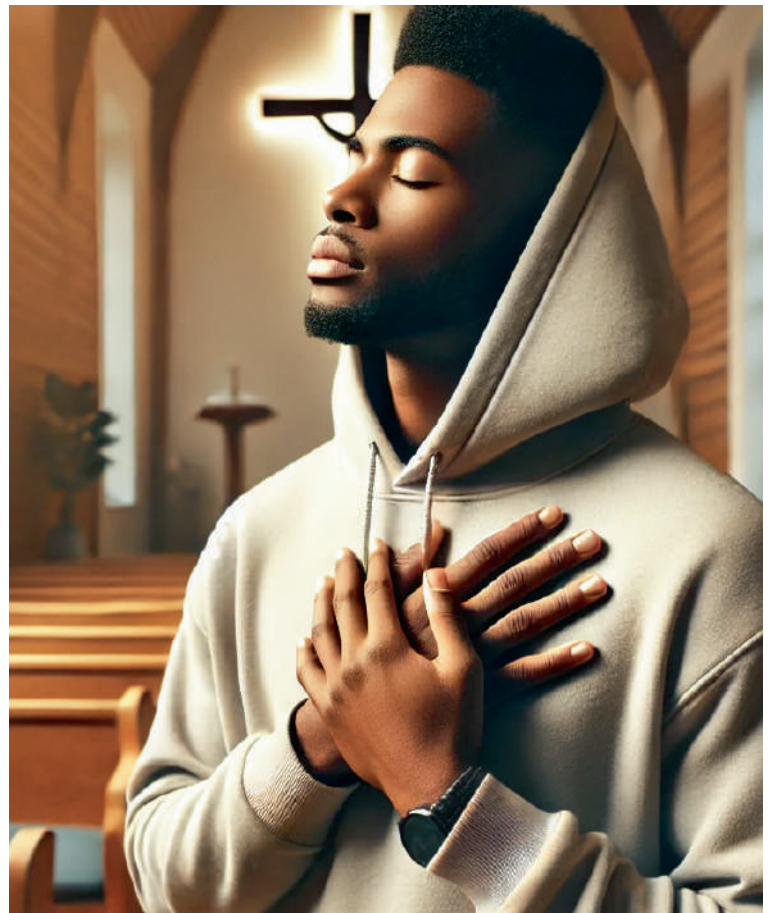
This transformative “yes” also unfolds through public criticism. The question was basically, how was Zacchaeus fit to host Jesus? Yet, Zacchaeus does not defend his reputation but he demonstrates repentance through his actions. Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” (Luke 19:8, NRSV) His “yes” caused him to face his injustice and exploitation. Therefore, Zacchaeus’ transformative “yes” is visible through both redistribution and restoration. When we say “yes” to Jesus, it causes us to face the man or the woman in the mirror. Confrontation leads to transformation ultimately.

Jesus’ goal is to save the lost as revealed in the passage, “Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:9 & 10, NRSV) Salvation is not merely individual but it also enters a household which has powerful effects. When Jesus extends salvation to us, the invitation is also connected to persons around us through the commitment that we make. A transformative “yes” welcomes Christ in and ends with allowing salvation to reorder one’s entire life. Jesus has the ability to reorder our lives, our families, and our relationships.

A SUBMISSIVE YES

At the end of the day, our hearts must be submissive to the will of Christ when we say “yes”. In Luke 2:15–19, Mary models a surrendered yes that is reflective before it is public. After the shepherds testify about the angelic announcement, the text says, “and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19, NRSV) Mary was shocked by the news of her assignment and was trying to grapple with the reality that was happening around her. A submissive “yes” begins with trust in what God has revealed, even when comprehension is incomplete. Mary was not sure what was going to happen but she was still submissive. There are times when God calls us to trust the plan even without the details. Submission is not about the loud announcements but the quiet obedience.

This submissive “yes” becomes active in John 2:1–5 at the wedding in Cana scene. When the wine runs out, Mary tells Jesus, “They have no wine.” (John 2:3, NRSV). Though Jesus

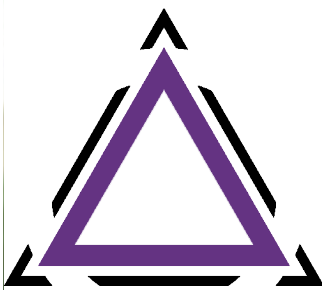


responds, “My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4, NRSV), she turns to the servants and says, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5, NRSV). Mary’s submission does not influence the miracle, but it trusts the Messiah; and she releases the outcome into Jesus’ hands. It is amazing to see and note that even the mother of Jesus had to be submissive to her Son, Jesus authority. She humbles herself to a servant of Christ, even in this moment. Submission is no respecter of persons; so, we must embrace a stance of humility even when saying “yes” to Christ.

The fullness of Mary’s submissive “yes” is revealed in John 19:25–27, when she ultimately stands at the foot of the cross. Mary witnesses the one she carried now hanging on the cross, and yet, she remains present and submissive. Jesus entrusts her to the beloved disciple John, saying, “Woman, here is your son.” (John 19:26, NRSV). Mary’s submission has moved her from cradle to cross. This journey reveals joy and agony, promise and pain. A surrendered “yes”, therefore is both life-long and costly. It is not limited to moments of celebration but a submissive “yes” endures through suffering. Mary’s witness teaches that true surrender to God’s will means remaining faithful even when the fulfillment of promise passes through the valley before the mountain top happens. Will you continue to say yes even in the valley?

CONCLUSION

Keep on saying yes to Jesus whether radical, risky, transformative, or submissive because every true “yes” reorients our lives around Christ and participates in the unfolding work of His kingdom.



UNIT THREE

Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News

By: Rev. Dr. Adrian V. Nelson, II

THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS



The summer quarter, entitled “The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses,” introduces women and men in the Bible who heard the call of God, responded in faith, and through their words and deeds, spread the good news. Unit III sheds a light on five famous disciples who are remembered for their bold testimony. Thomas, Stephen, Saul, Timothy, and Lydia exemplify the words of Romans 10:9: “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” These stories of Jesus’ disciples standing up for what is right, repenting of their past lives, offering kindness to strangers in Christ’s name, and accepting the call of God to serve Christ and his church inspire us to grow deeper in faith and to share our faith in Christ with those who have no faith.

BELIEVING THE GOOD NEWS

“Breaking News: He Lives! Jesus Christ Is Alive.” Yes, certain cable news channels overuse the phrase “breaking news.” However, had cable news been in existence during the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection, learning of his resurrection certainly would have been the “breaking news” of all “breaking news.” However, the key to some believing breaking news is to see evidence of what is being reported.

You’ve heard the phrase “seeing is believing.” There is no doubt that this phrase is linked to Jesus’ disciple Thomas, who said he needed to see evidence of Jesus’ resurrection. Thomas has come down through the centuries as a typical pessimist and skeptic. Some authorities believe the epithet “Didymus” referred to his doubting propensities since some versions render it “double-minded.”

Many of us know much of Thomas’s story, the origin of his reputation as a non-believer. On that first Resurrection Sunday evening, Jesus appeared to some of his disciples, who were locked in out of fear of the Jewish leaders. (John 20:19) However, Thomas was not pres-

ent. (v. 24) Nonetheless, the disciples shared the breaking news – “We have seen the Lord!” (v. 25a) Thomas’ response was typical for him and many, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.” (v. 25b)

Some understand that Thomas’ issue was not disbelief, but unbelief; there is a difference between the two. Unbelief involves a lack of faith, while disbelief is a refusal to believe. Many of us have a lack of faith when it comes to matters of faith, versus refusing to believe at all. It’s not that we refuse to believe that God can heal, but we can have a lack of faith when it comes to God’s ability to heal us. Unbelief is a believer’s struggle; disbelief is a non-believer’s condition.

Thomas’ unbelief bluff was about to be called by Jesus. Eight days after his appearance to the other disciples, Jesus appeared to Thomas. (v. 26) That Jesus invited Thomas to touch Jesus is important. Jesus said, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!” (v. 27 NLT) Touching turned Thomas into a believer. It is for this reason that initial/early encounters with the resurrected Jesus are so important in our faith formation. Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (v. 28 NLT) When we are certain that we’ve had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus, not only is our salvation secure but it also forms the foundation for us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

Belief is essential to our proclamation of the good news!

SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS

Once we believe the good news, we are called to be faithful witnesses who spread the good news. Do you know the gospel song lyrics that say, “Said I wasn’t gonna tell nobody but I, couldn’t keep it to myself . . . What the Lord has done for me.” We should spread the good news with the same fervency that we spread a good rumor or some good gossip. Yes, when it comes to a rumor or gossip we say, “I won’t tell anybody.” But as soon as the rumor or gossip hits our ears, we are telling someone, saying, “Please don’t tell anybody, but . . .” Imagine if we share what the Lord has done for us, our personal good news, like we serve rumors and gossip.

Stephen was a disciple associated with the spreading of the good news. After he and six others were commissioned in the early days of the church, scripture records that “The word of God continued to spread . . .” (Acts 6:7a) Stephen is described as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (v. 5). He “did great wonders and signs among the people” (v. 8). And he foresaw that the Temple would no longer be the center of worship—God can be worshipped anywhere. If it could be recognized in the early church that the church would not be building-cen-

tric, why don’t we understand this today? Spreading the good news requires us to leave the four walls of our respective churches.

So, what resulted in Stephen’s arrest? Acts 7 intends to make clear that Stephen and other Christian believers did not promote Jesus by defaming the Temple and Torah (Acts 6:8–7:1). Stephen was not pitting Christianity over and against Judaism. Rather, this debate/conflict was an intra-Jewish struggle over identity and the continuing role of the Temple and Law.

Spreading the good news can have consequences. When we share what we believe, there are many responses that we can experience – rejection, acceptance, disdain, delight, skepticism, and curiosity. We should be prepared for the consequences of sharing the gospel regardless of what they might be.

There were tragic consequences for Stephen for spreading the good news to the Jewish religious council, as captured in Acts 7:1-53. They became enraged with Stephen and rushed him. (vv. 54, 57) He was dragged out of the city and pushed over a ledge to be crushed and buried by heavy stones hurled down upon them. (v. 58) Not only did Stephen spread the good news, and die for the gospel, he also lived the gospel. As he was being stoned, and dying, he prayed for those who were stoning him, saying, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” (v. 60)

Stephen’s death demonstrates dying for the gospel, and in so doing, challenges us to accept its message as good news. In one respect, spreading the gospel does require us to die unto the good news, as we become a new creation that is willing to share the good news regardless of the consequences.

BEING TRANSFORMED BY THE GOOD NEWS

Do you remember your old self? Each of us should have an old self and a new self. The former is the person that we were before we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and the latter is the person that we are becoming since we accepted Jesus Christ.

Before there was Paul, there was Saul of Tarsus. There was the old Saul and the new Paul. Saul was very proud of his Jewish identity. He said, “I am a Jew born in Tarsus . . . educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God . . .” Saul was so proud of his Jewish identity, prior to his conversion, that he persecuted Christians. He said, “I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison . . .” (v. 4) The Way is a reference to those who lived as Christians, in “the way” of Christ. “To the point of death” refers to Saul’s presence, consent, and possible participation in Stephen’s stoning. (See Acts 7:58 and 8:1) Definitely, Saul was a proud Jew, whose pride made him a zealous defender of his faith.

BEING NURTURED IN THE GOOD NEWS

Saul's conversion to Paul is vividly captured in Acts 9. His conversion occurred on the road to Damascus Road when he encountered the risen Christ. Saul "fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'" (Acts 9:4) When he asked to whom he was speaking, the reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." (v. 5) Saul was blinded by the encounter. After three days in that condition, Saul was visited by Ananias who had been sent by the Lord to lay hands on Paul so that he might regain his sight and receive the Holy Spirit (after his baptism). (vv. 17-19a) After his conversion, Saul began to spread the good news. (vv. 19b-22)

Unofficially, Saul became Paul. No, Saul's name was never legally changed. However, at some point after his conversion, Saul (a Hebrew name) was referred to as Paul (a Greek name) beginning in Acts 13:9. This change was one way of distinguishing between the old Saul and the new Paul. And so, in Acts 21:40-23:35, Paul defends his mission, considered a criminal enterprise, as his obedience to the will of God. He asserts that following a universal gospel does not mean surrendering his Jewishness, especially his piety.

Being transformed by the good news is never easy. Going from who we used to be to who God would have us to be is the journey of a lifetime. In 1 Corinthians 15:31, Paul says, "I die daily." Dying each and everyday is what we are called to do. And while we should be authentically transformed into new creations in Christ Jesus, we also need to learn how to transform in the moment depending upon our audience. For in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul says:

¹⁹For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might gain all the more. ²⁰To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to gain Jews. To those under the law, I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might gain those under the law. ²¹To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not outside God's law but am within Christ's law) so that I might gain those outside the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might become a partner in it.

Paul's conversion informs his vocation—"What am I to do?" It will be clarified in Damascus (22:10). Ananias is a messenger telling Paul of the content of his ministry. Ananias demonstrates that being a pious Jew and a Christian convert are not mutually exclusive. And while this is true, the universal scope of the gospel's offer of salvation will prove to be a stumbling block to those who hear this speech (22:21-22).

Nonetheless, we are to allow ourselves to be transformed by the good news so that we can love and serve God, as well as love and serve others.

For many of us, the good news is that we have been nurtured in the good news of our faith. We have a family history of loving and serving the Lord. Our parents made us go to Sunday church school, worship services, and afternoon programs. We hated it then, but we are the better for it today. However, there are many today who were not, or are not being, nurtured in the good news. In Second Timothy, Paul proffers a genuinely radical solution – he calls Timothy back to basics: engaging the Scriptures and the Christian witness.

Second Timothy was written in Paul's name probably within a decade of the year 100 CE, long after the apostle's death. It places high value on preserving and passing along a heritage from one generation to the next. Generally, Second Timothy warns against false teachers who promote a form of Christianity that threatens the faith. In the same way, false teachers exist today, some of whom find no value in the good news, having replaced it with slogans that are not based in scripture, and who have made the good news about what we personally can get from God, not about loving and serving God and others.

At the outset of Second Timothy, it highlights that Timothy's mother and grandmother were instrumental to his faith development. Timothy's mother and grandmother nurtured him in the faith and prepared him for ministry. Of note is the fact that Timothy was the offspring of a "mixed" marriage – his father was a non-believing Greek person, while his mother Eunice was a devout Jewish believer. (See Acts 16:1-3) In mixed marriages, if the mother was Jewish, her offspring was considered Jewish. (See Deuteronomy 7:3 for prohibitions against mixed marriages.) Timothy's mother was called Eunice and his grandmother was Lois. (2 Timothy 1:5).

Paul calls on Timothy to "fan the flame" of that gift – the knowledge of the good news – confirmed through the laying on of hands. In Philippians 2:19-22, Paul commends Timothy for two essential qualities: (1) his like-mindedness with Paul and (2) his genuine concern for others. Timothy has served with Paul in the gospel work as an apprentice son serves with his father.

Many of us need to be reminded that it is time for us to go back to the basics. First, we need to nurture those in our immediate families in the good news of Jesus Christ. "Gimme that ol' time religion. Gimme that ol' timer religion. Gimme that ol' time religion. It's good enough for me." Second, we need to share our faith with others. It wasn't shared with us for us to keep it to ourselves. Not, it was given to us to share with the world.

Being nurtured by the good news is essential for disciples of Christ.

LIVING THE GOOD NEWS

It has been said, "It's better to live a sermon than to preach one." If you are reading this reflection, it is likely that you regularly attend church worship services on Sundays. And if you regularly go to church, you probably have heard your fair share of sermons. Some of them have probably been good, while others have probably not been so good. Most preachers might be surprised, even insulted, about the extent to which people remember their sermons. To the contrary, people are more likely to remember the sermons that are lived versus sermons that simply are preached. Think back over your life. What do you recall about persons who demonstrated their love of God and others in the way that they lived their life?

One way that we "live a sermon" is to demonstrate hospitality. Some say that there is something special about southern hospitality – the food, the extra touches, and the supportive ways. However, hospitality does not have to just be a southern thing, it should be a human thing. As you live out your life, always keep in mind ways that you can demonstrate genuine hospitality toward others as a way of sharing the good news and the love of Christ with others.

In today's text, Acts 16:11-15, 40, we encounter Paul experiencing another vision. His vision inspired him to set sail. In Acts, the Spirit is the driving force in the church's emerging mission. Today, the Spirit remains the driving force in the church's continuing mission to share the good news with everyone and everywhere. Is the Holy Spirit telling you to go and share the good news with others on your job, among friends, and with family?

Paul, and possibly Luke with him, find themselves in Philippi. There, they go near the river where they believe they will find a "place of prayer." Remember, they were in a Roman colony. There may not have been a synagogue in the city, and so it is possible that Jews gathered at the "place of prayer," to both pray and engage in ritual washing. It was at the place of prayer where Paul encountered Lydia. She was a God-worshipper, a convert to Judaism. She is also described as a dealer in purple, which may mean that she was a wealthy person. The women with Lydia listened to Paul, and they were baptized. After her conversion, Lydia offered Paul a place to stay. Her open heart resulted in open doors. Not only that, but Lydia also used her wealth to benefit Paul's work.

Hospitality was a prized virtue in the ancient Mediterranean world and characteristic of the early church. Luke mentions hosting concerning Lydia and the jailer (v. 40). Have you ever thought about hospitality as a way of sharing the good news with others? What does it take to share hospitality with others? While Lydia was wealthy, hospitality does not require wealth. Think about the hospitality that many of our grandparents shared even though they had very limited financial means.

First and foremost, as we said at the beginning of this reflec-



tion, to be a witness of the good news of Jesus Christ we must accept the message and submit to Christ's rule in our lives. Lydia did that. But she did not stop there. She allowed her heart to be changed in ways that allowed her to live out the good news. She showed love for other believers by allowing them to stay in her home. And she put her money where her mouth was by using her wealth to support Paul's ministry.

You may not be comfortable preaching, singing a solo, or going out to evangelize others, but each of us can demonstrate genuine hospitality to others, the hospitality that Christ shows to each of us.

CONCLUSION

Each of us must believe the good news, spread the good news, be transformed by the good news, be nurtured in the good news, and live the good news.

Walter J. Harrelson, Editor, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 968.

"'Out of nothing' or *ex nihilo* is a doctrine of creation that relates to bringing 'all things' into creation when nothing previously existed." Ibid. ¹

THE PROMISES OF GOD:

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Submitted By: Rev. Tashara Person

A promise is only as strong as the one who makes the promise.

We all know something about promises – whether it’s a parent who promises a child, “I’ll be there,” or a friend who reassures us, “You can count on me,” or a leader who encourages us, “Things are going to get better.” Sometimes those promises are kept. Sometimes they are broken.

Many of us have lived long enough to recognize the fragility of a promise. “Stuff” happens, after all. Life changes. Circumstances shift. Good intentions fall short; and every now and then, we discover that the one who made the promise simply did not have the power to keep it.

This is why promises matter so much. A promise reveals something about the one who makes it. The promise may reveal their character, integrity, or possession of both the will and the capacity to follow through. If we’re honest, we must also admit that sometimes we are the ones who fall short of keeping our word. Human limitation, forgetfulness, and frailty often interfere with even our best intentions.

Let’s take a look at the story of God’s relationship with humanity against the backdrop of this fragility. Scripture presents a God who makes promises and a God who is consistently faithful to His promises.

Throughout the course of biblical history, God made several promises. He promised Abraham that he would have descendants as numerous as the stars (Genesis 15:5). He promised Israel deliverance from bondage (Exodus 3:7-8). He promised David that his kingdom would endure (2 Samuel 7:16). He even goes so far as to promise the world a Savior (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:11).

Across generations, across wilderness journeys, across exile and return, the people of God discovered one thing to be irrevocably true: God is faithful to keep God’s promises.

The apostle Paul puts it this way: “For in him every one of God’s promises is a Yes” (2 Corinthians 1:20).

In other words, when God speaks a promise, there is no lack of certainty. The promises of God are grounded in the character of God. They reveal who God is. In particular, God’s promises bear witness to God’s grace, love, and provision.

It is here, in this revelation of God’s character, that the Church is called to respond.

In the Black Church tradition, especially, believers have long understood that the promises of God are not only doctrines to be read, but realities to be witnessed. Many of us grew up attending testimony services where members of congregations would stand up and recount how God made a way, carried

them through sorrow, or provided comfort in the time of crisis. Other may recall moments during worship when the praise leader shared how God opened unexpected doors, forgave what seemed unforgivable, or provided when there was simply not enough.

Somewhere in the telling of these stories, the voice would rise to invite congregational participation. They would call out:

"Can I get a witness?"

To this, there is always a response:

Yes, I've seen it.

Yes, I've lived it.

Yes, I am a witness.

Christian education rests in the sacred space between promise and witness. Our task as educators is to balance the teaching of the promises of God as a theological concept and helping believers recognize how these promises are at work within the biblical narrative, within the life of the Church, and within everyday experiences.

In what follows, we will explore four promises that stand at the heart of the Christian faith – grace, love, and provision. We must consider how Christian educators can teach these truths faithfully and creatively within the life of the Church. When the Church learns how to bear witness to these promises, our faith moves from the pages of the biblical text into the lived reality of God's people. Therefore, as Christian educators, we are called not only to the informing of the mind, but also the forming of witnesses.

THE PROMISE OF GRACE

Among the many promises revealed through the scriptures, the promise of God's grace sets at the foundation of the Christian faith. Grace is the assurance that God gives freely what humanity could never earn on its own. It is the unmerited favor of God extended toward a world that continually falls short of God's righteousness.

The New Testament speaks frequently of this grace. The Apostle Paul reminds us, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Grace, then,

is neither a reward for moral perfection nor a prize for our spiritual achievements. Grace is a gift freely given by God without necessitating the proof of humanity's worthiness to receive it.

This promise of grace runs throughout the biblical story. Long before humanity demonstrates faithfulness, God demonstrates mercy. God calls Abraham not because Abraham has earned divine favor, but simply because God choose to initiate a covenant relationship. God delivers Israel from Egypt not because the people had done anything to prove themselves righteous, but because God remembers the covenant promise. Even in moments when the people repeatedly turn away, God's grace continues to pursue them.

Early Christian tradition emphasized that grace begins in the character of God rather than in the merit of humanity. Theologians such as Augustine of Hippo described grace as the divine help that restores humanity's relationship with God¹. He would contend that salvation is ultimately the work of God rather than the achievement of human effort. In other words, within the doctrine of grace, we find a God who moves toward humanity, even when humanity struggles to move toward God.

At its fullest expression, Christians understand the promise of grace through the life and work of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God's grace is both spoken and embodied. The ministry of Jesus repeatedly demonstrates God's willingness to extend mercy toward those who were overlooked, rejected, or condemned by society. Tax collectors, sinners, the sick, the poor, and the marginalized all encounter a Savior whose actions reveal that grace is extended to all; no matter how undeserving one may feel.

For the Church, this promise carries enormous implications for how we teach the faith. Christian education must continually remind believers that the Christian life does not begin with human accomplishment, but with divine generosity. Too often, faith formation can unintentionally slip into the language of performance, implying that God's love must be earned through good behavior, spiritual discipline, or moral perfection. While faithful living is certainly an important response to God's work, it should not be the starting point.

Grace comes first.

Because grace comes first, Christian educators have the opportunity to help people understand the liberating truth about God's love and mercy. That is, grace reaches us before we even have the chance to repent of our wrongdoing; and grace moves toward us before we fully understand our need for it. While the Christian life is often propagated as a journey of striving to become worthy of God's love, the reality is, it is a journey of learning to live in response to the love that God has already given.

Teaching grace, then, requires more than simply defining the term. It requires creating spaces where believers can come together—recognizing grace at work in the story of Scripture and in the story of their own lives. When students of the faith begin to recognize that God has been present, even in moments of failure, uncertainty, or struggle; it is only then that they truly begin to understand grace as a lived reality.

In this way, the promise of grace invites the Church to become a community that reflects the same generosity it has received. A Church that truly understands grace becomes a place where people are welcomed before they are perfected and loved even while they are still growing.

And perhaps this, in itself, is one of the richest witnesses the Church can offer to the world: a community that lives by grace because it has first received grace.

THE PROMISE OF LOVE

Closely connected to the promise of grace is the promise of God's love. Grace reveals how God moves toward humanity, while love reveals why God does so to begin with.

The scriptures frequently affirm that love is not just something God does; it is something God is. The First Epistle of John states: "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). This is a reminder that divine love is neither occasional nor temporary – it is neither action nor emotion. Love, quite concretely, belongs to the very nature of God.

Like God's grace, God's love is also expressed through covenantal commitment. When God establishes the covenant with Abraham, liberates Israel from Egypt, and remains faithful to the people even during periods of rebellion and exile, God is displaying a love that will not abandon its subject. God's love is steadfast, as the psalmists celebrate in the repeated refrain of Psalm 136.

The New Testament presents a pure expression of this love in the person of Jesus. The Gospel of John summarizes the heart of the Christian message in one of the most familiar passages of Scripture: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16). Here, divine love is demonstrated through sacrificial action. In Christ, God's love moves toward a broken world with the intention of restoring it.

For centuries, theologians have reflected on the depth of this kind of love. In the Black theological tradition, scholars like James H. Cone have emphasized that God's love must always be understood in relation to the lived experiences of God's people, particularly those who have endured suffering and injustice. Cone reminds the Church that God's love is solidarity with those who are oppressed². In other words, God's love is just as much immanent as it is transcendent. This is the kind of love that chooses to stand with humanity in the midst of struggle and works with us toward our liberation and healing.

This insight has been historically evident within the worship and witness of the Black Church. Songs, sermons, and testimonies have consistently affirmed that God's love persists even in the most difficult circumstances. Generations of believers have proclaimed with confidence that no hardship – whether personal sorrow, communal struggle, or societal injustice – can ultimately separate God's people from the love of God. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:38-39, "neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

For Christian educators, the promise of God's love carries important implications. Teaching love is not limited to encouraging kindness or "good" moral behavior, although these practices certainly matter. Rather, teaching love involves helping the believer understand the depth and persistence of God's commitment to humanity.

Students of the faith must learn that God's love precedes their successes and survives their failures. We are talking about the kind of love that welcomes the outsider, restores the broken, and affirms the dignity of every person created in God's image. When we, as believers, begin to grasp the breadth of this love, we are better equipped to embody that same love in our relationships with others.

The Church, then, is a living testimony to the promise of divine love. In a world that is so often defined by division, indifference, and exclusion, Christian communities are called to demonstrate a different way of living. This way is rooted in the conviction that every person is worthy of dignity, compassion, and care, simply because they are loved by God.

The faithful and responsible teaching of this promise has the potential to reshape how we see our-

selves, how we see our neighbors, and how we understand our responsibility to the world around us.

And, when the people of God truly grasp the depth of that love, the witness of the Church grows stronger—for a community that has experienced the love of God cannot help but reflect that love to the world.

THE PROMISE OF PROVISION

Alongside the promises of grace and love is another assurance that has sustained the faith of believers across generations: the promise of God's provision. Throughout biblical history, God is revealed as the One who cares for creation and provides for the needs of God's people.

Jesus speaks directly to this promise in the Sermon on the Mount when he tells his listeners, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink... Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:25-26). With this imagery, Jesus invites into the grounding truth, that is: the God who created life is also deeply invested in sustaining it.

The biblical story offers several examples of this divine provision. God provides manna for Israel during their journey through the wilderness (Exodus 16). He provides water from the rock when the people become thirsty (Numbers 20:11). In the ministry of Jesus, crowds are fed with a few loaves of bread and fish (Matthew 14:13-21). These stories are told to remind us that God's care is tangible, and it is a reality experienced by the people of God.

At the same time, it is imperative to note that Scripture does not present provision as the absence of difficulty. The Israelites still had to travel through the wilderness. The disciples still had to face uncertainty and hardship. Provision did not eliminate struggle, but it did ensure that God's presence remained active within the struggle. In this way, the promise of provision is closely related to what Christian theology often calls the doctrine of providence – the belief that God continues to sustain and guide creation with wisdom and care³.

For Christian educators, teaching the promise of provision requires helping believers understand both its comfort and its depth. God's provision is not a guarantee that life will always unfold according to our expectations⁴. More truthfully, it is the assurance that God remains attentive to the needs of creation and continues to work for the well-being of God's people.

This distinction is important, especially in a world where many people experience uncertainty about employment, health, family stability, and the future. In such circumstances, the promise of provision becomes a source of hope. People of God learn to trust that even in seasons of scarcity or struggle, God's care is still present.

Within the life of the Black Church, this promise has often been expressed through testimony. Generations of believers have told stories of how God provided when their resources were limited. They would tell of how God opened doors that seemed closed and how God sustained them and their families through seasons of hardship. These testimonies serve as reminders for the Church that God's provision is not always a dramatic or wondrous display of miracles. Sometimes, God provides through community support, unexpected opportunities, or even a boost of resilience to help us make it through tough moments.

Teaching the promise of provision then involves helping others recognize the many ways God's care for us shows up in our everyday lives. When Christian educators encourage believers to reflect on moments of

provision they experience, whether large or small, these help to cultivate gratitude and trust. Students of the faith will start to see that God's sustaining presence has been active in their lives even when they did not immediately recognize God's presence..

Ultimately, the promise of provision points us back to the faithfulness of God. The same God who created the world continues to sustain it. The same God who cared for Israel in the wilderness continues to care for the Church today. The same God who has provided in the past remains faithful in the present and hopeful for the future.

For the people of God, this promise is another opportunity for witness. When we look back over our lives and identify the ways God has sustained us, our testimony emerges almost naturally. That is, universally: God has been faithful. God has made a way. God has provided.

CAN I GET A WITNESS?

The promises of God, throughout history, have been real, lived, proclaimed experiences within the community of faith. From generation-to-generation, the people of God have held fast to the assurance that God is gracious. God is loving. And, God provides.

These promises have carried the Church through seasons of joy and seasons of sorrow. Long before these promises were written about in articles or taught in Sunday School classrooms, they were spoken in prayers, sung in songs, and shared in testimony. This is the sacred inheritance of the Church.

This is also the responsibility of Christian educators.

Teaching the promises of God ought not be the simple transfer of information from teacher to student. Rather, Christian educators ought to participate in the formation of a witnessing community. Christian educators are entrusted with the task of helping believers remember the faithfulness of God; not only in the scriptures, but also in their own lives and in the life of the Church.

This work requires embodiment. Educators must teach in ways that invite reflection, cultivate trust, and create space for testimony. When people are encouraged to name where they have experienced God's grace, where they have encountered God's love, and where they have seen God's provision, the promises

of God are then revealed as lived realities.

In this light, Christian education is an act of witness. In a world where promises are often broken and trust can be difficult to sustain; the Church has been gifted a different story. This story is one in which the Promisor's word never fails to be kept. It is a reflection of the character of God.

And as long as that story is told, there is a question that will continue to reverberate within the life of the Church.

"Can I get a witness?"

The answer, as it has always been, rises from the depths of our shared testimony:

Yes, Lord, we have seen Your grace.

Yes, Lord, we have known Your love.

Yes, Lord, we have experienced Your provision.

Yes, Lord. ***We are witnesses.***

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THE POWER OF GOD: CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Submitted By: Rev. Dr. Adrian V. Nelson, II

God is not just powerful; God is omnipotent, or all powerful. As Christian educators, there are at least three ways that you can teach about the importance of witnessing/teaching about the power of God – the power of God in nature, the Name, and what’s next.

THE POWER OF GOD IN NATURE: CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Nature, herself, witnesses to the power of God in many ways. Psalm 19 affirms:

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world ... (vv. 1-4a NRSV)

From the rising of the sun, to the going down of the same, the power of God is evident in nature.

First, witness is given to the power of God from the very beginning of creation. From the beginning of creation, and in the beginning, the power of God is evident in God’s creative acts. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1-2). Traditionally, it has been understood that “the formless earth and waters was God’s first creative act.”⁵ The traditional understanding is that while the formless earth and the waters are there at the beginning of Genesis’ telling of the story of God, it is understood that the formless earth and waters were created prior to the beginning of the telling of the story of God. Ibid. Thus, the creation of the formless earth and waters is a mystery that is attributed to the power of God.

As Christian educators, there are so many ways that you can help students imagine the power of God at work in the beginning of creation. Imagine the power of God in creating the matter that may have been at play to create the formless earth and the water.

Children would especially enjoy such an activity. Also, learners can image the face of the deep and the wind of God sweeping over the face of the waters.

Second, we are reminded about the power of God in nature in the book of Job. In Job 38, the Lord answers Job out of a whirlwind (v.1). The Lord says,

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding . . . On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy? Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors . . . Have you commanded the morning since your days began and caused the dawn to know its place . . . Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth? Have you entered into the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail . . . Who has cut a channel for the torrents of rain and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no one lives, on the desert, which is empty of human life . . . From whose womb did the ice come forth . . . Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go and say to you, Here we are? (vv. 1-41(selected verses))

As Christian educators, Job reminds us that God is the ultimate meteorologist, atmospheric scientist, oceanographer, and geographer. Why not have students study from a scientific perspective what God has done through and in nature? Doing so will give learners the language to use to share the awe of God's creation with others, which is a form of witnessing.

Third, we are reminded that about the power of God in creation in a number of biblical tests in which God speaks through nature. What immediately comes to mind is part of the Prophet Elijah's experiences with God in First Kings. In 1 Kings 18, it was Elijah versus King Ahab. The people of Israel were "limping between two opinions" (v. 21) Elijah said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him, but if Baal then follow him (v. 21)" It was show up or shut up time. Baal, who Ahab had come to worship, did not show up on Mount Carmel. "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice and no answer (v. 26b)." However, when Elijah called on the Lord, "the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust and even licked up the water in the trench." God's power was on full display. And after the showdown on Mount Carmel, in 1 Kings 19 we find Elijah, despite his victory, fleeing King Ahab's wife Jezebel, depressed and despondent. Elijah is told to meet God at Mount Horeb and to "Go out on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by," which resulted in "a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the lord ... (v. 1a-b)."

As Christian educators, the showdown and showing up of God are scenarios that are ripe to teach about the power of God. The sheer power of God's presence on Mount Carmel and Mount Horeb will give voice to students about the power of God in nature, which they can share as they witness to others.

Finally, the power in nature that Elijah experienced is the same power that was present during Jesus' crucifixion. "From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon (Mat. 27:45)." Matthew further records:

Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs were also opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

Christian educators, it should not be surprising that God's power in nature gave witness to the momentous moment when the Son of God gave his life for the sins of the world. God's power was on full display when an earthquake took place, so powerful that it opened sealed tombs. This is another biblical account that can be used to give voice to the power of God nature, which will give learners the tools with which to witness to others.

Jesus said himself, as he triumphantly rode into Jerusalem and a multitude of disciple began exclaiming about his kingship, "I tell you, if these are silent, the stones would shout out. (Lk. 19:40)" God can and will use nature, and us, to witness to his power.

THE POWER OF GOD IN THE NAME: CAN I GET A WITNESS?

At the outset, when we say that the power of God is made manifest in the Name, we are talking about the name of Jesus. However it should be clear that Jesus' name alone is not the power source, rather it is in the person of Jesus represented in the name of Jesus. As Christians, we should be careful creating Christian magic, if you will. A magician says, "Hocus pocus," and the belief is that something magical happens. As Christians, we should not believe that simply saying, "Jesus," results in Christian magic. Yes, there is power in the name of Jesus, but the power comes in who Jesus is, which is represented by his name.

God has many names. (The names of God would be an article unto itself.) However, in the Old Testament the names of God, which have meaning as it relates to nature of God, are important. In Exodus 3, it records:

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name? what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, "I am who I am." (vv. 13&14)

But in the Old Testament, there is not an emphasis on the power of God in the person of God because in the Old Testament God is only understood as a spirit since Jesus had not yet come in human-divine form. When God came in human-divine form, the children of God began to focus on the power of God in the person of God who we know to be Jesus.

Prior to Jesus' birth, his earthly father Joseph was told by an angel, "[Mary] will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. (Mat. 1:23)" Jesus is also "Emmanuel," which means "God with us" (Ibid.). Thus, Jesus' name literally "he who saves," which means that Jesus is associated with the power to save. Jesus save us from many things, including sin. It is this power – the power to save us – that causes us to want to call on the name of Jesus.

Think of the occasion when Peter cried out to Jesus. As he was walking on the water toward Jesus, Peter began to sink. He cried out, "Lord, save me!" Peter understood that Jesus had the power to save him, so he called out to him saying, "Lord." We do the same thing. We call upon Jesus to save us, even using Jesus' name. However, it is not Jesus' name that saves us, but it is Jesus' person that has the power to save us. And so, Christian educators, why not teach students the power in the Name, the power associated with the Name, and the power of the person who bears the Name?

How many times have we quoted Philippians 2:9-11? "Therefore God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and

on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." These verses more than any others probably have conditioned us as followers of Christ to understand that there is power associated with the name of Jesus. Additionally, these verses establish the expectation that the power of Jesus' name should cause us to confess our belief in Jesus' divinity which is a form of witnessing.

As Christian educators, perhaps a study on the names of God and the characteristics of God represented in the names of God would allow you to teach about those characteristics being fulfilled in Jesus and represented in his name.

THE POWER OF GOD IN WHAT'S NEXT: CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Christianity is a faith that is characterized by the hope that we have in what's next for us by the power of God. Jesus' resurrection is at the heart of the power of God in terms of what's next. As I write, we have just celebrated Palm Sunday and are preparing for Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. Going from the drama and devastation of Jesus' death on Good Friday to the resilience represented in Jesus' resurrection on Resurrection Sunday is a portrait of the power of God in terms of what's next for us in every situation.

Out of nothing⁶, Jesus gave the world hope in all situations. Jesus died. And Jesus rose again. What happened in between Jesus' death and resurrection is evidence that there is always a next move for God in our lives through Jesus Christ. Only God can create out of nothing. Only Jesus, from the nothingness of the tomb and his own death, could have another move, a next, when Death thought it had won on Good Friday.

- When we experience financial death, the power of God has a next for us.
- When we experience the death of a relationship, the power of God has a next for us.
- When we experience employment death, the power of God has a next for us.
- When we experience reputational death, the power of God has a next for us.
- And when we ultimately experience physical death, the power of God has a next for us – eternal life through Jesus Christ. Romans 8:11 reminds us that "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you."

No matter the death we experience, the power of God has a next for us. "[A]nd what is the immeasurable greatness for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places ..." (Ephesians 1:19&20)

As Christian educators, in addition to teaching the importance of being obedient to God, and living a life that is pleasing to God, we also must teach people that when life takes a left turn, even if it is of our own doing, God has a next for us. This is a powerful lesson that we can teach about the power of God available to us in our lives. When we find ourselves challenged in life, the next move that God has for us, should result in us having a powerful witness.

CONCLUSION

God is powerful, omnipotent in fact. God's power is present in nature, in the Name of Jesus, and in what's next for each of us. The question is, Can God get a witness to testify to his power in our world and lives.

¹ Walter J. Harrelson, Editor, *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 968.

² "'Out of nothing' or *ex nihilo* is a doctrine of creation that relates to bringing 'all things' into creation when nothing previously existed." Ibid.

THE PROCLAMATION OF GOD: CAN I GET A WITNESS?

Submitted By:
Rev. Dr. Richard Gadzekpo

Forming Apologetic Disciples in the AME Zion Church

INTRODUCTION

"Can I get a witness?" Within the Black Church tradition, this question invites affirmation grounded in experience. Yet, in the present cultural climate, the question presses beyond affirmation to articulation. Can we produce disciples who understand the faith they profess and who can defend their profession with clarity and integrity? The Church proclaims God because God has spoken. Scripture begins with divine initiative: "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1). This is to indicate how revelation precedes proclamation.

The Church does not construct its message; rather, the Church receives and announces the message she proclaims. Paul asked, "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" (Rom. 10:14). Faith comes through hearing (Rom. 10:17). Proclamation is therefore essential to mission. Yet, proclamation requires formation. Peter commanded believers to be "ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). Proclamation without understanding produces fragility, and defense without proclamation produces silence. The mission of the Church requires that the Church hold both proclamation and defense together.

BIBLICAL PROCLAMATION AND REASONED DEFENSE

Proclamation originates in God's self-disclosure.²⁹ The prophets declared the word of the Lord. The apostles proclaimed Christ crucified and risen. In the Great Commission, Jesus commands the Church to make disciples and to teach (Matt. 28:19–20). Teaching is intrinsic to discipleship. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles presents proclamation as reasoned engagement. In Acts, we discover how Paul explained scripture and argued publicly (Acts 17:2–3, 22–31). This indicates that Christian proclamation addresses both the heart and the intellect. Alister McGrath defined apologetics as the articulation, defense, and commendation of the Christian faith. Scripture reflects this integration. In a skeptical culture, Timothy Keller argued that Christians must engage doubt thoughtfully. J. P. Moreland warned that anti-intellectual Christianity weakens witness. The biblical mandate, therefore, calls for reasoned hope expressed with humility.

WOMANIST AND AFROCENTRIC CORRECTIVES

Womanist theology grounds proclamation in the lived experience of Black women. Jacquelyn Grant exposed theological distortions that ignore race and gender. Delores Williams reframed redemption through survival and quality of life. Afrocentric scholarship deepens this analysis. Molefi Kete Asante defined Afrocentricity as centering African agency in interpretation. Maulana Karenga emphasized communal responsibility and moral grounding. Kwame Bediako affirmed that authentic Christian theological identity in Africa must be grounded in African cultural traditions. Oduyoye highlighted the relational and communal dimensions often marginalized in Western theology. Therefore, apologetics in the AME Zion Church must defend not only doctrinal propositions but the gospel's credibility within Black historical experience. James Cone asserted that, theology arises within struggle, and Kelly Brown Douglas argued that Christian faith must confront narratives that undermine Black dignity.

ZION'S HISTORICAL AND WESLEYAN GROUNDING

The AME Zion Church emerged from resistance to racial exclusion. William J. Walls documented the Church's public witness tradition. James Walker Hood also recorded Zion's theological defense alongside moral protest. The AME Zion Church's Wesleyan heritage further strengthens this mandate. Albert Outler's articulation of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral affirmed Scripture as primary, interpreted through reason, tradition, and experience. Randy Maddox described Wesleyan theology as responsible grace, emphasizing sanctified living. The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (2024) affirms the Church's responsibility for Christian education, discipleship, and doctrinal continuity. The Church School, therefore, serves as a center of formation for apologetic discipleship.

This cultural moment requires an apologetic that integrates rigorous thinking with profound spiritual development. Secular skepticism, fragmentation, and misguided theology challenge the Church to produce disciples who can discern truth, deflect deception, and articulate theological truth. A womanist and Afrocentric approach require that any gospel apologetic take seriously the lived-experience of oppression and the wounds of Black communities. Wesleyan-Holiness theology further maintains that credible witness can be offered only through holy character. The intersection of these currents challenges the AME Zion Church to embody an apologetic that does not merely persuade. It must transform. It must tell the truth about God and history. It must be remembered. And it must live with courage.

TOWARD A PROPHETIC APOLOGETIC

The modern-day Church is subject to cultural forces that require more than simply playing defense or making doctrinal claims. People who can distinguish truth from competing narratives, who can resist the forces of distortion that seek to erode human dignity, and who can witness clearly in the contested terrain must be raised. In the AME Zion tradition, this means developing a theology that draws on the resources of Wesleyan holiness theology, womanist theology, and Afrocentric thought to create a faith that is both intellectually informed and socially engaged. Such a theological vision, naturally, calls for an apologetic that is not simply reactive, yet, prophetically engaged.

A prophetic apologetic integrates doctrinal fidelity, historical consciousness, and moral courage. Cornel West described the Black prophetic tradition as truth-telling rooted in justice and hope.³¹ Willie James Jennings calls for theology to confront racial distortion in the Christian imagination. Esau McCaulley modeled biblical orthodoxy that addresses racial injustice directly. Christian educators have to cultivate disciples who:

- Understand foundational doctrine.
- Engage cultural challenges thoughtfully.
- Integrate womanist and Afrocentric insight.
- Articulate the gospel clearly.
- Embody holiness consistently.

Proclamation without formation produces instability. Formation without proclamation produces retreat.

A prophetic apologetic of this sort requires a formation process that is at once rigorous and communal. Such disciples as are formed in this vision are not made in a series of occasional lectures—but in a sustained engagement with Scripture, tradition, and the world of their communities. They must be formed in an environment where theological sophistication is developed in tandem with cultural discernment, where the practices of holiness are lived out in the world, and where bold witness is modeled by leaders who will not be content with either intellectual complacency or moral silence. In a culture increasingly fragmented, the Church must create learning environments that train believers to think critically, speak truthfully, and act justly. When this happens in Christian communities, disciples are formed who can defend the faith persuasively, resist injustice boldly, and live out the gospel credibly.

CONCLUSION

The question remains: Can we get a witness? Zion's history answers, yes. Our theology demands, yes. Our moment requires, yes. The proclamation of God calls for witnesses formed by Scripture, sharpened by reason, informed by womanist and Afrocentric insight, grounded in holiness, and committed to justice. By God's grace, the AME Zion Church will form such disciples.

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**CHILDREN'S
DAY
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children's DAY

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2026 CHILDREN'S DAY INTRODUCTION

Greetings Intelligence Officers, Controllers, and Directors (CED Leaders)!!!

"The Company" (Body of Believers) experience new challenges (operations) every day and it is essential to properly equip our agents for mission success. For this reason, the Varick's Children Department is pleased to present our 2026 Children's Day Curriculum "MISSION POSSIBLE!" which teaches our children to trust and obey their Heavenly Father. The theme verse is Proverbs 3:5-6 NIRV – "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not depend on your own understanding. In all your ways obey him. Then he will make your paths smooth and straight." The curriculum visits two spy operations dispatched by Moses and Joshua in the Bible to examine the true meaning of "trusting and obeying God" despite fear, appearances, circumstances, or a lack of understanding. It is our desire for agents-in-training (our children) to journey through the lessons, establishing connections and applying spiritual truths to their everyday lives as they follow Christ. Resources are provided in the curriculum to assist you with this effort, including powerful affirmations and encouragement activities that will leave a lasting imprint on our children's lives. For "Everything is possible for the one who believes." – Mark 9:23 NIRV

The Varick's Children Department is ready to help our children EXPLORE God's Word and new territory to build their FAITH and gain access to everything He has in store. It is very important that they understand the basics of our Christian living. So let's work together to teach, evangelize and disciple them. In order to also ELEVATE our ministry, it is imperative that we continue engaging in personal Bible study and prayer time with the Lord, developing a closer relationship and expanding our knowledge of Him.

Don't forget to remind the children they are "Out of This World!" (from the 2025 curriculum). They belong to God! Therefore, the 2026 Children's Day mission is not only possible... Mission Accomplished! And don't worry, this message will not self-destruct. Let the mission begin!

Have an amazing Children's Day Weekend!!!

In HIS Service,
Mrs. Ravelle L. King

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MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

UNIT ONE

FAITHFUL WITNESSES TESTIFY TO GOD'S PROMISE

JUNE 21, 2026

"JONATHAN AND DAVID, A NOBLE FRIENDSHIP"



JUNE 7, 2026

"DEBORAH, A LEADER IN A NATIONAL EMERGENCY"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

427 | "HOW SAD OUR STATE BY NATURE IS"
429 | "LOVE LIFTED ME"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"LOVE LIFTED ME," HEZEKIAH WALKER
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/9XPP9GYGA_Y?si=eHmDFWIDj8KLi0GH](https://youtu.be/9XPP9GYGA_Y?si=eHmDFWIDj8KLi0GH)

"NOT LUCKY, I'M LOVED," JONATHAN Mc REYNOLDS
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/QAU4o0PU8Xo?si=4G4xOAYmCDvWRPA2](https://youtu.be/QAU4o0PU8Xo?si=4G4xOAYmCDvWRPA2)



AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

#537 | "FROM AGE TO AGE THEY GATHER,"
#493 | "BLESSED BE THE TIE THAT BINDS,"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"I NEED YOU TO SURVIVE," HEZEKIAH WALKER
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/LNAHTOUiGJM?si=pVhDIEj2wDBAFOMD](https://youtu.be/LNAHTOUiGJM?si=pVhDIEj2wDBAFOMD)

"FRIEND OF GOD," ISRAEL HOUGHTON
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/1kDcnw666xQ?si=iJpXFRPFI-GKUAXO](https://youtu.be/1kDcnw666xQ?si=iJpXFRPFI-GKUAXO)



JUNE 14, 2026

"HANNAH, A GODLY MOTHER"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

528 | "FAITH OF OUR MOTHERS! LIVING STILL"
532 | "O PERFECT LOVE"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"SOMEBODY PRAYED FOR ME," DOROTHY NORWOOD
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/QMGHU5EB2IM?si=m0QoHxRLONjF0-LH](https://youtu.be/QMGHU5EB2IM?si=m0QoHxRLONjF0-LH)

"A MOTHER'S PRAYER," LASHUN PACE
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/OY6w9CMYwSo?si=niQN5iJNPTrgL9-U](https://youtu.be/OY6w9CMYwSo?si=niQN5iJNPTrgL9-U)



JUNE 28, 2026

"AMOS, A HERDSMAN CALLED OF GOD TO BE A PROPHET"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

430 | FORWARD! BE OUR WATCHWORD
432 | "STAND UP, STAND UP FOR JESUS"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"STAND UP FOR JESUS," NEW JERSEY MASS CHOIR
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/tNz4P4Lwxx4?si=NUUbyUM77EINC-2P](https://youtu.be/tNz4P4Lwxx4?si=NUUbyUM77EINC-2P)

"STAND UP" ORLANDO DRAPER
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/NbVkf_TCCdk?si=1LI05yEgZ8Rrr4UO](https://youtu.be/NbVkf_TCCdk?si=1LI05yEgZ8Rrr4UO)

MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

UNIT TWO

FAITHFUL WITNESSES SAY YES TO JESUS CHRIST

JULY 5, 2026



"THE BELIEVING CENTURION, A GENTILE WHOSE FAITH JESUS COMMENDED"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

- # 508 | "TIS SO SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS,"
- # 291 | "PASS ME NOT O GENTLE SAVIOR?"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"TIS SO SWEET," COMMISSIONED
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/Ow3NjZV9w2Y?si=eZOMHGbdSjU2FkUGz](https://youtu.be/Ow3NjZV9w2Y?si=eZOMHGbdSjU2FkUGz)

"I TRUST YOU," JAMES FORTUNE
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/uTe2ZqI9_Ao?si=UMT4Aj6ock70qPJH](https://youtu.be/uTe2ZqI9_Ao?si=UMT4Aj6ock70qPJH)

JULY 19, 2026



"ZACCHAEUS, THE PUBLICAN"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

- # 416 | "IT'S ME, IT'S ME,"
- # 407 | "JESUS, THE SINNER'S FRIEND, TO THEE"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"GIVE ME YOU," SHANA WILSON-WILLIAMS
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/RxKBVoEEct0?si=-_CiSs4agDPnF13b](https://youtu.be/RxKBVoEEct0?si=-_CiSs4agDPnF13b)

"STANDING IN THE NEED OF PRAYER," JOHN P KEE
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/FloREm2rXey?si=LERI_k3AM8HlOOWj](https://youtu.be/FloREm2rXey?si=LERI_k3AM8HlOOWj)

JULY 12, 2026



"SIMON PETER, FROM WEAKNESS TO STRENGTH"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

- # 282 | "WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS"
- # 286 | "MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING LESS,"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"YOU ARE MY STRENGTH," WILLIAM MURPHY
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/pUDmKOEIEYA?si=fy11SMA5R2o4NR_](https://youtu.be/pUDmKOEIEYA?si=fy11SMA5R2o4NR_)

"STRENGTH," JOHN P. KEE
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/FCARR6WTSFU?si=HPDQMEXGGMTZIDLl](https://youtu.be/FCARR6WTSFU?si=HPDQMEXGGMTZIDLl)

JULY 26, 2026



"MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

- # 105 | "WHAT CHILD IS THIS?"
- # 90 | "COME, THOU LONG-EXPECTED JESUS"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"MARY DID YOU KNOW,"
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/D1ptNwE7K8o?si=Q_VePFAoWwYD8hL1](https://youtu.be/D1ptNwE7K8o?si=Q_VePFAoWwYD8hL1)

"SOMETHING ABOUT THE NAME JESUS," KIRK FRANKLIN
[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/ALXQEVlliw4?si=Gg49G-P2j7W4z9XQ](https://youtu.be/ALXQEVlliw4?si=Gg49G-P2j7W4z9XQ)

MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

UNIT THREE

FAITHFUL WITNESSES SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS



AUGUST 2, 2026

"THOMAS, THE HONEST DOUBTER"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

504 | "BLESSED ASSURANCE, JESUS IS MINE"

510 | "OH! THAT MY BURDENED SOUL"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"I BELIEVE", JAMES FORTUNE

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/BdWkKJ30jts?si=MfJiDeqTdgJJWA1](https://youtu.be/BdWkKJ30jts?si=MfJiDeqTdgJJWA1)

"I BELIEVE," JONATHAN NELSON

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/JCq6nCHUGFM?si=8vUGHogr-NYFvukY](https://youtu.be/JCq6nCHUGFM?si=8vUGHogr-NYFvukY)



AUGUST 9, 2026

"STEPHEN, AN EARLY INTERPRETER OF CHRISTIANITY"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

383 | "HARK! 'TIS THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE I HEAR,"

389 | "I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY,"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"JESUS PROMISED", CHICAGO MASS CHOIR

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/iCN8c8BRoD0?si=8I3YDxm1NU3HS7QB](https://youtu.be/iCN8c8BRoD0?si=8I3YDxm1NU3HS7QB)

"YOU ARE MY STRENGTH", WILLIAM MURPHY

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/pUdMKOEiEYA?si=etWKTJANREncQL38](https://youtu.be/pUdMKOEiEYA?si=etWKTJANREncQL38)



AUGUST 16, 2026

"SAUL OF TARSUS, HOW A PHARISEE BECAME A CHRISTIAN"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

423 | "I HEARD THE VOICE OF JESUS SAY,"

506 | "WHEN I CAN READ MY TITLE CLEAR"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"I GIVE MYSELF AWAY", WILLIAM McDOWELL

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/-AtQEBYVMIs?si=zUwMByxBPzJGXsB_](https://youtu.be/-AtQEBYVMIs?si=zUwMByxBPzJGXsB_)

"TAKE ALL OF ME", HILLSONG WORSHIP

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/8Z5iuvSovIA?si=uQpvx3smDgSDMLVQ](https://youtu.be/8Z5iuvSovIA?si=uQpvx3smDgSDMLVQ)



AUGUST 23, 2026

"TIMOTHY, THE INFLUENCE OF HOME TRAINING"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

#535 | "WHEN HE COMETH"

#543 | "THE LORD OUR GOD ALONE IS STRONG"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"ALL OF MY HELP", RICKY DILLARD

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/P6sZwD0dVR0?si=OCkTKk1dDZjFZKwJ](https://youtu.be/P6sZwD0dVR0?si=OCkTKk1dDZjFZKwJ)

"MY HOPE IS BUILT ON NOTHING ELSE", THEO MILFORD

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/7IY2kdTmt6A?si=ND9Niz047NU3YxM_](https://youtu.be/7IY2kdTmt6A?si=ND9Niz047NU3YxM_)



AUGUST 13, 2026

"LYDIA, JUDGED TO BE FAITHFUL"

AME ZION BICENTENNIAL HYMNS (2)

#535 | "BE PRESENT AT OUR TABLE, LORD,"

#536 | "HOLY FATHER, SEND THY BLESSING,"

CONTEMPORARY SELECTIONS (2)

"BLESSED", FRED HAMMOND

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/kTBvPB4C4ms?si=4Ulw_VZBGnmuTZPP](https://youtu.be/kTBvPB4C4ms?si=4Ulw_VZBGnmuTZPP)

"I TRUST IN GOD", ELEVATION WORSHIP

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/IJE4YAhELBQ?si=MnQgzdV9E3PTxMxS](https://youtu.be/IJE4YAhELBQ?si=MnQgzdV9E3PTxMxS)

WORDFIND

THE TESTIMONY OF A FAITHFUL WITNESS

W J Y T E B C S I K X X T C B Q S N O I T A R E N E G F N F
X L O W K E V S U O R E N E G X A C T F O R G I V E N E S S
V X N L E A D E R S F I C I S M D E T R A E H N E K O R B I
S I O V C M J P S T B Z B M F T Y H T R O W T S U R T T N T
H D C I H D L S P G X T E G L C S S K D Z L U O S W D Y L H
Y Y H T R O W Q C N G O E B U O A B Y I P T J U O V H T T R
U M L B W F O Y C O W Q B S F K F P S L U F E T A R G I H Z
J O P S E Z Q X P I H Q W E H L N A L O V P R A I S E L G J
M D R E S T I T U T I O N R T U U B C N N B E J U R F A I I
I R E K I U J J M A Y Z T V I B P J S N W A M S K P E T L N
U Y K P D M I Z D V T X N E A J Z Q Z P V N D T E U L I Y M
N T A P L W S N L L G D G Y F F C T X F B Q T E F Q P P X E
V R T Y Y J A I S A O S N E N O R H T A G U Q A T E I S I R
C A K E E R B L V S O Z A T O U S M G S N E M D W E C O R C
B M S H L E B B V W D J U S T I C E E S I T W F V N S H Z Y
Q B I L B J A A R S S L F O P P S X M E D F H A R C I T U P
Q X R D A O T V W S H T H S R I P F G N N L R S I O D L X I
E V X F T I H E Y G E N V S O O I G Y S A E H T G U Q L R H
E R P W I C L D Z N P E T E C N R C N U T C C K H R A U Q S
G D Z H P E U E F I H M S N L T I B O O S N H Y T A P F P R
J E E T S C F C A S E T U T A H T R M E R A O W E G N K N O
P L V R O H I R I S R N R I I G F D I T E R S W O I O N M W
K L O A H F C E T E D E T W M H I R T H D E E B U N I A F L
D A L E A A R T H L T T I F B K L O S G N V N M S G T H X S
N C B H A A E N V B C N M U Q H L L E I U I S E E K A T Z U
E I B J Y M M I P D V O C X T C E J T R T L U D J F E F F S
S I Z F L F R I E N D C Q X E O D P A U Z E V M S E R D C E
V G N I H C A E T K S N O I T A N S D M P D K B A N C Z B J
C G I B B H B M A I P T V P R B O L D N E S S L S Y S S L U
N X N J T A E K E L O L J N L A I R U E N E R P E R T N E Z

BANQUET
BLESSINGS
BOLDNESS
BROKENHEARTED
CALLED
CHOSEN
CONTENTMENT
CREATION
DELIVERANCE
DISCIPLE
ENCOURAGING

ENTREPRENEURIAL
FAITH
FAITHFUL
FORGIVENESS
FRIEND
GENERATIONS
GENEROUS
GOOD SHEPHERD
GRATEFUL
HEART
HOSPITABLE
HOSPITALITY

INTERCEDE
JESUS
JUSTICE
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LIGHT
LORD
LOVE
MARTYRDOM
MERCIFUL
MERCY
NATIONS
PRAISE

PROCLAIM
REJOICE
RESTITUTION
RIGHTEOUS
RIGHTEOUSNESS
RISK TAKER
SABBATH
SALVATION
SEEK
SEND
SERVE
SOUL

SPIRIT FILLED
STEADFAST
TEACHING
TESTIMONY
THANKFUL
THRONE
TRUST
TRUSTWORTHY
UNDERSTANDING
WITNESS
WORSHIP
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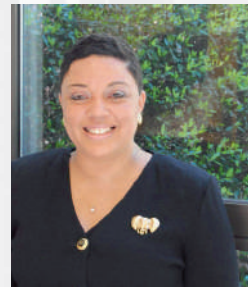
REV. PATRICK BARRETT, II

Patrick A. Barrett, II serves as the General Secretary-Treasurer of the Christian Education Department. Rev. Barrett has years of experience serving as the Program Director in the Christian Education Department and as the Co-Episcopal Director of Christian Education for the Mid-Atlantic Episcopal District. Prior to his election, Rev. Barrett was the pastor of Alleyne AME Zion Church, located in Alexandria, VA.



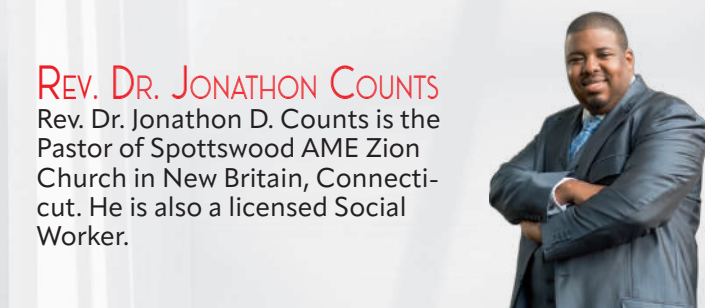
REV. DR. ADRIAN V. NELSON II

Rev. Dr. Adrian V. Nelson, II, serves as the Editor for the Department of Church School Literature. He is an experienced Christian Educator having taught on all levels of the Church. He is pastor having pastored for 22 years. Presently Dr. Nelson serves as the pastor of the historic Lomax AME Zion Church, located in Arlington, VA.



REV. DR. TAJUAN KYLES

Rev. Tajuan Kyles serves as the Senior Editor and Writer for Children's Literature. She is a Christian Educator and Certified Coach. She serves as the Pastor of St. John AME Zion Church, Mocksville, NC.



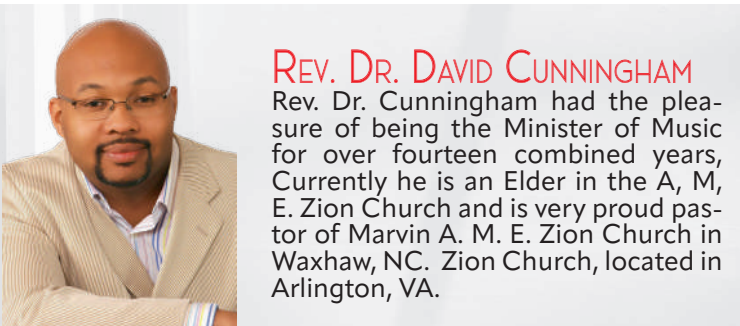
REV. DR. JONATHON COUNTS

Rev. Dr. Jonathon D. Counts is the Pastor of Spottwood AME Zion Church in New Britain, Connecticut. He is also a licensed Social Worker.



MRS. KIRSTEN MARTIN

Mrs. Martin is a Graphic Artist/Layout Master for the Department of Church School Literature, and the Creator of Zions Superheroes, The Faithful Five Beginner and Primary Crew, and Zion and Zaya.



REV. DR. DAVID CUNNINGHAM

Rev. Dr. Cunningham had the pleasure of being the Minister of Music for over fourteen combined years. Currently he is an Elder in the A, M, E. Zion Church and is very proud pastor of Marvin A. M. E. Zion Church in Waxhaw, NC. Zion Church, located in Arlington, VA.



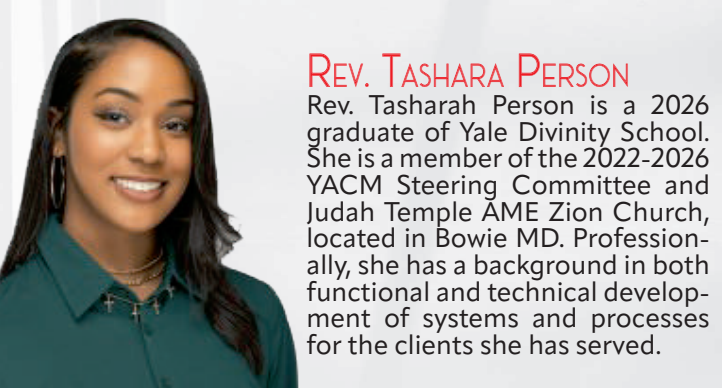
DR. MOZELLA MITCHELL

Dr. Mozella G. Mitchell is a Professor Emeritus, at the University of South Florida, Tampa, FL. She is also the pastor of Love of Christ A.M.E. Zion Tabernacle, Inc. in Brandon Florida.



REV. DR. RICHARD GADZEKPO

Rev. Dr. Richard Gadzekpo is an engineer by training and a theologian by calling. He holds a plethora of academic degrees, including a Doctor of Ministry from Perkins School of Theology, and currently serves as the Presiding Elder of the Chattanooga District (Tennessee Annual Conference), the Pastor of the Cleages-Tompkins United A.M.E. Zion Church, and as the International Prayer Coordinator for the AME Zion Church.



REV. TASHARA PERSON

Rev. Tasharah Person is a 2026 graduate of Yale Divinity School. She is a member of the 2022-2026 YACM Steering Committee and Judah Temple AME Zion Church, located in Bowie MD. Professionally, she has a background in both functional and technical development of systems and processes for the clients she has served.

What's Next?

FIRST QUARTER THE SOUL OF A NATION

Unit I: From Nomadic Tribes to Settled People

Unit I explores Israel's transformation from a nomadic people to a nation-state. To begin, God renews God's covenant with Joshua and a new generation of Israelites (Lesson 1) in Joshua 1. In moving into the land (Joshua Chapter 4), Joshua leads Israel to remember all the ways and times God has provided for them, including crossing the Jordan (Lesson 2). The book's core (Chapters 6–12) outlines Israel's systematic defeat and destruction of other nations. This issue is problematic as it has been used throughout the church's history to support imperialism and slavery. Lesson 3 offers an opportunity to unpack this violent narrative—the battles are not about Israel destroying other nations but about God fulfilling God's promise of land (Joshua Chapter 11). While there is a thread of nationalism within the Bible, there is also a thread of universal love and acceptance, as represented by Rahab in Joshua Chapters 2 and 6 (see Lesson 4). Lesson 5 moves to the end of Joshua's life and the book's close (Joshua 24). Joshua concludes his life by imploring the people of Israel to remember their identity as the people of God.

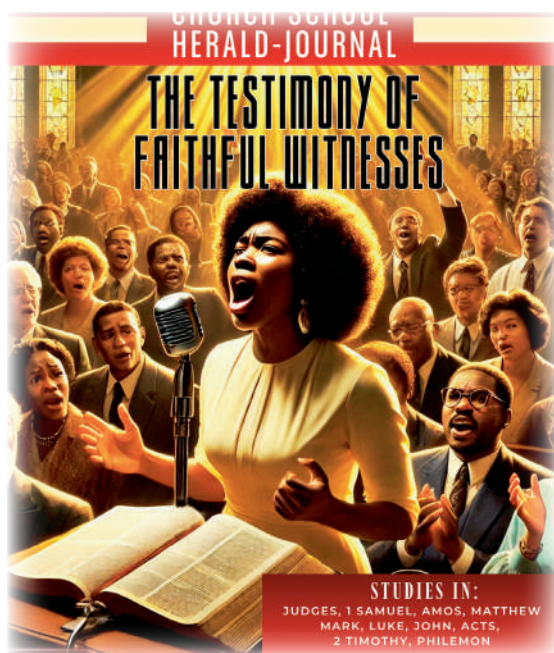
Unit II: Lacking Leadership and a Moral Compass

Judges is a difficult book in the Bible. After Joshua warns the Israelites to stay true to their faith and remember their identity, the people fall into apostasy, seemingly forgetting Joshua's warning. They recognize their sinful ways, repent, and call on God when trouble ensues. As soon as God intervenes to save them, they turn away. Lesson 6 addresses the cyclical pattern of apostasy, repentance, and divine rescue that repeats throughout the Book of Judges and is exemplified in Chapter 2. Lesson 7 shows God's faithfulness in raising leaders despite Israel's unfaithfulness (Judges Chapter 3). Lesson 8 demonstrates the book's theme, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes," as depicted in Chapter 17. Despite God's faithfulness, the people consistently fall back into religious impurity and lawlessness. The pattern of leadership in Judges highlights the fact that "Israel had no king," which ultimately forms the rationale for Israel's petition for a king in 1 and 2 Samuel.

Unit III: Samuel: Prophet, Priest, Judge, and King-Maker

Samuel is an exemplary leader. Throughout Israel's history and into the NT, Samuel exemplifies one who walked faithfully with God (Jeremiah 15:1, Hebrews 11:32). Lesson 9 introduces Samuel (1 Samuel 3) as one who responded to God's call at an early age. Lesson 10 (1 Samuel 4) reflects Israel's continued struggle for control of Canaan. There is both spiritual and political significance to the Philistines' capture of Israel's sacred Ark of the Covenant. In Lesson 11 (1 Samuel 7), the Ark is recovered and marks an occasion in which Samuel shows his capacity to serve as God's prophet and judge by calling Israel to spiritual renewal and military readiness. Lesson 12 brings the study to a pivotal moment in Israel's history (1 Samuel 16) as Samuel clandestinely anoints David as God's chosen king. The unit closes with a leap forward in history to the time of David's coronation as king and his capture of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5), which will form the seat of worship and government for Israel from that day forward.

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