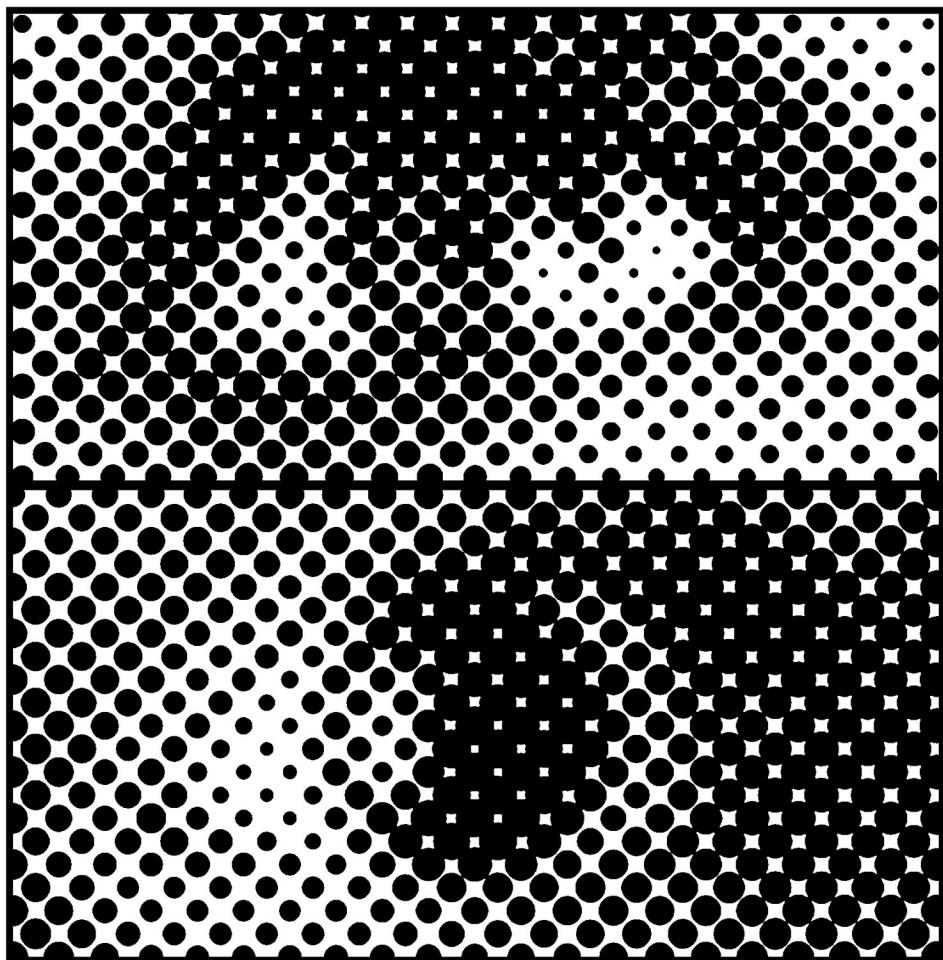


WITNESS

THE SERIES GUIDE BY CROSSWALK



Name

Date

WITNESS

January 8 - February 26

We are all witnesses to what God has done, what God is doing, and to what God will do. We have seen his faithfulness, we have wondered about his love and his mercy, and we are agog in the reality of who God is. This witness is something that we take with us everywhere we go. We are made up of that witness to the greatness of God, and that defines us in a very particular way. However, we are not the first witnesses to the greatness of God. We come from a long line of those who have seen and have experienced and told of the works of God in their lives and for the world.

This series takes into account some of the witnesses we find in scripture, and in turn informs our witness and our ability to share with the world what we have seen and experienced. We go through the Old Testament as well as the New Testament in a way that is certainly not complete, but it carries with it a strand of commonality so that you might be included in the great long line of witnesses to God. We deal with reasons why witnesses are not listened to, the tragedy of witnesses that are broken and the glory as they are healed, we see the diversity of witnesses that Jesus brought into the story, and we understand that in doing so, Christ built a diverse chorus of witnesses as an example for the diversity and inclusion that we should find in the family of God on any given day.

As you study this year, we invite you to engage, interact, and to make sure you have a group of people that you can bounce ideas off of, argue with--in love, and grow together. Our second End Statement states that "Crosswalk will be a community where people learn and grow in an authentic relationship with God." This means that we are deeply invested in discipleship and interested in building a community of belonging that leans into the idea of study as a major portion of what we are called to do together as a body.

Thank you for joining us this year. I challenge you to study every day in 2022, to engage in the study of scripture in ways you never have before, and to believe that God is going to be just as faithful as he has always been, and can help you be more faithful in your study than you ever have before.

Blessings,
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WEEK 1

John 9:1-12

1 As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. 2 "Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" 3 "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. 4 We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned to us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. 5 But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. 7 He told him, "Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "sent"). So the man went and washed and came back seeing! 8 His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some said he was, and others said, "No, he just looks like him!" But the beggar kept saying, "Yes, I am the same one!" 10 They asked, "Who healed you? What happened?" 11 He told them, "The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.' So I went and washed, and now I can see!" 12 "Where is he now?" they asked.

This word is important in the new year as it sets the stage for what is about to happen in this weeks' pericope (the portion of scripture we have decided to study). But context is important in all of the aspects of our lives. It is so easy to take things out of context, or to even ignore the context that gives us clues to the importance of a text, or to the importance of what is being said in our lives. The context of this story is that a man was born blind, and was healed. The way Jesus healed him is interesting, as Jesus spit on the ground and made mud. It was not something Jesus needed to do, but he used it as a teachable moment for his disciples and for us. He corrected the disciples' thoughts about why the man was blind (sin) and both healed him physically and taught them all a lesson about what God can do. He also reminds them that time is of the essence when it comes to doing the work that God has for us to do. We need to remember that we are all on a timeline that is relatively short compared to eternity, so we should do what God calls us to do in much haste.

The Pool of Siloam was located at the south of the Tyropoeon Valley, it was built by King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:30), it was first explored by Edward Robinson in 1838,

and its purpose was to bring water from the spring of Gihon into Jerusalem. Again, context is important!

We need to not ignore the confusion that this miracle (the fifth major miracle of John--called a sign, not a miracle) caused in the community where this blind man had spent his life. His friends were confused, as he had been born blind, and they were used to things not changing, and certainly not changing in such a dramatic way. The truth is, they didn't expect much from God, and we don't often either. The chaos that ensued from this healing is palpable, and we should take note to understand that sometimes God works in ways that are almost troubling to us, but they are to create an opportunity to learn more about God, rather than to be convinced that we are worthy of these signs and wonders.

Every miracle we see is to expose to us an apocalyptic vision of who God is. (Remember, apocalipsis really means to unveil or reveal something). When we read this story with an eye to what God is revealing about himself, we see the story through different lenses than if we think the story is about the man who was healed.

1. What is God trying to reveal about himself to you in this story?
2. Have you ever been healed in ways that felt like they might have been miracles?
3. If so, what did God reveal about himself to you and your family?
4. How can we be a healing miracle to someone else to-day?

John 9:13-17

13 Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, 14 because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him. 15 The Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, "He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!" 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath." Others said, "But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?" So there was a deep division of opinion among them. 17 Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, "What's your opinion about this man who healed you?" The man replied, "I think he must be a prophet."

We are deep into the chaos that this sign created. One of the reasons he was taken to the Pharisees was so that he could be proven clean and healed. However, it doesn't seem to have gone that well. It did not go that well because there was division among the Pharisees as to who Jesus might be. While they were recognizing the sign, they were having a difficult time interpreting it.

By the way, this is something that we often do. We see the signs of God working in our lives, but we have a hard time deciphering what it all means. A good rule of thumb for interpreting miracles and signs in our lives is simply to ask; "what does this reveal about God?" We often look at these instances and wonder what it reveals about us, rather than God. When we do this, we are moving onto dangerous ground, ground that can swallow us up without a second thought. It is up to us to make sure we decipher these signs as toward God, not toward us. Often, it is the narcissistic nature of our thinking that creates confusion as to what God is revealing in these types of instances.

You can see in their argument, some of them are rule keepers (v.16) and some of them are curious about the very nature of Jesus. These differences of opinions and even process created deep divisions among the Pharisees. You see, it was not the truth of the healing that was in dispute, it was in the interpretation of the sign that divisions happened. Again, we are still involved in these kinds of interpretative arguments with one another. The truth is about Jesus, and not about us, when we understand this we view the signs differently, as they don't point to us. (We call this semiotics).

They did give the man an opportunity to share what he

thought about Jesus. He gave Jesus the highest honor that could be given at the time; a prophet. In the Jewish tradition, a Prophet was above a Rabbi in the hierarchy of influence. Therefore, the man was giving Jesus the highest honor he could at the time. He recognized the divine hand in his healing, and while he couldn't have imagined the incarnation of God in Jesus, he gave him the highest office he could think of. I wonder what the highest honor we could give to Jesus is?

1. Have you ever argued with someone over the interpretation of something?
2. How did you resolve the argument, or did you?
3. What could you have done differently in this situation, and how can you guard yourself against getting into arguments about interpretations again?

Day 4

24 So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, "God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner." 25 "I don't know whether he is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!" 26 "But what did he do?" they asked. "How did he heal you?"

Truly, this is one of my favorite interactions in all of scripture. The tone, the snarkiness, the wit, the sardonic sarcasm, and the fearlessness of the man in the face of spiritual persecution and doubt is simply awesome! He doesn't back down, for him things are not complicated; "I was blind but now I can see. . ." That is it, he doesn't try to make it too deeply theological, and he doesn't question the miracle. He simply lives into the reality of the unveiling of God through his healing.

That has happened to me a time or two. There have been times in my life that were really difficult and dark. When you finally get delivered from those places, the last thing you want to do is go back to living those memories. I suggest that you take steps in your life to shield you from those people, those places, and those experiences. You may have to protect yourself from people, and that is

In some respects, there are two kinds of blindness that are being dealt with here. The physical blindness of the man, but also the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, and they never get over that. We need to make sure that we don't become so biased and so blinded that we can't recognize the miracles that are happening all around us, every day. It is easy to become cynical and to live with very little expectation from God. When we live like this for too long, we become like dry crackers, we cannot bend or even see what God is doing in the lives of those around us. May God protect us from such little faith!

1. Do you believe that God is still active in the world today?
2. How does that look to you?
3. What can you do to recognize where God is already at work in your life?

[illegible]

Day 5

35 When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?"

—

Chesterton says "We are perishing for lack of wonder, not for lack of wonders." And he is correct. We have been given the wonder of Jesus, and when we recognize that gift, that power, and that presence, we have the opportunity to worship in a way that transcends these mortal limitations.

1. Has there ever been a time when you have experienced the presence of God so powerfully you had to worship?

2. What has God revealed to you about himself over the years?

3. Do you want to believe?

John 9:39-41

39 Then Jesus told him, "I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, "Are you saying we're blind?" 41 "If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty," Jesus replied. "But you remain guilty because you claim you can see."

Boom! Jesus is no longer playing games with these Pharisees! He has decided that he is going to tell them everything that he has been thinking about them. There are times when Jesus decides he is going to let us into his world just a little, and we see that there is power and decisiveness there. If anyone thinks Jesus is just a peaceful and soft kind of God, they have forgotten these kinds of interactions he had with people.

Remember, the things that Jesus said to the establishment were the same things that got him killed, so to think that Jesus didn't have a spine to say difficult things really doesn't make sense. The beauty of this interchange is that the Pharisees were eavesdropping on what he was saying to someone else, and they stuck their noses in where they didn't belong. They were incredulous that anyone would question their intent and motives, but Jesus did, and that changed everything.

To the point of the week, what we have seen is a witness coming from a man who had been healed of his blindness. He was a broken witness, fully healed by Jesus, and then fully convinced of the divinity of Jesus, by Jesus. If you can sense a pattern here, it is that Jesus is, at every point, the instigator, motivator, revealer, and healer. It is all of Jesus at each and every stage. Jesus was able to use a broken witness, because he knows how to heal what is broken at every juncture. There is no one who has ever been able to be so ubiquitous in their revealing of what wholeness is, what love is, and what grace is.

So the question becomes, are you a broken witness to the goodness of Christ in your life? Have you been able to be healed, to be revealed, and to be brought into an understanding of who God really is because he has been completely and deeply exposed by who Jesus really is? What have you thought about your witness? The power in this man's witness was twofold; he was simple in his approach "all I know is that I was blind and now I see..." and he was open in his willingness to believe; "... I want to believe in Him..." This was all he needed to do in order to take his

broken witness and continue to show others who God is.

1. How have you been broken by this world?
2. Have you asked God to use your broken witness?
3. Has he already? Explain.

Week 01 of 08
Sermon Series Companion Guide

Miracles and signs are to reveal to us more about God. Why do we want to make miracles and what we learn about God about us instead of about Him?

How do you and I, broken as we are, become better witnesses to who God is?

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

If you had to lose one sense or ability that you currently have, what would it be and how do you think your life would change?

Read together John 9: 1-41, and share any thoughts, insights, or impressions you had as you read through the passage.

What does Jesus' answer to the disciples' question reveal about how he views the man's suffering?

Did Jesus have to use mud to heal the man? If not, why do you think he did?

Do you think it would have been easier for the Pharisees to dismiss the healing if the man became blind later in life versus being born blind? Explain.

Why didn't the blind man's parents stand up for their son more?

What were the Pharisees blind to that became clear in this story?

Think about the blind man's journey from blind to sight; from not being able to go to synagogue to now having access, only to be kicked out because of his witness to who he thought Jesus was. Knowing all this, reflect on the blind man's journey and Jesus' action of seeking the man out in verse 35. Is Jesus only interested in physical healing? Who enabled the man to want to believe? Who enables us? (see also John 14: 6)

Thinking of something that God has done in your life, is there someone in your circle of influence (family, friend, coworker, neighbor) that you can share that with and what you learned about God through that experience? If so, pray for an opportunity to witness to them about God.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. (Romans 3: 23-25, NLT)

[illegible]

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read John 9:1-11 together with your family.

Have you ever gone outside to play in the mud? Maybe the sprinkler was leaking, or perhaps mud puddles were left behind after a big rainstorm. Usually getting muddy just makes a big mess. But Jesus used mud to do something amazing in this story. He brought healing out of a muddy mess! This week, think about how Jesus is working in your life to bring something incredible out of something not-so-amazing!

- 1. What happened to the blind man in this story?
- 2. How did Jesus use mud to help the man?
- 3. Was it the mud that helped the man, or something else?
- 4. Have you ever seen a miracle? What happened? What was it like?

THE WALK (YOUTH)

Week 01 of 08
Sermon Series Companion Guide

WITNESS

A Broken Witness
John 9:1-41

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Do you ever have a hard time speaking up? What was an experience you had where you wish you would have spoken up about something?

HEAD

Read John 9:1-41. Why did the disciples ask whether the man was blind because of his sin or his parents' sin? What do you think the connection between sin and physical ailments were?

What new paradigm does Jesus introduce instead of the current paradigm? (physical ailments due to sin vs. physical ailments due to..)

When the man was healed of his blindness, what do you think he experienced? (imagine you were him).

In this culture, the jewish leaders were regarded as experts in the law and move of God. They had their own perspective on how God worked. It was rare that a normal person, let alone a blind man, would give a counter argument to a pharisee. With the experience of the healed man in mind, what do you think gave him the courage to be strong in his witness in front of the jewish leaders? (verse 24-34)

HEART

Jesus explains a new reason why people experience physical ailments - Jesus explains that it wasn't the sin of a person (or their parents) that made them the way they were but rather so that God's glory could be seen through them. A surface level viewing of this idea could be seen as controlling on God's part. What do you think it's actually beautiful about this new paradigm that Jesus introduces? (God expresses his Glory how? By healing!)

The Man who could now see had a whole new perspective (literally and figuratively!) With his new found perspective, he didn't know everything but he knew one thing - Jesus wasn't just a regular person. No, Jesus was

more than that. Jesus was the one who made a blind man see for the first time. What would happen if you believed that Jesus wasn't just another self help model or just another religious figure but actually was the God who revealed himself through healing?

The Healed Man's witness was more than simply standing firm in what he believed. In fact, he didn't know completely what he believed. All he knew was that someone had changed his life, literally gave him new sight, and he was convinced that that person was more than something regular. He was a supernatural force of good and love. Think about your witness - what has Jesus done for you that grounds you in who he is?

HANDS

Witnessing is often something that is scary or uncomfortable. This story solidifies that reality - I can't imagine the newly healed blind man didn't experience any fear or discomfort in his witness. Instead of being fearless, the healed man was courageous. In his discomfort and fear he spoke up about who Jesus was to him. This paints a picture of what a witness is for us. A witness isn't someone who is fearless or even convinced of everything - no a witness is a person who is courageous and believes that Jesus has done something incredible in their life.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"... And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20

[illegible]

WEEK 2

Day 8

1 Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. 2 As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.

This story begins with Peter and John heading up to the temple to be part of the prayer service happening there. Some translations say they were heading up to the temple, as the temple was on one of the highest points in the city at the time. Of the many miracles that are told to us in the book of Acts, this one seems to resemble the Gospel accounts of miracles as much as any of them. Perhaps more striking still are the parallels between this story, Jesus' healing of a paralytic (Luke 5:17–26), and Paul's healing of a lame man at Lystra (Acts 14:8–11). There is one major difference; Jesus healed by his own authority, and Peter healed by the "name" of Jesus.

We also notice that Peter does the lion's share of speaking and interacting with this man, as John seems to fade into the background a bit. We probably shouldn't read too much into this, perhaps other than knowing that Peter always seemed to be the most assertive of the apostles, except for Paul. This is probably why those two got into difficulties later on.

The lame man then asked them for money. This is something we have all had to deal with. People asking us for money. However, some of the difference between now and then was that giving to the poor was essentially the

1. Have you ever been asked for money by someone?
2. How did it make you feel?
3. Scripture talks about us helping out the poor, the sick, and the needy, as well as widows and orphans, how do we do that now, in a way that is beneficial to them?

[illegible]

Day 9

4 Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. 6 But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!" 7 Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. 8 He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them. 9 All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. 10 When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded! 11 They all rushed out in amazement to Solomon's Colonnade, where the man was holding tightly to Peter and John.

This is such a great story, so uplifting and so simple. We see a man who is expecting very little from those who are walking by, and yet he receives the blessing of God in a much more powerful way than he had ever experienced before. This man was probably simply saying “alms, alms” something he would have done thousands of times each day. He was probably expecting a coin to be thrown in his direction that he would scramble to get a hold of before some other beggar might have taken it. Usually, those giving the coins would probably hardly even have given him a second glance.

So the fact that Peter and John stopped and decided to have a conversation with the man is a big deal. Beyond this, they were willing to give a gift that goes beyond silver and gold, and move straight to the heart of the real problem that the man was dealing with.

Last summer, I was working with some churches in the Walla Walla valley on some health equity programs, and was incredibly surprised as I worked with one congregation. They were small, and seemingly not one of the more important churches in the valley. But when I was speaking to their pastor, he told me that they had paid over 5 million dollars in medical debt for the underserved over the last 6 months. Honestly, it was incredible, and as I have been thinking about this story, I see a parallel; While Peter could have given this man money, rather, he got to the real issue. This church tried to do that as well. Barring the ability to heal each person, they were able to create an opportunity to fix something that would have sent them

The other portion of this text that is worthy of note is the reaction of this man. He was immediately healed, and people could see it. His response to this healing was, as the song and text go, he went “walking and leaping and praising God!” (I can’t write that without singing that tune in my head, and neither can you read it without hearing it!)

His response to the healing is what I always wanted to see in all the other healing stories. I can only imagine the thrill of being healed in such a powerful and dramatic fashion! It must have been amazing.

1. What do you think you would feel like if you were healed of something so dramatic?
2. What could you do to help someone feel healed and made whole?
3. Have you ever walked, leaped and praised the Lord for something he has done?

[illegible]

Day 10

12 Peter saw his opportunity and addressed the crowd. “People of Israel,” he said, “what is so surprising about this? And why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness? 13 For it is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of all our ancestors—who has brought glory to his servant Jesus by doing this. This is the same Jesus whom you handed over and rejected before Pilate, despite Pilate’s decision to release him. 14 You rejected this holy, righteous one and instead demanded the release of a murderer. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. And we are witnesses of this fact!

You see, Peter had to make the case as to why he could heal, why they couldn't, and where that power comes from. He spends his time in verses 13-15 teaching, pointing, and rebuking, all at the same time. Again, this sounds like his pentecost sermon in Acts 2:14-41. He makes the case that the power comes from being a servant of Jesus, through the glorification of Jesus, his resurrection as well. He uses a common patriarchal formula (the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). In fact, it is the same formula that Luke uses in chapter 20:37 of his gospel. It becomes a clear and powerful connection to what has already been seen in the gospel penned by the same person as the book of Acts.

What does this have to do with joy? And that is a fair question, to be sure. In fact, this part of the chapter actually seems pretty negative, as Peter talks about them rejecting Jesus before Pilate, their desire to release a murderer (Barrabas), and the fact that they killed the “Author of Life.” But the truth is that Peter is making a case for the very glorification of Jesus that he had mentioned before. Peter was not interested in taking any credit for the healing, rather, he was interested in forcing the people around him and John to take a closer and more introspective look into what they may have done to exacerbate the death of

3. What do you think Peter was trying to teach them in the previous verses?

[illegible]

Day 11

16 “Through faith in the name of Jesus, this man was healed—and you know how crippled he was before. Faith in Jesus’ name has healed him before your very eyes.

17 “Friends, I realize that what you and your leaders did to Jesus was done in ignorance. 18 But God was fulfilling what all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah—that he must suffer these things.

Perhaps Peter said it this way so that we might understand that it is faith alone, not the possessor of the faith that matters. For after all, faith is the greatest miracle of all, and that miracle stood open to all in Solomon's Colonnade that day.

Now, in the next two verses he seems to change his tone to be almost conciliatory. That is, he almost seems to want to bring his friends into his inner circle so they might understand a little bit better. In fact, he actually lets them off the hook by saying it was the leaders who did this to Jesus, and they did this out of ignorance rather than hatred. As well, he reminds them that there were things Jesus needed to go through, according to scripture, in order to see the prophecies fulfilled among them.

In the book of Acts there are four mitigating factors given to the Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus. 1, ignorance. 2, nowhere is there a blanket condemnation of Jews; only the Jerusalem Jews are given that responsibility. 3, the Gentiles are shown to have shared in the culpability of the death of Jesus. And 4, the suffering of the messiah was bound up in scripture beforehand, so it all needed to happen the way that it did.

Therefore, Peter did not seem interested in leaving them out of God's salvation plan, rather, he was giving them opportunities to be a part of it.

2. How is Peter bringing his Jewish brothers and sisters back into the conversation?

3. What do you think that

Acts 3:19-23

19 Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. 20 Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. 21 For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your own people. Listen carefully to everything he tells you.' 23 Then Moses said, 'Anyone who will not listen to that Prophet will be completely cut off from God's people.'

There is some interesting wordplay here to which we should pay attention. Peter says to "repent" and "turn to God." For Peter, the idea of not following Jesus means that you have moved away from God. Therefore, there is a need to repent and return to God, as by not recognizing the messiah you have stepped away from your relationship with God in its entirety.

What happens when you accept Jesus as your savior, Peter describes this as well; a time of "refreshment" that comes with the presence of the Lord, and he will send Jesus to us again. Whether he is talking about the second coming of Christ or about the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit is not clear, but it does not have to be. Sometimes, when we focus on the second coming of Christ, we forget that he has been promised to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit, and that we can access that love and that Joy all the time. Of course, we want Jesus to come again, and soon; but in the meantime, we can at least recognize his presence, which leads to great Joy!

In verse 21 we see some logistics made clear. But they are not logistics for logistics sake. They are not so we know a formula, or a piece of a puzzle. Rather, it is because there is something that Peter is assuming in this conversation. He is assuming that Jesus was the messiah, and that the Jews need to recognize it before they can understand something else. This assumption of his divinity and messiahship is an indelible marker for Peter. It is something that must be recognized, made clear, and made real in everyone's life.

In that same way, we need to recognize the messiahship of Jesus in our lives as well. He already came, and conquered sin and death, so that we may have life, abundant and eternal. We are deeply blessed by the acknowledgment of this truth, and we can live our lives with a differ-

ent kind of joy than those who have no hope, or even those who continue to wait for a promised messiah. This joy that is transcendent, eternal, and palpable. A joy that does not wait for things to be well to become real, but rather, shows up in the midst of our sorrows and our trials.

1. Have you ever had joy like this?
2. When did you know Jesus was the messiah?
3. Have you ever had to repent and turn back to God?

Day 13

24 “Starting with Samuel, every prophet spoke about what is happening today. 25 You are the children of those prophets, and you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors. For God said to Abraham, ‘Through your descendants all the families on earth will be blessed.’ 26 When God raised up his servant, Jesus, he sent him first to you people of Israel, to bless you by turning each of you back from your sinful ways.”

In verse 26, the use of the word offspring is singular, so he can only be speaking of Jesus. Much as in Galatians 3:16: God gave the promises to Abraham and his child. And notice that the Scripture doesn't say "to his children," as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says "to his child"—and that, of course, means Christ. This means that the emphasis that Peter is making is always going to be deeply connected to Christ.

This story goes beyond the joy the lame man experienced, and it moves into the joy that all of Israel can experience if they are willing to see just who Jesus really is. Without this recognition, there will always be a lack in their ability to live full and abundant lives for the kingdom of God. This is what we have been given by the grace of Jesus and by understanding that He is the overwhelming love and power in the universe. What a beautiful and powerful statement of trust in us that Jesus would come to save us. Peter knew this, and wanted the Jews who wit-

1. Do you think you would have seen Jesus as a messiah or just a great teacher and prophet if you lived back then?
2. Would Peter's words have fallen on receptive ears?
3. Would you have listened?

Week 02 of 08
Sermon Series Companion Guide

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Acts 3:1-9 together with your family.

This is a pretty dramatic story! From someone unable to walk to someone becoming able to leap for joy is a pretty big change! Have you ever had a really big change in your life? Maybe you learned to tie your shoes, or you could finally climb the big tree, maybe finally riding a bike all by yourself. You probably felt really excited, happy, or joyful at your new skill. These big changes come from us growing and maturing. But the change talked about in this story came from a different source. This week, think about how you can make someone else's life amazing by showing up in their story.

- 1. In the story, what did the man do? And, what was given to him?
- 2. What did the man do after he received his gift?
- 3. Why didn't the man jump up and down thanking Peter and John?
- 4. What amazing thing has God done for you?

THE WALK (YOUTH)

Week 02 of 08
Sermon Series Companion Guide

WITNESS

A Joyful witness
Acts 3:1-26

HEART

We see something incredible in this portion of scripture - instead of helping the lame beggar the way we would have expected Peter helps the man in a new way. Instead of helping him in a way that would last only a moment, Peter gives this man a new life by healing him of his paralysis. Here we see that Jesus doesn't want to just give us a moment of a better life but wants to change life in a way that allows us to experience the fullness of life.

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever had to choose between living for the moment or living for the future? Perhaps it was when you were a kid and your parents gave you some money. You had a decision to make - were you going to save it for something great or use it for something immediately. Think of a time you had to choose between the momentary and the future.

Here we learn that Joy doesn't come from the momentary but rather from things that last. God longs for you to have a life, not a moment. Today, think of how you can live not for the moment but rather for life. What part of your life do you need surrender because it's for the momentary?

HEAD

Read Acts 3:1-26. What is significant about the temple? What is the purpose of going to the temple?

The temple was the place where you could communally connect and pray with God. It signifies community with God and each other. We see a picture of a community in the first sentence. Yet there is someone missing from this community. Who is missing and why are they missing? (you can refer to the previous weeks lesson for some guidance)

HANDS

A major lesson that can be learned here is that part of the mission of God is inviting those who have been on the outside of the community into the community. How can your witness bring others into the community? Think of how God has changed your life in a way that isn't just momentary but in a way that lasts. What joy can you remember and experience that leads to others seeing the glory of God?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life." John 10:10

Instead of offering money to the person on the outside of the community Peter offers something different. What does Peter offer and why is this more significant than money? (think about what a lame person's life looked like. Could they live a normal life on their own?)

According to scripture, when the man was healed he jumped, walked, and praised God as he entered the temple with Peter and John. In light of the picture of community we see and the previous question, why do you think this man was so joyful?

The witness from the healed man didn't necessarily come from his words about Jesus, though I wouldn't be surprised if he did talk about Jesus. Scripture doesn't record his words. Yet he was witnessing through his joy. How do you think this joyful witness inspired others?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

WEEK 3

John 20:1-2

1 Early on Sunday morning] while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. 2 She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, "They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

This week, we are speaking about witnesses that are not always believed, and in this particular case, female witnesses. It seems appropriate to pose the question: why are women so often ignored as witnesses to the gospel? While we will be studying from the book of John, we will also look to some other texts in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) in order to flesh out this story a bit more. The gospel of Luke has a broader story that includes disciples and their reactions to the story that the women told them.

While scripture is often dominated by men, there are some particular stories of women that need to be remembered and revered. I have always thought this story of the women going to the tomb on an early Sunday morning is an important example of the fearlessness and commitment that women witnesses to Jesus often had. It helps us to look at these stories and to remember that it was not just men who had a commitment to Jesus and his ministry, particularly after his death and resurrection.

So the story begins on an early Sunday morning, they are up with the darkness; and we know from Matthew's account that Mary Magdalene was not alone in this visit (Matt 28:1). If we follow the story of Matthew's text from 27:55 through the burial and resurrection, it would appear that the "other Mary" refers to Jesus' mother who had already taken a secondary place before the resurrection. This is interesting in that some faith's give her such a storied and high position, while in the New Testament her witness was already being a bit downplayed.

Luke refers to the time of day as the last of the watches, so probably between 3am and 6am. The Greek word is BLEPO, or glanced, when it comes to what Mary did in the tomb. She glanced around and saw that Jesus was no longer there. This was a problem, as the reason for them coming was so that they could anoint his body with spices. An interesting note in the Johannine story (John's Gospel), is that while only one woman was mentioned, it is probable that he is using Mary Magdalene as a model or representative of a type of person. He does this often

with people such as Andrew, Nathaniel, Nicodemus, the woman at the well in Samaria, the Blind Man, Thomas and Martha. We should spend less time on the number of people who went to see the tomb, as the other gospels say there were more, and more time pondering the type of person Mary was.

1. What type of person was Mary? What are the characteristics we know about from the other gospels and what do they tell us about her as a model?

2. Do you think you might have been with the group that went to see the tomb in the morning that Sunday?

3. How do you think you would have spent Sabbath after Jesus had died?

January 17, 2022
Day 16

John 20:3-9

3 Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb. 4 They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn't go in. 6 Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there, 7 while the cloth that had covered Jesus' head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings. 8 Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed— 9 for until then they still hadn't understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead.

Now, this account moves right on to the men in the story, but let us take a look at the Lucan account of this story, that doesn't move quite so quickly to Peter running down to the tomb.

Luke 24:9 So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. 11 But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. 12 However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.

You can see an interesting dynamic here; the men had a hard time believing Mary. There are probably 2 reasons for this; 1) The story was pretty hard to believe, why would the tomb be empty? 2) A woman was telling them this. Unfortunately, this is too often the case when it comes to the witness we see coming from women in the church. We underplay their importance, we deny their authority to teach scripture, and we lean into the very poor and bankrupt theology of Male Headship that assumes women are somehow less than men in the eyes of God. (This sometimes has to do with the order found in creation, or by taking specific texts of Paul about women and misinterpreting them as saying that women have less of a role in the church than men).

Of course, we could spend a great deal of time on the theology of Male Headship, but we won't here. To give it too much time is to give bad theology too much real estate on these pages. Suffice it to say that in the creation story, Eve was made from the Rib of Adam, and is given the term "help Meet", which has an indication that man is not complete without women, and she was not taken from his

heel, so she is to be seen as an equal and a compliment to man. To diminish the work that women do for the gospel is to literally put us back into an age where we believe that God cannot work through anyone he calls.

However, if we jump back into the story, taking a look at what happened at the tomb; the women went there, and two men showed up, with “dazzling robes” says the Lucan account (24:4). The men tell the women that Jesus has risen from the tomb, and they remind the women of the prophecy of his resurrection on the third day. The women are reminded and rush back to tell the disciples, who struggle to believe, yet they run to see for themselves. As they looked into the tomb they were wondering what happened. Interestingly, the women already knew, as they were listening to the men they had met at the tomb.

1. Have you ever wondered what you would feel if you had heard that Jesus was no longer in the tomb? Would you have looked for the logical explanation, or the super-logical explanation?

2. The resurrection of Jesus is a pivotal moment in the story of the Gospel, and it is something that was not ever denied by the disciples, even unto death. It must be important, how important is it to you?

3. Can you take a few minutes to ponder the resurrection, perhaps write a few notes about what it means theologically, and what it means to you today?

[illegible]

Day 17

10 Then they went home.

Here is the question; “Who went home?”

When we go to the garden tomb in Jerusalem, we understand that staying in that beautiful setting would have been not only pleasant, but also pretty calming. It is a beautiful place, and if the original tomb had looked anything like it, it would have been a great place to stay and think on all that had happened. Mary did not know what was about to take place, so we can imagine that she was taking a moment to try and understand the implications of everything that happened in those early hours.

And how long do you stay somewhere until God speaks to you? There are many ways that God speaks to you and me, and often, for many of us, they are not from an audible voice. Rather, impressions, intuitions, or simply God's revelation through the things that we read, that we study, or that we hear. But there is one thing that is in common no matter how God speaks to you; it takes time. So the fact that Peter went home before the visit from heaven is worth mentioning.

1. What is your devotional practice?
2. Do you have a system, a usual place, or a way that you connect with God each day.
3. Take some time to think about it, to plan, and to become more consistent with your devotional life.

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

1. Where do you see Jesus working, through the Holy Spirit in your life?
2. What are the outcomes you hope to see as Jesus is alive and working in the world today?
3. How can you help the work of Jesus and the kingdom of God around you today?

3. How can you help the work of Jesus and the kingdom of God around you today?

John 20:14-15

14 She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. 15 "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

Sometimes, when we don't allow ourselves to believe the lesser witnesses that God puts in our way; for Mary it was the angels--Jesus decides to get in the mix. Mary did not know what to do with the message that came from the angels, so as she turned to leave, she saw Jesus, but did not recognize him. Sometimes that is how it is with us. Jesus is trying to speak to us, but we don't recognize him until he allows us to.

Mary is still dealing in the practical. She is asking him to tell her where they had taken Jesus. She was still worried about her duties to take care of the body. It is very difficult for us to sometimes get out of our practical heads and move into the places where belief takes the place of duty and practice. This is hard for many of us, especially if we are of a very practical nature.

I teach a class to nurses at Azusa Pacific University that deals in the philosophical and theological understanding of faith and God. It is a fun class to teach, but nurses are very practical in nature, and they often just want to know the answers or "how things work." Unfortunately, that is not the way it always happens when it comes to faith. Sometimes there is no process other than the experience of faith as we grow and learn and believe. This can be incredibly frustrating for people who are built with a more practical mind and application of life.

When Mary was confronted with a difficult truth, she chose to lean into her duty as one who would anoint Jesus' body with the spices they had carried for so long. However, by doing this she was missing the point of the revelation that Jesus was trying to give her at the time. She was deeply in love with Jesus, but could not recognize him for the work she had been given to do.

1. When have you had your nose so close to your work that you forgot who was asking you to do the work for Him?

2. What do you see as the work God has given you to do in this world?

3. Do you take the time to stop and see if Jesus is still around and asking you to come to Him?

hear the Gospel witnessed powerfully by the women in our midst.

May God continue to call women to gospel ministry, and may we have open hearts and open ears to hear the words that God places on their hearts.

1. Who are some of the powerful female voices you have heard in your life?
2. Why do you think God calls women as well as men to the gospel work?
3. How can you support women in ministry?

[illegible]

WLK
33

January 22, 2022

Day 21

Week 03 of 08

An Unheard Witness

Sermon Series Companion Guide

John 20: 1-18

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever been surprised by someone that you love dearly? Or maybe you surprised somebody that you love and had not seen in a while? What was it like? What feelings did you experience?

HEAD

Read together John 20: 1-18, and share any thoughts, insights, or impressions you had as you read through the passage.

Imagine you are Mary and you are the first to arrive at the tomb. It's two days after the crucifixion and you're completely distraught and grief-stricken. You see the stone has been moved and the body is gone. How would you react?

Mary is a very unlikely witness and should have been an "unheard" witness however John gives her incredible importance here; first to the empty tomb, first to tell the disciples, and first to see the resurrected Christ! Why do you think these things were so significant for that day/age and what implications do they have for us today?

There is a lot of excitement and anticipation in this text. They ran, they looked, and they saw. In the Greek, the word for "saw" is different all three times it is used here. When the first disciple saw the clothes, the word *blepo* (to notice something) is used. When Peter saw, the word *theoreo* (to observe intently, or ponder) is used. Finally, when the other disciple went into the tomb he saw and believed, the word *eidon* (to pay special attention, perceive, comprehend, or understand) is used. Why do you think John emphasized these three different layers of "seeing"?

HEART

After seeing that the tomb was empty, Peter and John went home (v.10), but Mary stayed. Why do you think that was? What can we learn from this particular portion of the story?

Jesus uses a special term to describe his relationship with the disciples in v.17. What is it and how is it different from what he used before? What is the significance of this?

HANDS

When it comes to His resurrection, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway." Mary received surefire evidence of the resurrection, but what evidence do we have today? Why is believing in the resurrection so central and crucial to the Christian faith and the gospel?

As you think about the importance of your witness in regards to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, in what ways can you make your witness not go unheard?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

"The fact is that Christ has been raised from the dead. He has become the first of a great harvest of those who will be raised to life again. So you see, just as death came into the world through one man, Adam, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man, Christ."

1 Corinthians 15:20-21

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read John 20:1-18 together with your family.

Sometimes you might hear a story that is just too good to be true. That makes it really hard to believe the person telling the story. But what if the story is true, and it really is that amazing? Today's story really is that amazing, but not everyone believed the news when Mary told her story. Even though Jesus spoke directly to her, and she had a first-hand experience with the risen Lord, people still had trouble believing.

- 1. Can you imagine if you were the one who saw Jesus? What would you tell people?
- 2. Do you think people would believe your story? Why, or why not?
- 3. What is something that Jesus has done in your life that you want to tell others about?

NOTES

WEEK 4

Day 22

1 When the uproar was over, Paul sent for the believers and encouraged them. Then he said good-bye and left for Macedonia. 2 While there, he encouraged the believers in all the towns he passed through. Then he traveled down to Greece, 3 where he stayed for three months. He was preparing to sail back to Syria when he discovered a plot by some Jews against his life, so he decided to return through Macedonia. 4 Several men were traveling with him. They were Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe; Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. 5 They went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. 6 After the Passover ended, we boarded a ship at Philippi in Macedonia and five days later joined them in Troas, where we stayed a week.

He was planning a trip through Macedonia and hoped that he would connect with Titus on the way and give him a report on how things went with the letter. He went through Troas, but unfortunately did not connect with Titus there. He continued through Macedonia, perhaps Philippi, in the hopes of connecting with Titus there. He finally met up with Titus and heard that the letter had a positive effect and that the church had become reconciled with Paul. Paul then writes 2 Corinthians at this point and sends it before his coming back to Corinth. Finally, he went to Corinth himself, and this is the visit that is referred to in Acts 20 as his three month stay in Greece. It was his final visit to Corinth and probably took place around A.D. 55-56, and is also where he probably wrote

That's a lot of background, but what we are beginning to see is the importance of community when it comes to the witness for the gospel in the world. Paul was an apostle, so he had been tasked with starting churches, taking care of them, directing them, as well as continuing the work of the gospel through other newly established communities as well. Paul was a church planter, and truly churches can be powerful witnesses to God in the world, but only if they are on track with what their values, goals, mission and vision say about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. Have you ever planted a church?
2. Is it easy? What voices were you listening to while you did it?
3. How is it going? Has God called you to establish a community of belonging where you are?
4. Does a small group of people count as a church?

[illegible]

Day 23

7 On the first day of the week, we gathered with the local believers to share in the Lord's Supper. Paul was preaching to them, and since he was leaving the next day, he kept talking until midnight. 8 The upstairs room where we met was lighted with many flickering lamps. 9 As Paul spoke on and on, a young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, became very drowsy. Finally, he fell sound asleep and dropped three stories to his death below. 10 Paul went down, bent over him, and took him into his arms. "Don't worry," he said, "he's alive!" 11 Then they all went back upstairs, shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together. Paul continued talking to them until dawn, and then he left. 12 Meanwhile, the young man was taken home alive and well, and everyone was greatly relieved.

Regardless, we have a story of Eutychus falling from the window. Paul had been preaching for a long time, and the poor kid fell asleep in a windowsill, and fell out, fell three stories, and died. Is this a cautionary tale for preachers not to preach for so long? Perhaps, and I will take note of it. However, moreso, it is a story of the power of God and of the desire of the community to gather together, to listen to the witness of Paul, and to linger together, even late into the night.

Have you ever been at someone's house and you are having such a good time that you don't want to leave, even though you know that you have perhaps overstayed your welcome? It seems like this was happening in this story a bit. While the coming of the Apostle would have been a big deal, they were in no rush to get out of the place where he was preaching. When the young man fell from the window, it was an opportunity for God to be glorified in his

I can imagine they became pretty powerful witnesses to the power of God that night. I wonder if we can be the same sort of witnesses that these people were as we testify to what God has done in our lives? When have you seen God move, when have you seen him heal, when have you seen God move in the midst of worship and the community.

Interestingly, Crosswalk has grown not because of what we do each week, but by the power of the testimony and witness that you have given to others in your life. As people hear that God is good and moving at Crosswalk, you have invited others to come and be a part of what God is doing and has done here. It is because of your witness to what God is doing that we see kingdom growth, baptisms, professions of faith, and more people coming to understand the grace of Jesus Christ.

1. Who can you witness to what God is doing today?
2. When was the last time you brought someone to church with you?
3. How can we continue to support your witness to the world?

[illegible]

January 25, 2022
Day 24

Acts 20:13-17

13 Paul went by land to Assos, where he had arranged for us to join him, while we traveled by ship. 14 He joined us there, and we sailed together to Mitylene. 15 The next day we sailed past the island of Kios. The following day we crossed to the island of Samos, and a day later we arrived at Miletus. 16 Paul had decided to sail on past Ephesus, for he didn't want to spend any more time in the province of Asia. He was hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, in time for the Festival of Pentecost. 17 But when we landed at Miletus, he sent a message to the elders of the church at Ephesus, asking them to come and meet him.

“The journey from Troas to Miletus is given with exceptional detail. It seems to have taken about five days’ sailing time, with each port given representing a day’s journey. They evidently put it into port each night. The winds usually died during the night, and the rocky coastal area was more favorable to daytime sailing. From Assos their voyage took them to Mitylene, the chief city of the island of Lesbos, located on the eastern shore of the island. The next day’s voyage took them just offshore of the island of Kios, which was famed as the birthplace of the poet Homer. The following day they passed by the island of Samos, the birthplace of the “founder of mathematics,” Pythagoras. On the final day they sailed to Miletus, a major Asian city in Paul’s day which lay on the south shore of the Latonian gulf at the mouth of the river Maeander.” (See D. Boyd, “Miletus,” *IDBSup*, 597f.)

This is just travel logistics. Pretty boring stuff. But maybe not. In verse 16 we see that he wants to get to Jerusalem in order to be there for the festival of Pentecost. However, in the very next verse he summons the leaders of the church in Ephesus to come and meet him. Miletus is about 30 miles away from Ephesus, and the trip could have taken about 5 days for them to get there. So let's give a messenger a couple days to get to Ephesus, moving quickly, and then another 5 days to get the delegation back from Ephesus. Paul is going to be staying in Miletus for a while!

There seems to be an important message that he has for the delegation from Ephesus, and we will see that in the ongoing texts. But perhaps it is important to note that he was willing to take some time out of his schedule in order to meet with the leaders from Ephesus and tell them to guard themselves. Did Paul know that he wasn't going to be getting back there? Was he willing to forego his schedule to give a warning, or to simply meet with them

because he loved them and the work they were doing in that big city of Ephesus? All of these questions don't really have an answer, but what we do know is that he was willing to see them and wanted them to know something.

The good news is that they were willing to come and learn from the apostle. They did not think they were too big of a church to listen to the one who had helped plant and grow the church. He had Apostolic authority in that church. This is something we don't see too often anymore. That kind of influence is often lost in today's world. We have "famous" pastors, but we don't have those with apostolic authority to often. Can you think of anyone who has that for your church and community experience?

1. Have you ever gone to hear a preacher or leader in the church? How far did you go?
2. Why was it important to go hear what they had to say?
3. Who are the preachers and teachers you look up to, and are willing to let have influence over your life?

[illegible]

Acts 20:18-21

18 When they arrived he declared, “You know that from the day I set foot in the province of Asia until now 19 I have done the Lord’s work humbly and with many tears. I have endured the trials that came to me from the plots of the Jews. 20 I never shrank back from telling you what you needed to hear, either publicly or in your homes. 21 I have had one message for Jews and Greeks alike—the necessity of repenting from sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus.

Paul begins this sermon, sometimes called the “Miletus Address” with a remembering of what he has done for the Lord over the years. Her reminds them that he has endured trials and tribulations that often came from the plots of Jews. He also has them remember that he never shrank back from telling them what they needed to hear when it came to the gospel.

Paul often spoke of himself as a Doulos, or bondservant of the Lord. To Paul, this means that he is a servant and that the stance of a servant is humility, and that is paramount to being able to serve God to the fullest extent he is asking us to serve him. Humility is a way that we can understand who God is and who we are.

A second understanding of his ministry is that he was ready and willing to declare the goodness of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was prepared in season and out of season, holding nothing back. He did this regardless of the consequences that he often suffered to declare the gospel whenever he could. He preached in the churches, synagogues and in houses throughout all of his ministry. And here, as he gives his last words to those who came from Ephesus, we see him recalling and remembering his ministry as one that was at the ready at all times.

When someone writes the memoirs of your gospel ministry, what will they say? Will they be able to say that you were prepared, in season and out of season, to share the love that was so incredibly shared with you? What will the fruits of your ministry be, and will they outlast your time on this earth? Is there a way that you can understand the role that God has asked you to play in the kingdom of God at this time in your life?

Paul was also reminding them of the inclusiveness of his witness to the gospel. He had preached to everyone, both Jews and Greeks, and no one had been left out. Had this been the case in Ephesus, the church would not have grown in the way that it did. And while he always claimed

to be the apostle for the Gentiles, he never abandoned his Jewish brothers and sisters and always preached to them as well.

1. Who do you feel you are called to preach/teach to?
2. How can God use you to proclaim the Gospel today?
3. Is the Gospel you preach as inclusive as the one that Paul preached in his day?

more content and willing to continue to follow the will of God in our lives.

1. Do you have a sense of accomplishment when it comes to the calling of God in your life?
2. What would that look like to accomplish God's call?
3. How can you continue to work for the kingdom, even if you have that sense of accomplishment?

[illegible]

Acts 20:28-38

28 “So guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders. 29 I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. 30 Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. 31 Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you.

32 “And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself.

33 “I have never coveted anyone’s silver or gold or fine clothes. 34 You know that these hands of mine have worked to supply my own needs and even the needs of those who were with me. 35 And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

36 When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them. 37 They all cried as they embraced and kissed him good-bye. 38 They were sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they escorted him down to the ship.

Verse 28 is a clear appeal to give a basic charge to the elders to be watchful overseers of the church. It is important to notice that they are first charged to guard themselves against any attacks. This is so very important in that if we are not careful in the teachers we listen to, we may find ourselves off track with the gospel and falling into heresy by listening to those false teachers who will inevitably show up when the true gospel is being preached.

I am often fascinated by the way Satan gets pretty active as the inclusive and powerful gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached in a church. I think there are a lot of churches that he doesn’t really need to bother with as they are caught in a cultural expression of christianity, but have lost the true heart of Christ, which makes this idea of Christianity sacred. As churches get lost, as their leaders get distracted, we are in danger of becoming just another cultural artifact that is interesting to listen to, but has little impact on the world that it is called to minister to. However, even worse is for it to become so toxic or vitriolic that the witness it carries for Christ becomes some-

thing worse than neutral, it actually becomes a sickness in the world, adding to the noise of hatred and anger that is too often heard much too loudly in our lives.

The gospel of Jesus, as expressed here in the book of Acts, is one that is inclusive, is full of love and joy, and is relentless in its pursuit of others to experience the grace that Jesus has given to his followers. When this is preached and it becomes a focus for a church and faith community, you will see a few things; growth, and struggle. Everytime the Gospel is preached, you can bet there will be a strong reaction from those who would rather that they control the narrative of Jesus.

But that is something that Paul understood. The gospel is not something to be tamed, rather, it is something that can change the world, and as such, is probably the most dangerous story ever told. If you are tired of hearing the gospel, then it has not been preached in its power to you yet. Keep listening, keep learning and keep becoming the community that is a witness to the gospel, as the church in Ephesus was. Deep in the midst of pagan commerce, the church in Ephesus was a light to the world of how Jesus can change culture, values, and the world.

1. Where have you heard the Gospel preached with power?
2. Have you ever experienced the pushback that Satan gives when the Gospel is preached?
3. How can you make sure you are connected to a faith community that continually leans into the power of the Gospel?

Day 28

Week 04 of 08

A Community of Witnesses

Sermon Series Companion Guide

Acts 20: 1-38

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever been part of something that was making (or made) a really significant impact in the world? We're talking on a large scale here...something that was much bigger than yourself? Something you had to partner with many people in to make it all come together? What was that like for you?

HEAD

Read together Acts 20: 1-38, and share any thoughts, insights, or impressions you had as you read through the passage.

Paul's missionary journeys were often long and complex. Why was it important for him to have helpers on this particular journey?

What are your impressions of this meeting in Troas that went all night and ended up having someone die and be brought back to life?! What do we learn about the believers in Troas? About Paul? And was Eutychus really dead or just knocked out? Does it matter?!

As Paul prepares to go to Jerusalem, not knowing what hardships he will face, it appears he is ready for whatever will come. What do you think about that? Share your perspectives on his attitude found in verse 24.

HEART

Paul was accompanied by a large number of helpers on this journey. These men were from various churches he had established and were invested in his ministry and cared deeply for Paul's health and wellbeing. Who do you have in your life like this? Who are you there for in this way?

How would you complete this sentence: "The one thing I must accomplish at any cost is _____?" How does that relate to Paul's goal in v.24?

HANDS

Paul quotes Jesus in v.35 by saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." In our relationship with Christ, the more we receive from Him, the more we're able to give to others. What is limiting you from receiving more from God? What changes can you make this week to allow for more time/space to receive so that you can give?

In verses 37-38 we see the believers being overwhelmed with sadness at the possibility of never seeing Paul again. If you had to say 'goodbye' to someone for the last time, what parting words would you share? How do you think you would be remembered and spoken of by them?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

[illegible]

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Acts 20:7-12 together with your family.

Do you like to stay up late at night? When I finally learned to read story books, I would stay up late into the night reading with a small light under the blanket. I just couldn't get enough of these amazing stories. In the Bible story today, the community is gathered to hear Paul's amazing stories about Jesus. They were all so happy to be together in community listening to Paul that they were up very late at night. The community heard Paul tell stories about Jesus and the community witnessed the power of Jesus at work that night too! This week, how do you want to share how Jesus is at work in your life?

- 1. What happened to the boy in this story?
- 2. What did Paul do for the boy?
- 3. If you were in the crowd that night, and you saw what happened, what would you tell your community?

[illegible]

WEEK 5

Matthew 27:32

Along the way, they came across a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. We are still talking about different witness to the gospel, how they impact our lives, and what it means for the church today. This week we will begin to spend some time with Simon of Cyrene, the North African who carried the Cross of Jesus when Jesus faltered and fell under its weight.

The people of Cyrene were African people who lived in what is now Libya. Situated on the Mediterranean coast of northern Africa, Cyrene was the chief city of the region known then as Cyrenaica, the nation that borders Egypt on the west. Cyrene itself lay about 450 miles (720 km) west of Alexandria. Even though northern Africa is often considered Arab today, there were no Arab peoples anywhere in northern Africa in Bible times (Old Testament or New Testament), only Africans. Arab peoples did not move into Africa until the 7th-11th centuries A.D., about 600 - 1,000 years after the Bible was finished, by some accounts.

Cyrene, capital city of the Roman province Cyrenaica. The city was famous for three schools of philosophy and for native sons who excelled in medicine, mathematics, rhetoric and literature. Perhaps the most illustrious of these was the astronomer Eratosthenes, who in approximately 200 BC computed the circumference of the earth with remarkable accuracy. No less brilliant was the Hellenistic poet Callimachus, who became the director of the library at Alexandria and acquired an astonishing reputation for the versatility of his aptitudes. Athletes from Cyrene excelled in Olympic competition, especially in horse chariot racing.

Ships carried corn, oil and wool from the fertile fields of Cyrene, as well as a contraceptive known as sylvium, much sought after in Rome. Cyrene maintained a monopoly on the herb until it became extinct through overharvesting approximately AD 200.

So, Cyrene was not simply a little village, it was a pretty significant place in that time. As well, Africa itself was a real and true presence in the Middle East in the first century. It would have not been unheard of to see a panoply of peoples and cultures represented in Jerusalem at any time, particularly during the time of festivals and celebrations. Jerusalem lay at the center of many trade routes in the Middle East, and therefore, having a plethora of

cultures and people represented would not have been strange.

Today, I will leave you with this poem from Countee Cullen, an early 20th Century Black Poet from Harlem.

Simon the Cyrenian Speaks
Countee Cullen, Poet/Harlem Renaissance (1925)

He never spoke a word to me,
And yet He called my name;
He never gave a sign to me,
And yet I knew and came.
At first I said, "I will not bear
His cross upon my back;
He only seeks to place it there
Because my skin is black."
But He was dying for a dream,
And He was very meek,
And in His eyes there shone a gleam
Men journey far to seek.
It was Himself my pity bought;
I did for Christ alone
What all of Rome could not have wrought
With bruises of lash or stone.

1. Have you given much thought to people of color in the Bible?
2. Do you know of any, and where were they from?
3. How does Scripture approach the idea of race and ethnicity?

diversity that was expressed in the Gospel, as well as the diversity that makes the church such an exciting place to worship on any given Sabbath.

A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.)

The citizens of Cyrene roamed far and wide throughout the Mediterranean world as merchants, athletes, philosophers, orators, mercenaries and entertainers. The Jewish community of the city had a deep interest in Judaism and produced important literature including a five-book history of the Maccabees by Jason the Cyrenian (2 Maccabees 2:43). There were close ties with Jerusalem. Simon of Cyrene may have been impressed to carry the cross of Jesus when he came as a devout Jew to pay a Passover visit to Jerusalem. Apparently he became a believer, and his sons were known to the Christian community (Mk 15:21; cf. Rom 16:13).

Although an African synagogue, that of the Cyreneans and Alexandrians, first objected to the preaching of Stephen (Acts 6:9), other natives of Cyrene became early adherents of Christianity and carried the good news to Cyprus (Acts 11:19-26). From there Cyrenians and Cyprians travelled on to Antioch and innovated a Gospel approach to non-Jewish Greeks. This revolutionary action drew the attention of the Jerusalem Council, and Barnabas was dispatched to assess this new development. Convinced of the authenticity of the mission, Barnabas strategized with the leaders and went to Tarsus to seek out Paul. Implementation of the Africans' dream would require the involvement of a multinational and multicultural task force. As the church at Antioch prayed, searched the Scriptures and strategized for a full year, a core of leaders developed. Of the five who are named, two are African: Lucius of Cyrene, and Simon called the Black (Acts 13:1-2). Translations fail to inform us that "Niger" is Latin for "Black." This may well be none other than Simon of Cyrene. (The Priscilla Papers, CBE International).

So we learn a little more about Cyrene, about his impact on the early church, and on the organization of the early Christian church in Africa. There is a great deal more information that will come over the next few days, as most of our history of the early church consists of its move west, as opposed to the way the church moved to the east and even to the south, through Africa. It is a fascinating history, and needs to be explored. While at the same time, we need to think devotionally about the importance of the

1. What has diversity brought to your life so far?
2. How can we learn more about the early history of the Christian church that we have perhaps ignored in the past.
3. If you had been asked to carry the Cross of Jesus, would you have?

[illegible]

Day 31

And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me,
you cannot be my disciple.

Interestingly, this subunit of scripture comes after Jesus had rebuked those leaders who were not interested in learning (discipleship) and not interested in following the new revelation of God that he was bringing into the world. As Jesus isolated himself more and more from the Jewish leadership, we see more and more people following him, and so Jesus leans into disciple-making more and more, and clarifies what it means to follow him in no uncertain terms. It is not easy, it is not always fun, it is not for the faint of heart, rather, it is a deep commitment to the future that God has for you.

Regardless of why, the end result when we follow Jesus is always a renewed purpose and strength for what lies ahead. While Jesus is clear that following him has a cost, he also reminds us of the cost that he paid so that we could follow him at all. There is no comparing what we battle with what Jesus had to overcome, and that is great news for us. Because Jesus has been through all that he has, his understanding of what we need to conquer and heal our burdens is clear to him, and that means the help we have is overwhelmingly powerful.

1. What burdens do you feel like you carry?
2. Would you call them your “crosses to bear?”
3. How can Jesus help lighten your load?

Luke 23:26

As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene,[a] happened to be coming in from the countryside. The soldiers seized him and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

I know we have been on this story for a while, but I'd like to spend the next few days leaning into a bit of the history of the church in Africa, and why it matters. Some of this information has been gleaned from the Gospel Coalition, Africa Edition, and some from the book "The Lost History of Christianity", by Philip Jenkins.

Africa is one of the most dynamic centres of Christianity in the world. Africa has a significant share of the world's 2.2 billion Christians. It has about 30 percent of the world's evangelicals, 20 percent of the world's Pentecostals and charismatics, and about 15 percent of the world's Roman Catholics. In addition, Africa has significant Orthodox groups such as the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Churches and the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.

When it comes the SDA Church, here are some statistics: The latest Adventist Yearbook sets the population of the West-Central Africa Division (WAD) territory at 399,646,000, with 3,894 Adventist congregations and a total church membership of 654,852—a ratio of 1 Adventist to 610 others. In the East Central Africa Division (ECD) the population is 359,674,000 with 13,820 Adventist congregations and a membership of 3,116,320—a 1 to 115 ratio. The Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID) has a territorial population of 190,060,000—10,251 congregations and a membership of 3,441,232, for a ratio of 1 Adventist per 55 people. All this means that Africa has about 7.2 million of the 18 to 20 million world membership—a third of the Seventh-day Adventist membership resides in Africa.

This is significant. It affects the policies and the way we vote about everything in the SDA church. However, and beyond this; it is reasonable to take a look at some of the history of the greater Christian church in and from Africa so we can understand that the movement of the church to the West, through Rome, was not the only legacy that the modern day church subscribes to. While much of our history of the church comes from the west, including Rome, Constantine, the Crusades, and the Reformation; early in the history of Christianity, we see that much of the early thought work came from Northern Africa.

Here are some examples:

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) was a Christian philosopher with a keen desire to win pagan intellectuals to Christ. He directed a school at Alexandria and wrote important exhortations to the heathen as well as to Christians, calling them to a more perfect life in Christ.

Another African, Origen (185-254), became the director of a school at age 18. His was the finest mind the church would produce in 300 years. Origen was highly successful in debating Jews, pagans, and Gnostics, and is in fact credited with destroying Gnosticism. This important biblical scholar, theologian, exegete, and pioneer in biblical criticism produced the Hexapla, comparing six versions of the Bible. He profoundly influenced the theological thought of the succeeding centuries.

Tertullian (160-225) was a pagan lawyer who converted to Christianity. He authored apologetic, theological, and controversial works, and was the first theologian to write in Latin. It was he who formulated the doctrine of the Trinity, and coined nearly a thousand new words to explain Christian truths.

Athanasius (296-373), was Bishop of Alexandria and a major theologian and writer. He was the chief upholder of the doctrine that Christ was both man and God, and was the principle opponent of the Arian doctrine that Jesus was man rather than God. Even as a very young deacon, he was influential at the Council of Nicea. Opponents referred to him as the "black dwarf." He was repeatedly exiled and persecuted, but his principles ultimately prevailed at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

That is just a few of the examples of the African contribution to early church history. If you are wondering why we are talking about this, just remember, we want to make sure we have a well-rounded understanding of how God uses everyone who comes in contact with the Gospel for furthering the kingdom of God.

1. Have you studied much church history?
2. Why do you think it might be important?
3. Are there any podcasts that might be good to help you learn more about these things?

Day 33

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

As well, the Coptic Church of Egypt has long claimed that the apostle Thomas and the evangelist Mark played important roles in the formation of the church in Alexandria, Egypt. But one of the key moments in early Christianity in North Africa was in the late third century when there was rapid growth, in part due to the conversion of many people in large Jewish communities. But perhaps the most surprising thing that helped Christianity grow was persecution. Persecution deepened the commitment of believers in Africa and gave them courage to witness an increasingly sympathetic African audience.

Having said all this, let's go back to the point of the previous paragraph, before I digressed. Persecution of these early Christians often led to a surge of believers. It is interesting that when Christianity comes into contact with persecution, it often thrives. Christianity has always been counter-culture, and when it is assimilated into the broader culture, it morphs and begins to look very different from what it was intended to be. As we look at what

1. Have you ever been persecuted for your faith?
2. What did that look like in your eyes?
3. Did it strengthen or weaken your faith?

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

Day 34

I find all this fascinating, and it changes the way I think about the history of the church over the years. We have always learned our history from such a western point of view, that hearing these stories, even in their abbreviated form, creates a greater sense of power as to how receptive people were to the gospel. These stories should give us hope that in a world that does not have the Gospel as their default, there are still great opportunities for the Gospel to make an impact, to tell the story of Jesus and watch

3. Have you learned something new this week, does it challenge you to learn more about the history of the church in the east and south?

[illegible]

Week 05 of 08 Simon of Cyrene An African Witness
Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read the accounts in Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26 together with your family.

Cyrene is a city located in Northern Africa, in what is now Libya. Simon was from Cyrene, and probably would have looked a bit different than many of the people around Jesus at the time. When Simon spoke, he might have even had an accent. Sometimes it can be easy to forget to treat everyone the same, even if someone looks different than us, or speaks a little different than we are used to. The way people look, or even how they might speak, should never get in the way of how we treat others. After all, God created all of us in His image, and each one of us reflects the image of God.

- 1. How did Simon help Jesus in this story?
- 2. Can you think of a time when you were treated unfairly? What did that experience feel like?
- 3. What can you do to make sure you treat others fairly, no matter what?

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Has something ever cost you something more than money? Perhaps it was time or work. Think back to a time where you had to give up something more than money.

HEAD

Read Luke 14 first, then read Matthew 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26. What do each of these portions of scripture have in common?

We see a first hand account of what taking up your cross looks like. What do you think Simon experienced as he carried the cross for Jesus? (remember he wasn't planning on carrying the cross)

Simon gained perspective and understanding with Jesus that others that day did not. He walked just a small portion of what Jesus had to walk. What do you think Simon may have learned that day after carrying the cross for Jesus?

HEART

Simon experienced physically what Jesus went through, which then led to him experiencing emotionally what Jesus went through. Today we are not called to physically carry a cross. Instead, we are called to emotionally and spiritually carry the cross.

Perhaps your walk with Jesus needs you to better understand what Jesus experienced. What we find as we think of the cross is that Jesus willingly continued towards the cross. He did not stop - he kept going. The motivator for Jesus was his love and compassion for humanity. What does that love and compassion do for your life?

HANDS

Jesus is calling us to carry his cross today. What does that look like in your life? Remember, choosing to carry the cross isn't something that is easy. It's something that puts God and others first. What do you need to drop so that you can carry the cross today?

Day 36

26 As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The place this happened was on the road to the south of Jerusalem that leads to Gaza, the last watering place before the desert on route to Egypt. As you know, to get to Ethiopia, one would have to go through Egypt, and get to the ancient area of Ethiopia, which is not the same as the modern country of Ethiopia, or Abyssinia, which is in the hill country to the east of the upper Nile. The ancient kingdom of Ethiopia (Meroe) was between the first and 6th cataract of the Nile river. In the Old Testament, this area was referred to as the Land of Cush (Genesis 10:6). This kingdom was thriving from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD, and was run by powerful queen mothers who all had the title of “the Candace.”

Whether this man was physically a eunuch or not has been a question over the years. While physical castration was a relatively common practice for slaves, particularly so they could work in the harems of certain monarchs, they often became trusted and were considered very loyal. So many were trusted that they often became treasurers, or “ministers of finance” in the kingdoms from whence they came. So common was this, in fact, that the term “eunuch” was at times synonymous with those who cared for the treasury. After further study, it seems that perhaps because not only was his physical state called out, but also his job posting, it is probable that both of these facts are true. He was minister of finance as well as a physical eunuch.

It is always a bit of a shock when we find ourselves so deeply within the will of God that it seems as if we are part of something larger, something we can't control, yet exactly where we are supposed to be in order to execute the will of God through our actions and our calling. Whether or not Philip knew what he was to be doing, he could be secure in the deep will of God that was being expressed through his life. While this is never a comfortable place, it is an exciting place.

3. Why is the fact that this man was a eunuch important to the story? Or was it at all? From your own research, can you find this answer?

[illegible]

Day 37

29 The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage."

30 Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

31 The man replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

Probably not by accident, but by divine appointment, the eunuch was slowly moving in the carriage, reading the Isaiah scroll as his carriage was slowly carrying him back to his home. Without a doubt, the Isaiah scripture was the most hopeful of the Old Testament writings when it came to the kingdom that God was building through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Little did the eunuch know he was about to see and experience the fulfillment of those prophecies.

Philip didn't know why he had been placed by the carriage as well, but we see a powerful leading of the Holy Spirit as he assumed the direction and led all the way. As Philip was wont to do, he complied with the Spirit's direction and he ran up to the slow-moving wagon and trotted alongside.

Philip then heard the man reading, which would not have been uncommon, as sometimes the letters on ancient manuscripts were difficult to decipher and to read aloud was the customary manner in that day. Philip questions the eunuch and interestingly, it contains a play on words that is not really reproducible in english: “Do you understand [ginōskeis] what you are reading [anaginōskeis]?” “How can I ... unless someone explains it to me?” replied the eunuch (v. 31)”

His response enunciates a basic principle that the Lucan gospel and much of the book of Acts retains concerning the interpretation of the Old Testament prophetic texts--that there is a need for a Christian interpreter in order to understand and point the reader to Christ. The interpreter therefore sought to explain the scriptures being read in light of Christ to the jews or the other audiences to which they spoke. The idea that a Christian guide was needed was paramount to Luke's understanding of what the responsibility of those who called themselves disciples and apostles were to do whenever they could. This situation lends itself to that formula.

Is this same formula true in your life, when you need an interpreter of scripture, or when you need to be that interpreter for someone? We are both students and teachers of the prophecies that lead to Jesus in the Old Testament, and the same can be said of our experience with the scriptures in the New Testament. We are both interpreters and disciples of the words that express who Jesus is and how the Holy Spirit works in our lives through the exposition of Scripture in our lives. This is perhaps why a robust learning community is needed for every Christian, with small group engagement, exposition of the word from the pulpit, and a deeply personal study habit to uncover the truths scripture holds for each of us.

1. Have you had an interpreter of scripture that has been compelling and important in your life over the years? Who is that, and have you thanked them for the work they did for you to understand scripture better than you might have by yourself?

2. Do you think it was a divine appointment that Philip encountered?

3. How often do we see God moving someone from one place to another in order to see his work fulfilled? Is this story of Philip unique in the New Testament?

[illegible]

February 8, 2022
Day 38

Acts 8:32

- 32 The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:
"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.
And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,
He did not open his mouth."
33 He was humiliated and received no justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

Responding to the eunuch's invitation, Philip jumped in the wagon and sat down beside him. Luke gives us the text from which the eunuch had been reading, Isaiah 53:7-8. The passage is a difficult, if not one of the most difficult texts to understand of all the servant psalms and even more obscure in the Greek than in the Hebrew. However, in general it depicts the basic pattern of suffering, humiliation, and ultimately exaltation of Christ. This picture of the lamb being led to the slaughter evokes in us, and it would have in Philip as well, the image of Jesus' crucifixion, the lamb before the shearers, that of Jesus' silence before the Roman and Jewish accusers. The inability for justice to be served reminds us of the false accusations of blasphemy leveled at Christ and Pilate's equivocation in the midst of a difficult decision.

What does "who can speak of his descendants" mean? That his life was cut short or perhaps the opposite is true, that the tragedy of his death had been followed by a whole group of believers that carried on his message and believed in his claims to be the son of Man. It is perhaps this part of the Isaiah text that drew in the eunuch and what he had difficulty understanding. Philip, being one of those descendants, would have been in a perfect position to explain what for the eunuch was inexplicable.

There is little doubt that the final phrase of the text would mean to a Christian like Philip. When Christ's life was stricken from the earth, it was continued in the glory of the resurrection, and in the ascension we see his life continued at the right hand of God.

What does all this mean to us? We often need to have the scriptures explained in a way that makes sense to us. In some ways, this is the essence of biblical preaching. To exposit on the text, and then to admonish and beseech a congregation or audience to put these truths into their lives in ways that are applicable to the growth and expansion of the kingdom of God. We are not so unlike the eunuch in our desire to understand but with an inability to interpret. However, unlike the eunuch, we have a plethora

of tools at our fingertips through the internet to help us understand. However, we have to know how to use these resources in a manner which is responsible to our faith tradition, as well as to the greater faith tradition of Christianity.

1. What tools do you use to study scripture beyond this series guide?
2. How can you use these resources to help you better understand the texts?
3. Have you ever studied using online resources? Biblegateway.com is a great place to start.

Day 39

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?" 35 So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

This is what happens when you open your heart and life up to the Holy Spirit and the guidance the Spirit gives in your life. You will find yourself in situations that you will find easy to share the gospel. It is not you trying to platform a conversation toward the gospel, it will just inevitably go there! This is the power of the Holy Spirit allowing you to reap what the Spirit has already sown in the life of the person to whom you are speaking.

Perhaps a challenge today is fitting. If you pray the prayer, "here I am Lord, send me" today, I have a feeling that within a few days you will find yourself witnessing--organically, not in a way that is forced or uncomfortable, but in a manner that is uniquely you. It is a challenge in that you have to step off the ledge and share your journey and understanding of Jesus with someone else. While this is not an easy step, the following staircase is actually pretty natura.

It seems that we often are afraid to share, to interpret, and to witness due to the fact we think there is a formula or way we are supposed to share so that the other person is “convinced” of the truth we are sharing. The reality is that we leave the convincing up to the Spirit, and we simply enunciate what we know to be true. Philip was able to use the Isaiah text as the jumping off point, but he then shared what he knew Jesus to be, and the eunuch listened and was convicted.

Perhaps that is the issue, we want to convince people, but the Spirit wants to convict them. A conviction is of greater impact than a conviction in someone's life. Why would we settle for the latter when the former is more powerful?

1. Have you ever tried to convince someone of Jesus? How did it go?
2. When were you convicted in the truth of Jesus as the messiah and savior?
3. How can you work in concert with the work the Holy Spirit is already doing?

[illegible]

Day 40

36 As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?"

Once Philip shared the gospel with the eunuch and probably ended with a note of invitation and commitment, the Ethiopian treasurer was eager and ready to be baptized. While many have tried to pinpoint where this body of water where this took place, more interesting is the coincidence of their being a body of water in which to baptize the eunuch. The coincidences are too numerous to be coincidences. The Spirit was guiding all of this interaction and experience.

The eunuch asks the question in an interesting way; “is there anything stopping me from being baptized?” There is an indication that all the barriers had been taken away from this man being baptized into Jesus. Now, remember, the barriers were significant for this eunuch; he would not have been able to worship in the Temple due to his deformity. His nationality would have been an issue to some people, and his ethnicity would have created waves as well. So there were quite a few different barriers to overcome. However, in his fervor for the gospel and to follow Jesus, he seemed to think all of the above were taken away, and he was right!

At Crosswalk, we do something that doesn't often happen within our faith tradition; if someone wants to be baptized and is convicted, we will baptize them. Often, this comes after some study with a pastor or church member, but there are times we baptize when we make a call. This text gives us biblical precedent for this. Sometimes, membership in the church takes a bit longer, as there is much to learn about this specific faith tradition; and we take that vote in our leadership team meetings monthly. We must remember that membership in the SDA church and baptism are not the same thing. We baptize into Christ, as per the Christian tradition--seen in these texts--but we accept membership as a voting body. Because in most churches these things are done at the same time, we get confused as to whether or not the baptism is the acceptance into church membership. This is, by the way, sometimes hotly contested in church.

gospel, we can baptize as soon as the person asks. This in no way takes away the community's responsibility to disciple a person toward spiritual maturity and growth. It in no way means they no longer have to study scripture or engage in acts of compassion and mercy, or continue to seek God in prayer. All of these things are the ongoing result of a relationship with Jesus. We encourage these things and commit to them as a community at time of baptism.

1. When did you recognize the gospel?
2. How long did it take to be baptized after this realization and conviction?
3. Where is your membership held? And would you like to move it to Crosswalk church near you? You can do this on our website www.crosswalkvillage.com/membership.

[illegible]

Day 41

39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea.

On to today's text:

While Adventists have not been known to be a particularly charismatic group of people, we have, within our own faith tradition, an assent to these supernatural things happening. In the early SDA tradition, we did not shy away from the moving of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those early pioneers. Ellen White is a great example of our

Have we lost the ability to believe that God still moves? We sing songs about it, we pray for healing and for understanding and wisdom. Do we still see God moving within the movement of Crosswalk? And what do we do with it? Our worship is relatively charismatic, but we sometimes deny the Spirit really still moves.

3. Did you catch that there was no verse 37? What does that make you think about when it comes to the veracity of the text if something like that can happen over the years?

[illegible]

Day 42

Scripture: Acts 8:26-40

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

Have you ever been to a country where they spoke a language you didn't know? In your visit was there a moment you felt the need for an interpreter?

Read together Acts 8:26-40, and share anything that stands out to you or any questions/comments that immediately pop-up.

Have you ever noticed how strange the Holy Spirit's command (Acts 8:29) would've been considering how important and powerful the eunuch was?

In the series guide commentary, Pastor Tim emphasizes the importance of Philip's role as an interpreter. The job of interpreting is central to the definitions of discipleship we find in Luke and Acts. What stands out about Philip's attitude as an interpreter when he approached the eunuch?

What is the significance of the eunuch's question about baptism in Acts 8:36? Have you ever thought about the fact that Philip said nothing in return?

The Holy Spirit's movement is central to this week's story. Do you believe that the Holy Spirit moves similarly in the world today?

Going back to the notion of the role of disciples to be interpreters for those seeking, what can modern-day interpreters learn from Philip's words and actions in this story?

After studying Scripture, the eunuch immediately made a deeper commitment to God. This action sparked joy in his life. Are there any deeper commitments that our Witness series has been pressing in your mind?

In our modern churches, we can at times come to depend on pastors to do the work of sharing Scripture, but the truth is that we're all disciples—not just Pastor Tim. What and how are you preparing to be an interpreter of Scripture for others?

Take some time as a small group to pray and ask God to show you if there's anyone in your lives that (either as a group or as individuals) you can help bring to a greater understanding of Jesus. Jot down just their first names and commit to praying regularly for Holy Spirit-led opportunities to guide them.

I declare the end from the beginning, and ancient times from what is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and all My good pleasure I will accomplish.' (Isaiah 46:10)

[illegible]

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Acts 8:34-38 together with your family.

Have you ever looked for something, but you just couldn't find it? Maybe you lost a favorite toy, or maybe you are looking for something you've never found before, like a four-leaf clover. It can be hard to find what we are looking for sometimes, and it's always good to have a second (or third!) person to help you find something. In the story today, the Ethiopian was looking for hope in the scripture, and Philip came at just the right time to help him find the good news! The Ethiopian was so impacted by the Good News of Jesus that he wanted to be baptized immediately!

- 1. What does knowing the Good News of Jesus change in your life?
- 2. Have you ever helped someone find what they were looking for? What was that experience like?
- 3. What would you tell someone who was looking for hope or looking for Jesus?

THE WALK (YOUTH)

Week 06 of 08

Sermon Series Companion Guide

WITNESS

A Seeking Witness

Acts 8: 26-40

HANDS

Here we see a clear picture of what witnessing takes: faith. You must have faith that God is leading you and faith that when you share with someone God is working as well. How can you strengthen and nurture your faith?

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Everyone has questions about God! In fact, asking questions is important to belief in God. Have you ever had the awesome opportunity to ask your God questions to someone who had the time to go through them with you? What was your question and how did you feel as someone took the time to go through them with you?

HEAD

Read Acts 8:26-40. What opportunity presents itself for both the Ethiopian Eunuch and Phillip? (they both seem to have the piece the other is looking for).

Nobody likes a know-it-all. Often when people interject their opinion it can be annoying. But there are also those times when someone is willing to share something valuable with you and it turns out to be awesome. In order to gain knowledge on his questions about Isaiah, what posture did the Eunuch have to take? (in other words, was he willing to listen or not?)

It can be extremely scary to share with someone information about God. Often we refrain because we are afraid that our answers won't be sufficient. Yet here in this portion of scripture we see Philip listen to the spirit and courageously share with someone the good news about Jesus. Why do you think Philip had the courage to speak up about Jesus? (when you believe something is so great, what do you do with that information?)

HEART

We see the posture of both the witness and the person being witnessed to in this portion of scripture. The Eunuch had to allow himself to be told information and Philip had to be obedient to the spirit and share the knowledge. In both cases there is a submission to what God is leading them both to. How are you currently posturing yourself?

What areas of your faith do you need to submit to God so that either you or others can learn about Jesus?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

“I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.” Matthew 17:20 NLT

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

WEEK 6

Day 44

“In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord[;
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God”

God's highway, spoken of here, is an interesting concept. That a way would be made through the most difficult of places, and then it would be something that could be well-travelled, makes me think. When I was young, I wasn't always sure of the difference between a freeway and a highway. We lived in Southern California, and of course travelled the area quite a bit. It turns out that all freeways are highways, but not all highways are freeways. I know, it's a bit confusing. Basically, a freeway never has intersections, only off and on-ramps. That is the basic gist of it. However, a highway can have access for all people,

3. Who is John the Baptist to you? Have you studied his life and his words?

[illegible]

Matthew 3

1 In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, 2 “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” 3 The prophet Isaiah was speaking about John when he said,

“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming!

Clear the road for him!”

4 John’s clothes were woven from coarse camel hair, and he wore a leather belt around his waist. For food he ate locusts and wild honey. 5 People from Jerusalem and from all of Judea and all over the Jordan Valley went out to see and hear John. 6 And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to watch him baptize, he denounced them. “You brood of snakes!” he exclaimed. “Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? 8 Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. 9 Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones. 10 Even now the ax of God’s judgment is poised, ready to sever the roots of the trees. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptize with water those who repent of their sins and turn to God. But someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not worthy even to be his slave and carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”

These texts we are usually very familiar with. We know that the Jewish audience would have been expecting a precursor or prior witness to the Messiah. One who would speak like a Moses to whom all Israel should listen. Some probably expected a literal Elijah to return from Heaven, based on Malachi 4:5. John fits into this stereotype but fulfills a bunch of different prophetic roles and themes.

We first see John introduced as one who baptized people. He is called a preacher, or “one who speaks as herald”. He came from the desert, and was so popular many people went out to the desert to go and see him and hear him

preach. He was confidently strange, like many of the Old Testament Prophets, and his clothing and his diet were interesting enough to warrant mention in the text.

Like the Old Testament Prophets, his call was to repentance from sin. Repentance, in Greek, traditionally means a change of mind or attitude, but it also took on a sense of change in action as well. This means that John was asking his listeners to change their way of life as a result of a complete change of attitude and thought with regard to sin and righteousness. This was new and novel, and people were not sure what to do with it. New theology is often very worrisome, but it can sometimes start people thinking a little differently, and creates a foundation for the change that comes when people finally recognize who Jesus is.

The term “kingdom of heaven” is used here, and 32 other times in Matthew’s Gospel. This is due to the fact that a pious Jew would steer clear of using the name of God (Yaweh) in any form. But this depicts the interruption of God’s power into history in a new and powerful and dramatic way with the coming messiah. While they were expecting the Messianic vision of the Jewish people to come through in a physical and even military way, Jesus came with a very different concept about what it should be.

But this is nothing new to you. You understand what John was up to, and what to expect from Jesus, as we have had 2000 years to become comfortable with what was done on that little strip of land in the Middle East. Unfortunately, we have sometimes lost the ability to see it for what it was, a revolution in thinking, dreaming, and believing in a God who was intangible, but becoming explained through the life and ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus himself.

1. When you first met Jesus, what did you think of him? Did you ever doubt who he was?

2. How can we understand the revolution that John ushered in, getting the world ready for Jesus to show up?

3. What are some of the most revolutionary things that John said and witnessed to?

Matthew 11:1-18

1When Jesus had finished giving these instructions to his twelve disciples, he went out to teach and preach in towns throughout the region.

2 John the Baptist, who was in prison, heard about all the things the Messiah was doing. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus, 3 “Are you the Messiah we’ve been expecting, or should we keep looking for someone else?”

4 Jesus told them, “Go back to John and tell him what you have heard and seen— 5 the blind see, the lame walk, those with leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.” 6 And he added, “God blesses those who do not fall away because of me.” 7 As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. “What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was he a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? 8 Or were you expecting to see a man dressed in expensive clothes? No, people with expensive clothes live in palaces. 9 Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. 10 John is the man to whom the Scriptures refer when they say, ‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you.’

11 “I tell you the truth, of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist. Yet even the least person in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he is! 12 And from the time John the Baptist began preaching until now, the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and violent people are attacking it. 13 For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time. 14 And if you are willing to accept what I say, he is Elijah, the one the prophets said would come. 15 Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!

16 “To what can I compare this generation? It is like children playing a game in the public square. They complain to their friends,

17 ‘We played wedding songs,
and you didn’t dance,
so we played funeral songs,
and you didn’t mourn.’

18 For John didn’t spend his time eating and drinking, and you say, ‘He’s possessed by a demon.’ 19 The Son of Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks, and you say, ‘He’s a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and other sinners!’ But wisdom is shown to be right by its results.”

If you haven’t read this section in a while, take your time

and read it through twice. We see three sections; 1) The growing relationship between John and Jesus, 2) John’s questions about Jesus, 3) and Jesus’ rebuke of “this generation” for its response to both John and himself. Let us jump right in!

John sort of abruptly reappears in the narrative given to us by Matthew, as he is now in prison. Matthew assumes his audience knows something of this episode, and so doesn’t explain more than he has to. He is probably held in Herod Antipas’s territory, in the fortress at Machaerus, east of the dead sea and thirteen miles southeast of Herodium, which is just south of Jerusalem. John must have had some doubts, this is why the question, but he has probably also heard of some of the works that Jesus was doing, and so needed to ask the question specifically. Remember, they were cousins, and it is always difficult to see someone you grew up with as something different. We all experience this with people we know as we grow up. The kid in high school that was sort of a goof-off is now a cardio-theracic surgeon, or the kid who ditched school all the time has become a wealthy and respected person of note in the community. John may have been dealing with some of the more human aspects of his cousin being the spoken of Messiah.

Jesus’ reply points to his works, but he now itemizes them. Jesus was probably trying to remind John of the messianic significance of some of the specific miracles of healing (recall Isaiah 29:18-19). In verse 6, Jesus encourages John, and everyone else with doubts, to remain faithful to him regardless of what may come. This is actually really helpful for us, as if John had doubts, we should not be embarrassed when we wrestle with doubts about Jesus as well.

In 11:7-10 John’s disciples went back to him to report what Jesus had said, but their question had been in a larger public gathering. So while John was questioning Jesus, others were questioning John’s role as well. Jesus addresses these questions by reassuring his audience of the legitimacy of John’s ministry. They were working in tandem as support and witness to each other. I love how Jesus witnesses to the efficacy of John’s ministry as well. That is a good cousin!

Who do you need to support today? Who in your life is doing good work and should be recognized, affirmed, and supported?

1. Who ministers to you?
2. How can you support them?
3. What words of affirmation do you have for them today?

Day 47

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah,¹ the Son of God,² as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:
 “I will send my messenger ahead of you,
 who will prepare your way”—
 3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,
 ‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
 make straight paths for him.’”
 4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness,
 preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of
 sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people
 of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they
 were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore
 clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around
 his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this
 was his message: “After me comes the one more power-
 ful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to
 stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he
 will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

John, being the character that he was, found it worthwhile to pray and preach for the repentance of Israel and to let them know that someone was coming who would take away the sins of the world. While this probably caused confusion to many, it was also a way to create a great deal of buzz around who it would be that would come. In the following verses to this pericope, we see the baptism of Jesus revealed. In this way, those who were following John were then encouraged to follow Jesus, much to the chagrin of those who were following John as his close disciples.

else? It is almost surreal to think that you would change allegiances quickly. I have seen some of you and your rabid fandom for a particular team or a particular sporting event even. To change alliances is no small feat. The followers of John would have had to disavow some of their thoughts about John, and transfer those loyalties to Jesus. John actually encouraged this, but not all of his followers were able to do this so quickly. Perhaps, once he had been imprisoned and beheaded, it would have happened. Interestingly, the followers of Jesus never changed their loyalties, in fact, once Jesus was gone their loyalty became even more pronounced.

1. Do you think you could have changed your loyalty from John to Jesus?
2. Have you ever thought about whether you would have resonated with John's message?
3. Why do prophets always have to be weird?

[illegible]

Luke 3:7-20

7 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

10 "What should we do then?" the crowd asked.

11 John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

12 Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

15 The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with[c] the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

19 But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, 20 Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison.

Luke jumps in with facts and understanding that the other gospels leave out. Let's take a moment to read about what it was that John told people they were to do. This text reminds us that there are very practical applications for all the teachings of scripture, and they are to be applied in ways that make us better people, with more integrity, more morality, and more thoughtfulness.

When the crowd asks John "What should we do then?" John answers them pretty simply. If you have two shirts,

give one to someone who has none, and do the same with food. This is a move toward compassion, which is to be one of the first instincts of those of us who call ourselves Christians. This general moral stance should inform who we are, how we live our lives, and what it is that we should do in most situations. What gives the most compassion to the world by our actions. Care, mercy, feeding people, clothing them, all of these things are included in his simple statement. What are we doing today in order to make the world a better place by our actions, our giving, and our advocacy?

But then a more difficult moral conundrum presents itself. The tax collectors ask what they should. John essentially says "be honest", which doesn't seem that hard. But apparently, it was for many tax collectors, as they were some of the most hated people in the ancient world. They come up again and again as people that very few others like.

And then the soldiers, we can only assume we are talking about Roman soldiers here, ask what they should do, and again they are told in the simplest of terms; be decent people. Don't steal money from people, and don't assume guilt before you know it to be a fact. While again, that seems simple, it is not always simple for people in those situations.

So what situation do you find yourself in that could use some integrity, some compassion and some mercy. Where in your life can you exercise these types of things?

John is making the case that what we do has spiritual implications. We might think this is obvious, but it might not have been so for the 1st century Jewish believer. In this way, John was laying the foundation for the moral prerogatives that Jesus laid out in Matthew 5-8. It is amazing how the Spirit moves to make all things work together!

1. Where do you need to practice better integrity and morality in your life?

2. How can you take these words of John to heart?

3. Can you think of any careers that would have a particularly difficult time with these teachings?

Day 49

Week 07 of 08

A Prior Witness

Malachi 4, Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 11:11,

Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Have you ever been a forerunner? Have you ever gone before someone or something in order to prepare the way? What did you do? What message did you have to share?

HEAD

Read together some or all of Malachi 4, Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 11:11, Matthew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3, and share any thoughts, insights, or impressions you had as you read through the passage.

As you reflect on the prophets of old being prior witnesses to Christ, what statements of theirs surprise you or inspire you? What do you think those same statements did for the people in their day and age?

Malachi is the last prophet of the Old Testament and the words we read in chapter 4 are the final words given until the New Testament. What are the significance of these words? What do you find to be the most important? The most shocking?

In Matthew 11 we find John in prison and sending his disciples out for confirmation. How might his situation have caused him to doubt or question things? What report does Jesus give his disciples? Does he answer with promises or evidence?

HEART

The Gospels quote Isaiah 40:3 in reference to John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus. What does that imply about the identity of Jesus? Who prepared the way for Jesus in your life? How can you “prepare the way” for Jesus yourself?

The prophets and forerunners of Jesus preached a strong message of repentance. When has repentance been especially important in your life? Is that something you often focus on or invite others to think about? Why or why not?

HANDS

What do these words and thoughts of prior witnesses to Jesus invite you to consider in your life? Are baptism and repentance things of the past for you or do they still hold value in your daily life? What changes in your life can be made to make you more of a prior witness or forerunner for our soon coming King?

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

“Then the angel said to me, ‘These words are trustworthy and true: ‘The Lord God, who tells his prophets what the future holds, has sent his angel to tell you what will happen soon.’”

“Look, I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the prophecy written in this scroll.”

“See, I am coming soon, and my reward is with me, to repay all according to their deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.”

Revelation 22:6-7; 12-13

[illegible]

Malachi 4:5-6, Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 11:11,
Mathew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Mark 1:1-8 together with your family.

Have you ever played the guessing game with your family? They pick an item and you have to guess what it is. But they can give you clues as you guess, until you finally know exactly what it is! In the story this week we learn that John the Baptist was sent ahead of Jesus to share the Good News and the Hope of the Messiah. John shared this hope with everyone he could so that when Jesus did come, their hearts would be open to following Jesus. John taught the people the characteristics of Jesus so that when Jesus arrived, they would know who he was and would listen and follow him. Isn't it amazing how God works to help people know who He is?

1. What is the best news you ever heard?
2. Did you share the good news with anyone else? How did they react to your good news?
3. How would you describe Jesus to someone else who might not know Jesus like you do?

THE WALK (YOUTH)

Week 07 of 08

WITNESS

A Prior Witness

Malachi 4:5-6, Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 11:11,
Mathew 3, Mark 1, Luke 3

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN

Being different can be an awesome thing, and at the same time a scary thing. Think back to a time when you knew that you were different from everyone else. How did that make you feel?

HEAD

Read Malachi 4:5-6, Isaiah 40:3, Matthew 11:11, Matthew 3, Mark 1, and Luke 3. Each one of these passages connect - they all talk about a prophet who would come before Jesus. John the Baptist is this prophet.

Read the descriptions of John the baptist. What is your first impression of him? (is he nice and easily approachable? Is he weird and kinda out there?)

John the Baptist was living a life completely different than that of the religious during his time. Instead of teaching in the synagogues and temples, he was in the wilderness. Instead of teaching how to be more Jewish, he was speaking of the coming of something new and different. It's evident that in his witness he was different.

Based on these passages, do you think that John was confident in his witness?

HEART

John is a great example of what a witness can look like. In John we see confidence and courage. John confidently speaks of the coming of Jesus before he even knew that Jesus was there. This is an amazing model of witnessing for us today!

John lived differently based on what he knew to be true. This teaches us that sometimes we will have to live differently because of our belief in Jesus.

Being different can often be difficult, yet John had confidence to do so. He had confidence because he believed that Jesus was the Messiah. For us today, we can be con-

fidant in our witness because we know that Jesus is our savior and that wherever we go, he goes as well.

HANDS

How is your witness leading you to be different? Are you currently living a comfortable life when Jesus is calling you to live a called life?

There will be times where we must look different for the sake of Jesus. As the hands of Jesus we must find confidence in him to be different so that people would know Jesus.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” Matthew 28:19

[illegible]

Day 50

3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

This week we are focusing on what you have witnessed, and how that relates to the way we see God, the way we talk about God, and the way that we witness God. While we are certainly not biblical characters, we are those who have the opportunity to see how God has worked in the past, how he is working in our lives, and we can witness to the faithfulness that God will have in our lives in the future. This vantage point gives us the opportunity to continually see the work of God that is happening and also gives us the ability to speak to who and what he is. While it might seem a little thing, it could mean forever to someone who hears our words and witnesses our testimony.

In this First John text, we see that the fellowship was centered around the witness that people give to one another. While it is not a requirement, the idea that we would encourage one another by the way we witness about Jesus is important for us to understand in a community that seeks to Lovewell. We also see this leaning into encouragement in the book of Romans, Chapter 1. Paul wants to visit Rome in order to “mutual encouragement” may happen by the sharing of what the Lord has done in their lives and in his.

Whether it is through church, friends, family, worship, miracles, or even conversations, what is it that God has done and is doing in your life that you can be a witness to? What is the best and what is the worst of what is happening, and where is God in it? To witness truthfully, you need to be looking to see what God is doing.

Perhaps you have a hard time seeing it. I get that. But look around you, it is possible that God is doing things that you can't even see or imagine. Everytime I look at Crosswalk church I am amazed at how many places God is moving, and we aren't even paying attention to all of them. We are constantly being bombarded with the work of God, and our job is to become more aware of the ways that he is already moving.

1. Where is God moving now in your life?
2. Have you had a chance to witness to what God is doing?
3. How can you be more aware of the moves God is making?

[illegible]

Day 51

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

When I was young, I was under the impression, and I'm not sure where it came from, that when the whole of the world had heard the message of Jesus, he would then have to come. I literally thought that if we "finished the work", we could force the hand of Jesus to come. I thought that we should be flying helicopters around the world simply broadcasting the gospel message, and then once everyone had heard those words, Jesus would be forced to come and take us home.

From then on, I saw this text as an opportunity to partner with God in amazing ways for the expansion and multiplication of the kingdom of God. Everyday, I have the amazing opportunity to share the Gospel with as many people as I can. The deal that I made with God a long time ago was that as long as I could do ministry in my own skin with my own gifting, I would stay and work for him. Amazingly, he has made good on that promise year after year, and I find myself with the opportunity to partner with God on interesting projects, creative endeavors, and church planting. The influence that God has given has been overwhelming and humbling. I find as I get older I am more and more in awe of how God is willing to use someone like me.

skills and talents that I only wish I had. The opportunities God has for you will be amazing. I can't wait to see how it all comes together.

1. Have you felt God's call on your life to witness his goodness?
2. Where do you feel most comfortable sharing the Gospel?
3. Where would you like to partner with God to make the Gospel more effective?

Day 52

5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

This is such a great continuation of the previous day's text. God chose you to bear fruit for him! That is such an important fact for us to understand. These words come from Jesus himself, so you know they are true, and right and holy. This means that you have been chosen for a particular purpose, by the God of the universe. There is no better place to be.

The ride that you get to take is not a relaxed kind of Sunday drive to grandma's house. Rather it is a ride with someone who really knows how to race. It is probably safer than any drive you could ever take, but it is not boring, it is not slow, and it is not the route you would have taken by any means. However, Because you have been chosen, the ride is for you.

So what do you want to tell people about Jesus? Is it the story of his life, the story of transformation in your life, the aspirational sayings that have meant so much, or simply the understanding that you are loved, chosen, and placed right where you should be in order to bear fruit for the kingdom of God. There are so many ways to witness to the greatness of Jesus, find your lane and go for it!

1. What is the way you want to witness to the kingdom of God?
2. Who do you think might be receptive to your witness?
3. How does knowing that you were chosen make you feel?

[illegible]

Day 53

14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

But this was not an easy road. 2 Corinthians 11 tells us:

What have you had to endure in order to be a witness to the kingdom of God? Perhaps our suffering is not quite the same as Paul's was. And while there is a sense, at times, that Christians are being cancelled in today's world, I don't have a tendency to believe that is true. The witness of the early church was not one that drove the culture. It was deeply counter-cultural. In fact, Christianity is always at its best, it's most effective and most

This is when our witness becomes ineffective. Jesus will always create a witness that runs counter to the culture we belong to. Why? Because love simply demands more and different than getting along, being successful, and minding your own business. Love demands we become a bit more uncomfortable in the world where God has placed us.

1. How have you suffered for your witness?
2. Do you think your witness makes people feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
3. How can you push back on the prevailing culture we see around us? How does Jesus change our view of culture?

[illegible]

Romans 10:14

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Paul is making a great argument about people cannot believe in a God that they have never heard about. Therefore, it is imperative that we spend some time in conversation, giving and bearing witness to Jesus, so that others may call on his name in their time of need. It is pretty simple, if they never hear about him, how will they know to call on him?

Paul was deeply motivated by this. It seems he couldn't fathom letting someone miss the opportunity of the kingdom due to the fact that he did not speak and preach to them. He was going to work in season and out of season in order to be able to help them to understand who Jesus was and is for them. The overarching theme in his life was witness. It was clear to everyone that he was driven in a way that many others just weren't, or perhaps couldn't be. He was tireless in his pursuit of the kingdom, deeply committed to an overwhelming sense of duty, and would not take no for an answer. He preached in season and out of season, and he went where the spirit led him in order to preach the gospel. He had no real home, had no real income, lived on couches and in homes of other believers, and changed the world forever. His witness is, obviously, the stuff of legends.

Is that something you would ever want? Would your witness create in others the kind of quickening that would launch them into a life of service, of witness, and of expansion of the kingdom of God? If you shared your witness again and again, who would catch the vision of the kingdom you are trying to show them?

Remember, a witness is more than simply giving your testimony. Witness is allowing others to see the vision of God that he has shown you. It is inviting others to experience that witness with you, and it is, quite literally, growing the kingdom by sharing the vision of the Gospel to those you come in contact with.

1. Do you think you could work as tirelessly as Paul?
2. Does his logic make sense to you?
3. Who first witnessed you?

Day 55

18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Those of us who have grown up with a choir of witnesses around us may not understand the power that a witness can truly give. Can you imagine never having heard the story of Jesus? For many of us, that is unconscionable as from the very earliest ages we were steeped in the stories of scripture and in the love that Jesus has for us. However, not everyone is so privileged to be blessed with this kind of knowledge early on in life. While many of us almost get tired of the stories, when it finally hits home, we have already the infrastructure in place in our lives to express that love fully and in our own cultural understanding of the church. For many, this is not the case.

When we witness those who don't know, there is a particular kind of awe that takes them. They have never experienced this kind of love, and therefore are amazed by it. They grow, they get excited, and they then want to become a beacon of light to others. Understandably, some allow themselves to be led to pretty intense places by poor theology, and this is why those who understand a blanché and grace filled theology must constantly be seeking to walk with those who are just growing in the faith. It is our duty and our privilege.

3. Would you like to witness to someone like that? How can you?

[illegible]

February 26, 2022

Day 56

Week 08 of 08 What Have You Witnessed

I John 1: 3, Matthew 28: 19-20, John 15: 5 and 16,

Romans 1: 14, Romans 10: 14, Acts 26: 18

INTRODUCTION

The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion. Feel free to add or subtract or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

CONNECT

Were you ever a witness to a “crime” (whether it be literal or something you considered a crime like a sibling stealing a cookie or a classmate cheating on a test) that you had to give an account of to an authority? What happened and how did it feel to tell someone else what you had seen and/or heard?

HEAD

Read together I John 1: 3, Matthew 28: 19-20, John 15: 5 and 16, Romans 1: 14, Romans 10: 14, Acts 26: 18, and share anything that stands out to you or any questions/comments that immediately pop-up.

In I John 1: 3, what were some of the things they had seen and heard that were worth telling as it related to the story of Jesus and His kingdom?

How do you think Jesus’ disciples felt when they heard what we call the great Co-Mission? Were they excited? Scared? Overwhelmed? Why?

When it comes to witnessing and bearing fruit for Jesus, according to John 15: 5 and 16, who does the work? What are some ways that we stay connected?

Concerning Romans 1: 14, how do you think Paul was able to connect with those inside as well as those outside his culture?

Have you ever seen someone walk “out of the darkness” and into the light of God’s love? What happened to them? What happened to you as a witness to those events?

HEART

Have you ever had the thought or feeling that God’s love for you is dependent on you sharing about Him to others?

What do you think is the “secret” for sharing about God

out of a place of love and joy instead of just duty and obligation? Might it have to do with how you see and understand God and His love for you? If so, how can you and I work to gain a clearer picture of God that we can’t help but share with the world?

Is our witness one we only do with words? How else do we “witness” to people what we have seen and heard about God and His love and His salvation?

Have you ever had to suffer or face negative consequences for your witness? If so, how did you handle it? If not, how might you handle it so you, like Paul, could sing in worship to God even when in chains for God?

HANDS

Spend some time writing out your witness of God. Who is God to you? How has He revealed Himself to you? What has He taught you? How and when has He helped you?

Think of a person in your circle of influence (work, home, school) that God may be placing on your heart to witness to the love of God. Pray for that person and an opportunity to witness.

LIVING WORDS for YOUR WEEK

But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.” Acts 4: 19-20

CRSWLK KIDS

WITNESS

Week 08 of 08

What Have You Witnessed

I John 1: 3, Matthew 28: 19-20, John 15: 5 and 16,
Romans 1: 14, Romans 10: 14, Acts 26: 18

INTRODUCTION

The following questions are a guide to help families with children understand God and discover His love throughout the series. You may think of other ideas that fit the needs of your family.

Read Matthew 28: 19-20 and John 15: 5, 16 together with your family.

Have you ever been chosen to do something special? Maybe you were chosen to be a part of a team, or chosen to help your teacher, or parent. Maybe the task you were chosen for was difficult, but maybe it was easy and really fun. In the Bible passages today, we see that each one of us is chosen by God to share the Good News about Jesus with other people. We can be certain that God will be with us in all that we do, and help us in this task we are chosen for.

- 1. What do you like to be chosen for?
- 2. Have you ever been chosen for something that felt too hard to do? What was that like? How did you get through it?
- 3. Since we know that God has chosen each of us, and God helps us complete the task, how do you want to share the Good News of Jesus with someone else?

THE WALK (YOUTH)

Week 08 of 08

WITNESS

What Have You Witnessed

I John 1: 3, Matthew 28: 19-20, John 15: 5 and 16,

Romans 1: 14, Romans 10: 14, Acts 26: 18

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How do you think Jesus’ disciples felt when they heard what we call the great Co-Mission? Were they excited? Scared? Overwhelmed? Why?

What is the fruit Jesus talked about in John 15: 5 and 16 and how does it grow? What are some ways that you and I can practice staying connected to the vine?

Paul witnessed people like him as well as people very different from him, from different parts of the world, different cultures. Concerning Romans 1: 14, how do you think Paul was able to connect with so many different people?

HEART

Have you ever had the thought or feeling that God’s love for you is dependent on you sharing about Him to others? Do you think this is true?

What do you think is the most important thing for us to know before we try and witness to others about God and His love for us?

How do you and I get a better and better picture of God to share?

Is our witness one we only do with words? How else do we “witness” to people what we have seen and heard about God and His love and His salvation?

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YOU WANT MORE?

Video

Bad Ways to Witness by Skit Guys
youtu.be/Y7Ek9jvDge4

Song

So Will (100 Billion X’s)
Hillsong United

Other

“Preach the gospel always and when necessary, use words.” -St Francis of Assisi

[illegible]

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

Lined area for text entry, consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

