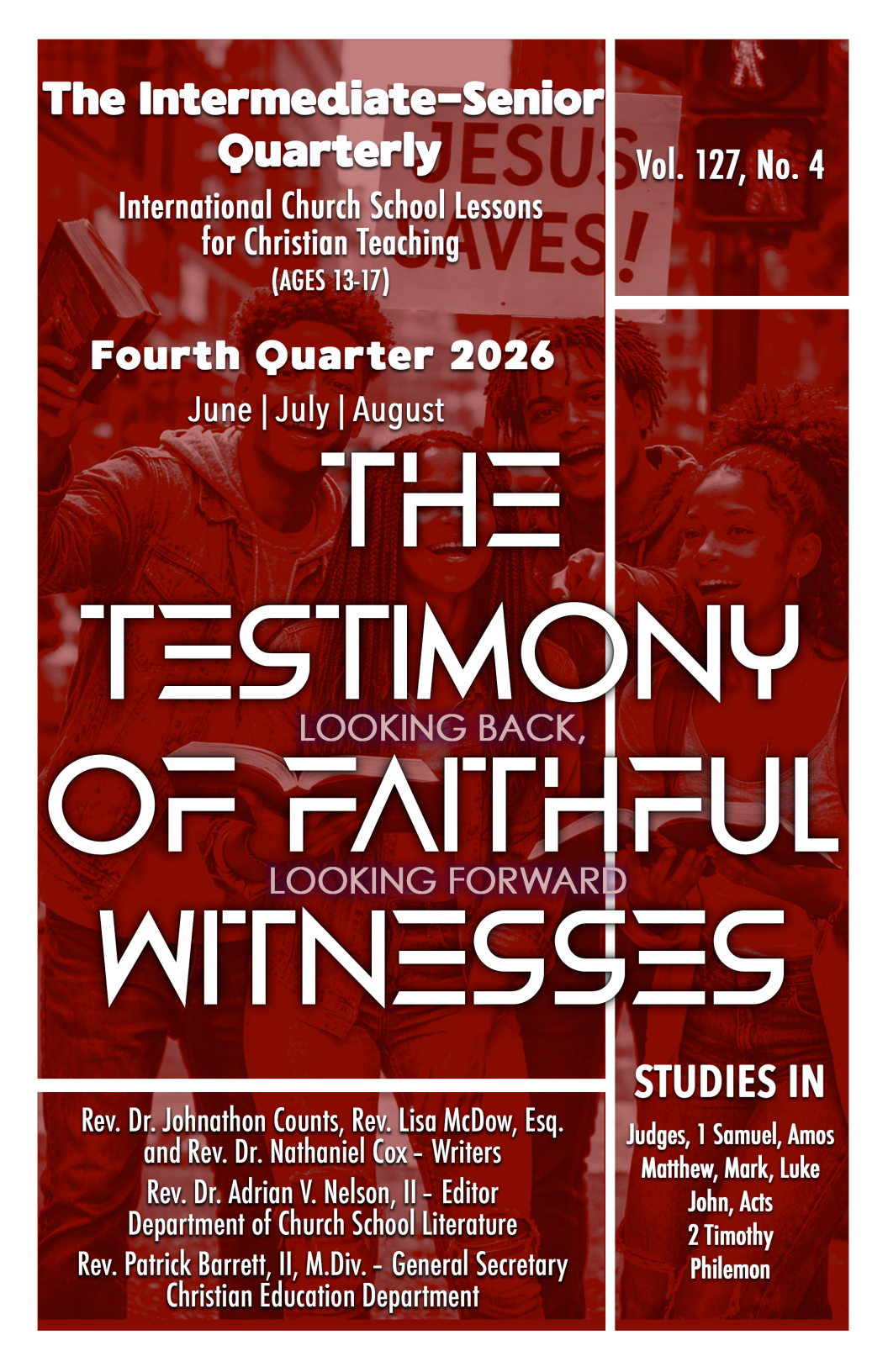




The Intermediate-Senior Quarterly

**International Church School Lessons
for Christian Teaching
(AGES 13-17)**

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Fourth Quarter 2026

June | July | August

THE TESTIMONY OF FAITHFUL WITNESSES

LOOKING BACK,
LOOKING FORWARD

**Rev. Dr. Johnathon Counts, Rev. Lisa McDow, Esq.
and Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Cox - Writers**

**Rev. Dr. Adrian V. Nelson, II - Editor
Department of Church School Literature**

**Rev. Patrick Barrett, II, M.Div. - General Secretary
Christian Education Department**

STUDIES IN

**Judges, 1 Samuel, Amos
Matthew, Mark, Luke
John, Acts
2 Timothy
Philemon**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

⁹ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father
which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

¹⁰ Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from
evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and
the glory, for ever.
Amen."

Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven
and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the
Virgin Mary; suffered under the Pontius Pilate; was
crucified, dead and buried: The third day He rose from
the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on
the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from
thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy, catholic Church;
the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the
resurrection of the body; and life everlasting.

Amen.

**catholic means universal*



June, July, August 2026 WORSHIP PROGRAM

MUSICAL PRELUDE

June: "The Morning Light Is Breaking," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #381, or "My Testimony," by Marvin Sapp, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZG-8B8xYc7g&list=RDPZG8B8xYc7g&start_radio=1.

July: "Yes, God Is Real," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #53, or "Testimony," by Anthony Brown and group therAPy, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJBN-2jgiHY&list=RDFJBN-2jgiHY&start_radio=1.

August: "How Great Thou Art," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #47, or "The Story I'll Tell," by Maverick City Music (featuring Naomi Raine), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVCsJaPkvug&list=RDBVCsJaPkvug&start_radio=1.

CALL TO WORSHIP

June: Led by the VBS Director (1st Sunday); a child (2nd Sunday); a father (3rd Sunday); and a youth (4th Sunday).

Leader: "O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord; bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day."
(Psalm 96:1-2 NRSVue)

All: "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; he is to be re-

vered above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.” (Psalm 96:3-4 NRSVue)

July: Led by a military service member or veteran (1st Sunday); a senior (2nd Sunday); a child (3rd Sunday); and a youth (4th Sunday).

Leader: “Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.” (Psalm 96:7-8 NRSVue)

All: *“Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth. Say among the nations, ‘The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.’”* (Psalm 96:9-10 NRSVue)

August: The Young People-Adult teacher (1st Sunday); the Intermediate-Senior teacher (2nd Sunday); the Junior teacher (3rd Sunday); the Primary teacher (4th Sunday); and the Beginner teacher (5th Sunday).

Leader: “Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar and all that fills it; let the field exult and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he is coming ...” (Psalm 96:11-13a NRSVue)

All: *“[F]or he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth.”* (Psalm 96:13b-13c NRSVue)

CHORAL INVOCATION

(Sung corporately)

“He Is Lord”

(AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #689)

MORNING HYMN

June: “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine,”
(AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #504)

July: “I Love to Tell the Story,” (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #389)

August: “We’ve a Story to Tell the Nations,”
(AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal, #388)

RESPONSIVE READING

1 John 1:1-5 NRSV

Leader: We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ...

People: [T]his life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us ...

Leader: [W]hat we have seen and heard we also declare to you so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

People: We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

All: This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

RALLY SONG

"Goodness of God," CeCe Winans, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sE-5kEnitqE&list=RD9sE5kEnitqE&start_radio=1.

STUDY PERIOD

Learners study the lessons in their classes.

CLOSING ASSEMBLY

Class members will commit and dedicate themselves to being faithful witnesses who testify to the promises of God, to Jesus Christ, and to the good news.

SUNDAY SCHOOL BENEDICTION

Sunday school is over for another day. Hear us, Heavenly Father, as to Thee we pray. Through the week be with us in our work and play; Make us kind and loving, help us to obey.

Amen.

YOUTH UNIT I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Deborah, A Leader in a National Emergency
YOUTH TOPIC: An Indomitable Woman

LESSON 1
DATE: June 7, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Judges 4:1-24
PRINT PASSAGES: Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

“Plucked From the Fire” - Julia Foote (1827-1900) was born in New York to parents who had been enslaved. She became the first woman ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. She found faith at 15 and began preaching about holiness. Despite strong opposition from her husband, her mother, and her church in Boston, which would not allow her to preach in 1844, she did not give up. She traveled through the Midwest and New York, attracting crowds as large as 5,000 people.

Foote shared her powerful conversion experience in her autobiography, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*. During a quarterly meeting, she collapsed under the glory and presence of God. She lay unconscious for 20 hours and then stood up, shouting, “Redeemed! Glory!” She began to visit people door-to-door to share the Gospel. Even though friends made fun of her enthusiasm, this experience with God shaped her ministry, which was filled with fiery holiness, deep devotion, and genuine sincerity.

Rev. Foote’s ministry really shows the strength and brilliance of Black women. Whether in business, church, family, or education, areas where society has often tried to hold women back, Black women’s voices have still made an impact and brought us hope, even when we’ve been oblivious. Foote’s prophetic ministry and emphasis on holiness remind us that Black women are more than just the church’s backbone; they bring the leadership we need to strengthen our present and shape our future.

KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- Julia Foote kept preaching even when her husband, mother, and church told her to stop. Think about a time when someone close to you doubted

something you felt called or passionate about. How did you handle it, and what did Foote's story teach you about pushing through opposition?

- Foote's autobiography is called *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, meaning she was rescued and set apart for a purpose. What do you think it means to be "set apart" for something greater than yourself, and how does that challenge the way you see your own gifts and potential?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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.

⁴ At that time Deborah, a prophet, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel.

⁵ 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. ⁶ She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you, 'Position yourself at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. 7 I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand.'" ⁸ Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go." ⁹ And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰ Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and ten thousand warriors went up behind him, and Deborah went up with him.

¹⁴ Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day on which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him.

²¹ But Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground—he was lying fast asleep from weariness—and he died. ²² Then, as Barak came in pursuit of Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are

seeking.” So he went into her tent, and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent peg in his temple.

Deborah was a prophetess and judge in Israel who served her people with wisdom and authority. The children of Israel came to her for judgment as she sat under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim. For 20 years, Israel had suffered harsh oppression under Jabin, King of Canaan, whose army commander Sisera controlled 900 chariots of iron. When the people finally cried out to the Lord, God raised up Deborah to bring God’s word and plan for deliverance. When God was ready to move, God used Deborah to call Barak and confirm what God had already spoken to him, that the time had come to gather 10,000 men and go to war. Deborah never believed God called her alone to deliver Israel. She understood that God would do much of the work through Barak, and she pointed him back to the word and the power of the **LORD**.

When Barak refused to go into battle without Deborah by his side, she agreed to go, but warned him plainly that the glory of the victory would not belong to him because the Lord would sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. Barak’s faith, though genuine enough to be remembered in Hebrews 11, was more rooted in Deborah’s relationship with God than in his own. Yet, despite his weakness, he showed remarkable courage by leading ten thousand men down from the mountain onto a battlefield where the enemy had a powerful, technologically advanced army. The LORD rewarded that step of faith. He brought a flash flood that turned the ground to mud, making Sisera’s iron chariots useless, and routed the entire army before Barak and his men. Not a single enemy soldier was left standing.



God’s final victory came through an unexpected hero named Jael, an ordinary woman living in a tent. When Sisera, the enemy commander, fled the battlefield on foot and sought refuge in her tent, Jael welcomed him in, covered him with a blanket, and gave him milk to drink. Once he fell into a deep sleep, she took a tent peg and a hammer and drove the peg through his tem-

ple, fulfilling Deborah's prophecy—exactly as God had spoken it. Barak arrived in pursuit only to find that the battle was already finished and the victory already won. This account reminds us that God's purposes cannot be stopped and that God often works through the people the world least expects, bringing glory not to the proud and powerful, but to those who are simply available and willing in the moment He calls.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

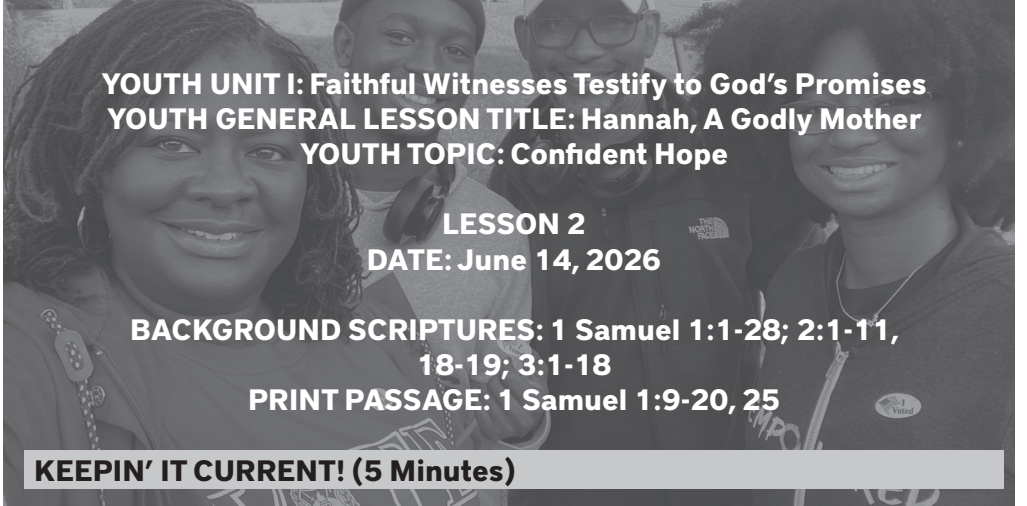
Julia Foote and Deborah lived in different centuries, but their lives had similar stories. Both women were called by God during difficult times. Deborah stepped up when Israel faced 20 years of oppression, and no other leader would. Julia Foote stood strong when Black women were denied equal rights, even in the church. Neither woman waited for permission; but acted on faith. Faith pushes us to move forward, even when we are scared or feel foolish. When God speaks, we must confidently follow His Word, knowing He will provide for us.

Both women were trailblazers because of the challenges they faced. Deborah had to confront a military leader who lacked the courage to protect Israel. Rev. Foote preached the Gospel, even when her family, including her husband and mother, opposed her. Both women succeeded without people's support because they had God's support.

You may feel ordinary, but with God, you can achieve extraordinary things and see remarkable results. Deborah judged a nation. Jael ended a war. Foote inspired a revival. The lives of these women urge all of us, especially young people, to stop waiting for perfect conditions. The key question is not whether God can use you; it's whether you will be willing when God does.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- Deborah, Jael, and Julia Foote all took action when it would have been easier to remain quiet. Think about one area in your life, whether at school, home, or in your community, where God may be calling you to take action right now. Write down one specific thing you can do to respond to the call and share it with the class for support.
- All three women faced opposition but continued on, knowing God was with them. Who encourages your faith and supports your purpose? Create a short "faith playlist" of three-to-five songs that inspire you during tough times, and be prepared to share one song and explain its significance.



YOUTH UNIT I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Hannah, A Godly Mother
YOUTH TOPIC: Confident Hope

LESSON 2
DATE: June 14, 2026

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 Samuel 1:1-28; 2:1-11,
18-19; 3:1-18**

PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

"My Mother Prayed for Me" - Kevin Hart is one of the most successful comedians ever, known for sold-out shows and popular movies. Before he became famous, he was a young man with a dream and a supportive mother. In an interview with Oprah, Hart shared how his mother reacted when he wanted to be a comedian. She said, "I'm not a dream killer," which showed her support. They made a deal: Hart would try comedy for a year. If he could support himself, he would keep going. If not, he would go back to school.

To help Kevin realize his dream, His mother offered to pay his rent for one year while he pursued his dream. What Hart didn't realize was that his mother had a bigger plan. During his struggles, when he fell behind on rent and got an eviction notice, she encouraged him to read his Bible. Out of frustration, he finally opened it and found six months of rent checks hidden inside. His mother had placed the checks in his Bible to teach him an important lesson: before achieving success and fame, he needed a strong foundation of faith.

Many people can relate to the idea of having a "Praying Grandmother," as Helen Baylor sang about. There's an old spiritual that says, "My mother prayed for me, had me on her mind, took the time to pray for me." When Kevin needed help, his mother told him to look in the Bible for answers. In his interview, he expressed frustration with her for discussing the Bible while he was facing an eviction notice. Kevin's mom had given him exactly what he needed; he just hadn't looked for it. Kevin Hart's mother wanted to help him, but she also wanted to prepare him for life by teaching him how to connect with God on his own. We should be thankful for mothers and grandmothers who love us enough to teach us, support us, and correct us. They not only guide us but also help us find our way back to God.

KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- Hart's mother hid the rent checks in the Bible because she knew he would eventually open it. This shows that she understood something about him that he did not, yet, understand about himself. What does it tell us about the wisdom of the people who love us most?
- Kevin felt frustrated with his mother for suggesting he turn to the Bible while he faced eviction. Have you ever received advice that annoyed you at first but ended up being helpful? What did that teach you? How should we treat those who support us?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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.

⁹ After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. ¹⁰ She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. ¹¹ She made this vow: "O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

¹² As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth.

¹³ Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore, Eli thought she was drunk. ¹⁴ So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine."

¹⁵ But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. ¹⁶ Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." ¹⁷ Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." ¹⁸ And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went her way and ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

¹⁹ They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah,

and the Lord remembered her.²⁰ In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I have asked him of the Lord.”

²⁵ Then they slaughtered the bull and brought the child to Eli.

The first chapter of 1 Samuel introduces Elkanah, a Levite from a place called Ramathaim-zophim, which had both an old and a new section. Elkanah was a man of God, but he had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. At this time, in Israel, polygamy was common because there was no king, and everyone did what they thought was right. Each year, Elkanah traveled to Shiloh with his family to worship and to offer sacrifices at God’s sanctuary.

The chapter focuses primarily on Hannah. Elkanah loved her deeply, but she could not have children. When he offered food to his family from the peace offering, he gave Hannah a special portion to show his love. However, Peninnah teased and provoked Hannah about being childless, which caused Hannah a lot of sorrow. There was tension and jealousy in the household, and even though Elkanah loved Hannah more, her inability to have children was painful for her, especially during their visits to worship.



In her desperation, Hannah prayed to the LORD with great intensity. Eli, the priest, thought she was drunk because of her silent, passionate prayer. She made a vow to God, saying that if He gave her a son, she would dedicate him to serve in the tabernacle as a Nazirite. After realizing Hannah’s true condition, Eli told her that God would grant her request. Hannah left with a renewed spirit, feeling happier and more hopeful. In time,

God remembered her, and she became pregnant and had a son named Samuel, which means “heard by God.” True to her vow, and with her husband’s permission, she took Samuel to Shiloh to serve the **LORD** for his whole life.

KEEPIN’ IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

Hannah and Kevin Hart’s mother lived in very different worlds, but both understood an important truth: the best gift you can give someone you love is not money or an easy life, it is a strong foundation of faith. Hannah took her pain

to God in prayer when no one else could help her. Kevin's mother brought her son's future to God and gently guided him back to the Bible when he was too frustrated to look for answers himself. Both women chose not to let despair win. They prayed, trusted, and waited, hoping that God would help them.

What makes both stories powerful is that neither woman got an immediate answer. Hannah cried, fasted, and prayed so intensely that a priest thought she was drunk. Kevin's mother saw her son fall behind on rent, get an eviction notice, and struggle before he opened the Bible. Waiting is hard, especially when you feel pressure and urgency. But these stories show that God's timing is perfect. God remembered Hannah. And, He used checks, hidden in a Bible, to teach Kevin faith in God. Breakthroughs happened not when everything was perfect, but when faith was acted upon.

The lesson for everyone, especially young people, is that true hope is not just wishing for things to get better. It means continuing to pray, trust, and move forward, even when things seem tough. Hannah named her son Samuel, which means "heard by God," because she always believed God was listening. Kevin Hart is now in front of sold-out crowds because his praying mother made sure he had a strong spiritual foundation. Whatever you are hoping for, don't give up. Share your heart with God as Hannah did. Don't wait until times are hard to read the Bible like Kevin finally did. Establish a relationship with God that will take you through life's ups and downs.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- Hannah prayed so intensely that Eli thought she was drunk, while Kevin's mother encouraged him to read the Bible, even during his frustration. Both women demonstrated unwavering faith. Reflect on something you've been praying for that hasn't come to fruition. How does Hannah's story influence your prayer life and patience? This week, write an honest prayer like Hannah's and read one chapter of the Bible daily. At week's end, journal what God revealed to you that brought you hope.
- Kevin's mother not only supported him financially, she hid checks in the Bible to encourage his relationship with God. Similarly, Hannah dedicated her son Samuel back to God, acknowledging that all she had was a gift from Him. Think of someone who has quietly sacrificed to strengthen your faith. Have you thanked them? Write them a letter or message expressing the impact their faith and love have had on you, and share your plan with the group.

YOUTH UNIT I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Jonathan and David:
A Noble Friendship
YOUTH TOPIC: The Best of Friends

LESSON 3
DATE: June 21, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-7, 20:1-42;
2 Samuel 1:17-27, 21:7

PRINT PASSAGES: 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 20:16-17, 32-34, 42;
2 Samuel 1:26-27; 21:7

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

"My Brother from Another Mother" - There's nothing like a good friend. One of the greatest gifts that God has given to humanity is friendship. A good laugh with a friend, someone who has been through life's challenges with you and gets you even when you aren't talking is important. I mean there is nothing like a "Day One", "Bestie", who is a real one, genuine and loyal through and through. Research confirms the value of a good friend. Friendship makes us healthier, happier, and better able to handle life's challenges. Research shows that people with real friendships often deal less with depression and anxiety. Having friends can even lower the risk of early death.

Research suggests that not having meaningful friendships is as damaging to our health as smoking a pack of cigarettes each day. We are meant to be part of a community, to have our group! God said during creation, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." (Gen. 2:18) A good friend helps you through tough days and stays calm in hard times. When we face heavy burdens, a trusted friend can listen and provide support, making it easier to cope.

The Bible talks a lot about the power of friendship. Proverbs 17:17 tells us that "a friend loves at all times," while Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 reminds us that "two are better than one" because when one falls, the other can lift them up. God did not intend for us to go through life alone. The friendship between David and Jonathan in the Bible shows us what true loyalty and devotion look like. Proverbs 27:17 teaches us that good friends help us grow, while Proverbs 13:20 warns us that our friends can greatly influence who we become.

One of the most powerful messages about friendship in the Bible is found in John 15:15, where Jesus calls his disciples friends instead of servants. In John 15:13, he explains that the greatest form of friendship is to lay down your life for another. God shows us what true friendship means: being intentional, loyal, sacrificial, and transformative. That is the standard we should strive for in our friendships.

KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- Think about a “Day One”, someone who has been genuinely loyal and present in your life through the good and the bad. What is it about that friendship that has made it last, and how have they helped shape who you are today?
- Jesus is the ultimate example of what a friend looks like. In what ways do you feel like you are living up to Jesus’ example in your friendships, and where do you think God might be calling you to show up better for the people in your life?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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.

¹ When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.
² Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father’s house.
³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing and gave it to David and his armor and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

¹⁶ Thus Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the Lord seek out the enemies of David.” ¹⁷ Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own life.

³² Then Jonathan answered his father Saul, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” ³³ But Saul threw his spear at him to strike him, so Jonathan knew that it was the decision of his father to put David to death. ³⁴ Jonathan sprang up from the table in fierce anger and ate no

food on the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David and because his father had disgraced him.

⁴² Then 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.' " He got up and left, and Jonathan went into the city.

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.²⁷ How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

⁷ But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the Lord that was between them, between David and Jonathan son of Saul.

David and Jonathan shared one of the most legendary friendships in the entire Bible. From the moment they met, there was an instant connection. Jonathan, the prince and son of King Saul, made a covenant with David, which meant they made a serious and binding promise to support each other no matter what. Jonathan even gave David his robe, armor, and weapons, signifying that "what's mine is yours." This was not just a casual friendship; it was a deep bond where they would literally fight for each other.

However, the situation became complicated when Jonathan's father, King Saul, grew jealous of David and sought to have him killed. Jonathan found himself torn between his father and his best friend. Despite this conflict, Jonathan remained loyal. He warned David about Saul's plots, defended David to his father, and even helped David escape when danger arose. At one point, Jonathan risked his own life to protect his friend. True friendship comes with sacrifices, and Jonathan made those sacrifices without hesitation.

Their story did not end with separation. Even after Jonathan died in battle, David remembered their covenant. When David became king and had every reason to move on with his life, he asked a question that many might overlook: "Is there anyone left from Jonathan's family whom I can show kindness to?" This inquiry led him to Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son. David honored his friendship with Jonathan by blessing his child. This exemplifies a loyalty that transcends life itself and reflects the kind of faithfulness that God shows to us.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

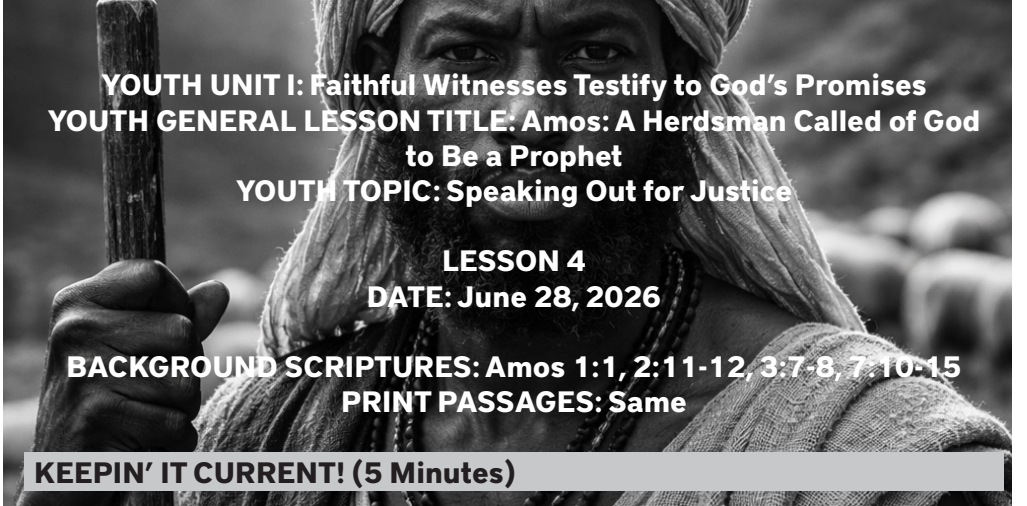
The friendship between Jonathan and David offers several important lessons. First, we learn that true friendship is a choice, not just a matter of convenience, and Jonathan exemplified this from the very beginning. He had every reason to view David as a threat due to the political implications. After all, David was the one that the people praised, and he was the one anointed to take the throne that Jonathan believed should be his. Yet, Jonathan chose to strip off his robe, give David his armor, and make a covenant with him, regardless. True friendship comes with sacrifices. It speaks up even when it poses risks, endures tension, and refrains from competition. Jonathan understood that David would become king instead of him, and he celebrated without jealousy, bitterness, or any recorded moment of resentment.



However, what truly challenges and transforms us is this: real friendship transcends time and even death. David didn't need to seek out Mephibosheth, but he honored the covenant made with his "brother from another mother". With Jonathan gone and years passed, there was no one keeping track, and David had every reason to move on as king. Yet, he chose to look for Mephibosheth anyway because a covenant formed in love never expires simply because one of the individuals involved is no longer present. This principle is not just about friendship; it serves as a profound reflection of God's love for us. God loves us not because we have earned it, remembered it, or upheld our end of the bargain, but because a promise was made, and He has never wavered in keeping it. The hymn writer said it best, "He looked beyond my faults and saw my needs."

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ❑ Reflect on a friendship that demanded something from you, like speaking up or showing loyalty. What made you stay, and how did that choice shape the friendship today?
- ❑ David kept a promise to Jonathan years later, even when no one was watching. Where in your life is God prompting you to honor a commitment or a promise you've neglected? What would it look like to seek out your Mephibosheth?



YOUTH UNIT I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Amos: A Herdsman Called of God to Be a Prophet
YOUTH TOPIC: Speaking Out for Justice

LESSON 4
DATE: June 28, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Amos 1:1, 2:11-12, 3:7-8, 7:10-15
PRINT PASSAGES: Same

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

"Ordinary People, Extraordinary God" - Sometimes, God doesn't call the most famous or powerful people. Instead, God calls those who are faithful. Rosa Parks was not a politician or a celebrity; she was a seamstress trying to get home after a long day of work. On December 1, 1955, when a bus driver told her to give up her seat, she felt something rise up inside her. She later said, "I felt the Lord would give me the strength to endure whatever I had to face. God did away with all my fear." One simple act of courage started a movement that changed American history. But, what gave her that strength? It wasn't just her bravery. Rosa Parks grew up in a home where her grandfather led daily devotions, and her grandmother read the Bible to her every day. She was influenced by the church, scripture, and the songs of freedom her mother sang to her as a child. By the time she sat on that bus, years of faith had built up in her spirit. She wasn't just refusing to move; she was standing on every prayer, every verse, and every hymn that shaped her life. That is what courage looks like when rooted in faith.

What makes Rosa Parks' story even stronger is that she never intended to be a hero. She wasn't looking for a moment of fame; that moment found her. She was ready because she had been faithful long before anyone noticed. The church, she said, was the heart of her community. It was a place of strength, refuge, and support where people gathered, prayed, and found the courage to face hate and violence. The same spirit of justice and willingness to speak for the oppressed is found throughout the Bible. Long before Rosa Parks, a simple shepherd named Amos was going about his regular life when God called him to do something great. Amos was not a trained prophet. He had no title, platform, or religious credentials. He was just an ordinary man. But, God saw someone with a willing heart and a passion for justice. Like Rosa Parks, Amos stood up

in a moment that required courage and spoke truth to power in a way that still matters today.

KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ❑ Rosa Parks was ready for her moment due to a lifetime of faith instilled by family, church, and Scripture. What daily habits or relationships in your life are preparing you for the moments God may be calling you to?
- ❑ Rosa Parks and Amos were ordinary people used by God in extraordinary ways because they were willing. Is there an area in your life where you feel God nudging you to speak up or take a stand, but you're holding back? What's stopping you, and what would it look like to say yes?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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.

¹ The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

¹¹ And I raised up some of your children to be prophets and some of your youths to be Nazirites. Is it not indeed so, O people of Israel? says the Lord. ¹² But you made the Nazirites drink wine and commanded the prophets, saying, "You shall not prophesy."

⁷ Surely the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. ⁸ The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?

Amaziah Complains to the King

¹⁰ Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹ For thus Amos has said, 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.' "

¹² And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there, ¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

¹⁴ Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am no prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I am a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, ¹⁵ and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

To understand the book of Amos, we need to know who Amos was and where he came from. Amos 1:1 tells us that he was a shepherd from Tekoa, a small town about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. He was from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, not the Northern Kingdom where he preached. Amos was not a priest or a member of any religious group. When the religious leaders questioned his right to prophesy, Amos clearly stated in chapter 7:14-15 that he was “no prophet, nor a prophet’s son, but a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs.” He explained that God called him to prophesy to Israel. This shows us that God doesn’t seek credentials; God looks for people who are available.

What’s fascinating is that God sent Amos north to Israel, a separate kingdom, enjoying great prosperity and power under King Jeroboam II. While everything seemed to be going well, with a booming economy and crowded temples, many people suffered. The rich were exploiting the poor, judges were taking bribes, and people were being sold into slavery for small debts. Even worse, religious leaders supported this behavior, silencing anyone who spoke out. This was the environment Amos entered. In chapter 2:11-12, God complains that the Israelites pressured Nazirites, people devoted to God, to break their vows and commanded prophets not to speak. They were trying to silence God’s voice because it threatened their profits.

This context makes God’s words in Amos 3:7-8 powerful. God says God does nothing without first revealing God’s plans to God’s prophets. God emphasizes that when the lion roars, fear follows. When God speaks, a true prophet cannot remain silent. This shows that Amos’s message is urgent and not just his opinion.

In chapter 7:10-15, we see this urgency tested. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel and a major religious leader in the northern kingdom, tells Amos to go back south and stop stirring trouble. This is the religious establishment trying to silence God’s message. Yet, Amos stands firm. He reminds Amaziah of who sent him and continues to preach. This sets the stage for the whole book: an ordinary man called by an extraordinary God, sent to share an uncomfortable message that people needed to hear, even if they didn’t want to.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

Amos's story ultimately demonstrates what happens when an ordinary person takes God seriously in a pivotal moment. Unlike others, Amos lacked a seminary degree, a royal appointment, or approval from the religious elite. What he possessed was a divine message and the courage to deliver it, despite being told to remain silent by the most influential priest in the land. Amaziah embodied everything wrong with Israel at the time: a religion too comfortable with power and wealth, losing its passion for justice. He prioritized protecting the king's sanctuary over hearing God's voice. However, Amos stood firm, looking Amaziah in the eye and essentially saying, "I did not choose this. God did." When God speaks, silence is not an option. This spirit was also evident in Rosa Parks, whose courage stemmed not from personal ambition but from a deep, quiet faith. Neither sought conflict; both were faithful people who said yes when called.

What does this mean for us today? It means God still seeks ordinary people willing to speak up for justice, stand firm in adversity, and trust that the One who calls is greater than any challenge. Our world, like Amos's, still has exploitation, overlooked individuals, silenced voices, and comfortable religious institutions more focused on maintaining peace than proclaiming truth. Yet, God continues to roar. The real question isn't if God is speaking but if we are listening—and if we are willing to speak, go where needed, and act. Amos was a shepherd; Rosa Parks was a seamstress. Both were willing, and that made all the difference. Who is the next ordinary person God is waiting to use? It just might be you.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Amaziah was a religious leader more focused on his comfort and position than on hearing from God. In what ways do we allow comfort, convenience, or fear of judgment to silence us on important issues? What does it mean to prioritize faithfulness over comfort?
- ▣ Amos saw himself simply as a herdsman and sycamore tree dresser, but God chose to use him to deliver a strong message about justice. Think about a part of your life where you felt unqualified or unprepared. How does Amos's story inspire you to rethink what God can accomplish through your openness and willingness?

YOUTH UNIT II: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus Christ
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: The Believing Centurion, A Gentile
Whose Faith Jesus Commended
YOUTH TOPIC: Don’t Judge a Book (or a Person) by Its Cover

LESSON 5
DATE: July 5, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 8:5-13
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

KEEPIN’ IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

In a recent case in New York City, a man named Trevis Williams was arrested unjustly and jailed for two days because the police relied on facial recognition technology that mistakenly matched him to a suspect. He was not the person the police were looking for, but the only similarities were superficial traits like hair style, skin tone, and he even had phone location data proving he could not have committed the crime. Prosecutors dropped the case once his defense proved the mistake.

Many including the police judged Williams based on appearance and a technological “match,” not on actual evidence. The technology assumed that similar looks meant guilt and accusation, even though that was not true, which is a perfect example of judging based on surface traits rather than the whole truth. This story reveals how prejudgment and assumptions can hurt real people, even when intentions might be good. We have to be mindful of the facts before we act according to judgment.



Our lesson today will reveal how we cannot judge a book by its cover. When the centurion approached Jesus, you would never think that a man of his status would humble himself to approach Jesus. However, there was faith on the inside even when it might not have been noticed by his external disposition. This goes to show us that our

cover may say one thing but our internal storms say something different. Let us pursue truth instead of assumptions.

KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Why do we sometimes think we know someone just by how they look? What can go wrong when we do that?
- ▣ How does God want us to see others differently than the world does?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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.

⁵ When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him ⁶ and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress." ⁷ And he said to him, "I will come and cure him." ⁸ The centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. ¹¹ I tell you, many will come from east and west and will take their places at the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹² while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; let it be done for you according to your faith." And the servant was healed in that hour.

Today we begin a new unit entitled, "Faithful Witnesses Say "Yes" to Jesus Christ". The next set of lessons will outline how we demonstrate our faith and devotion to Christ. The passages that have been selected provide great examples that we can follow concerning how to live for Christ. Take this unit to reflect upon how faithful you are to Christ and how you can become more faithful. These lessons will help you to increase as well as stabilize your faith.

Matthew 8:5-13 has a parallel in Luke 7:1-10, and both are comparable to the healing story in John 4:46-54. Each of the Gospel writers offers a different perspective and focuses on different details. In Luke, the centurion sends

Jewish elders to Jesus. In Matthew, the centurion deals directly with Jesus. In John, an “official” journey to Cana from Capernaum to meet with Jesus. Also, in John, this official is concerned about his son’s illness, not his slave. In Luke, the centurion’s servant is referred to as *doulos* (slave) four times. In verse 7, however, the word *pais* (child) is used, as it is in Matthew. *Pais* had a spectrum of possible meanings depending upon the context—“son” or “boy,” “servant,” or a servant/slave who served as his master’s male companion.



The centurion reasons that just as he issues commands and receives obedience because he is under or backed by the full authority of the Roman Empire, so the authority of Israel’s God approves Jesus, and a command from him must be obeyed by the powers in subjection to him.

Jesus is amazed only twice in the Gospel traditions; here at a Gentile’s faith (v. 10) and in Mark 6:6 at his hometown’s unbelief. “From east and west” may include Jews in the Diaspora (Isaiah 43:5) and given the context also Gentiles (Isaiah 25:6-7; 56:3-8). Matthew 2 (the visit of the Magi) prefigured the Gentiles who come from “the east.” Now, the centurion, presumably a Gentile, comes from “the west” or Rome. These were undoubtedly important “origin” stories for the church’s Gentile mission.



Jewish teaching often envisioned damnation in darkness, sometimes as a prelude to or alongside burning. People would weep over their damnation (Judith 16:17). Gnashing teeth can depict anger (Job 16:9; Psalms 35:16; 37:12; 112:10) but here may reflect anguish or agony.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

There are times when we wrestle with unworthiness. We have been socialized to believe that we have to act and live a certain way to gain acceptance. Society bombards us with images concerning clothing and shoes. It is society that dictates what is in style and what is not in style. This pressure connected to looking a certain way can be suffocating--leading to a self-image that makes one feel "unworthy" to have access to certain opportunities and pleasures in life.

In the passage, a centurion felt unworthy for Jesus to come into his home. The context of this time made him believe that since he was a man under authority while executing authority, he felt that he was not fit to have Jesus come close to him. He was pleading with Jesus on behalf of his slave. Even in his state of unworthiness, Jesus recognizes his faith and responds to his request. The centurion simply stated that if Jesus just spoke the word, healing would happen. This man demonstrated tremendous faith that even though he felt that his life limited him in a spiritual sense, he still believed that Jesus was the answer and had the answer.

As a young person, perhaps you feel unworthy to have a true encounter with Jesus. Maybe because you feel you are too young or you feel that you have made too many mistakes. Perhaps you believe that you do not have the words or heart to approach Jesus authentically. Our passage speaks of the affirmation that Christ provides when Christ sees the heart of the centurion. Jesus looks at internal conditions and request that we see as stated earlier—a powerful response. Therefore, challenge yourself to push past your feelings of unworthiness and exercise your faith to encounter Jesus. Maybe you need to approach Jesus for yourself, a family member, a friend or even an enemy, Jesus responds to authentic faith. Give it a try!

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- Have students share an experience when someone prayed for them. How did it make them feel? Have they experienced praying for someone else in need? Relate their willingness to pray and serve to their capacity to show God's love to others.
- Illustrate examples of others who have demonstrated "great faith" like the centurion. What makes faith "great"?

YOUTH UNIT II: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Simon Peter, From Weakness to Strength
YOUTH TOPIC: Accepting a Second Chance

LESSON 6
DATE: July 12, 2026

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:31-34;
John 18:25-27, 21:15-17**
PRINT PASSAGES: Same

KEEPIN’ IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

In October 2025, the U.S. Senate passed the *Second Chance Reauthorization Act*, a bipartisan bill aimed at supporting people leaving prison or jail as they reintegrate into society. The law would continue and expand funding for programs that help people get housing, job training, substance abuse support, mental health services, and other resources after incarceration. Supporters say this kind of reentry assistance helps individuals who have made mistakes in the past turn their lives around and contribute positively to their communities rather than being defined forever by past convictions.

This bill is all about society offering people a second chance not writing them off because of past mistakes. These programs also recognize that people can change and grow, especially when given opportunities to rebuild their lives. It then reflects the biblical message of forgiveness, restoration, and letting people start anew rather than being trapped by their past failures. Have you ever longed for a second chance?

In our lesson today, we will notice that Simon Peter needed another chance. After denying Christ more than once, Jesus still receives him and gives him the assignment to “feed my sheep”. Jesus could have dismissed Simon Peter or discounted his destiny. However, we see that Jesus offers mercy and another chance. Jesus still offers that same opportunity to all of us today.



KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ❑ If someone makes a serious mistake, should they always be defined by that mistake? Why or why not?
- ❑ Why do you think it can be hard to accept a second chance, either from God or from other people?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

KEY VERSES: 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.

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"

²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."

³¹ "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail, and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." ³³ And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!" ³⁴ Jesus said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day until you have denied three times that you know me."

²⁵ 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." ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

In today's lesson, Simon Peter (Cephas, John 1:42) was a fervent disciple of Jesus, an apostle, and a church pillar (Galatians 2:9). Based on Scripture, Peter was enthusiastic, strong-willed, and impulsive. According to John, Simon was from Bethsaida, Mark says that he lived in Capernaum. Peter was married (1 Corinthians 9:5). He, James and John were partners in a fishing business (Luke 5:10). Mark 8:27-29. The title "Messiah" (Hebrew) or "Christ" (Greek) was associated in Jewish tradition with an anointed king from the line of David

expected to come and free Israel from their Gentile oppressors, purify the people, and restore Israel's independence and glory. Peter's proclamation of Jesus as Messiah belies lofty expectations that Jesus does not support.

Mark 8:27-29. Peter's rebuke of Jesus leads to Jesus's famous retort, "Get behind me, Satan!" (Mark 8:33). In his response and rebuke, Peter is a stumbling block to the truth of who Jesus is and what he stands for. Jesus calls him to get out of the way and get behind him, where a follower is supposed to be. From there, Peter and all disciples will be called to deny themselves and take up their crosses. Luke 22:31-34. All four canonical Gospels recount that, during the Last Supper, Jesus foretold that Peter would deny him three times before the following cockcrow ("before the cock crows twice" in Mark's account [14:30]).

Jesus speaks of Satan, perhaps looking back to Peter's proclamation and rebuke of Jesus; verse 32 may look forward beyond Peter's denial to his rehabilitation. Peter declares that he would never deny Jesus. John 18:25-27. John's record of the fulfillment of Jesus's prediction that Peter would deny him three times. Forms of the verb *arneomai* ("deny") range in meaning from "refuse or disdain" to "deny something or say that it is not true" and "repudiate, disown, or disclaim association with someone or something."

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

Our lesson today took us on Simon Peter's journey from Peter getting it right, the warning, the failure and the second chance. Peter had a big moment because he actually answered the question correctly. We noticed that Peter truly recognized who Jesus really was. This was similar to getting the answer right in class when nobody else did. Peter was confident and quite strong in his faith initially. This reveals to us that sometimes we get it right and demonstrate boldness in our faith.

Peter was then warned that he would be tempted to deny Christ but he did not believe that such a thing could happen. In our lesson, Peter meant what he said because he loved Jesus. However, Jesus already knew that Peter was not as strong as he thought he was. There are times when we overestimate ourselves by saying, "I would never do that," but pressure can definitely change things. We must understand that loving God does not mean that we will not make mistakes.

Peter actually denies Jesus three times as was stated then the rooster crows. Peter folded under pressure because he got scared. He did not want to be associated with Jesus when things became difficult. However, this was not a

small mistake but this was denying his best friend at His worst moment. Imagine saying you do not know your closest friend just to protect yourself. That is a very deep thought! This reveals that even strong believers can struggle which includes leaders.



Finally, Peter is given a second chance because after the resurrection, Jesus asks Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Each time Peter says yes and each time Jesus says, “Feed my sheep.” Peter denied Jesus three times; so, Jesus gave him three chances to affirm his love—which is extremely powerful. Jesus didn’t cancel, shame, or replace Peter as we stated earlier, instead Christ restored Peter. What is striking is that Jesus gave Peter responsibility again by saying “Feed my sheep.” This act means, “I still trust you. I still have a purpose for you.” A second chance is not simply forgiveness but it is about restoration. Your failure may have been evident but God’s grace is even bolder and louder.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Identify the “sheep” Jesus wanted Peter to care for. What does tending these sheep look like spiritually?
- ▣ Have students list privately several spiritual setbacks. Encourage them to process the events for positive outcomes, life lessons, or tools to serve others.

YOUTH UNIT II: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Zacchaeus, The Publican
YOUTH TOPIC: Going Above and Beyond

LESSON 7
DATE: July 19, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:1-10
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

KEEPIN’ IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

Let us reflect upon the life of Robert Downey, Jr. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Robert Downey Jr. struggled publicly with drug addiction and legal issues. He was arrested multiple times and even served jail time. Many people in Hollywood believed his career was over. However, as Downey was recovering and rebuilding his life, he had the opportunity to be a part of the cast of *Iron Man* in 2008. This role changed his life and made him one of the most successful actors in the world. Today, he is respected for his comeback story.

The beauty of the story is that there is power in a comeback story. When understanding the importance of our lesson, Zacchaeus had a bad reputation as it relates to the context of our Scripture. It was said that he had a bad reputation because he was a tax collector, was considered corrupt, and people even labeled him as dishonest. On the other hand, Jesus saw him, called him by name, went to his house and gave him an opportunity to change. The people complained because Jesus chose to go to Zacchaeus house.

Robert Downey, Jr. had a bad reputation in the eyes of many. As a result, people counted him out, but because he received another chance, his life, ultimately, changed and he lives differently. The good news is that Jesus believes in a comeback story. There are times when we do not always do the right thing and our decisions lead to dangerous consequences; but Jesus has the ability to change the narrative of our lives.

KEEPIN’ IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Why do people sometimes refuse to let others change?
- ▣ Have you ever been judged for something in your past?

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.

¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through it. ² A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵ 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." ⁶ So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷ All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." ⁸ 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." ⁹ Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

In order to understand today's lesson, we must begin in Luke 18. Jesus encounters a rich ruler who went away sad when invited to sell all he had and give to the poor. Jesus responds that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. The disciples respond, "Who then can be saved?" Luke 19 answers that question. The name Zacchaeus means "clean," "pure," and "righteous." Zacchaeus, the tax collector, is by profession considered a sinner of the worst sort for his collaboration with the Roman occupiers and questionable business practices. He is the kind of despised person that no one finds redeemable. See Luke 3:12.

"Short or little." This term is translated "least" in 9:48. Zacchaeus becomes one of the least of these by climbing the tree in the manner of a child. Because he humbles himself, Zacchaeus is in a position to welcome Jesus into his home. The story embodies the promise that anyone who desires to see Jesus will humble themselves. They will, in turn, be seen by Jesus and have their joy made complete. Zacchaeus joins the growing number of persons on the margins of God's people who possess insight into the values of Jesus's mission.



KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

The lesson points us to various themes that even the young person can consider. One of the major themes we notice in the lesson is that Jesus sees beyond labels. Zacchaeus was labeled within his context. The community had nothing good to say about him. There were also some labels that he placed upon himself such as being “short”. However, even through these limitations and labels, Jesus saw Zacchaeus beyond the labels. There may be times when you are labeled in your school, community, and yes, even amongst family. No label intimidates Jesus, and Jesus still has the ability to see you. Therefore, do not let the crowds all around you define who you are. You are better than every definition placed upon you.

When reviewing the lesson and even our current events narrative, you are more than your mistakes. The reality is that no one is perfect. No person has made all the right decisions or the right moves. We live in a world of imperfections, and yes, mistakes. However, the character of Christ reveals to each of us that we are more than what we did not do right. Jesus can handle our mistakes. Jesus loves us through our mistakes. And, Jesus sees us even in the midst of our mistakes. The good news is that Jesus still gives us an opportunity to change and experience redirection. Jesus extends an invitation to change our narrative through changing our actions. Assess the ways in which you can change your actions so that your reality can change.

Zacchaeus wanted to see who Jesus was and he intentionally tried to see Jesus by any means necessary. He did not mind climbing up the sycamore tree to fixate his attention on Jesus. As Jesus was passing by, Jesus looked up and noticed Zacchaeus. When Jesus noticed Zacchaeus, Jesus wanted to be a part of his company, and Zacchaeus was grateful to welcome Jesus. People were upset by the action but that did not change Jesus’s mind. Zacchaeus sought to change his actions and salvation was offered to him beyond the labels and the mistakes.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Reflect on how one’s life changes when one encounters Jesus spiritually.
- ▣ Identify those in your life at school or community who have been marginalized or left out. Commit to praying for those individuals and make an effort to show them compassion.

YOUTH UNIT II: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Mary, The Mother of Jesus
YOUTH TOPIC: Become the Best Version of “You”

LESSON 8
DATE: July 26, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Luke 2:15-19; John 2:1-5, 19:25-27
PRINT PASSAGES: Same

KEEPIN’ IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

During the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, which was actually held in 2021, Simone Biles made headlines when she withdrew from several events to prioritize her mental health. The world watched, some criticized her and others supported her. Throughout her entire journey from foster care, to Olympic gold medals, to public struggles; it has been her mother, Nellie Biles, who has consistently been present--encouraging, guiding, protecting, and supporting her in both victories and challenges. By the 2024 Paris Olympics, Simone returned stronger, demonstrating resilience and growth--supported by the same steady presence that had always been there.

Just like Simone’s mother supported her from the beginning, Mary was present at Jesus’ birth, quietly reflecting and holding onto what God was doing. Mary also was a present force within Jesus’ ministry. At the wedding in Cana, Mary noticed the problem before anyone else and told the servants: “Do whatever He tells you.” She didn’t try to control the miracle, but she pointed people to Jesus. Then, Mary was present at the cross--watching when others left, standing in pain, heartbreak, and faith. What a woman!

Whether reflecting on Mary or Nellie Biles, there is something very significant about having a supportive mother, motherly figure, and/or guardian. Someone to stand with you through good and bad times, during both low and high moments can make all the difference. Having that support is quite affirming and encouraging--while also providing the motivation to continue to strive. Think about who that person is or who are those persons who show up for you in this manner. You should honor those personalities because we cannot accomplish anything great without support.

KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Why is it easier to support someone when they're winning than when they're struggling?
- ▣ What does it mean to "stand" with someone?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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

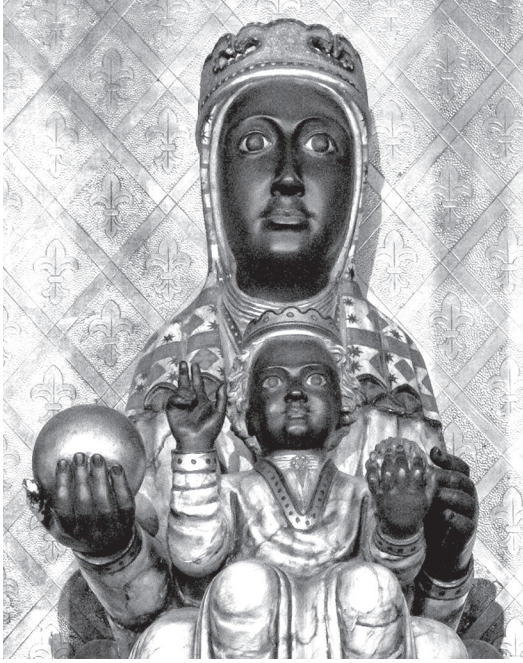
¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, ¹⁹ and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

²⁵ And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

As we review our lesson, Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy through Joseph's paternal line, and Mary is identified as "the wife of Joseph." John 19:25 states that Mary had a sister, but scholars are unclear about the identity of this sister. Jerome identifies Mary of Clopas as Mary's sister. Hegesippus (c. 110–c. April 7, 180 CE) conjectured that Mary of Clopas (married to Clopas?) was Mary's sister-in-law via Joseph (brother of Clopas?). According to Luke, Mary was related to Elizabeth, a daughter of the tribe of Levi, wife of Zechariah, the Priest.

“Humble servant” (Luke 1:48 NIV) is not Mary’s moral attribute. It is her economic and social condition. Mary serves as a valuable lesson to all Christians of how, through the lowliest and humblest of people, God accomplishes heaven’s purposes.



The great Reformer, Martin Luther, “was unabashed in honoring her, even referring to her as the “Queen of Heaven” and stating with great conviction, ‘Was not hers a wondrous soul?’” Luke 2:15-19. Mary needed time to fathom the meaning of it all. Sometime later, when she and Joseph found the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, Luke tells us that Mary responded the same way (Luke 2:51). Luke implies that Mary struggled with the questions of faith, particularly during the dark days of Jesus’s death (see Luke 2:34-35). She did not truly comprehend it all until after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Mary represents Christians who desire to believe in God but have honest questions and doubts. John 2:1-5, 19:25-27. John mentions Mary several times (see 2:12; 6:42; 19:25-28), never by name. She appears only twice in the Gospel of John, at the wedding at Cana and at the foot of the cross. She brackets his life. She is at the beginning of his career and watches him die.

KEEPIN’ IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

Faithfulness is not seasonal--it remains steady. The word faithfulness is often characterized as our faithfulness towards another person or our faithfulness towards God. We even comment on how God is faithful unto us; but have we considered the faithfulness of others towards us. We all need a support system, mentors, encouragers, and teachers etc. who will undergird us for who we are right now, and then challenge us to become our best version. We should not diminish the need for support. Yes, isolation is a reality on this journey called life, but we do not have to live alone. We have to give ourselves permission to receive the support.



We must note, particularly, as young people that you do not know everything. You need someone to pour into you who will give your wisdom and correction. Everyone needs a trusted circle who can remain faithful through every situation while becoming who God has called us to be. It is difficult to thrive when fickle people are around; so, it is beneficial to have

steady and committed voices concerned about your best interest. Therefore, choose your friends wisely. Choose your circle wisely. Choose your mentors wisely. The faithfulness of those who cover and support you is extremely beneficial for your well-being.

Mary, the mother of Jesus displays faithful support for her son from his birth to his death. The mother of Jesus did not always fully understand the fullness of her Son's ministry; but we find various examples of her support. At a very young age, Jesus was "special" so much so that Jesus had wisdom beyond His years. With that being noted, Mary had a unique responsibility to mother Jesus as Jesus' journey was unique and above the rest. What we notice is faithfulness even when the responsibility stretched her and even broke her heart. We all need someone to be faithful unto us in this manner. So, let us be mindful of who we allow in our space.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Imagine what Mary may be thinking at the wedding. What does the story demonstrate about Mary's character and her willingness to trust her son with this task?

YOUTH UNIT III: Faithful Witness Spread the Good News
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Thomas The Honest Doubter
YOUTH TOPIC: Is Seeing the Same as Believing?

LESSON 9

DATE: August 2, 2026

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 11:14-16, 14:5-8,
20:24-29, 21:1-2**

PRINT PASSAGE: Same

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

“Dare to Doubt” - Born in 1924 in Harlem, New York, world renowned author and social justice advocate James Baldwin applied his written and spoken word gifts to cast doubt on an unjust system and highlight the struggles of Black people in America to overcome the seemingly impenetrable barriers of racism. These visible and invisible barriers prevented Blacks in America from accessing the guarantees of freedom and justice along with life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness contained in the United States’ founding documents.

Baldwin began his career at age 14 as preacher sharing the gospel and speaking out against racial inequality. When disputes arose about his outspokenness and lifestyle, he accepted a fellowship in France where he launched his career as a writer creating such famous works as *“Go Tell it On the Mountain,”* *“Notes of a Native Son,”* *“If Beale Street Could Talk,”* and *“Fire the Next Time.”* He lived primarily in Paris for his entire life, but he frequently traveled to the United States for speaking engagements, television appearances and Civil Rights Protests.

As a Civil Rights advocate, he worked and socialized with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Nina Simone and others. His unique ability to articulate the negative impact of racism on Blacks and Whites opened doors to debate



William F. Buckley (known as the founder of the American Conservative Movement). The Baldwin-Buckley debate, as it became known, argued the propo-

sition that “The American dream is at the expense of the American Negro.” Baldwin won the debate 544 to 164. The power of his thoughts, writings and debates on race relations in America maintain their relevance today. Some of his quotes that still challenge us now include:

- “A civilization is not destroyed by wicked people; it is not necessary that people be wicked but only that they be spineless.”
- “You cannot fix what you will not face.”
- “People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction.”
- “I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.”

Baldwin certainly saw America in a way that America did not see herself.

KEEPIN’ IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Can doubts expressed about ineffective political systems and elected officials be used to empower people to work for social justice or political change? Yes or no, and how?
- ▣ What do you think James Baldwin meant by the quote “You cannot fix what you will not face”? What are important problems you see in your school, church, or country, and what do we need to face and fix them?

KEEPIN’ IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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

¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, ‘Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.’

¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.

⁵ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ ⁶ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know* my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’

²⁴ But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen

the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe it.' ²⁶ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' ²⁷ Then he 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.' ²⁸ Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' ²⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.'

¹ After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ² Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples."

The topic for this unit, "Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News", presents examples, challenges and unique opportunities to answer the call given in Luke 24:44-48 to be witnesses to the nations (which starts with those around us) of the great gift of salvation and eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection. Through the life of Jesus' Disciple, Thomas, Saul's conversion to Paul, Timothy's mother and grandmother, as well as Lydia's; this unit presents different ways that we can come to understand this good news and share it with others. Our gospel is universal. It is not limited to any one race, ethnicity, country, political ideology, or age group. The transformative force of the Gospel provides hope, life and light to a world plagued by death and darkness.

Today's lesson focuses on how Thomas—one of Jesus' first twelve disciples, experiences both unbelief as well as the love and forgiveness of Jesus. It demonstrates that as followers of Jesus we do not have to be perfect, but we must have a heart and mind that is willing to acknowledge the truth of Jesus' power and resurrection and believe that truth can overcome our doubts and fears.

Thomas, as one of the twelve disciples, left family, job, and home to follow Jesus and serve as a part of Jesus' traveling ministry. The disciples had daily opportunities to learn from Jesus' many life lessons from the Old Testament scriptures, observe how Jesus treated others, and witness the power of God operating in Jesus (who is God) to heal and deliver people. However, John 11:14-16 shows that Jesus understood that His disciples did not fully comprehend His power over death.

After Jesus informed the disciples that Lazarus had died, Jesus said “For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” Jesus did not say they were going to comfort Mary and Martha (Lazarus’ sisters) or any of the other family members. Jesus clearly stated that they were going to see their deceased friend, Lazarus. Thomas’ reply (“*Let us also go, that we may die with him*”, John 11:16) confirmed the need for Jesus to transform the situation into a teachable moment for those present, but especially for the benefit of the disciples who needed to comprehend Jesus’ power over death to share the Gospel with the world.



In John 12:5-8, Thomas responds to Jesus’ words of preparation to the disciples informing them of His death and assuring them that they would have a place with Him that He would prepare for them in Heaven. Thomas expressed his doubt (for himself and probably some of the others as well) saying in John 12:5 “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus reassured Thomas and the other disciples that knowing Him (Jesus) was the way to eternal life and also the way to the place prepared for them.



Chapter 20 of the Gospel of John can be viewed as Thomas’s third testing where he once again doubts rather than remembers and applies what Jesus said to this situation. He also chooses to reject the disciples’ firsthand account of seeing the resurrected Jesus, and he indirectly challenges Jesus by saying “*Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.*” One week later, the resurrected Jesus miraculously appears to the disciples behind their locked

doors and walls to respond to Thomas' challenge, challenging Thomas to touch the nail prints in His hands or the wound in his side, eliminating all doubt. Jesus ended this teachable moment saying, *"Do not doubt but believe."* All Thomas could say was *"My Lord and my God!"*

The final appearance in this lesson of Jesus after the resurrection to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias recorded in John, Chapter 21 has no reference to doubts or fears. The disciples all saw and believed in the Risen Savior and appeared to understand their assignment to share the good news.

The scriptures about Thomas in this lesson can be viewed as a progression. Prior to the disciples accompanying Jesus to see Lazarus, they had traveled with Him, observed miracles, and witnessed Jesus' love and power in action. However, Thomas did not seem to understand how that power applied to the situation with Lazarus. Even after witnessing Jesus' resurrection power that brought Lazarus back from the dead, Thomas appears to see it as a one-time event until he sees the resurrected Jesus for himself. These scriptures demonstrate the power of Jesus to break through our doubts and fears to help us understand the good news of Jesus, if our hearts and mind are open to learn the truth.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

Both the author James Baldwin and the disciple Thomas were honest about their unbelief, but in completely different eras regarding vastly different subject matters. Baldwin used healthy unbelief to challenge the racism in the United States in the mid-1900's that was an entrenched mindset enforced through the legal system. He motivated Blacks and Whites to see the status quo as a system of oppression that was harmful for all races. Baldwin used unbelief to redirect people's thinking from autopilot to becoming conscious of the harm that everyone experiences when anyone is treated with hate and disrespect. He captured this in his statement "One cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own." This type of unbelief opens doors to honest communication that seeks a deeper understanding, wisdom and truth that can bring people previously divided together based on mutual respect. Baldwin's healthy unbelief questioned and challenged the wrongs in society and provoked others to take a stand for racial justice and equality.

In contrast, the disciple Thomas' unbelief was based on misunderstandings of the mission, purpose and authority of Jesus as God in human form here to love the world sacrificially and bring salvation and eternal life through His death for

our sins. Before Jesus announced Lazarus' death to the disciples, He had performed 32 or more miracles including raising Jairus' daughter from the dead (see <https://blog.adw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/37-Miracles-of-Jesus-in-Chronological-Order.pdf>). Rather than think back to any of these other miracles, Thomas responds *"Let us also go, that we may die with him."* Rather than having a mindset of power, potential and possibility to change things, it may be that Thomas' limiting beliefs about his own abilities may have caused him to question Jesus' power and authority even when Thomas witnessed many other miracles. Then, in response to Jesus telling the disciples about Him preparing them a place in eternity, Thomas voiced his unbelief about not knowing where to go or how to get there. Finally, when the other disciples shared their testimony about seeing Jesus after The Resurrection, Thomas still believed he had to touch and see to believe. After these three events described in John chapters 11, 14 and 20, it appears that Thomas transitioned away from questioning Jesus and himself, which freed Thomas to believe in the truth that is Jesus (our way, our truth and our light) and He went on with the other disciples to share that good news.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Review the list of miracles Jesus performed and describe how remembering them can help us fight back against doubt? <https://blog.adw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/37-Miracles-of-Jesus-in-Chronological-Order.pdf>
- ▣ Name ways unbelief can negatively impact friendships or relationships. How can honest communication and trust overcome unbelief?
- ▣ When you have questions about your faith or your purpose in life, are there any people who can talk to? Are there scriptures you repeat (e.g., God will never leave you, nor forsake you – Deuteronomy 13:8; Isaiah 31:10-14)? Make a plan about who you can talk to when questions come and scriptures that reassure you.
- ▣ If time permits, view the video on "The World According to James Baldwin" and note the obstacles he faced such as constant surveillance and threats by the F.B.I. (Federal Bureau of Investigation) against him to attempt to prevent him from advocating for Civil Rights: <https://guides.library.cornell.edu/Baldwin/biography> Consider the doubts and fears that you face in life, then pray and plan during the next week how to overcome these doubts in order to use the gifts, talents and abilities God gave you to be a blessing to others in need.

YOUTH UNIT III: Faithful Witness Spread the Good New
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Stephen, An Early Interpreter
of Christianity

YOUTH TOPIC: Something Worth Dying For

LESSON 10

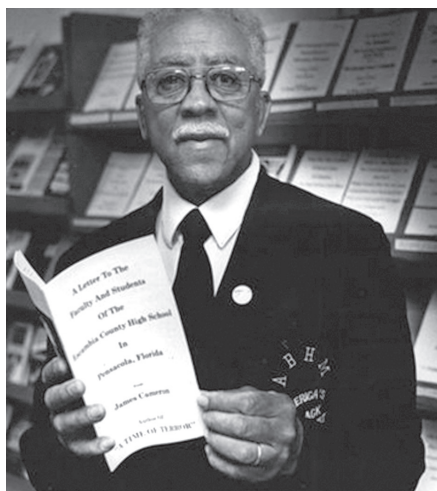
DATE: August 9, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 6:1-7:60

PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 6:7-10; 7:54-60

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

"Lest We Forget"- August 9, 2026, marks the twelfth anniversary of the killing of Michael Brown by the police in Ferguson, Missouri. His death and other past and ongoing acts of injustice are commemorated as part of Black August, an annual commemoration held in August to honor Black freedom fighters, political prisoners, and the history of Black resistance, and as part of the America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee.



Dr. James H. Cameron, Jr. (February 23, 1914 – June 11, 2006) the only person known to have survived a lynching, was a civil rights advocate, self-taught historian, prolific writer, and founder of Milwaukee's online and brick and mortar Black Holocaust Museum. His attempted-lynching took place in 1930 when Dr. Cameron was a teenager. The Museum's website (<https://www.abhmuseum.org/>) describes Holocaust as a series of atrocities organized by one social group against another. Dr. Cameron got the idea for the museum when visiting Yad VaShem, the

Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem, Israel. He saw the many similarities in the experiences of Jewish Holocaust survivors and survivors of other atrocities. It includes:

- Dehumanization and vilification
- Forced migrations
- Slave (forced, unpaid) labor
- Stolen property

- Mass Incarceration
- Torture
- Medical experimentation
- Discrimination in law and custom

The Black Holocaust Museum also presents information on “Black August,” an annual commemoration “to honor the lives and struggles of Black revolutionaries and activists. It is a time to reflect on the contributions and sacrifices made by those who fought for racial justice and liberation. The observance often includes education about the historical and ongoing struggles against systemic racism and oppression.” It has been celebrated for over 40 years.

KEEPIN’ IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Why is it important to commemorate past and present acts of injustice facing the Black community in addition to celebrating Black achievements?
- ▣ What do you think our reaction should be to injustice against others, like the ICE raids?
- ▣ How do you believe the role of today’s youth and young adults in the fight for social justice and racial equality is different than it was in the 1950’s and 1960’s?

KEEPIN’ IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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

⁷ The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. ⁸ Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke.”

⁵⁴ When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. ⁵⁵ But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man stand-

ing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷ But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸ Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died."

Last week's lesson examined how Christians can struggle with unbelief in the process of developing the necessary Christian faith to spread the good news of Jesus. Because of unhealthy doubt, Thomas (one of Jesus' first twelve disciples) thought that he must see Jesus resurrected with His own eyes to believe the truth that Jesus told Thomas and the disciples multiple time prior to the crucifixion. Today's lesson describes the bold faith of Stephen, a young adult selected to serve in the church, and through his humility, boldness and faithfulness in sharing the Gospel, he was able to see Jesus on the right hand of God with his spiritual sight.

The setting for the lesson is in the city of Jerusalem after the death and resurrection of Jesus. It was a major city for trade, religious worship, and business activity with great wealth and poverty. The city was under the control of the Roman empire that stationed soldiers throughout the city and appointed political leaders who were spies given their positions to prevent the Jewish people from trying to regain control of their land. Just imagine the tensions between the Jewish people and Roman soldiers there to keep the people in check and prevent attempts at rebellion; imagine the tension with the political leaders trying to comply with ever-increasing demands and taxes from Rome and the Jewish people who hated every moment of Roman domination; and, imagine the tension of the Jewish religious leaders trying to maintain the respect of their people while constantly being disrespected by Rome. Imagine the tension from internal threats by Jewish religious Zealots seeking to provoke fights to cause a war with Rome; imagine the tension with the Romans flaunting their pagan beliefs and rituals tempting the people to forsake God; and, imagine the tension between religious leaders seeing their own priest and people trying to abandon the Jewish faith (from their viewpoint) to become followers of a crucified Jesus.

Stephen's mindset in the midst of this tension reflected faithfulness and commitment: choosing to serve God with his whole heart in spite of opposition and challenges. Stephen (as a follower of Jesus) was not deterred by the Roman soldiers who brutalized Jesus prior to his crucifixion; he was not deterred the

Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders) who had Jesus arrested and tried; and, he was not deterred by the San Hedren Council who had the power to sentence him to death.

Stephen's passion for sharing the Gospel came at a time when the numbers of disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem was growing rapidly, and even some of the Jewish priests were becoming followers of Jesus. There were widows in the church of different backgrounds that received food and assistance, but the Greek (gentile) widows were being ignored.

There were widows of different backgrounds that received food and assistance, but the Greek (Gentile) widows were being ignored. The leaders decided to solve this problem by appointing seven members to serve as deacons, whose job were to take care of and provide food and supplies for those widows in need. Stephen was one of those chosen to serve as a deacon because of his wisdom and his spirit. Stephen not only served those in need, he also *"did great wonders and signs among the people."* (Acts 6:8).

Stephen's passion for sharing the Word of God drew opposition from members of the Freeman's Synagogue. When these men failed to win, they debated Stephen regarding the faith, became angry, and found people willing to lie before the Sanhedrin High Council. These men bribed the false witnesses to claim that Stephen cursed Moses, cursed God, and blasphemed against God.

When Stephen's time came to speak the Scripture, Stephen's face was described as glowing like an angel such that the members of the High Council were unable to take their eyes off of him. Then Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, starting with Abraham, gave the history of the Jewish people condemning them for their idol worship, disobedience, and rejection of the prophets and Jesus the Messiah. Stephen described them and their ancestors as bullheaded traitors and murderers.

The listeners became an angry mob and dragged Stephen outside to stone him, but Stephen hardly noticed. He had a vision from Heaven with Jesus standing at the right side of God. Rather than condemn them, Stephen prayed for them as the rocks hit him. Before he died, he prayed *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them"* (Acts 7:60a).

Historians consider Stephen the first martyr of the church who willingly gave his life for his faith in Jesus Christ. Through the life he lived, his sacrifice, the commitment of those first century Christians, and the move of the Holy Spirit, the church continued to grow and spread world-wide.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

In Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 1963 book, *Strength to Love*, he stated: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbor will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others." America's Black Holocaust Museum preserves the legacy of great social justice fighters who experienced loss of liberty and life in their quest for freedom and work to destroy racism and systems of oppression that have held Black people in economic, psychological, social and spiritual bondage. The life of Stephen provides an example of a spiritual freedom fighter who sacrificed his life for the faith, and he also extended the love of Christ to those who persecuted him based on lies and jealousy. God has provided us with great examples of freedom fighters and fighters for the faith to inspire us to continue growing in our faith, finding our purpose, forgiving and uplifting others for God's Kingdom purpose, and faithfully serving God.



iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ❑ Stephen is described as being "full of grace and power." Have the class name others in the Bible or people they know that they would describe as "full of grace and power."
- ❑ When Stephen was selected to serve as a deacon, the church leaders laid hands on the deacons as they prayed for them. The AME Zion Church ordination service includes the laying on of hands by the elders present in the service. Ask the class to give reasons why we still do this as part of the ordination ritual.
- ❑ Stephen prayed for those who stoned him. Have you ever forgiven someone? For those who want to share, ask why they choose forgiveness over hate?

YOUTH UNIT III: Faithful Witness Spread the Good News
**YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Saul of Tarsus: How a Pharisee
Became a Christian**
YOUTH TOPIC: A Complete Make-Over

LESSON 11
DATE: August 16, 2026
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 22:3-15
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

“Up, Down and Over” - Many people do not know that August 16th is National Roller Coaster Day. The National Roller Coaster Day website lists the location of roller coasters, most of which are in amusement parks, all around the country. Each year, millions of people visit amusement parks and roller coasters are one of the top attractions. For roller coaster lovers, the Guinness World Records websites posted The Ultimate Guide to Record Breaking Rollercoasters in 2024, (<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2024/7/the-ultimate-guide-to-record-breaking-rollercoasters-fastest-tallest-and-most-expensive>).

Many people assume that it's the speed of roller coasters that makes them exciting, but the website [physicsclassroom.com](https://www.physicsclassroom.com) (Lesson 2/Amusement Park Physics) proposes a different reason as to why people love roller coasters. “The thrill of roller coasters is not due to their speed, but rather due to their accelerations and to the feelings of weightlessness and weightiness that they produce. Roller coasters thrill us because of their ability to accelerate us downward one moment and upwards the next; leftwards one moment and rightwards the next. Roller coasters are about acceleration; that's what makes them thrilling.”

August 16th has been recognized as National Roller Coaster Day because on this day in 1898, Edwin Prescott filed the first patent for a roller coaster. However, self-taught African American engineer, Granville T. Woods, born in 1856, invented and filed the patent in 1892 for the world's first electric roller coaster located in Coney Island, New York. Woods registered over 50 patents for inventions including a telephone transmitter, a trolley wheel, and the multiplex telegraph, which was the subject of a lawsuit that Woods won against Alexander Graham Bell <https://www.biography.com/inventors/granville-t-woods>. For more information on Woods, see this link to an interview with David Head

about the life and work of Granville T. Woods, part of the Coney Island History Project, 2008, (<https://www.coneyislandhistory.org/oral-history-archive/david-head>).

KEEPIN' IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ If you could invent something, what would it be and why?
- ▣ Had you heard of Granville T. Woods before this lesson? Had you learned about Alexander Graham Bell? For those who only knew of Bell, why is that?
- ▣ Do you think if more Black students were taught about Blacks working and achieving in science, mathematics, engineers and technology, students would pursue these careers?

KEEPIN' IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

KEY VERSE: [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.

³ 'I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted this Way up to the point of death by binding both men and women and putting them in prison, ⁵ as the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. From them I also received letters to the brothers in Damascus, and I went there in order to bind those who were there and to bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

⁶ 'While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁸ I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" Then he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth* whom you are persecuting." ⁹ Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ I asked, "What am I to do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do." ¹¹ Since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, those who were with me took my hand and led me to Damascus.

¹² 'A certain Ananias, who was a devout man according to the law and well spoken of by all the Jews living there, ¹³ came to me; and standing beside me, he said, "Brother Saul, regain your sight!" In that very hour I regained my sight and saw him. ¹⁴ Then he said, "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; ¹⁵ for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard.

Last week's lesson, "Stephen, An Early Interpreter of Christianity," included Paul (then Saul) as a young man holding the coats of the Jewish mob and consenting as they stoned Stephen to death. Now, years later, Saul has been converted to Christianity and he, like Stephen, spoke to his captors and those around him to persuade them to become Christians. Paul shared that he, like them, was brought up in Jerusalem—learning the same "ancestral law." Like them, he was also zealous for God. He told of his education by well-respected teacher of Jewish law, Gamaliel.

Many of the Jewish religious leaders considered Christianity to be like a cult whose members wanted to tear down the temples, remove the current leaders, and replace them. Saul used his knowledge and connections to get the legal authority to have Christians imprisoned and killed. To make sure the listeners knew Paul was telling the truth, he mentioned the high priests and council of elders, which is like references when you are applying for job. No one present disputed his upbringing or the work he had done as a Pharisee (Jewish leader) to stop the spread of the threat that these leaders believed Christianity posed. Paul, understanding the hatred for Christians by the Jewish leadership (his former friends and mentors), did not let that stop him from choosing to become a follower of Jesus and sharing his faith with others.

After describing his experience growing up in Jerusalem (establishing a personal connection with many of those around him), Paul enthusiastically shared his "Damascus Road" testimony. It started with Paul getting letters from the high priest—giving him authority to lead a group of men to capture the Christians in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished. On his way to Jerusalem with those men, Paul had a miraculous meeting with Jesus that changed his life.

Acts 22:6-8 describes this meeting as follows: *"⁶ While I was on my way and approaching Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁸ I answered, "Who are you, Lord?" Then he said to me, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting."* Every-

one going to Damascus with Paul (Saul at that time) saw the great light which blinded him, but only he saw and heard the voice of Jesus. Some translations describe the power of God knocking Paul off the donkey or horse he rode. This combined with the light blinding him can be viewed as making him humble. Now Saul, the highly educated leader of men was forced to be led by the hand as one who was blind. He who was once feared and respected was now one to be pitied and looked down upon as unfit for service and unworthy to be in the presence of the Jewish leadership. In this condition, he may have been desperate enough to allow people to help him who he did not know and who were likely the Christians he spent his whole career hating and hunting down to be punished or killed.

The old school mothers and fathers of our community might describe Saul before he became Paul as an educated fool, but also as a dangerous one. Someone who has lots of “book learning” but missed the most important life lessons, like love and respect for others, which teach us how to apply knowledge. Saul understood about the many different rules and laws of the Jewish people, but he failed to understand the compassion and mercy of God. As Saul, Paul knew a lot about God from his studies with prestigious teachers, but he did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In Romans 10:2 (NKJV), Paul describes certain Jews saying, “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” This description fits Paul, himself, when he had his miraculous meeting with Jesus. However, all of that changed on the Damascus Road.

The men with Saul led him to Damascus to wait for the person Jesus said would meet him, that was Ananias whose name means “Yahweh has been gracious.” “The name Ananias can be seen as a reminder of the divine favor bestowed upon individuals, illustrating how God’s grace plays a crucial role in the lives of believers.” <https://bibledictionarytoday.com/biblical-names/ananias/> Some might describe it as ironic that Jesus would send someone whose name means grace (Ananias) to Saul who had persecuted Christians and was on the way to persecute more Christians in a manner demonstrating no compassion, grace or mercy whatsoever.

KEEPIN’ IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

Both Christian convert Saul (better known as Paul) and Black inventor Granville T. Woods used their skills and talents to change the world around them for the better. Paul, after he was transformed by his Damascus Road conversion, use his preaching, speaking and teaching gifts to transform people’s lives through the Gospel. He was a powerful evangelist—drawing many converts

from Judaism and the Gentiles to faith in Christ. The Apostle Paul was a gifted speaker, most likely speaking in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic and other languages through the gift of tongues. In addition to winning many converts for Christ and extending the Gospel message through his missionary travels to many Gentiles and regions far beyond Jerusalem, Paul faced shipwreck, snake bites and many death threats from those who opposed the spread of the Gospel, but he remained faithful to his mission.

Granville T. Woods transformed his brilliant ideas in electrical and engineering processes into electrical systems, machines and the electric roller coaster. He was a free Black man during slavery and served as an apprentice in electrical and engineering work as a youth, and as he registered over 50 patents during adulthood from the 1890s to the early 1900s. Woods filed patents to protect his inventions, so he had to wage many court battles against companies seeking to steal his ideas. Among his most famous court battles was a case he won against Thomas Edison. Woods' inventions have made train travel safer with a positive industry impact that continues to benefit the transportation industry and travelers today.

Both Woods and Paul faced strong opposition but displayed determination and resilience to overcome constant threats throughout their career. The theme Up, Down, and Over reflects the challenges of life as well as a physics perspective on why roller coasters are fun. Exhilaration and impact result when roller coasters create a combination of weightlessness and weightiness with unexpected left and right shifts (not speed alone) and these are the transformations that make it fun. Jesus' sacrifice for us included going up on the cross (taking the weightiness of our sin); down to the grave (weightlessness – leaving our sin behind by taking our punishment); and, Jesus crossed over the divide from death to new life in God.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- Why is it important for Christians to be humble and not prideful?
- Brainstorm ways the Church School class can witness to others about the good news of the Gospel or encourage others. Ask church leaders for help implementing one or more of the ideas.
- Have you ever had an idea to do something good, people tried to discourage you; but you were able to achieve your goal despite the opposition? Take time during class or later this week to write a thank you prayer to God for helping you to persevere.

YOUTH UNIT III: Faithful Witness Spread the Good New
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Timothy: The Influence
of Home Training
YOUTH TOPIC: Positive Influences in Our Lives

LESSON 12
DATE: August 23, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:1-3; Philippians 2:19-22;
2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16
PRINT PASSAGE: 2 Timothy 1:1-6, 3:14-16

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

Home Training - For generations, throughout the Afro-Caribbean diaspora and other communities of color as well, many parents and family members raising children and teens have insisted on certain rules or standards of behavior known as “Home Training.” The Afro-Caribbean diaspora includes Black people in the United States, the island nations in the Caribbean Ocean, and countries on the African continent. These behavior standards were reinforced by “the village” of extended family members, neighbors, babysitters and friends. These rules or standards of behavior typically were based on Biblical standards such as the fruit of the spirit and the Golden Rule of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. Television programs like *The Cosby Show* and *Good Times* provided a humorous look into some of the rules and standards, but with only words of correction and not physical discipline to enforce the standards.

General principles for children and teens that extend into adulthood listed in the article by Helen Tarer “*13 Cultural Codes Black Families*” include: 1. Respect your elders (e.g., not calling adults by their first name and speaking when spoken to). 2. Speak/greet people when you walk into a room, and look people in the eye; especially if it is a room with adults. 3. Don’t leave the house looking any old kind of way (e.g., uncombed hair, no shower/bath, uncombed or brushed hair, wrinkled clothes or pajamas). 4. Do not embarrass the family with temper tantrums in public or at church.

Home training also includes a lengthy list of communication rules, including how to answer the telephone (when there were home telephones) and how to answer the front door. Saying thank you, please, and not “talking back” was important. The instructions included what we now call “code switching.” Children and youth were expected to speak to adults in respectful tones and not

raise their voices, curse, roll eyes or suck teeth. Trying to participate in “grown folks’ conversation” was strictly prohibited. One phrase of correction was “You can talk to your friends like that, but don’t talk to me like that!” These were skills to prepare children and youth for school, work, college, employment or the boardroom. It included how to “read” the room and act appropriately in all types of settings.

The website refinedrebelcollection.com captures Heart of Home training as “not just preparing us to be polite – they were preparing us to survive, thrive, and represent ourselves with dignity in a world that often misjudge us before we open our mouths.”

KEEPIN’ IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Divide into two or more teams, set a timer, and see which teams can list the greatest number of rules or principles that are considered examples of acts that reflect good home training including hygiene habits.
- ▣ For people who have other clothes, is it okay to wear pajamas to the grocery store or hair bonnets in public? Why or why not?
- ▣ How does the gift of hospitality (creating an atmosphere in your home where people feel welcomed) relate to having proper home training?

KEEPIN’ IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, ² To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. ³ I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴ Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵ 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. ⁶ For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands;

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed,

knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have known sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.



This week’s lesson from the book of 2 Timothy is directed to Timothy, a young adult serving God, who Paul mentored after Paul’s conversion to Christianity. It places a high value on preserving and passing along Christian heritage from one generation to the next. The key verse of the lesson is a reminder to Timothy of the sincere faith of Timothy’s mother and grandmother that greatly influenced Timothy’s development of a sincere faith in God. In verse 2 of 2 Timothy, Chapter 1, the writer (Paul or one writing for him)

refers to Timothy as his beloved child, not just someone he was mentoring. This lesson demonstrates the power of love from family and members of our faith community to help build strong and sincere faith in children, youth and young adults like Timothy—who are willing to listen and serve.

Timothy served with Paul on the mission field—spreading the Gospel as an apprentice son serves with his father. Philippians 2:19-22 commends Timothy for two essential



qualities: (1) His like-mindedness with Paul, and (2) genuine concern for others. These are qualities that are often caught" rather than "taught" through spending time with people who have these values.

It is likely that Timothy developed a heart for ministry by spending time while growing up with his mother and grandmother who both had a heart for ministry and serving others. They nurtured him in the faith and that nurturing prepared him for his mission field journeys with Paul.

Christian nurture involves care for the body, mind, spirit and soul of children and teens by Christian family members and the faith community that builds trust and faith in God. The goal of Christian nurture is stated in Proverbs 22:6 as "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." The components of this training include learning and memorizing scripture, spending time in prayer, fellowshiping with other Christians, serving others in need, and prioritizing God to live a life of obedience to the Word and will of God.

A.M.E. Zion pastors instruct parents during the Baptism ritual on their duty in nurturing children and youth: "...it is your part and duty to see that this child be taught, as soon as they are able to learn ... the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Catechism, and all other things which a Christian should know and believe to their soul's health, in order that they may be brought up to lead a virtuous and Holy life...."

For those of you who have been baptized in the A.M.E. Zion church, the pastor, church and your parents/guardians pray over you that God grant "an understanding mind and a sanctified heart. May (God's) providence lead (you) through the dangers, temptations, and ignorance of youth; that (you) may never run into folly, nor into the evils of an uncontrolled appetite [i.e., unrepentant sin]. We pray that (God) order the course of (your) life that by a good education, by Holy examples, and by (God's) restraining grace, (you) may be led to serve (God) faithfully all of (your) days, so that, when (you) have glorified (God) in your generation and have served the Church on earth, (you) may be received into (God's) eternal kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

In addition to celebrating positive influences on nurture and spiritual growth, 2 Timothy also warns against false teachers who hinder spiritual growth and nurture. False teachers use lies, distractions and doubt to cause believer to drift away from God or reject God altogether. False teachers can be friends, family, celebrities, teachers or people pretending to be Christians that tempt Christians to prioritize greed, immorality, things or people over God and tempt

Christians to abandon their faith in times of trials and tribulation, such as the death of a loved one or betrayal by trusted family members or friends.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)



Many things in life can be done alone, but nurturing and growing our Christian faith is not one of them. With both home training, part of our culture, and spiritual nurturing, it takes a village like Timothy's support from his mother, grandmother and the Apostle Paul. With false prophets on the internet and in the community, suicide among youth and children and school shootings on the rise across the nation, it is more important now than ever that spiritual nurture take place in the home as well as the church to provide a spiritual defense system. Home training is important for our interactions

with people, but spiritual nurture is essential for salvation and eternity.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ❑ As a class, create a description for false prophets and ways to recognize and avoid them.
- ❑ Divide into two or more groups and create a list of characteristics of spiritual mentors. If time permits, switch lists and act out those characteristics in a quick game of charades.
- ❑ Think of friends or family members that you know who are not saved and who may be open to accepting salvation. Choose one to pray for in the group. Create a nickname for them using a number such as their age, day of the month they were born, or sum of the numbers in their telephone number. Have one person lead the prayer using one nickname from each person who wants to volunteer someone for the prayer.

YOUTH UNIT III: Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News
YOUTH GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Lydia, Judged to Be Faithful
YOUTH TOPIC: Actions that Reveal Our True Character

LESSON 13
DATE: August 30, 2026

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:11-40
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 16:11-15, 40

KEEPIN' IT CURRENT! (5 Minutes)

“An International Student Exchange Story” - Foreign student exchange began after WWII as a way to spread democracy between American and overseas teens. Specifically, the International Student Exchange (ISE) program began in 1982. ISE’s mission focuses on educating tomorrow’s leaders and breaking down the barriers to friendship (ISE, 2020). High school students on a J-1 Visa arrive in the United States and stay with volunteer host families. They stay for either 5, 10, or 12-month programs (ISE, 2020). To date, over 30,000 exchange programs have taken place through ISE (ISE, 2020).

Here is one student’s story: (Source: <https://iseusa.org/stories-of-exchange-students/>)

I am an American who is obsessed with other cultures. At the age of 16, I got my first passport. I keep a world map documenting my trips on the wall and have a goal of “seeing the world.” I can’t help but feel their opinion of Americans is not spot on. However; maybe I am an exception?

I completed my three-week cultural exchange only two months before tragedy struck on 9/11. The landscape of international travel was forever changed with more security and restrictions. Despite an increasing fear of “foreigners,” the number of passport holders increased steadily from 2003 and beyond (U.S. Department of State, n.d.) as more countries began requiring a passport to enter from another. In 2008, 42% of Americans held a valid passport while 76% of United Kingdom citizens held one (McCarthy, 2018).

I do not speak for all Americans. But if we expect the rest of the world to send their high school students to America to foster good relations

and show that we are a welcoming country, then we should be doing the same. American high school students should be highly encouraged and given the opportunity to go abroad for a school year. They have the chance to fully immerse themselves in a different culture. They should not have to worry about it “not counting” towards graduation. The majority of what we hear about other countries relates to government affairs and the military presence. (Ungar, 2016) We rarely look at the cultural side of other countries.

Multicultural classrooms should be the way of the future as a way to promote understanding in the classroom while coupled with an exchange year in high school. This change to the curriculum will need government support and federal funding as an investment in national security (Ungar, 2016).

If you are interested in participating in an international student exchange program, go for it! (Visit this site for information: <https://iseusa.org/travel-study-abroad/>)

KEEPIN’ IT REAL! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Have you had the opportunity to travel outside of the United States of America or your home country? If so, what were some of the benefits of traveling abroad? If not, is that something you hope to do in the future?
- ▣ A very important part of student exchange programs is the experience the student has with their host family. If you were hosting an international student, what would you do to ensure that you and your family were good hosts? If you were traveling internationally, what would you want a family hosting you to do to ensure that you had a good experience?

KEEPIN’ IT BIBLICAL! (20 Minutes)

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.

¹¹ We therefore set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³ On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and

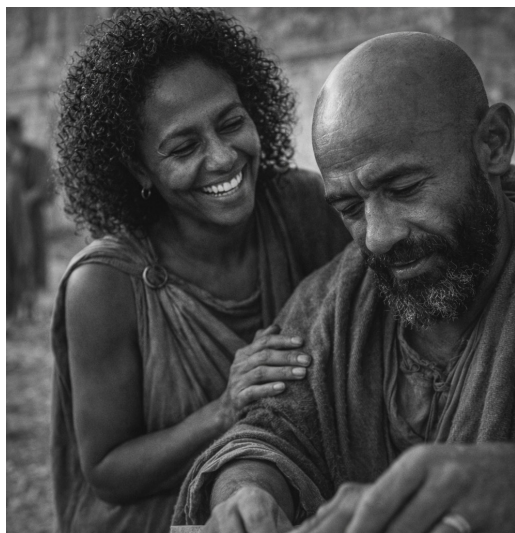
we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵ When she and her household were 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.

40 After leaving the prison they went to Lydia’s home, and when they had seen and encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed.

Today, we end our unit on the importance of Christians spreading the good news. We’ve considered Thomas and the importance of belief, Stephen as an early Christian witness, Paul and his dramatic Christian experience, and Timothy’s training. In this lesson, we will focus on Lydia, a Christian witness who was very hospitable to others.

In today’s text, 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, perhaps in a school club or sports team, on your part-time job, and/or among friends and 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, to be witnesses 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.

KEEPIN' IT TOGETHER (5 Minutes)

It has been said, "It's better to live a sermon than to preach one." If you are reading this lesson, 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. Do you remember many of the sermons that you have heard?

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.

iTHINK! (5 Minutes)

- ▣ Lydia is a rare example of a woman in Roman culture who is lifted up in scripture. Divide into two groups and debate whether women are better at showing hospitality than men.
- ▣ List Lydia’s personal qualities. Discuss whether there is anything unique about Lydia’s position, professional, or social status, which made her hospitable. (Consider the religious significance of the ancient practice of hospitality to strangers (cf. Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 2:46-47; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2).)
- ▣ Journal about groups or individuals to whom you have difficulty showing hospitality. In journaling, identify why you think you are having difficulty. Pray to God to help you get beyond your difficulty.
- ▣ Lydia was open to Paul and Barnabas, as well as their message. Reflect on what it means to be open to the Good News.
- ▣ Commit personally, and as a class, to a ministry of hospitality during worship services or youth functions. Welcome worshippers and make every effort to make everyone feel welcome. Create ideas for welcome gifts to share with visitors.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
6. You shalt not kill.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

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