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THE YOUNG PEOPLE-ADULT QUARTERLY

International Church School Lessons for Christian Teaching
(Ages 18 and up)

Fourth Quarter
June, July, August – 2026

THE TESTIMONY OF LOOKING BACK FAITHFUL WITNESSES LOOKING FORWARD

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

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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: "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.

ADULT UNIT I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Deborah, A Leader in a National Emergency
ADULT TOPIC: Women in Leadership

LESSON 1
DATE: June 7, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 20:20-28
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Judges 4:1-24
PRINT PASSAGES: Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Leaner

Celebration – “Where He Leads Me” - #631 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

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.

Affirmation – We rejoice in Deborah’s excellent example of faithful leadership during harsh circumstances. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)



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

Unit I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God’s Promises” introduces four stories of Old Testament women and men, who by their words and actions, offer us an opportunity to name, describe, and deepen our experience of God’s grace, love, forgiveness, and provision. Deborah,

a faithful judge, lays claim to God’s promised freedom from Israel’s enemy and employs the fine leadership trait of delegation. Hannah, an unfailing servant, implores the Lord for a child and dedicates her promised son to the service of YHWH. Jonathan and David, fast friends and colleagues, make covenant together, pledging their steadfast love and loyalty to one another. Amos, the shepherd from Tekoa, testifies to the justice and righteousness of God in condemning the people for their unjust practices.

Our bad choices can land us into a hole out of which we find it impossible to climb. Where can we find rescue when our troubles are too big to manage on our own? God empowered Judge Deborah to deliver Israel when they called on God for rescue from the grips of an oppressive foreign power.

In small groups, discuss and respond to the following questions and challenges:
1. Apply Jael’s violation of the rule of hospitality (found in Judges 4:17-22) to con-

temporary situations in which questionable means lead to God's desired outcome. 2. Specify ways to prevent gender or other forms of discrimination against God's leaders. 3. Devise a strategy to encourage church leaders to create and sustain interdependence and shared responsibility to accomplish the purposes of God. 4. Propose three ways that Deborah's actions are instructive for facing hardship today. 5. Organize a church or community program that emphasizes the value of seeking women as bosses, mentors, and role models in our churches, schools, and workplaces.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Judges 4:2-10, 14: Before the rise of kings in Israel, God called temporary warriors called "judges" to rescue a loose coalition of Israelite tribes from a series of enemies. "The Book of Judges opens with the news that Joshua, Moses' successor, has died. His death signals a transition to what we now call 'the period of the judges' (about 1373-1043 BC). The firm, centralized leadership that nomadic Israel knew under Moses and Joshua is gone. A theocracy remains in its place—a rule by God.... A cyclical pattern characterizes the book of Judges [as described in Judges 3:7-12, a pattern of sin, punishment, crying out, and rescue by YHWH's judge]" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, p. 346). Deborah (4:4), the Bible's only female judge, means "bee" or "leader." "Wife of Lappidoth" could be "woman of Lappidoth," referring to her home of origin. The word lappidoth means "torch" or "lightning"; so, Deborah could be a "fiery woman." She is the agent through whom the people expect a divine word regarding their present crisis—a familiar role of prophets. "When Deborah succeeded Ehud as judge, she found herself in the same situation as her predecessor: 'Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord' (Judges 4:1). Because of their desire to do evil, God allowed Jabin, the king of Canaan, to oppress Israel for 20 years (4:2-3)" (Ibid., p. 347).

Judges 4:21-22: Jael (vv. 17 and following) is a non-Israelite, wife of Heber the "Kenite," an ethnic designation as well as a word meaning "smith" or worker of iron (Judges 4:11). Jael's husband helped craft hundreds of iron chariots for Sisera's army. That connection may explain why Sisera went into Jael's tent with such confidence seeking security as he fled from his defeated army. In killing Sisera, who had sought hospitality and protection in her house, Jael violates the fundamental rights of guests. Nonetheless, God used such actions to accomplish God's objectives. The work of delivering Israel was shared between Deborah, Barak, and Jael. Judges 4 encourages interdependence and shared responsibility to accomplish the purposes of God. Deborah was not only a judge but also a prophet. When Barak declares that he will go as God had called him to only if she would go with him, "Deborah agrees to go with [him],

though she warns that there is a consequence for his doubt: the journey will not result in Barak's honor; Sisera will be sold in the hands of a woman. The deliverance and consequence come from the Lord. Deborah emphasizes that it is God who is in control" (Ibid., p. 349).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and challenge one another with the following questions and tasks: 1. Discuss how Deborah's practice of giving consistent credit to God for her success can inform our attitude when given a prominent role or an important task. 2. Empathize with Deborah's challenges by watching video clips from movies about women's leadership during wartime, such as *Paradise Road* or *Zero Dark Thirty*. 3. Develop value for women's leadership in the church from Deborah's example that commanded the respect of both men and women. 4. Bear witness to the fiery women in your life and in the church. Describe the power of their leadership and formulate ways to emulate their example. 5. Celebrate the diversity of people, languages, gifts, and ideas in your church and community in worship. 6. Create a faith statement based on what Deborah's story tells you about God and humans.

iTHINK: (5 – 7 min.)

1. Define the ministry of the judge in Israel by reviewing Judges 2:16-19.
2. Outline and memorize Israel's cycle of apostasy in Judges 2:16-19, 3:7-12.
3. Explore what the Bible means by witnessing or testifying to God's presence and purposes and how that applies to Deborah.
4. Research methods of warfare in the period of the judges.
5. Compare Judges 4 (prose) and Judges 5 (poetry). Discuss how both accounts describe the same story. Discuss what effect having these two accounts has in describing Deborah's witness.
6. Design a presentation about Deborah, highlighting her main qualities and what made her stand out from the crowd. What obstacles did she face? Did she overcome the obstacles or go with the flow? How did she use her abilities to do God's work?

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.

ADULT UNIT I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Hannah, A Godly Mother
ADULT TOPIC: Wishing and Hoping and Praying

LESSON 2

DATE: June 14, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 49:13-17

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

**PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25 (starting at "and they
brought the child to Eli")**

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – "Lord, I Hear of Showers of Blessing" - #464 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – 1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25 (starting at "and they brought the child to Eli") (Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

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 ... [A]nd brought the child to Eli.

Affirmation – We will cultivate a rich prayer life as an element of living a faithful witness before God. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Everyone has experienced fears that his or her dreams and hopes for the future may not be realized. How do we seek reassurance that our hopes and dreams may yet come true? Hannah turned to prayer, confident that the Lord would fulfill her hopes for conceiving a child.

Break into small groups and share responses and ideas regarding the following: 1. Devise a plan to pray for and serve women in your community who fear that their lives have no hope or future. 2. Name a barren area in your life. Ask God to fill your longing and respond with a vow that marks your commitment to the gift you hope to receive. 3. Share a story about how your heart's longings have expressed themselves in a relationship, in a creative project, or at work. 4. Explore your heart's longing through journaling. What do you most want? Who do you want? How will you commit your longing to God's service? 5. Arrange through your congregation, a hospital, or nursing home for your group to regularly visit residents and offer prayer for the longings of their hearts. 6. Plant trees as an expression of hope in God's future. Dedicate the trees to Hannah and all women who encourage us through their prayers.

1 Samuel 1:9-11: “The events of today’s text occurred late in the period of the judges, perhaps around 1100 BC. In 1 Samuel 1:1-8, Elkanah is introduced with two wives: Peninnah and Hannah. Elkanah may have been an important individual of the priestly Levitical tribe (1 Chronicles 6:23). Although Elkanah loved Hannah very much, she was unable to bear children (1 Samuel 1:8). Peninnah mocked Hannah, perhaps, jealous that Elkanah gave her a greater share of their family’s annual sacrifice (1:5-6). Even though Hannah was childless, Elkanah gave her a ‘double portion,’ the amount typically given to a firstborn son and heir (1:5 see Deuteronomy 21:15-17)” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, p. 354). The barren woman was normally an object of pity; the inability to conceive and bear children, particularly sons, was assumed to be the fault of the woman. (See Genesis 25:21; 30:1; Psalm 113:7-8a, 9a.). Scholars believe that the annual pilgrimage was the yearly Feast of Tabernacles that occurred at harvest time. Hannah’s barrenness stands in ironic contrast to the celebration of the harvest and the land’s fruitfulness. Mention of “the temple of the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:9) is an anachronism. Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem would not be built until more than seventy years later. Second Samuel 7:6 indicates the Lord’s house before King David’s time was a tent. Hannah makes a vow to the Lord resembling the Nazirite vow. The vow includes (1) abstaining from the use of grapes in any form, (2) not shaving the hair on one’s head, and (3) avoiding dead bodies (Numbers 6:3-7). Hannah’s prayer (1 Samuel 2; compare Mary’s Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55) links the prayers of a barren woman to the reversal of the spiritual and political fortunes of the nation. Through Hannah and her son Samuel, God would impeach the spiritually imperceptive Eli and the morally corrupt Hophni and Phinehas and secure an honorable king to unify the kingdom of Israel.

1 Samuel 1:12-20, 25b: Notice the parallel between the witness of Hannah and those gathered on Pentecost. Both stories occur during a time of barrenness and grief; the disciples are without their Lord, waiting for the promised Spirit. As Hannah prays “remember me” and the disciples speak in other languages, “declaring the wonders of God” (Acts 2:11), onlookers presume that they are drunk (1:12-14; Acts 2:13)! When the faithful pour out their hearts to God, resulting exultation may look and sound inappropriate to onlookers. “Hannah continues praying in her heart, or, in other words, in silence. It is important to note that ancient people usually prayed aloud. In fact, this is the only time that silent prayer is explicitly mentioned in Scripture (contrast with the Spirit’s ‘wordless groans’ in Romans 8:26) Eli’s insensitivity is [partly] the result of deliberate blindness. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are widely known for scandalously stealing from the Lord’s sacrifices (1 Samuel 2:12-17). Eli rebukes his sons privately but does not remove them (2:22-25). Ironically, Eli

himself will receive the Lord’s rebuke and judgment from the mouth of Hannah’s son-to-be (3:11-18: compare 2:27-36; 4:11-18) Hannah faithfully approached God with her grief, desire, and need. Because she did, God allowed her to play a role in the grand narrative of God’s design. Hannah’s fidelity to her vow put her son in the right place at the right time to lead Israel as priest, judge, and prophet” (Ibid., pp. 356, 357, and 359).

ELEVATE: (5-10 min.)

Share responses to the following questions and requests: 1. Reflect on vows your parents made that affected your development. In turn, reflect on vows you have taken that have influenced children in your care. 2. Contemplate the emotions behind Hannah’s far-reaching vow. It meant that her son would not be able to inherit from his father or take care of her in her old age. What does this vow say about how we might approach the future with God? 3. Rejoice that God’s kingdom operates based on promises that point toward a future with hope and life. 4. Review your faith tradition’s baptismal vows with a trusted spiritual adviser. Consider renewing your vows publicly. 5. Go around the circle and talk about an area of longing in your life today. Don’t try to explain how you got into this situation or how to fix it. Simply, be in the presence of your emptiness. 6. Brainstorm based on Hannah’s example.

iThink: (5-7 min.)

1. Research 1 and 2 Samuel, its author, historical context, and theological perspectives.
2. Draw a map of 1 Samuel 1’s setting.
3. Analyze Hannah’s barrenness as a metaphor for the spiritual barrenness of Israel.
4. Act out Hannah’s social stigma by pantomiming or applying different movie genres, such as westerns or Sci-fi.
5. Write the story of Hannah in the most compelling way you can on an index card.
6. “Found poems” take existing texts and refashion them and reorder them as poems. Create a found poem out of Hannah’s story to express the longing of a people for God’s justice.

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

ADULT UNIT I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Jonathan and David, A Noble Friendship
ADULT TOPIC: A Forever Bond

LESSON 3
DATE: June 21, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Proverbs 27:6, 10-11, 17, 19
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

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” - #282 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:16-17, 32-34, 42; 2 Samuel 1:26-27; 21:7 (Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

Jonathan's Covenant with David

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.

²⁶ 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.

Affirmation – We will practice love and loyalty to God through loving our neighbor. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

Amid danger and troubles, we may desire support from a trustworthy friend. How does a friend prove trustworthy in a difficult situation? Jonathan proved a trustworthy friend to David despite the paranoia of his father, King Saul; and David honored their friendship by providing for his son, Mephibosheth, after Jonathan’s death.

Break into small groups and respond to the following questions and suggestions: 1. Create a project that enables your group to be signs of loyal love that bridges divisions and heals wounds. 2. Brainstorm basic courtesies that your group can affirm and agree to practice as an example of loyal love in your group. 3. Help organize a blood drive at your work or church. 4. Giving to others is one part of covenantal love. Another is being able to receive graciously from others. How can you strengthen your giving and receiving? 5. Name the person who has taught you the most about loyalty. Connect with her or him with gratitude. 6. In your prayers and faith talk, replace the word “believe” with “love” or “trust.”

For example, the Apostles' Creed would be "I love God the Father Almighty..." Notice how confessing your love for God affects your witness to God's love in the world.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

1 Samuel 18:1-4: Saul, Israel's first king, was rejected as king due to his disobedience to God, and David was anointed king of Israel as successor to Saul. "Before Saul's disastrous rule ended, God prepared David to take over as leader in Saul's place. The secret anointing of David and plan to make him king created a potential conflict with Saul and his household, especially with Saul's firstborn son and heir, Jonathan, [who] had the most to lose and could have easily rejected God's choice of king" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, p. 362). Over several chapters, however, the shift in succession is characterized by Jonathan and Michal's shifting love and loyalty from their father Saul to David. The terms of the covenant involve a pledge of mutual loyalty and friendship. Jonathan accepts David as his equal. Although Jonathan holds the hereditary right to the throne of Israel, he recognizes that God has chosen David to be Israel's next king and affirms God's choice by giving his clothing and armor to David. The story helped to disprove any later rumors that David had been a hated rival of Jonathan. Jonathan's love and devotion to David is considered unique in that Jonathan is "Saul's own son from the royal household! If David can win the support of Jonathan, he must be a charismatic and compelling figure, capable of winning people over with the wisdom of his words" (Ibid., p. 363).

1 Samuel 20:16-17, 32-34, 42; 2 Samuel 1:26-27; 2 Samuel 21:7: Jonathan aligns himself completely with David, calling for the destruction of his enemies, even if that should include his father, Saul (1 Samuel 20:16). Jonathan is praised for his self-denying commitment to David (2 Samuel 1:26). The Hebrew word *hesed* is used in reference to the relationship between David and Jonathan throughout 1 and 2 Samuel. *Hesed* is not translated easily by a single English word. It is defined by a covenantal love that drives overabundant expressions of generosity and care. *Hesed* is also used in Scripture to indicate loyalty in political alliances. "The remaining chapters of 1 Samuel record Saul's pursuit of David, David's sparing of Saul's life (twice), the death of Samuel, David's hiding among the Philistines, and the eventual death of Saul and his sons in battle—including Jonathan (1 Samuel 31:1-2). The Book of 2 Samuel covers David's 40-year reign, but it begins with a time of mourning.... After Jonathan's death, David composes a lament for both the fallen prince and his father (2 Samuel 1:19-27). A lament is a song that expresses pain, loss, and uncertainty (compare Psalm 6). This response is consistent with David's honorable treatment of God's anointed—even when the king tried to kill David (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:11)" (Ibid., p. 366). The final verse of the poetic section says, "How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" (2 Samuel 1:27). We can understand both phrases, "the mighty" and "weapons of war"

as metaphorical to Saul and Jonathan. “After ascending to the throne, David, the king, honors his covenant with his now deceased friend. Details of David’s kindness to Mephibosheth son of Jonathan are recounted in 2 Samuel 9. This graciousness toward Jonathan’s disabled son is even more remarkable—given that the rest of Saul’s house had been at war with David (2 Samuel 3:1). Even after Jonathan’s death, David remembers and honors his commitments” (Ibid., p. 367).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Respond to the following questions and suggestions with those in the group:

1. Identify examples in contemporary culture that may correspond with the loyal friendship between David and Jonathan. What could today’s friends learn from David and Jonathan?
2. Who would you want for a friend, David or Jonathan? Why?
3. Lead the group in the examination of consciousness to cultivate intimacy with God.
4. Talk about the book or movie that expresses your favorite depiction of loyalty in love.
5. Witness your love for God by practicing centering prayer.
6. Write a short description of yourself as “The Best Friend Anyone Would Want,” including specific areas of growth you want to pursue to become a best friend.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Define the Hebrew word *hesed* as a standard description of God’s covenant love, loyalty, and generosity. See Exodus 34:6-7.
2. Create a character web. On a whiteboard, put a character’s name from the story in the middle of a web. Brainstorm associations and make connections between characters and concepts by filling in the web.
3. Identify the marks of David and Jonathan’s relationship that demonstrate covenant love and how they reflect the *hesed* of YHWH for Israel.
4. Retell the story, changing the gender of the male friends to female friends. How might they act differently? Discuss friendship and gender differences.
5. Write a haiku about David and Jonathan’s friendship.
6. Create a monolog for one of the people in the story. What is he or she thinking/feeling at that moment, and why?

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

ADULT UNIT I: Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Amos, A Herdsman Called of God to Be a Prophet
ADULT TOPIC: Standing Up to the Powerful

LESSON 4
DATE: June 28, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 23
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Amos 1:1, 2:11-12, 3:7-8, 7:10-15
PRINT PASSAGES: Same

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or learner

Celebration – “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?” - #438 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Amos 1:1, 2:11-12, 3:7-8, 7:10-15 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

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.’

Affirmation – We will speak truth to power as faithful witness to God’s justice. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

We may experience intimidation when speaking truth to those in positions of authority. How can we be bold to speak the truth even if people are not inclined to receive our message? Amos was a lowly shepherd who faced rejection when God called him to speak truth to powerful kings and priests. Remain in the group as a whole. Share and respond to the following questions and requests among those in the group. 1. Imagine that the president wants to recommend a book for the country to read. Tell him one important realization you had while reading Amos and why it is pertinent for today. 2. The equitable distribution of the world’s resources is a justice issue. Keep track of the consumption patterns in your home. Set a goal of trying to consume less. 3. Research pending legislation and judicial rulings that affect racism and poverty. Find out how you can make your opinions known. 4. Reflect: What kinds of causes do you tend to support? Which have you abandoned? Which do you still support enthusiastically? How do you account for any shifts in your allegiances? 5. Name injustices when you see them. Speak boldly and put your money where your mouth is. 6. Nurture a thirst for justice among the children in your care.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Amos 1:1, 2:11-12, 3:7-8: Amos (derived from a Hebrew verb meaning “to lift a burden”), from Tekoa in Judah, accused Israel’s religious leaders of sanctioning false worship and a political and economic status quo that exploited the weak. “Shepherd” or “sheep breeder” (1:1, from *noqed*) indicates that Amos was a person of means and status, the owner of the flocks, not a lower status

shepherd. Ro'eh is a more common Hebrew word for "shepherd" in the Old Testament. Amos also was a "dresser of sycamore trees" (7:14). This involves scraping or piercing the figs to hasten their growth and repel insects. He probably owned sycamore groves. "He preached in the northern kingdom of Israel in about 755 BC He ministered during a period of economic prosperity (3:15, 6:4-6). The national borders had been extended significantly through military campaigns (2 Kings 14:23-28). All this resulted in excessive pride and injustice among the people (Amos 6:8, 12-13). Despite material wealth, the kingdom was in spiritual decline. The people practiced idolatrous worship at national shrines in the cities of Dan, Bethel, and Gilgal (Amos 4:4, 5:5, 26, 8:14; compare 1 Kings 12:28-30). The people silenced voices that challenged their practices (Amos 2:11)" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, pp. 370-371). But Amos refused to be silenced, as 3:7-8 declares. God has spoken through him, and he considers it an urgency to speak the words of the Lord to the people, endangering his safety from persecution by the ruling powers. Martin Luther King, Jr., relied upon the words and character of the prophet Amos in his fight for justice in America and the world. He often quoted Amos' words to the Israelites (found in Amos 5:24) in his many speeches and writings). Amos refers to the Nazarites as a divine calling like that of a prophet. Perhaps, Nazarites flourished for a short period in his day due to the corruption of society that Amos denounces. He uses two titles for God in his book: Lord God and Lord. Lord God literally means "Lord Yahweh" (Hebrew Adonay YHWH). The NIV translates the phrase as "Sovereign God."



Amos 7:10-15: Concerning Amaziah's rebuke of Amos: Throughout the ancient world, it was believed that prophets not only proclaimed the message of deity but also, in the process, unleashed the divine action. "Word" and "deed" were the same word in Hebrew (*dabar*). Amaziah accuses (7:12) Amos of being a professional ("for hire") prophet. Amos responds by declaring that he is a farmer called by God for a specific prophetic mission. Amos had a clear sense of divine call, which is in sharp contrast to Amaziah. "The most important aspect of both Amaziah's report to Jeroboam [the king of Israel] and his challenge to Amos is the absence of any mention of God. Amaziah does not challenge Amos's interpretation of God's message or his role as a divine spokesperson. He does not contradict Amos's accusations of sin. Instead, Amaziah is interested only in countering threats to the vested interest" (*Ibid.*, p. 373). The king and Amaziah did not heed the words of Amos and other prophets of God and were conquered and exiled by the Assyrians nearly 40 years later. "Because of their nation's relative prosperity and religious fervor, Jeroboam and Amaziah assumed God was on their side. Amos challenged this assumption, warned of

judgment, encouraged repentance, and offered hope for the future.... For modern readers, the account of Amos also encourages us to reflect on how we hear the word of God today. Are we willing to listen? Will we accept God's challenge? Are we so committed to our religious, economic, and political status quo that we become unwilling to give an ear to anything that questions it? The fact that God speaks is a sign of God's grace. He wants to communicate with us. Will we have ears to hear?" (Ibid., p. 375).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Challenge one another in the whole group with the following questions and suggestions: 1. Ask yourself, "What am I doing for others?" Search your soul and write an honest journal entry. 2. Evaluate your relationship with money. Assess the criteria you use in giving money to various causes. 3. Watch the movie *The Winslow Boy* (1999, G). Reflect on the courage and conviction involved in taking a moral stand. 4. Breathe in, saying, "Justice here," and breathe out, saying, "Justice now." 5. Reflect: Does your church's worship inspire you to do justice? If it doesn't, wonder aloud with a trusted friend on the reasons and solutions. 6. Transformation means it is possible to do a "new thing." What would that new thing be for you concerning the powers that be?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Watch "Amos Overview" at bibleproject.com.
2. The print passages exclude the content of Amos's prophecies against the nations. Review other passages, such as 5:18-24 and 7:7-9.
3. Name the problems associated with the Northern Kingdom's decentralization and destabilization—no centralized worship site, politics, and economics revolved around trade with the countries to the north, few protections in place for the poor.
4. Identify tensions between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Imagine how the northerners would receive a negative message from a southerner.
5. Analyze the connection between worshipping the gods of other cultures and committing social injustices.
6. Discuss what intrigues, bothers, and confuses the group about Amos's faithful witness.

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

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

LESSON 5
DATE: July 5, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Acts 10:19-22, 30-35

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 8:5-13

PRINT PASSAGE: Same

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or learner

Celebration – “Sweet Hour of Prayer” - #446 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Matthew 8:5-13 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

Jesus Heals a Centurion’s Servant

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.

Affirmation – We will develop a compassionate, intercessory spirit as a faithful witness to Jesus. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)



Unit II: “Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus Christ” brings into view four persons who when confronted by the person and power of Jesus, revealed the truth of who they were. These stories invite us to learn the truth about ourselves in relation to Jesus Christ. The centurion demonstrated great faith in entrusting the health of his servant to Jesus. Impetuous Simon Peter, the rock, could also be a stumbling block and sink like a stone in the sea when challenged. Even in his rebuke of Peter, Jesus shows that although we may falter, God’s gracious call to us is always within the possibility of restoration. Zacchaeus, the hated tax collector of Jericho, becomes like a little child when he climbs the tree to see Jesus; salvation comes to Zacchaeus’s house when Jesus invites himself for dinner. Mary, the mother of Jesus, makes the boldest testimony of all, saying, “yes” by giving her life to bearing the Son of God.

We do not expect our enemies to trust us and ask for our help. When someone we previously considered our enemy asks us for help, how do we respond? Je-

sus responds favorably to the extraordinary faith of the centurion, made even more remarkable because of his ties to the evil Roman government.

Discuss the usefulness of the following actions in your Christian witness:

1. Post on your refrigerator or bathroom mirror the names from your congregation's prayer list. Let every time you prepare a meal or brush your teeth be a reminder to pray for real people with profound needs, struggles, and feelings.
2. Start your prayer time by reviewing news stories about trials that people face. Lift them before God as you pray fervently for God's kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10).
3. Practice specificity in your intercessions as the centurion did.
4. Seek ways God wants you to learn or grow from praying for others. How do your prayers for others convict you, inspire you, or move you?
5. Listen to the prayers of a seasoned worshipper. Study the way others pray.
6. Post photos or drawings of people of different cultures, races, and languages. Practice praying for people who are other than you when you see the photos.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Matthew 8:5-9: Overall, 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. In the Greek language of the time, *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 Jesus must be obeyed by the powers in subjection to Him. "A centurion was an officer in the Roman army. He led between 60 and 100 troops.... [He] approaches Jesus as a supplicant and subordinate, asking Jesus for a favor.... [He] calls Jesus Lord. The title carries some ambiguity in meaning, as it can refer to a human ruler, serve as an honorific title like 'mister,' or even represent the name of God. Using the term 'lord' or 'master' allowed God-fearers (non-Jewish followers of God) to avoid pronouncing the revered name—Yahweh. Throughout Matthew's Gospel, Lord frequently refers to God (Matthew 1:20; 2:13; 4:7; etc.). Only one chapter prior to today's text, Jesus uses Lord as a title for himself (7:21-22). Therefore, it is significant that the centurion—an outsider and representative of imperial power—approaches Je-

sus as a suppliant and repeats this title. At a minimum, the term bestows honor and indicates authority.... Leaving the servant at home indicates the extent of the centurion's faith. His approach presumes that Jesus is capable of healing without even seeing the man" (Standard Lesson Commentary, 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, 379).

Matthew 8:10-13: 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 (e.g., 1 Enoch 10:4-6, 103:8). 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 it may reflect anguish or agony. "Jesus expresses amazement at the centurion's faith [, which] here is more than mere belief; it includes concepts like 'trust' or 'fidelity.' The centurion identifies Jesus' authority and submits himself entirely. He trusts that Jesus can and will respond with favor. And Jesus finds this conviction astonishing—it displays a level of trust and submission that Jesus has not seen, even in Israel. Despite having the witness



of the law—an advantage that the apostle Paul calls 'the very words of God' (Romans 3:2)—the residents of Israel do not exhibit this measure of trust and submission. The centurion's active faith surprises Jesus; as a Gentile, the centurion enjoys none of those advantages. The centurion's faith recognizes the presence and authority of God in the person of Jesus.... Remarkably, Jesus teaches that God includes outsiders, like this centurion, among the faithful. In the new era of justice and life, many will be rewarded and treated as heirs to the covenant, even alongside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Ibid., p. 381).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and discuss the following questions and issues: 1. Reflect: How available are you to others? How interested are you in people? How flexible are you? Do you usually think you already know how things are going to come out? Are you willing to try something new? Be candid about both your strengths and growing edges. 2. Share an example of a situation when something or someone tested your willingness to be compassionate. What do you usually do when you meet someone in need of help? What kinds of questions do you ask yourself? What conditions do you set? 3. Consider the confidence that the centurion had in Jesus. How confident are you in Jesus's authority? What makes you less than sure? How can you reimagine your prayers for others to demonstrate confidence in Jesus to answer? 4. Imagine intercessory prayer as a way to nurture your relationship with another. Notice when you pray for the needs of another how close you feel to that person. 5. Rejoice in the amazing idea that you have the privilege of direct communication with God—thanks to the intercessory work of Christ. 6. Resist telling another person that you are praying for them to call attention to yourself. Instead, “go into your room and shut the door and pray” (Matthew. 6:6).

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Set the cultural, religious, and military contexts for today's story.
2. Interpret the centurion's act of faithfulness as interceding for his slave with Jesus.
3. Assess Scripture's testimony to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as our intercessors (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25).
4. Describe intercessory prayer, prayer for the needs of others (James 5:16), as a selfless act that testifies to the power of God.
5. Review intercessory prayers in the Bible and your tradition's prayer book.
6. Develop a prayer pattern for group members to create their own intercessory prayers.

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

ADULT UNIT II: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Simon Peter, From Weakness to Strength
ADULT TOPIC: From a Rock to a Hard Place

LESSON 6
DATE: July 12, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 40:26-31
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:31-34;
John 18:25-27, 21:15-17
PRINT PASSAGES: Same

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Leaner

Celebration – “Love Lifted Me” - #429 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:31-34; John 18:25-27, 21:15-17
(*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Peter’s Declaration about Jesus

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.”

Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial

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."

Peter Denies Jesus Again

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.

Jesus and Peter

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Affirmation – We will use reflection and prayer to gain a deeper relationship with Christ. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

It often seems impossible to overcome one's failures and regain respect. How might one be restored from the shame and dishonor of personal failure? Aware of Peter's shame and remorse for his betrayal of Him, Jesus forgave Peter and commissioned him to "feed my sheep." In the group as a whole share your thinking with one another on the following questions and suggestions: 1. Practice saying, "Failure is not an end but an opportunity to grow in Christ." 2. Describe the butterfly effect of Peter's up-and-down witness, with the effects felt two thousand years later worldwide. Discuss how your witness, no matter how flawed, might influence people and events in the future. 3. Send notes to acknowledge and encourage people whose Christian witness you admire. 4. Peter's witness was enthusiastic. Brainstorm ways to encourage the enthusiastic witness in group members' lives. 5. List ways to renew the church's ministry of evangelism, affirming the value of failure for developing faithful witnesses. 6. Strategize ways to deny yourself—fasting from food, social media, or spending—to express your witness to Christ.

Mark 8:27-29; Luke 22:31-34: 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 and James and John were partners in a fishing business (Luke 5:10). 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. “First century Jewish expectations regarding this figure were diverse. Some believed the Messiah would be a prophet like Moses or Elijah, performing miraculous deeds to lead Israel to righteousness.... The prevailing belief among most first-century Jews was that this person would be a political figure, a nationalistic king, who would sit on the earthly throne of David and rule over an earthly empire” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, p. 388). Peter’s proclamation of Jesus as Messiah, Jesus asserted, was due to God’s revelation of the fact to him. However, when Peter shows his opposition to Jesus in his godly mission, Jesus rebukes him with the words “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. All four canonical Gospels recount that Jesus foretold that Peter would deny him three times “before the cock crows twice.” Peter declares that he would never deny Jesus.

John 18:25-27, 21:15-17: John here records the fulfillment of Jesus’s prediction that Peter would deny him three times. “The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all note that Peter wept after his third denial and the rooster crow (Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62). Jesus’ prediction has come true, and Peter responds to this realization with shame, anguish, and remorse. At this point, there is nothing he can do to change what has happened. The next section of scripture takes place following Jesus’ resurrection. By this time, the risen Jesus has appeared to many disciples and followers (John 20:11-29). He appears again to seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee (21:2), directing them to a large catch of fish before inviting them to breakfast (21:12) After breakfast, Jesus turns the meeting into a teaching moment. [In the process, Peter, whose previous pledge of devotion and loyalty had proven to be bluster, was quite sensitive to Jesus’ questioning him three times about his love and loyalty.] Just as Peter denied Jesus three times, Jesus allows Peter to affirm his love three times. Peter responds by being as absolute in his affirmation of love as he was in his denial.... Following Jesus’ ascension, Peter demonstrated his love for Christ and commitment to God’s people. He played a key role in the

first-century church (Acts 1:21-22; 2:14; 3:12; 4:8-20; 10:47-48). His declaration of commitment to Christ, even while imprisoned, came to fruition.... Peter faced a painful low point in his life when he denied his Savior. We, too, will experience painful lows on our road to spiritual maturity—every Christian does.... God redeemed Peter’s failure and used his weakness to strengthen his faith. The same can happen to us” (Ibid., pp. 390 and 391).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and share your responses to the following questions and suggestions: 1. List instances when you have hurt, betrayed, lied to, ignored, or used someone. Write a prayer for forgiveness. 2. Share a story about a time when you felt accepted even though you thought you were unacceptable. 3. Reflect on Peter’s uneven witness to Jesus by watching *Tender Mercies* (1982, PG). 4. Have you ever experienced a “dark night of the soul”? What did you learn about your witness to Jesus during this time? 5. Share a story about a dark time in your life when your relationship with God was a source of strength. 6. Tell the story of one of your most vivid experiences of forgiveness. How does forgiveness influence your Christian witness?

iTHINK: (5 – 7 min.)

1. Create a monologue for Peter—looking back on his life.
2. Read and sing hymns based on each of the scenes in today’s readings. Present them as a choral interpretation of Peter’s ups and downs.
3. Describe Peter with terms a psychologist or recruiting officer might use. How does knowing him through other eyes affect how you see him?
4. Create a mandala to connect different aspects of today’s lesson on Peter, his historical time, and his culture.
5. Write the name Peter on newsprint. One at a time, ask adults to add a word or phrase about Peter, then share their thoughts about something that has been written.
6. Bring in children’s storybooks about Peter and analyze how they interpret Peter’s ups and downs.

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

ADULT UNIT II: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Zacchaeus, The Publican
ADULT TOPIC: Climbing a Tree, What Will I See?

LESSON 7
DATE: July 19, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 6:31-38
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:1-10
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “All to Jesus I Surrender” - #490 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Luke 19:1-10 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

Jesus and Zacchaeus

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.”

Affirmation – We will practice enthusiastic and generous responses to Jesus. *(Spoken together by class and teacher).*

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

An unexpected encounter with someone we’ve never met before can result in a transforming experience. What is it about a new relationship that opens the possibility of transformation in our lives? When Zacchaeus opens his home to Jesus as his special guest, he is transformed by the experience and becomes a follower of Jesus who does more than the law required.

In the larger group, interact with one another in responding to the following questions and activities: 1. Compare your generosity with Zacchaeus’s. How can you wisely step up to his level of giving? 2. Watch a movie that demonstrates enthusiasm that upsets the status quo, such as School of Rock. How can you bring spirit to your witness? How is God asking you to testify to the world being turned upside down by Christ? 3. Assess your relationship with money. Covenant together to adopt practices that demonstrate the relative insignificance of money when considering the call of God and the needs of others. 4. Let Zacchaeus’s example inspire your class to challenge your church leaders to make bold innovations, especially when a chorus of “this is how we’ve always done it” tries to derail your church’s faithful witness.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Luke 19:1-6: 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.” “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, he is in a position to welcome Jesus into his home. “The sycamore tree is a species of fig, native to the Middle East and Africa. It has a wide, short trunk and low branches. We may imagine Zacchaeus climbing it quickly. Grown men typically do not climb trees, and Zacchaeus’s actions may have been humbling. His posture in this moment is neither haughty nor concerned with outward appearance (Compare Luke 18:14)

This is one of many examples in Luke’s Gospel where Jesus exhibits supernatural knowledge, which can be rightly expected of God alone (compare Luke 5:22, 6:8, 7:36-50, 8:46, 19:29-34, 22:7-13). Astonishingly, Jesus stops and calls Zacchaeus by name.... Jesus does not compare schedules or ask if today is convenient for guests—he tells Zacchaeus to hurry down and invites himself over.... Zacchaeus obeys Jesus immediately. He doesn’t act flustered or annoyed at having an unexpected houseguest (or 13!). Instead, he responds to Jesus’ message with joy” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2024-2026, Large Print Edition, p.396). The story embodies the promise that anyone who desires to see Jesus will. They will, in turn, be seen by Jesus and have their joy made complete.

Luke 19:7-10: 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. “The crowd... are not happy with Jesus’ choice to stay with Zacchaeus. Therefore, they grumble (mutter). The onlookers’ condemnation is clear; they consider Zacchaeus a sinner.... As a notorious tax collector, the crowd regards Zacchaeus as disloyal to God and God’s people.... They are shocked to think Jesus would associate with him. Throughout Luke’s Gospel, Jesus receives criticism for affiliation with ‘tax collectors and sinners’ (Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1-2). In going home with Zacchaeus, Jesus is doing the right thing, not the popular thing.... By standing to speak, Zacchaeus emphasizes the importance of his pronouncement. He begins by calling Jesus to attention and then attributes to Jesus the respectful title of Lord. Zacchaeus affirms an attitude of humility and reverence toward Jesus. Then he declares an intention toward restitution.... [He] announces to Jesus (and the city of Jericho) the actions he will take to fix the damage he has caused. He begins by halving his wealth and pledging it to the poor. In doing so, he aligns with the wisdom and goodness taught through Jewish Scripture.... He promises to restore monies taken by false accusation or cheat[ing]. Since the tax collector system was not standardized, extortion ran rampant, and bribery was common. Zacchaeus says he will pay four times the amount” (Ibid., p. 397). Zacchaeus joins the growing number of persons on the margins of God’s people who possess insight into the values of Jesus’s mission. He “chooses righteousness over wealth, one of the significant obstacles to inheriting God’s kingdom (compare Luke 18:18-30)” (Ibid.).

ELEVATE: (5-10 min.)

Break into small groups and challenge those in your group with the following questions and suggestions: 1. Notice the enthusiasm you feel for your favorite

team or performer and practice the same zeal for Jesus. 2. Watch children climbing a tree and notice the joy. Offer God thanks for the children's witness to exuberant life in God's kingdom. 3. Wonder: What metaphorical tree is God asking you to climb to see Jesus? Climbing this tree may lead to ridicule and embarrassment. How do you follow through? 4. Recall a time when a group to which you belonged excluded someone from participation because she or he was different. How do you feel about your behavior? What can you do in the future to prevent a repeat performance of exclusion? 5. See yourself seated at your table with strangers. As you eat, realize that you are entertaining Christ. What happens, and how do you feel? 6. Name ways we are reminded today that the Kingdom is composed of helpless children, blind beggars, and tax collectors in a world obsessed with wealth, health, and power.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Analyze the importance of Jesus's relationship with Zacchaeus in light of what Luke wants his audience to understand about healing, conversion, restoration, and/or justice.
2. Read 18:9-29 as a setup for today's lesson. Compare Zacchaeus to the rich young ruler and the "least of these."
3. Read 19:8 in several different Bible translations/paraphrases. Do you notice any differences in the telling of the story that alter your understanding of the actions of Zacchaeus?
4. Some translations use a past tense and others use a future tense (see 19:8) to describe Zacchaeus's actions. Some commentators argue that Zacchaeus did not change his ways, but rather, Luke's account is intended to communicate Jesus's message to the community that Zacchaeus is one of them. Consider whether this alternate interpretation is worthy of consideration.
5. Compare today's story with John the Baptist's counsel to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" rather than relying on the saying, "We have Abraham as our ancestor" (Luke 3:8).

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

ADULT UNIT II: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Mary, The Mother of Jesus
ADULT TOPIC: Living with What You Didn’t Ask For

LESSON 8
DATE: July 26, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 12:1-6
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Luke 2:15-19; John 2:1-5, 19:25-27
PRINT PASSAGES: Same

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “Something Within” - #630 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – Luke 2:15-19; John 2:1-5, 19:25-27 (Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

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.

The Wedding at Cana

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.

Affirmation – We will practice welcoming others as an expression of faithful witness to Christ. (Spoken together by class and teacher).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

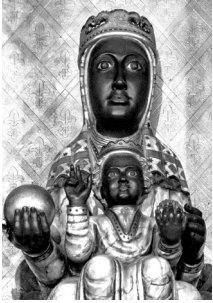
We are faced with many choices throughout our lives, but it is impossible to commit to everything. How do we prioritize our commitments? We see Mary’s commitment to Jesus at significant moments throughout his life--from the announcement of his birth to his first miracle, to his crucifixion.

In the larger group discuss with one another your responses to the questions and suggestions below: 1. Support organizations that provide food, shelter, and legal and financial assistance to homeless people, immigrants, and refugees. 2. Watch the movie Babe (PG, 1995) and discuss how to emulate the pig’s hospitality, empathy, and service for others. 3. Volunteer to guide visitors at a zoo or a museum, where you can practice welcome in places known to evoke wonder. 4. Discuss how welcome requires us to dismantle some barriers we put up to keep the stranger out. 5. Design welcome mats for your church that reflect Mary’s hospitality. 6. Agree to be “hospitable” with the natural environment and be amazed at the wonder of God’s creation.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Luke 2:15-19: Matthew traces Jesus’s genealogy through Joseph’s paternal line; 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?’” (See <https://christianityfaq.com/lutherans-beliefs-mary/> referenced on 5/25/2022.) Luke 2:15-19 indicates that 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). “Imagine the things Mary pondered: angels, visions, dreams, her husband’s obedience, miraculous pregnancy and subsequent birth, tales of more angels, and shepherds who know what she knows—this is no ordinary baby!” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print



Edition, p. 404) 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: Whereas Luke’s Gospel provides many details about Mary and her experience—more than any other Gospel (e. g., the angel Gabriel’s visit and Mary’s miraculous conception, Mary’s visit to her relative Elizabeth’s home and special reception she receives, Mary’s worshipful song of praise to God known as the Magnificat, and her example of faithful trust in God’s plan) (Ibid., pp. 402-403), John only mentions Mary a few times (see 2:12; 6:42; 19:25-28), and 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 Jesus’ life. She is at the beginning of his career and watches him die. The Standard Lesson Commentary says these two passages of scripture from the Gospel of John (2:1-5; 19:25-27) “act as bookends to Jesus’ life and ministry.... The first passage has no parallel texts in the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark, and Luke]. Parallel texts for the second [passage, 19:25-27] are found in Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; and Luke 23:49” (Ibid., p. 403). From all that we learn of Mary in the four Gospels, we can conclude that “Mary’s ‘yes’ to God included cherishing her son’s identity through tender, exciting, and excruciating circumstances. She trusted God to sustain her journey and Jesus as her son and divine Lord. Mary held Jesus as he took his first breaths, and she was there with him as he took his last. She was with him as much as possible in between, even witnessing his first miracle. Mary observed Jesus’ earthly life in all its humble

humanity and divine activity. She kept watch and cherished the glorious (albeit painful) unfolding of God’s perfect plan: the salvation of the world through Jesus Christ, our Lord” (Ibid., p. 407).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and challenge one another to respond to the following questions and suggestions: 1. Reflect on motherhood as “welcome,” especially in hosting a baby in utero. 2. In what sense does Hebrews 13:2 describe Mary’s faithful witness? 3. Keep a diary as if you were Mary. Write down events that happen during the story and reflect on how they affected Mary and why. 4. Recall a story of an experience, event, or person that aroused or renewed your sense of wonder. How has that memory helped you to be more hospitable to the wonder of God? 5. Read the poems of Mary Oliver, a poet of wonder at human life. 6. How do you “make room” for Jesus in your inward being? Using the themes in Mary’s story, write your own story of welcoming Jesus, creating characters and situations.

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Discuss the connection between the names Mary and Miriam and Jesus and Joshua. How might the names of Mary and her child have testified to God’s plans for Israel and the early church?
2. Read the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Given what we hear of Mary’s obedience to bear God’s child, how might we imagine her relationship with Jesus?
3. Put Mary on trial for aiding and abetting her son. Class members can be expert witnesses called to testify, judge, jury, bailiff, reporter. Is Mary guilty or innocent?
4. Play a video version of Mary’s story but turn off the sound while you watch. Challenge the students to narrate what is happening and what the actors reveal through their gestures. Then compare what you saw with what you read.
5. Write an essay in which Mary reflects on how she feels about how Luke and John represented her.

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

ADULT UNIT III: Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Thomas, The Honest Doubter
ADULT TOPIC: I’ll See It When I Believe It

LESSON 9
DATE: August 2, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 91:1-6
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: John 11:14-16, 14:5-8,
20:24-29, 21:1-2
PRINT PASSAGES: Same

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or learner

Celebration – “Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound” - #501 *AME Zion Bi-centennial Hymnal*

Declaration – John 11:14-16, 14:5-8, 20:24-29, 21:1-2 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

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.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”

Jesus and Thomas

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.”

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.”

Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

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.

Affirmation – We will practice passing our testimony to others. (Spoken together by class and teacher).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

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

In the face of doubts, many people will seek out solid evidence or proof. What source of evidence is persuasive enough to address our doubt? John indicated that after Thomas received evidence from Jesus, his doubts were relieved, and his faith restored.

In the larger group, share responses and possible responses to the following questions and actions: 1. Play trust games, such as trust falls, with your fellow group members. 2. Write a group or personal creed and share it with your congregation as your testimony. 3. Watch the movie *The Apostle* (PG-13, 1997) and evaluate its depiction of spreading the word. What can we learn from such a depiction of living your testimony? 4. Develop resilience by exploring skills that help people bounce back from trauma. Reflect on resilience as a Christian spiritual practice in relation to the doubts of faith. 5. Interview someone who has broken patterns of personal addiction and turned their life around. Ask specifically what role talking honestly about their struggles had in their rehabilitation. 6. Discuss the importance of questions on a spiritual journey. What is your faith tradition's attitude toward questions?

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

John 11:14-16, 14:5-8: Thomas is mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels only in lists of the disciples (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15. Also Acts 1:13). Thomas emerges in John's Gospel connected with the great mysteries of Christ's glorification (11:16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2). Thomas: in Aramaic (Te'oma) and Greek (Didymos) means "twin." John 11:16 references "Thomas, called the Twin." See <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Thomas> (accessed 5/25/2022). There is a book called "The Gospel of Thomas," that is included in apocryphal literature but not in the official New Testament canon, as we see. There is an interesting YouTube clip giving a brief rationale for why the Gospel of Thomas is not listed among the canonical books of the Bible. See https://youtu.be/LDQ0w_f5P2s (accessed 5/25/2022). Thomas has come down through the centuries as a typical pessimist and skeptic. Some authorities believe the epithet "Didymus" referred to his doubting nature since some versions render it "double-minded." John 14:5-8 is a part of the "I AM" statements that reveal Jesus as the source of life, abundant grace, and the very presence of God. There is nothing uncertain about the disciples' present or future because of their relationship with Jesus. Scholars have commented on the designation of Thomas that signifies "twin" "as meaning 'double,' like 'double-minded,' [leading to the characterization of him] as a doubter.... The reputation is not entirely fair, however, as it presupposes that Thomas's questions and requests for evidence were extreme or his disbelief was unwarranted. The disciples [did not know] Jesus would return to life. Thomas's desire for proof did not make him a 'typical skeptic' because he alone, among the other disciples, had yet to see Jesus" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, p. 410).

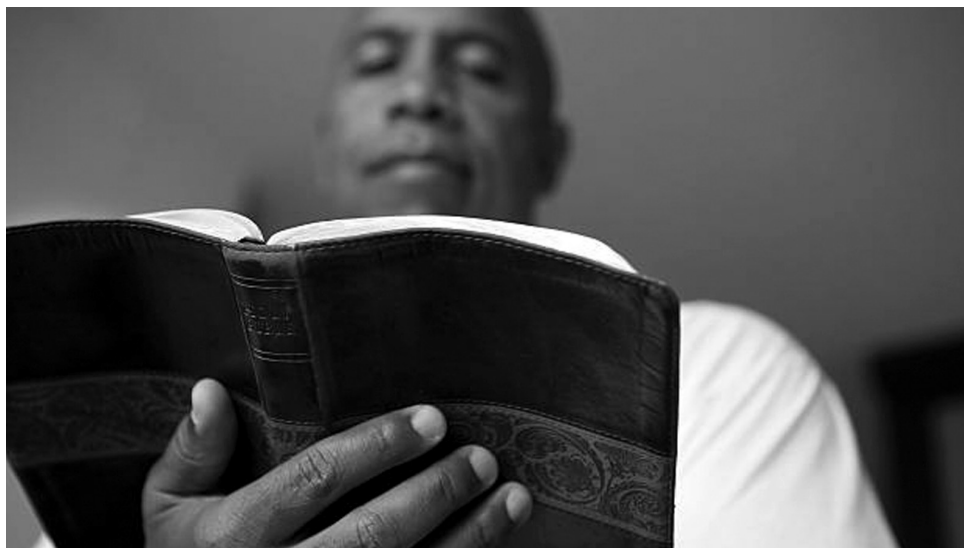
John 20:24-29, 21:1-2: Some find a clue to Thomas's post-Crucifixion relationship to the community in verses 22 (disciples receiving the spirit), 23 (forgiving and retaining the sins of others), and 24 (Thomas's absence). Some conjecture that Thomas had separated himself from the group after Jesus's death. Further, they surmise, given the disciples' spirit-given commission to forgive/reconcile, Thomas returned on the eighth day for a challenging discussion about reconciliation. However, there is no proof of this. "Jesus appeared personally and in the flesh to several people on the day of his resurrection (Matthew 2:1-10; John 20:1-23, etc.). Even so, doubts lingered and would continue to linger over the weeks ahead (Matthew 28:17; Luke 24:38). The most articulate of these comes from the Apostle Thomas. [His response to the disciples' assertion, We have seen the Lord, that he would need to see and examine for himself] is where the derogatory phrase 'doubting Thomas' originates. Eyewitness accounts of his fellow disciples are not enough for Thomas.... Belief in disembodied spirits was common in the ancient world, and Thomas wants firsthand proof that the claims of Jesus' resurrection is more than a ghost story. Only then will Thomas believe that the person the disciples saw is the same Jesus who was crucified, was buried, and has risen. [When Jesus again appears to the disciples with Thomas present, his invitation to Thomas to examine his hands and side for the evidence] exactly mirrors Thomas' stated demand [for proof], [although this invitation to Thomas to touch him contrasts with his comment to Mary Magdalene about not touching him before his ascension]. John does not specify whether Thomas reaches out and touches Jesus' physical body. Instead, the text suggests that Thomas believes without touching Jesus' side. He responds to Jesus with personal confession of faith in his Lord and God, [acknowledging the truth of] everything Jesus taught about Himself [as embodying] the very essence of God the Father, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells (John 10:30; Colossians 1:15-19, 2:9; Hebrews 1:3)" (Ibid., pp. 413 and 414).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and entertain the following questions and suggestions:

1. What does Buechner's perspective mean to you: "Let your doubt be the ants in the pants of your faith" (Frederick Buechner).
2. Imagine spiritual doubt as a form of pain and pray to God to lead you through it.
3. Decide to refer to "doubting Thomas" as "searching Thomas" or "honest Thomas." Reflect on your honest seeking after God.
4. Who are the members of your spiritual board of directors? Those who by their witness have brought you to where you are in the faith? Parents, teachers, friends, authors, historical persons? Write an annual report to your board exploring your maturity in the faith.
5. Talk about the different stages of your journey of faith. When did you first experience doubt?

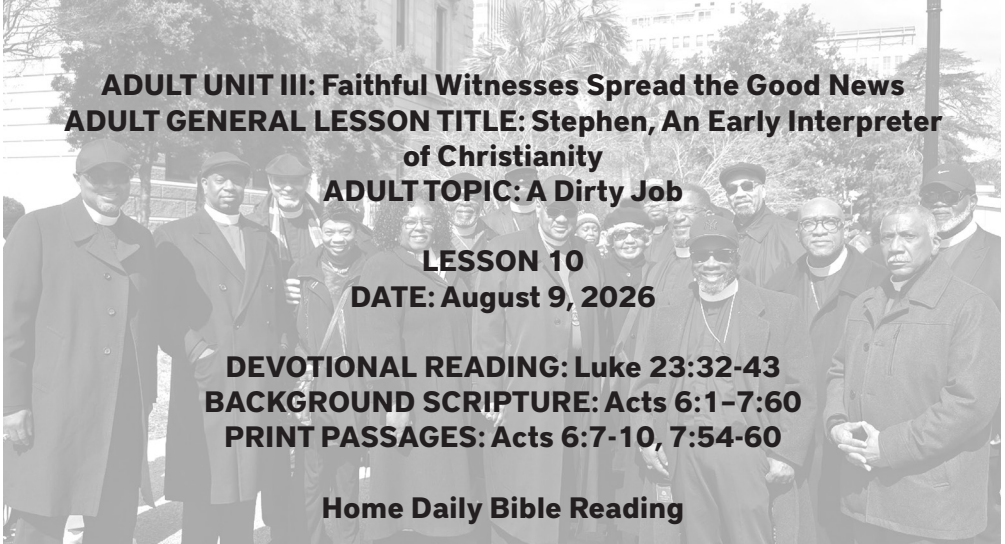
Did you reject your faith in God? What drew you back? What new adventures of faith do you look forward to?



iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Chart the chain of witnesses to the resurrected Christ, from Mary Magdalene to the disciples to Thomas. Note how each one tells the next, but nothing happens until each has her or his own experience of the risen Christ.
2. Prepare a character study of Thomas.
3. Discuss the significance of expressing doubts and questions for growing in the faith.
4. Create a monologue for Thomas that expresses what he is thinking and feeling. Ask a volunteer to wear a biblical costume and present the monologue in character.
5. Using the words of Thomas in today's reading, write a poem that expresses his journey from doubting to believing.
6. Do a word study of seeing in John's Gospel and its relationship to believing.

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



ADULT UNIT III: Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Stephen, An Early Interpreter of Christianity
ADULT TOPIC: A Dirty Job

LESSON 10
DATE: August 9, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 23:32-43
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 6:1-7:60
PRINT PASSAGES: Acts 6:7-10, 7:54-60

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

- Invocation** – Teacher or Leaner
- Celebration** – “All to Jesus I Surrender” - #490 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal
- Declaration** – Acts 6:7-10, 7:54-60 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

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.

The Arrest of Stephen

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.

The Stoning of Stephen

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 standing 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.

Affirmation – We will seek to emulate Stephens’ potent and courageous witness to Christ. (Spoken together by class and teacher).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

People may hesitate to speak up and take action even when their beliefs are called into question. What sparks a readiness to act on and speak the truth? Stephen, full of grace and the power of the Spirit, was equipped to defend his faith and speak the truth of God’s Word.

Break into small groups and share responses to the following questions and suggested activities: 1. Research Stephen Ministries at stephenministries.org. Discuss how initiating such a ministry program for your congregation might invigorate your church. 2. Make room in your life to do things that help you maintain the role and attitude of “servant.” 3. Research the names of those suffering for preaching the Gospel. Send a card or email of encouragement to a missionary, or anyone else suffering for the stand he or she has taken for Jesus. 4. Discuss sacrifices group members are willing to make for Christ and pledge to support one another in their commitments. 5. Formulate a testimony as a response to 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.” 6. Develop the practice of constantly looking to Jesus in all situations.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Acts 6:7-10: Acts 6:1 begins the mission and ministry of Hellenistic Jewish Christians, of whom Stephen, “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (6:5), was one of these. They were either Greek-speaking Jews (from the Diaspora) or Jews who had adopted Greek customs. Luke’s term for “Freedmen” (6:9) refers to freed slaves of Roman citizens, who became Roman citizens when they were freed. Stephen came from a group of people considered compromised

in some way by Greek language, customs and culture. Both Stephen and his accusers were likely to experience some forms of bias from the more orthodox Jewish residents of Israel. Stephen “did great wonders and signs among the people” (6:8). He was a noted teacher as well (7:2-53). “The display of miracles that accredit Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:22) and confirm the message of the apostles (2:43; 5:12) now also certify God’s approval of the ministry of Stephen. These signs affirm the presence of God’s grace and the empowerment of his servants (2 Corinthians 12:12). The book of Acts does not specify the nature of Stephen’s miraculous work among the people. His calling before this was to be one of seven men to oversee a first century version of “Meals on Wheels” (See Acts 6:1-40. We presume that Stephen’s ministry in that regard did not involve miracles. Therefore, the great wonders and signs he now performs indicate relief from suffering from both physical and spiritual ailments, as has been true of the apostles (compare 3:1-10; 4:30; 5:15-16). Although he is not one of the apostles, Stephen is chosen by God to bear witness to salvation (compare Hebrews 2:3-4). As one who is ‘full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5), his life demonstrates the spiritual power that Jesus promised (1:8) The fact that the synagogue members could not stand up against Stephen does not mean that they agreed with his message; rather, it indicates their inability to refute his teachings. Their powerlessness fulfills Jesus’ promise to give his persecuted disciples ‘words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict’ (Luke 21:15). Such fulfillment suggests that Stephen’s wisdom was given to him by Jesus, Himself, undoubtedly, through His Spirit (compare 12:11-12)” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, pp. 419 and 420).

Acts 7:54-60: Stephen foresaw that the Temple would no longer be the center of worship—God can be worshipped anywhere. One aim of Acts 7 is to answer the charge that Christians promoted Jesus by defaming the Temple and Torah (Acts 6:8–7:1). Stephen is not pitting Christianity over against Judaism. The debate is an intra-Jewish struggle over identity and the continuing role of Temple and Law. Victims were dragged out of the city (7:58) and pushed over a ledge to be crushed and buried by heavy stones hurled down upon them. “The witnesses” were legally required to cast the first stones. See Leviticus 24:14 and Numbers 15:35-36. “Today’s Lesson presents a servant of God who faced a catastrophic blow. The story of God’s servants is stained with the blood of prophets and apostles who paid the price for speaking the truth, and today’s lesson presents this reality in vivid detail.... The conflict between Stephen and the synagogue members escalates. False accusations lead to Stephens’s arrest and trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:11-15). Stephen, speaking in his defense, emphasizes Israel’s history of rebellion against God. In that regard, Stephen lodges at least four countercharges: the Jewish leaders (1) are ‘stiff-necked’ and ‘uncircumcised’ in heart and ears (7:51); (2) resist the Holy Spirit (7:51) (3) have betrayed and murdered the Messiah and his prophets (7:52);

and (4) have not obeyed the Law of Moses (7:53)” (Ibid., p. 418 and 420). Stephen’s death demonstrates dying for the Gospel, and in so doing, challenges us to accept its message as good news.

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

In the larger group, challenge one another to respond to the following suggestions: 1. Commit to serving another person in Christ’s name. 2. Wonder about rejection: When we reject others, are we rejecting a reflection of ourselves? 3. Notice that Stephen witnesses to Christ through serving others, prayers for his killers (Luke 23:34) and dying faithfully (Luke 23:46; Psalm 31:5). How does Stephen’s witness encourage you to imitate Christ in yours? 4. Name some people you consider to be vibrantly alive. What are the keys to their vitality? What do they live for? For what or whom would they die? 5. Assess the relationship between your public and private self. In which is your faith commitment most profound? How can you develop continuity between your public and private expressions of faith in Christ? 6. Identify ways that your gifts and talents are clues to God’s purpose for you. How well are you fulfilling your calling as a witness for Christ?

iTHINK: (5 – 7 min.)

1. Today’s reading omits the background leading up to Stephen’s execution. Flesh out the wider story, explaining who Stephen is, who his adversaries are, and why his testimony offends them.
2. The Scripture Matrix for the lesson suggests that Stephen is not pitting Christianity over against Judaism. The debate is an intra-Jewish struggle over identity and the continuing role of Temple and Law. Discuss the possibility that Stephen is not rejecting Judaism outright but advocating for Jesus as a fulfillment of God’s plan for Israel. In what ways can Christians and Jews cooperate in advancing God’s purpose in the world today?
3. Review Leviticus 24, which describes stoning as the appropriate punishment for blasphemy.
4. Select five adjectives for Stephen and explain how they apply. Which of these adjectives do you want to emulate in your own walk with Christ?
5. Search Google Images for “martyrdom of Stephen contemporary” and reflect on the ways today’s artists have interpreted the event.

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

ADULT UNIT III: Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Saul of Tarsus, How a Pharisee
Became a Christian
ADULT TOPIC: Tell Me What You Know

LESSON 11
DATE: August 16, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 86:1-10
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 22:3-15
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound” - #501 *AME Zion Bi-centennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Acts 22:3-15 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

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.

Paul Tells of His Conversion

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.

Affirmation – We will develop ways of witnessing for Christ that encourage others to serve. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

It's sometimes difficult to believe that change in a person is authentic. What convinces us of the authenticity of the changes a person claims to have made? Paul testifies to his faith in Christ to convince Christians that he had truly repented of his former convictions and violent actions against believers.

Break into small groups and share your responses to the following questions and suggestions: 1. Practice communicating your faith by telling your story. 2. Create a "family tree" of your spiritual mentors. Share stories about them. 3. Recall a meaningful coincidence when two random things occurred together for a purpose. How did this synchronicity mentor you in your faith? 4. Discuss how practicing faith is like developing a relationship. What role does our testimony play in growing the relationship and in practicing our faith? How would Ananias respond, given his relationship with Paul? 5. Name ways difficulties have proven to be catalysts for your faith.

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Acts 22:3-5: In Acts 21:40–23:35, Paul defends his mission, considered a criminal enterprise, as his obedience to the will of God. He asserts that follow-

ing a universal gospel does not mean surrendering his Jewishness, especially his piety. Awkward sentence construction in 22:3-5 suggests two possible scenarios after his birth in Tarsus: 1) Paul was raised in Tarsus and educated in Jerusalem; or 2) he was raised and trained in Jerusalem and moved back to Tarsus after his initiation into the Pharisaic party. His “defense of his ministry includes an account of his own incredible transformation. Details of that experience occur three times in the book of Acts: here, in Acts 9:1-19, and in Acts 26:12-23. [He was part of the Jewish dispersion existing throughout the Roman Empire.] Having been born in a Roman province allowed Paul to gain Roman citizenship (compare Acts 22:27-28). Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, located in present-day Turkey, is about 360 miles north of Jerusalem. [The city being thoroughly Greco-Roman presented] numerous pressures for someone born a Jew. But Paul strongly implies that he had not been assimilated into that pagan environment, given that he had been brought up in Jerusalem. [Continuing to present his credentials, he establishes] his background as a faithful Jew. A posture of sitting at the feet of a teacher was common for Jewish disciples (example: Luke 10:39). In that light, one could hardly do better than having studied under Gamaliel. This man’s wisdom and high regard among the people is seen in Acts 5:34-39). [Paul reveals that as a zealous Jew he aggressively persecuted the Jesus-followers, operating] with the support of the high priest—most likely Caiaphas, who held that position until AD 36. Saul intended to carry out his persecutions against the Jewish followers of Jesus in Damascus (compare Acts 9:1-2). The fact that Damascus is over 130 miles away from Jerusalem highlights Saul’s [later named Paul] fanaticism at the time” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, pp. 427 and 428).

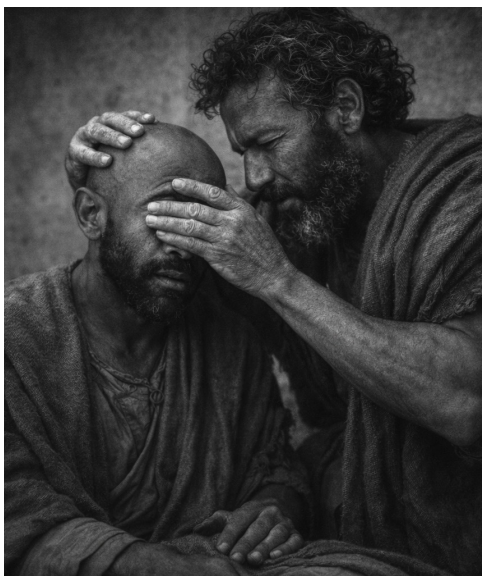
Acts 22:6-11: “The opening statement ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me, as presented here and in Acts 9:4-5, baffled Saul. Having been overwhelmed by the light to the point that he found himself on the ground, all he could do was sputter out the question, Who are you, Lord? We should not think that Saul’s use of the word Lord necessarily means that he recognized the voice as that of God. The underlying Greek is also used in contexts where it means ‘sir’ (example: Matthew 27:63). Saul’s confusion likely deepened when the voice identified itself as Jesus of Nazareth. There is no record of Saul ever having met Jesus prior to this encounter. As Paul’s self-assured confidence in his zealous conduct began to melt away, the implication became clear: to persecute Christians is, in essence, to persecute Jesus, Himself. This stresses his identification with them. This moment thus began a radical reshaping of everything Saul believed about God, who was at the center of his worldview” (Ibid., p. 428). “Ultimately, this encounter will also radically reshape how Saul lives, as he will transform from being a persecutor of the church into a chief proclaimer of its gospel in service to this Lord (1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13-16, 23;

1 Timothy 1:13). Saul's transformation began with his interaction on the road, but he would need a lengthy period of growth (Galatians 1:17-18)" (Ibid., pp. 428 and 429). Paul's conversion informs his vocation— "What am I to do?" It will be clarified in Damascus (22:10). Ananias is a messenger telling Paul of the content of his ministry.



Acts 22:12-15: Ananias demonstrates that being a pious Jew and a Christian convert are not mutually exclusive. Ananias emphasizes continuity with the God of our fathers who had appointed Paul (3:13; 5:30; 7:32; Exodus 3:13). "Acts 9:10-17 provides a more detailed account of the actions and attitude of Ananias. He is designated as 'a disciple,' marking him as a follower of Jesus. It's important to note that this Ananias should not be confused with men of the same name mentioned in Acts 5:1-11, 23:1-5, or 24:1. To describe him as a devout observer of the law who is highly respect-

ed by all the Jews suggests that Paul aims to reassure the crowd that a Jew who is above reproach could testify truthfully about Paul's claims.... Ananias reveals a willingness to refer to Saul as brother because of the Lord's revelation to Ananias. This is despite Ananias's initial consternation about Saul as a persecutor of Christians.... The commission Paul receives to be Jesus' witness to all people is a mark of his becoming a disciple of Jesus. But more specifically, in the context of Acts, it also marks him as participating in the commission bestowed on the apostles (Acts 1:8, 22, 2:32, 13:31). This is further stressed by reference to what he has seen and heard. That phrase [v.15] conveys the personal experience of the speaker (compare Luke 7:22; Acts 4:20; 1 John 1:1, 3). For



the Lord’s purposes in making Paul an apostle to the nations, he needed to be a witness of the risen Jesus. And so, Paul experienced Christ firsthand when God interrupted his trip to Damascus” (Ibid., pp. 430 and 431). The universal scope of the gospel’s offer of salvation will prove to be a stumbling block to those who hear this speech (22:21-22). Compare Luke 24:46-48 and Acts 22:7-10, 14.

ELEVATE: (5-10 min.)

Discuss with those in the larger group your responses to the following questions and suggestions: 1. Wonder: when has your zeal for God been misdirected and destructive like Saul’s? 2. What would it mean for you to anticipate God’s call? Does God ask us to do difficult things and go to unexpected places? 3. Do not exclude your enemies from the work God might do in the world through you. 4. Reflect: Who has God brought alongside you to encourage you and hold you accountable in your faith commitments? 5. Name ways that you have been blind to the love and grace of God. How did you learn to see again? 6. Imagine you’re on your Damascus Road. How do you experience Christ’s appearance? How do you respond?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Compare the three accounts of Paul’s conversion and calling in chapters 9, 22, and 26.
2. Review texts that assert Christ’s presence among the suffering community, such as Matthew 25.
3. Do a character study of Ananias. In what ways is Ananias converted and commissioned?
4. Create a timeline that places today’s story in a sequence of significant events of Luke–Acts.
5. Practice retelling Paul’s commissioning story, but with you as Paul. As you do, note how certain parts of the story resonate with your own experience of knowing Christ and being called to serve him.

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

ADULT UNIT III: Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Timothy, The Influence of Home Training
ADULT TOPIC: Home Is Where the Heart Is

LESSON 12
DATE: August 23, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 12:46-50
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Acts 16:1-3; Philippians 2:19-22;
2 Timothy 1:1-6, 3:14-16
PRINT PASSAGES: 2 Timothy 1:1-6, 3:14-16

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – “Faith of Our Mothers! Living Still” - #528 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

Declaration – 2 Timothy 1:1-6, 3:14-16 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

Salutation

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.

Thanksgiving and Encouragement

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 grand-

mother 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,

Affirmation – We will adopt practices of home-nature for becoming a faithful witness. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

People closest to us can influence us either positively or negatively. How can we discern the positive influences from the negative influences in our lives? Paul reminds Timothy of the genuine faith of his mother and grandmother and encourages him to see in them models for his own faith.

Break into small groups and challenge one another to respond to any of the questions and suggestions listed below: 1. Discuss the question of how you would like your home life to be different because of 2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16. What will you take away from the reading? What will you do with what you have learned? 2. Have each person select a word or phrase in 2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16 that speaks to a specific situation in her/his life and share with a partner. The partner prays that verse for that person throughout the week. 3. Discuss what each person has “mothered”—we’ve given birth to and raised children, animals, plants, friends, passion, and money for a cause. How have these birthing’s informed our spiritual nurture in our homes? 4. Name ways to practice patience, discipline, hope, vision, and transformation, all components of home nurturing. 5. Involve young people in interviewing and recording elders talking about what they have learned in life. 6. Draw a map of your home, noting all the things that come from other countries and cultures, such as crafts from artisans in developing countries. Discuss ways to nurture in your household solidarity with people around the globe.



EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

2 Timothy 1:1-6: “Scripture gives us little information about Paul’s parents, but we know he received high-lev-

el religious education, learned tent-making as a trade, and was a Roman citizen. We know he studied under the famous rabbi, Gamaliel, in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). Paul's relationship with Gamaliel as a spiritual father may have influenced his decision to consider Timothy as a son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2) Paul first met Timothy while traveling through Lystra (Acts 16:1-3). According to Acts 16:1, Timothy's mother was Jewish, [and a believer in Christ], but his father was Greek" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, pp. 434 and 435). In mixed marriages, if the mother was Jewish, her offspring was considered Jewish. (See Deuteronomy 7:3 for prohibitions against mixed marriages.) Timothy's mother was called Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). In Philippians 2:19-22, Paul commends Timothy for two essential qualities: (1) his like-mindedness with Paul and (2) his genuine concern for others. Timothy has served with Paul in the gospel work as an apprentice son serves with his father. 2 Timothy places high value on preserving and passing along a heritage from one generation to the next. In 2 Timothy 1:6, "For this reason" refers to how Timothy's mother and grandmother nurtured him in the faith and prepared him for ministry. Paul calls on Timothy to "fan the flame" of that gift confirmed through the laying on of hands. "Paul is impressed with Timothy's faith—he was from their first meeting. He knows Timothy has not abandoned his devotion to God or renounced the truths he learned in childhood.... He asks Timothy not let his gift drift into stagnancy" (Ibid., p. 437).

2 Timothy 3:14-16: 2 Timothy warns against false teachers who promote a form of Christianity that threatens the faith. Paul proffers a genuinely radical solution, in the original sense of the meaning of that word (*radix*, "rooted," "foundational"), calling Timothy back to basics: engaging the Scriptures and the Christian witness. Returning to the idea that Timothy learned the Scriptures and truths from his mother and grandmother, "What Paul calls Holy Scriptures cannot refer to a complete Bible as modern Christians understand it, since Timothy's childhood came before most of the New Testament was written. Paul is referring to the Old Testament, particularly the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, which Paul frequently quotes in his letters. Paul gives a theological reason for Scripture as the basis for faith: Scripture's contents make a person wise and lead toward salvation. Salvation comes to fruition through the Messiah, who is Christ Jesus. Paul encourages Timothy to remember the incredible tool that he has in his ministry toolbox: long-term knowledge of God's Word.... Paul names two essential truths that apply to Scripture: it is God-breathed and useful. First, the message is from God.... Paul uses [God-breathed] to describe the God-giveness of Scripture that Timothy can trust the Scriptures because God is the life force behind them. As 2 Peter 1:20-21 explains, 'No prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will,

but prophets, though human, spoken from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.’ God’s Word is entirely true because God cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), but God works through human agency, using human writers” (Ibid., pp. 438 and 439).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Share with the group your responses to the following questions and suggestions: 1. Contemplate: What do you learn about home and nurture from Timothy’s relationship with his family? Which person in the reading is most like you? 2. Recall what you learned about nurturing others when you were growing up. Did you care for a pet or younger brothers and sisters? Who nurtured you? 3. Watch Once Upon a Time... When We Were Colored (1996, PG), revealing a young man surrounded by the wisdom and the sacrifices of those who love, nourish, and sustain him. What insights do you gain from this? 4. Write about the most important spiritual teacher in your life. What did he or she do for you? 5. Name your gifts as a spiritual teacher. When and where have you given back the wisdom? Where else can you teach?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Research the practice of nurture in Jewish-Christian homes. Include references to Proverbs 22:6 and Ephesians 6:4.
2. Create a possible list of biblically-based strategies for raising children that contribute to their faith formation.
3. Compose a letter Timothy might have written in response to Paul.
4. Imagine the text from Timothy’s mother and grandmother’s perspectives. What do they see, hear, think, and do from their perspective?
5. Read 2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16 and write verses that stood out to you, your questions about the passages, and action steps based on the reading.
6. Ask people in your group who have gifts and experience in the dramatic arts to develop a presentation of today’s reading.

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

ADULT UNIT III: Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News
ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Lydia, Judged to Be Faithful
ADULT TOPIC: All Are Welcome

LESSON 13
DATE: August 30, 2026

DEVOTIONAL READING: James 2:14-26
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:11-40
PRINT PASSAGE: Acts 16:11-15, 40

Home Daily Bible Reading

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

EXALT!

Invocation – Teacher or learner

Celebration – “Blest Be the Tie that Binds”- #493 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal*

Declaration – Acts 16: 11-15, 40 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

The Conversion of Lydia

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.

Affirmation – We will practice hospitality as a characteristic of a faithful witness. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

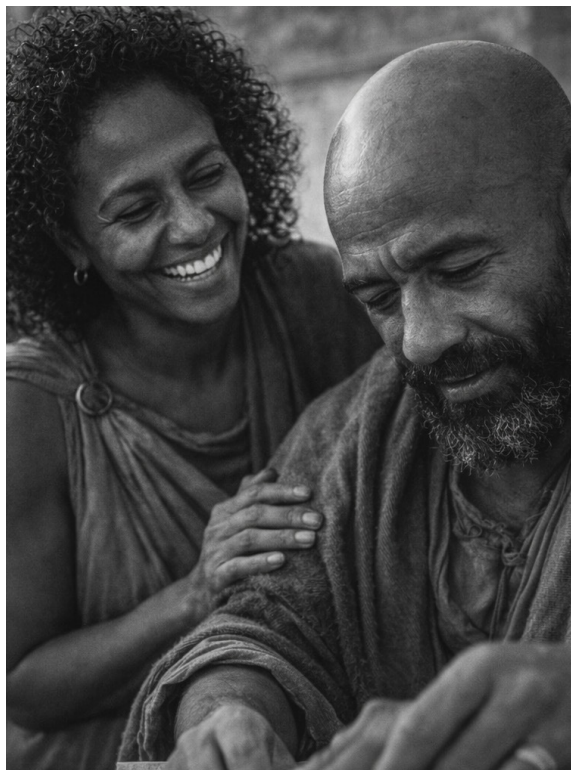
ENGAGE: (5-10 min.)

We question the sincerity of others when their words are not backed up with their actions. How do our actions show that we are genuine? Paul and his companions accepted Lydia’s hospitality after her household showed their faith and were baptized.

Break into small groups and share responses to the following questions and activity suggestions: 1. How might you covenant as a group or church to provide a safe place for refugees as a witness to God’s hospitality, grace, and love? Do you think this will be possible? What might be the positive or negative consequences? 2. Discuss whether you might work on a project to design a party for the children of the church or community that will make each one feel welcome. 3. Discuss ways to make the group’s Sabbath observances a hospitable time for God in your life. 4. Plan to be hospitable to yourself by setting aside rushing and busyness to practice relaxing and enjoyable activities. What adjustments would you have to make to be a success at this? 5. Do you think it would be possible to make a practice of delighting in God’s grace, your family and friends, shared meals, and all of creation? Explain what changes you would have to make to be a success at this?

EDUCATE: (10-15 min.)

Acts 16:11-14: The encounter and incidents recorded in this scripture are a part of what is referred to as Paul’s second Missionary Journey in which he travels with Timothy and Silas. Having traveled through Phrygia, Galatia, and entered Troas, Paul had a “vision” from which he concluded that God had spoken to him through an unknown man from Macedonia—inviting him to come to that area (Acts 16:8-10). So, they set sail to travel there. The word for “vision” (horama) occurs twelve times in the New Testament: once in Matthew 17:9, then eleven times in the Book of Acts (see also 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 27:23-24). In the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit is the driving force in the church’s emerging mission. In verse 10, the use of “we” appears for the first in the pas-



sage in Acts. Luke being the assumed author of the book of Acts, there are two views of his use of “we”—1) Luke joined Paul at this time, or 2) Luke is using “we” to insist that the events happened. Supporters of this view note that Luke only uses “we” at decision points in Paul’s missionary path. It is presumed, regarding Lydia’s profession that dealers in purple could be persons of means. And Lydia used her wealth to benefit Paul’s work. Paul expands his circle to include Gentiles and women who would become ministry partners. Lydia is described as a God-worshipper, a convert to Judaism. The women in the group listen to Paul, are baptized, and Lydia

offers Paul a place to stay. An open heart thus results in open doors.

Acts 16:15, 40: Gentile women were attracted to Judaism by its ethical standards. Josephus (Jewish Wars 2.20.2) writes of the wives of Damascus being addicted to the Jewish religion. “Most women in this era were expected to follow the religious practices of their husbands. Roman men, however, often complained of the influence of foreign (non-Greco-Roman) religions on their wives. Historians of the period report that a significant number of Gentile women converted to Judaism or were drawn to worship alongside Jewish women. Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul would interact with both Jewish and Gentile women. Furthermore, women played significant roles in the growth of the first-century church (examples: Acts 18:2; Philippians 4:2). [In Lydia, therefore, Paul met] a woman who would become a key member of the forthcoming church in Philippi.... Despite her independence and wealth, Lydia’s heart is ready for the message of Christ. After hearing Paul’s message, she does not spend the upcoming week reflecting on the message. Instead, as Paul speaks the word of God, her heart is opened by the Lord, perhaps indicating that he removes any misconceptions that may prevent her from accepting a crucified Messiah.... Lydia’s decision of faith is followed by her baptism [as well as her whole household] No longer merely a worshiper of God..., she experiences

a shift in identity that leads her to be a believer in the Lord. This change leads her to make a proposal that must not be overlooked.... Part of [her] response after her baptism is her insistence that Paul and his companions come lodge at her house—a response full of generosity and hospitality” (Standard Lesson Commentary 2025-2026, Large Print Edition, pp. 444 and 445). 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. 34).

ELEVATE: (10 min.)

1. Consider the last several times you offered or received hospitality. What did you feel when the experience went well? When happened when it went poorly? What spiritual benefit do you see in either type of experience?
2. Seek an encounter with a person of another religion. What do you learn from the experience?
3. Name ways God has used your heart as a shelter for those who are hurting. In what way was that experience a faithful witness to Jesus Christ?
4. Where do you struggle with offering and receiving hospitality? Does it figure in the quest for perfection? Pray for peace to be with your guests.
5. Do you share your faith with others in a hospitable way? How does that work out?

iTHINK: (5-7 min.)

1. Set the story’s context: Paul and Barnabas’s decision to visit the churches they’ve planted.
2. Discuss the standing of women in Roman provinces. How rare would it have been to be a wealthy businesswoman?
3. Review the religious significance of the ancient practice of hospitality to strangers (compare Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 2:46-47; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2). What is the significance of Jews entering a Gentile home and sitting at the table together?
4. Create a monologue for Lydia. What is she thinking and feeling? Why?
5. Create a collage around Lydia’s hospitality as a faithful witness.
6. Design a Jeopardy-like game based on today’s passage.

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

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

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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