

# Sustaining Our Faith

Devotional Reading: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
Background Scripture: Jude

## Jude 17-25

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.



## Key Text

*But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. —Jude 20-21*

# Examining Our Faith

## Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1-5

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the doxology in the text.
2. Distinguish between what God promises to do and what He expects us to do regarding personal holiness.
3. Create a plan to implement the imperatives of the Key Text.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Anxious Times
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Remembrance (Jude 17-19)

- A. Remembering the Apostolic Word (v. 17)
- B. Revisiting the Warning (v. 18)
- C. Recognizing False Teachers (v. 19)  
*In a Flash Flood*

#### II. Perseverance (Jude 20-23)

- A. Remain in God's Love (vv. 20-21)
- B. Reflect God's Love (vv. 22-23)  
*Leading by Example*

#### III. Praise God (Jude 24-25)

- A. God's Work for Us (v. 24)
- B. God's Glory (v. 25)

#### Conclusion

- A. The Love of God and Loving Others
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Anxious Times

We live in anxious times. Many believers live with doubt. Many often feel like people are mocking their faith from both inside and outside the church. Historic beliefs are under attack. The gospel itself is under attack. Skeptics deny the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His ultimate return. Within the church, abuse and immorality are becoming more known. Some leaders have destroyed their congregations through their own ambition and pride. Social media and newspapers are filled with these kinds of stories. The church has lost its moral credibility and its authority to speak truth in the eyes of many people. While the church and its ministers at one time were ranked high in trustworthiness, that ranking has fallen over the past 30 years. These are perilous times for the Christian faith.

### B. Lesson Context

Jude is a brief letter, and it reflects a perilous time similar to our circumstances. Some ambitious and prideful people had attached themselves to congregations, presented themselves as leaders, and practiced an immoral lifestyle. Jude calls them "ungodly" people who turn the "grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4). These intruders exploited their welcome by promoting immorality (v. 4). They mocked the judgment of God and behaved as if God would not hold them accountable for their actions and immoral ethics. They despised authority, spoke evil of others, and sought wealth in their greed (vv. 8, 11). Jude called them "spots in your feasts of charity" who had nothing true or valuable to offer; they were like clouds "without water" and fruitless trees (v. 12). They walked "after their own lusts," and though they influenced many, their words were filled with their own ambition (v. 16). This was a dangerous time for the churches, and Jude addresses the situation directly with both warning and hope.

Jude, the author of this letter, was the brother of James, and James was one of the elders and leaders of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; 2:9). Since James was a brother of

Jesus, this means Jude was as well. Though both opposed Jesus during His ministry before His death, both became committed believers after the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7; Jude 1).

What we know as the book of Jude was probably a sermon that circulated among several congregations as an open letter. Jude addressed a number of congregations at one time, and they were all endangered by ungodly intruders and leaders. Jude clearly stated his main interest. He encouraged believers to "contend for the faith" that had been delivered to them (Jude 3). He identified the troublemakers, warned that their destiny is the same as that of Sodom and Gomorrah (v. 7) and the devil (v. 9), and promised God would execute judgment against the "ungodly" for their "ungodly deeds" (v. 15).

But what are believers to do? How do they "contend for the faith" (Jude 3)? How do believers live out their faith in such perilous times? Jude ends his letter with a call to persevere in the faith. That call is our lesson text for today.

## I. Remembrance

(Jude 17-19)

### A. Remembering the Apostolic Word (v. 17)

**17. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

*Remember!* That is the main point (compare Jude 5). After describing the characteristics of these false leaders and the judgment that awaits them, Jude reminded his readers that this was not unexpected. *The apostles* warned about the rise of ungodly people who would disturb the church and seek to gain their own followers. For example, the apostle Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus that wolves would arise from among their own leadership (Acts 20:29). Consequently, the situation should not have surprised them. The apostles told them it was going to happen.

By reminding them of this apostolic warning, Jude highlighted the importance of the apostolic voice in the early church. The apostolic word, or teaching, both guides and warns the church. According to Acts 2:42, the disciples of Jesus devoted themselves to the teaching of the

apostles. The church listens to the apostles of *our Lord Jesus Christ*, heeds their direction and warnings, and follows them as they follow Jesus. Their teaching, along with the prophets, is the church's foundation, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). Jesus sent the apostles with His authority, and the apostles spoke for Jesus.

In the middle of this perilous time, Jude not only reminds his readers of the apostolic warning but also reminds them who they are. They are *beloved*, and Jude called them as such three times (Jude 3, 17, 20). While we need reminders about the dangers of any situation, we also need reminders that we are loved by God and loved by our leaders. Jude, for example, was a leader who wrote forcefully against false teachers but compassionately for those whom those ungodly leaders endangered. Believers have been called by God and kept safe in Jesus Christ (v. 1). Despite the dire circumstances and uncertainties of the times, they are secure in Jesus and loved by God.

### What Do You Think?

How do you encourage other believers to remember they are beloved by God?

### Digging Deeper

How can those same practices help you remember that you are beloved?

### B. Revisiting the Warning (v. 18)

**18. How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.**

What did the apostles say to the church? A time was coming and had already arrived when *mockers* and scoffers would arise within churches, and their only concern would be pursuing their own *ungodly* interests.

When Jude used the language of *the last time* or "last times," he was not referring to something in the distant future, though it includes that. Rather, he reminded his readers about this warning because it was already happening in their congregations. Often "last time" or "last days" (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; 2 Peter 3:3) refers to the last era of God's redemptive work in the world. This

is the final era because after this comes the judgment of God and the salvation of God's people. It was important to hear the apostolic warning not only applying to some final moment in the world's future but also to Jude's readers and the whole history of the church. Mockers and scoffers have always been part of the story of the church, and the warning is for all believers throughout the life span of the church. This is a constant danger rather than a unique one.

What drives these false leaders? They mock God's judgment and scoff at any notion of personal accountability. They did not believe God's judgment applied to them, or perhaps that there was any coming judgment at all. Rather, they followed their own desires. They had their own agenda, and they were only interested in indulging their own cravings. Jude emphasized that their motivations were ungodly (see also Jude 4, 15). They were only interested in themselves, whether that greed or ambition was about wealth, power, or sex, among other possible lusts.

The apostles warned that people would come who had no interest in authentic faith. Rather, they would ridicule accountability before God and pursue their interests for their own gain.

#### What Do You Think?

When have you needed to resist a person who was trying to manipulate faith for their own selfish gains?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps do you take to guard against any impure motives in your own faith walk?

### C. Recognizing False Teachers (v. 19)

**19. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.**

Jude described these ungodly people in three ways. They (1) are divisive, (2) are worldly, and (3) lack *the Spirit* of God. In essence, Jude identified this ungodly presence by their works or their effect on the congregation. They lacked the fruit of the Spirit. There was no evidence of the Spirit in their lives. They created divisions as they separated

themselves and created their own followers. They lived by the seat of their pants. In other words, they lived by their natural urges and impulses rather than by the mind of Christ. Their interests were rooted in their sensuality and the works of the flesh. They were not led by the Spirit but by their *sensual* compulsions driven by their ungodly agenda.

#### What Do You Think?

What characteristics suggest that a person does not have the Spirit? Offer supporting verses for your answer.

#### Digging Deeper

What other verses caution you about declaring this or that person not to have the Spirit?

### In a Flash Flood

Stuart's wipers were going full speed, but he could barely see the road. The drumming rain drowned out the radio's warning of flash flooding. Ahead, an SUV inched into the turbulent water running across the road. The car behind Stuart blew its horn. He pressed the gas pedal and inched into the torrent, the water rising around his tires. The car lurched sideways and lost contact with the road! Then the tread found pavement, and Stuart could proceed. By the time he made it home, his heart was pounding, and he was drenched, not from rain but from sweat. Later he learned that two cars had been washed away at that same treacherous spot, with disastrous results.

How often do we follow the example of those who scoff at danger? Scripture's warnings of judgment seem distant, unlikely to affect us. But one day, the consequences could sweep us away. Where in your life do you need to stop and turn around before it's too late? —A. W.

## II. Perseverance

(Jude 20-23)

### A. Remain in God's Love (vv. 20-21)

**20-21. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the**

**Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.**

Jude contrasted his readers with these ungodly mockers. While the ungodly mock the faith, believers build their lives on the faith. While the ungodly lack the Spirit, believers pray in the Spirit. While the ungodly scoff at the judgment that accompanies the coming of the *Lord Jesus Christ*, believers joyfully anticipate the mercy they will receive when Jesus comes again. Jude addressed these believers as *beloved*, and this belovedness was rooted in God's love for them. It was not simply Jude's love for his readers but also their relationship with God as people who are beloved *of God*. God loves them.

In the Greek text, the main verb—and the only imperative or command—is *keep yourselves in the love of God* (Jude 21). This was a call to action. Jude thought believers ought to respond to perilous times by persevering in God's love. In other words, as dangers mounted and seemed to overwhelm, believers need to continually ground themselves in God's love. Jude called believers to pursue godly living by remembering that they were beloved.

But what does that look like? Jude gave his readers three cues: (1) by building on the *most holy faith*, (2) by *praying in the Holy Ghost*, and (3) by looking forward to *the mercy of Jesus*. These three cues were means of grace or spiritual practices that could sustain faith during perilous times Jude's readers endured.

First, they can build on the foundation of the faith. The faith for which the Christian community was to contend (Jude 3) is also the foundation for remaining in the love of God. The *faith* refers to the work of God in Jesus by the Spirit to redeem and save the world from its ungodly lusts and practices. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Believers build on an authentic foundation secured by the love of God, the grace of Jesus, and the communion of the Holy Spirit rather than one imagined by the mockers who stirred up trouble among the churches.

Second, they should pray in the Spirit. This includes two important points. On the one hand, Jude thought prayer was a necessary response to perilous times. Prayer calls upon God to act and

deliver. On the other hand, prayer was not simply wishful thinking but addressing God in the Spirit. To pray in the Spirit is probably a rather broad idea that includes almost anything that could be said about prayer. The full meaning of prayer includes not only the work of the Spirit in hearts but also the function of the Spirit in communicating the prayers. We pray in the Spirit when we pray in accordance with God's agenda, pray out of a heart sanctified by the Spirit, and pray by the power of the Spirit who unites us with God's own heart (compare Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 14:15).

Third, they should trust in the mercy of God. The faithful looked forward to the day when the fullness of God's mercy will be poured out on believers to usher them into eternal life with God. The second coming of Christ, though it involves judgment for the ungodly, is mercy for believers who build their lives on the most holy faith and pray in the Spirit.

Importantly, these verses refer to the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Jude recognized the Triune God by naming the love of God, the mercy of Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Jude's language is similar to the final benediction of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 13:14).

**What Do You Think?**

What do you do to keep yourself in God's love?

**Digging Deeper**

What encouragement do you find regarding the fruit of imperfect effort in this endeavor?

**B. Reflect God's Love (vv. 22-23)**

**22-23. And of some have compassion, making a difference; and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.**

Jude invited his readers to remain in the love of God, and then Jude turned his attention to how his readers ought to love others with that love. Remaining in the love of God means pouring out that love on others.

## BUILD YOUR LIFE ON FAITH THAT LASTS.



Visual for Lesson 1. Discuss human effort and the Spirit's work that goes toward fulfilling this directive (based on Jude 20).

We can imagine Jude's readers were angered by the disturbances within their churches. Indeed, ungodly mockers who divided a church for their own selfish gains deserved anger and exclusion, and they received Jude's condemnation. The damage these mockers left in their wake was probably devastating. It affected many people, and Jude does not forget them. Those who persevered in the love of God needed to love the people who had been damaged by these mockers. How does Jude want believers to love people in anxious times?

First, some were doubting due to the influence of the scoffers. The meaning of the Greek word behind the phrase *making a difference* is difficult to determine in this context. It may refer to a process of discernment, or it may refer to doubting or wavering. It seems the latter is more likely, but whichever is the case, Jude's main concern is the command to show mercy or *have compassion*. Jude commanded believers to have mercy on those who doubt or are evaluating. They should not be mocked or dismissed. On the contrary, just as the Lord Jesus will show mercy when He returns, so believers ought to show mercy and have compassion for those who are struggling with their faith.

### How to Say It

apostolic	ap-uh-stahl-ick.
doxology	dawk-saw-leh-jee.
Triune	Tri-yoon.

The mercy Jesus gives to believers is the same mercy believers ought to show to doubters. Jude used the same word (*mercy or compassion*) in both verses 21-22.

Second, some needed rescuing from *the fire* stirred up by the mockers. Jude commanded believers to act in ways that would save others from the destructive mess created by the mockers. Rather than contribute to the fire by stoking it or neglecting those who are endangered by the fire, believers, according to Jude, ought to save them from the fire.

Third, some were so entangled in the ungodly patterns of the mockers that Jude commanded believers to act with mercy but also with fear. Again, the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ is a quality Jude wanted shared with others. At the same time, it ought to be shared in a way that one does not become complicit in evil itself. The love of God means evil is hated. Even as mercy and compassion are given, Jude's language respects the danger of evil. The love of God rescues people from evil rather than joining them in their evil.

Jude commanded believers to keep themselves in the love of God, and Jude also commanded believers to show mercy to those caught up in the agenda of the mockers. The beloved are to love others because God has loved them.

### Leading by Example

When the doctor diagnosed her as prediabetic, Jeannine wasn't convinced any lifestyle changes were possible for her. She was resigned to developing diabetes. But Jeannine's daughter Morgan knew not only what her mother needed to do but also how to convince her to do it. Morgan led by example. She invited her mother regularly for diabetic-friendly meals and shared the recipes. Morgan took Jeannine shopping to get her walking. Gradually, Jeannine started to make positive lifestyle changes.

A similar approach can help those who are resistant to the gospel. Christians can be merciful and understanding to those who doubt. We can walk alongside them and demonstrate the Christian life. Reaping a harvest takes time, care, and the work of the Spirit. If God is patient, we must be as well. —A. W.

### III. Praise God

(Jude 24-25)

#### A. God's Work for Us (v. 24)

**24. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.**

Jude concluded his letter with a doxology, a praise to God. The doxology first identified what God is doing for us (Jude 24), and then it attributed to God what rightfully belongs to Him (v. 25).

While Jude stressed that believers are responsible for keeping themselves in the love of God, he also made it clear that it is God who empowers our perseverance in that love (Jude 1, 24). God keeps us, while believers are also accountable for their own faith as well. Ultimately, believers do not save themselves, nor do they generate their own assurance. Rather, God acts to keep us and causes us to stand in His *presence* without blemish. It is God's loving mercy through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit that redeems us and gives us a righteous and holy standing before the Triune God.

#### What Do You Think?

What practice could you begin or deepen to be more aware of God's helping you to stand faultless before Him?

#### Digging Deeper

How can this practice nurture the joy of being in God's presence?

#### B. God's Glory (v. 25)

**25. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.**

Because of God's gracious mercy, Jude praised God's eternal *glory, majesty, dominion, and power*. These characteristics or attributes describe God's relationship to the world and, consequently, God's own capacity both to keep us from falling and present us without blemish.

Since this doxology is offered to *God* through Jesus, it constitutes a prayer of praise. As Jude has already told us, believers pray in the Spirit. In effect, then, Jude offered a triune prayer. God is

praised through the Son in the Spirit. That is the most holy faith. God poured out mercy through the Son by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and we joyfully return to God the Father our praise through the Son in the Spirit.

### Conclusion

#### A. The Love of God and Loving Others

We live in perilous times, much like the church at the time when Jude was written. So we should recognize and identify the dangers. The church is called to exercise healthy discernment and heed the warnings of the apostles. We ignore them at our own peril.

At the same time, the church does not live in fear but in confidence. We root ourselves in God's love for us, and we pour that same love on those who have been damaged by these perilous times. We confidently live within the love of God as God's beloved, and we mercifully show that love to others in our community. Our response to this divine grace is deep joy and gratitude.

While we practice discernment and contend for the faith, we also show God's mercy to others as we minister to those who doubt, those ensnared in the fire, and those who have soiled their garments. Secured in the love of God by the foundation laid down by apostolic teaching, praying in the Spirit, and looking forward to the mercy of Christ's second coming, we help others and show them the love with which God has loved us.

#### B. Prayer

God, keep us secure in Your love and enable us to show mercy to others in need of Your love. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

#### C. Thought to Remember

Secure in God's love, we are able to love others.

### Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 238) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the Adult Resources packet for the Spring Quarter. Order ISBN 9780784740132 from your supplier.

# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Group learners in pairs and have them take turns sharing the best advice they ever received. Ask them to discuss whether or not they heeded that advice and what consequences resulted. Bring the class back together and ask for volunteers to share briefly the advice they received.

Then talk together about what factors help us decide whether we have received good advice or bad, and how we decide whether to heed that advice. What factors might cause us to disregard advice even when we believe it to be sound? What might convince us to take advice we think is questionable at best? Ask to what degree a positive or negative outcome might change one's mind about whether advice was good or not.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Beloved" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Ask learners to pair up to finish as indicated. After about 10 minutes, bring the class back together to discuss their findings.

Lead into the lesson by saying, "It is good to be able to recognize when a good leader has our best interests at heart. Jude's words in our lesson today encourage us to remember what we know of God and to remain true to Him."

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read Jude 17-19. Have another read 2 Peter 3:3-7. Keeping these texts in mind, have pairs of learners find New Testament examples of mockers. *Option.* Get the class started with these examples: Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. The learners should explain who, if anyone, acted in keeping with Jude's advice before answering the following questions: 1-How were the mockers' actions opposed to God? 2-What harm did this do? Bring the class together to talk about the examples they identified.

Ask a volunteer to read Jude 20-23. Have the

class identify the seven actions mentioned in these verses as you record them on the board. (Expected responses: build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Ghost; keep yourselves in God's love; look for the mercy of Jesus; have compassion; save others from the fire; hate garments spotted by the flesh.)

Then divide the class into seven small groups and assign an action to each group. Give the groups a couple of minutes to discuss their action further and answer: 1-How does this action reflect the heart of God? 2-What New Testament examples show Jude's directives in action? 3-What were the results of acting in keeping with Jude's advice? After several minutes, invite groups to share their insights with the whole class. Take notes on the board as they discuss.

Ask a volunteer to read Jude 24-25. Talk about how these verses are an expression of praise. Have the same small groups from the previous activity review the points listed on the board considering these two verses and discuss: 1-How are believers able to resist living like the world? 2-How are believers able to live sustainably in faith and holiness? (Expected response: through the grace and mercy of Jesus.)

## Into Life

Divide the class into pairs to discuss which of Jude's directives they feel most comfortable trying to carry out and which they feel least equipped to do. Have them talk about the examples brought up in previous exercises for any insights or encouragement as they seek to heed Jude's direction in the upcoming week. Encourage the pairs to conclude with a concrete plan to live out Jude 20-21. *Option.* Distribute the "Build Yourselves Up" exercise from the activity page to facilitate creating a plan for implementing Jude 20-21. Pray for the learners as you wrap up class time.



# Testing Our Faith

Devotional Reading: Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24

Background Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11

## 2 Corinthians 13:5-11

5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong; and this also we wish, even your perfection.

10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.



## Key Text

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.* —2 Corinthians 13:5a

# Examining Our Faith

## Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify criteria for being “in the faith.”
2. Explain how the imperatives of 2 Corinthians 13:11 are interrelated.
3. Create a test question that reflects Paul’s challenge in the Key Text.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Self-Testing
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Examination (2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

- A. Imperative (v. 5)  
*Dangerous Spots*
- B. Result (v. 6)

#### II. Expectation (2 Corinthians 13:7-10)

- A. Paul’s Request (v. 7)
- B. Paul’s Values (vv. 8-9)  
*The Value of Weakness*
- C. Paul’s Purpose (v. 10)

#### III. Exhortation (2 Corinthians 13:11)

- A. Invitation to Community (v. 11a)
- B. Assurance of God’s Presence (v. 11b)

#### Conclusion

- A. Taking Inventory
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Self-Testing

Social media is filled with opportunities to test ourselves. We can test our knowledge of history, the Bible, government, and even our personalities and tastes. Self-testing is part of modern culture.

We test ourselves to gain insight into our capabilities. Such testing is sometimes quite valuable. At other times, however, we may focus on such tests narcissistically by interpreting personality defects as strengths. And some self-evaluations are designed to form or influence us as consumers.

Despite these potential problems, testing can often serve productive and valuable ends. We all take tests, need tests, and benefit from tests. This includes, as we will see, the benefits of Christians and churches testing themselves.

### B. Lesson Context

Paul had established the church in Corinth during a personal visit to that city in about AD 52 (Acts 18:1-18). We are not certain how many letters he wrote to that church, but there were at least two—the ones we call *1 & 2 Corinthians*.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in preparation for a return visit (2 Corinthians 10:2; 12:20-21; 13:10). While the church in Corinth had, in general, responded favorably to Paul’s previous letter (see chapter 7), he knew some problems remained (12:20-21).

At least part of the reason for those problems was that some doubted that Christ was speaking through Paul; they wanted proof (2 Corinthians 13:3). Was he a true apostle of the Lord Jesus, or was Paul a con artist? Some Corinthians thought that Paul’s weaknesses—his weak presence and suffering-filled ministry—meant that the answer was *no*. But Paul proved earlier in the letter that such weakness and suffering proved the opposite (much of chapters 6, 10, and 11).

Weakness was how Jesus came into the world, and He suffered on the cross to display God’s power (2 Corinthians 13:4). Paul’s apostolic ministry had been (and was being) tested and verified through suffering rather than by avoiding it. The power of God seen in Paul’s suffering was also seen in the life

of Jesus. In like manner, through Paul's suffering and weakness, God's power gave life through Paul's ministry. Therefore, it wasn't Paul's credibility that was on the line. Instead, it was the credibility of the naysayers in the church at Corinth that was at issue.

## I. Examination

(2 Corinthians 13:5-6)

### A. Imperative (v. 5)

**5a. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.**

This is the second time that Paul has challenged the believers in Corinth to *examine* and *prove* themselves (the first time was in 1 Corinthians 11:28). The challenge was for the readers to undergo a season of spiritual self-discernment. This self-examination required the readers to stop questioning Paul's credibility and instead look to their credibility as Christian believers.

We note how the word *faith* is used in this context. This word usually refers to one's personal belief (assent) in Christ (John 20:31; 2 Corinthians 4:13; etc.). Included in that understanding is the concept of trust. Therefore, the word *faith* in Scripture typically means belief plus trust (Psalms 78:22; 86:2; Romans 4:5; 2 Timothy 1:12). But that is not the sense here. Instead, the phrase *the faith* refers to the body of doctrine to be believed and practiced (compare Acts 6:7; Ephesians 4:13; Titus 1:13; Jude 3). Thus, Paul's challenge is not to examine oneself to determine how much faith (belief plus assent) his readers have in Jesus but rather to determine whether the readers accept his doctrinal teaching regarding the nature of the Christian faith. The stress on the importance of

being *in the faith* is highlighted by the bookend phrase *examine yourselves* and *prove your own selves*.

### What Do You Think?

How can believers "examine" their beliefs and actions to ensure they are "in the faith"?

### Digging Deeper

In what ways can an accountability partner or a small group help a believer complete this examination?

**5b. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?**

Testing, both self-imposed (Galatians 6:4) and imposed by others (James 1:12; 1 Peter 4:12-13; etc.), is necessary for evaluating one's status regarding whether *Jesus Christ is in* him or her. The test is not graded in terms of letter grades, such as an A- or a C+. Neither is it graded on a "curve." Instead, it's simply Pass/Fail. Either Jesus is in you, or He is not; there's no in-between. To fail in this regard is to *be reprobates*. As Paul uses the underlying Greek word elsewhere, it is translated "unjust" (1 Corinthians 6:1) and "unrighteous" (6:9).

While this pointed question challenged the church in Corinth, it seems intentionally focused on those who were dismissive of Paul and unconvinced of his authority. Thus, we detect a bit of "verbal judo" by Paul: those who find fault with him are revealing a fault of their own. They ought to test themselves rather than test Paul. They should be concerned about whether they had failed the test rather than whether Paul had failed it.

Paul's hope, of course, was that the readers would realize the seriousness of the issue. To fail the self-evaluation would be to reveal a life without Jesus.

## How to Say It

apostolic	ap-uh-stahl-ick.
Corinth	Kor-inth.
Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (th as in thin).
epistle	ee-pis-ul.
Philippians	Fih-lip-ee-unz.
Thessalonians	Thess-uh-lo-nee-unz (th as in thin).

## Dangerous Spots

Recently I went to the doctor to have a strangely shaped mole examined. Peering closely at it, she said, "It's good you came in; this could be cancerous." She then proceeded to freeze it with liquid nitrogen (cryotherapy). Should the mole reassert itself, its removal by surgery would be needed.

The doctor went on to identify more than 20 spots on my skin that she decided to treat

preventively. She explained, "Once I had a patient with a spot only a couple of millimeters across, really easy to miss. It was cancer, and if we hadn't caught it, he could have died within a year." Dangerous spots are easy to miss, especially if our attention is unduly distracted by spots that exist only in our imaginations. As the "problem people" in the church at Corinth were misdiagnosing Paul, he did them a great service by pointing out that (1) the spots they saw in him were imaginary and (2) they had very real spots of their own—spots they should have seen but could not due to their focus on him.

Jesus himself addressed this problem of wrong focus (Matthew 7:3-5). It's an issue of self-imposed spiritual blindness (23:16-34; etc.). We all tend to have one or more spiritual blind spots. Some such spots are more serious than others, but the goal is to eliminate them all (1 Timothy 6:13-15). Will you be proactive in searching for them and enlisting others to help? Or will you simply assume you don't have any? —A. W.

## B. Result (v. 6)

### 6. But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

Here, Paul does two things to the phrase "except ye be reprobates?" from the previous verse: (1) he changes the question to a statement, and (2) he changes "ye" to "we." These indicate that Paul was confident that his proposed self-examination on the part of the Corinthians would cause them to realize who had the presence of Christ (Paul himself and most members of the church at Corinth) and who did not (the minority of troublemakers in that church).

The key to reaching the correct conclusion was ensuring that the proper criteria were applied to the assessment. Paul sprinkles these criteria throughout this letter (examples: 2 Corinthians 10:2, 7, 12) and includes the general criteria noted in the next verse in our lesson.

## II. Expectation

(2 Corinthians 13:7-10)

### A. Paul's Request (v. 7)

#### 7. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not

**that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.**

As Paul prepared for his third visit to Corinth (2 Corinthians 13:1), he prayed to God regarding the state of the church there. The nature of the prayer, which we see in the verse at hand, is neither that of simple-minded wishful thinking nor one of mere psychological encouragement. Instead, Paul's prayer calls upon God to strengthen the readers against *evil*.

In this light, we keep in mind that a significant theme of this letter is a defense of Paul's ministry and apostolic authority. The two main pieces of evidence that validate that ministry and authority were God's power that shone through Paul's weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9; 13:4) and the moral transformation of the members of the church at Corinth (3:2-6). For those believers to *do no evil* would maintain their growth with regard to that transformation. Paul hastened to add that this was *not that we should appear approved* (that is, for the sake of his reputation), but *that ye should do that which is honest* (that is, for the reputation of his readers). Thus, Paul is principally concerned that his readers bear the fruit of their transformation and be less concerned with his credentials as an approved apostle.

## B. Paul's Values (vv. 8-9)

### 8. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

The epistle of 2 Corinthians has been called the least organized of Paul's writings. That's because he often seems to jump from topic to topic in a stream of consciousness. But here we detect an important and well-organized chain of thought: the confidence in 2 Corinthians 13:6 combined with the prayer in 13:7 leads to the certainty that gospel *truth* will prevail. Indeed, the importance of truth is a theme of this letter (see 4:2; 7:14; 11:10; 12:6). One truth was that Paul had not failed any test regarding the validity of his message and authority, though some Corinthians thought he had.

### 9a. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong.

Paul uses accusations from his critics (2 Corinthians 10:10) and transforms them into an asset.

Unlike the apostolic pretenders of 2 Corinthians 11:5 and 12:11-12, Paul had neither sought wealth nor had tried to deceive. He was not a manipulator but one who lived authentically and without guile (2 Corinthians 4:1-4). Paul conformed his ministry to the gospel, which included his willingness to suffer and place himself in a position of weakness for the sake of others. He was willing to suffer the hardships and persecutions of gospel ministry if it meant strengthening the faith of the Corinthians (6:3-10; 11:23-29). Paul willingly worked with his hands to be self-supporting so that the Corinthians would not be distracted by requests for financial support (11:7-9; 12:13-17; compare Acts 18:2-3). This was Paul's joy. He gladly lived in weakness so that the Corinthians might live in strength (2 Corinthians 12:19).



Visual for Lesson 2. Ask students to silently contemplate this question before you pose the questions associated with verse 5a.

### What Do You Think?

How can believers embrace their perceived weaknesses in order to encourage the spiritual growth of others?

### Digging Deeper

How will you respond to the lie that believers must be "strong" in the eyes of the world?

## 9b. And this also we wish, even your perfection.

We may wonder what exactly is entailed in Paul's desire for the Corinthians' *perfection*. The Greek word being translated occurs in its noun form only here in the New Testament. But in its verb form, it appears five times in Paul's letters. In four of the five cases, it refers to movement from one state of being to a better one (1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:10). In the remaining case, it refers to the opposite (Romans 9:22). Using the two passages from the Corinthian letters as touchstones, the idea is one of church unity that results from the repentance of rebellious believers.

Paul prayed that God would sufficiently equip them for life in the gospel. Paul prayed that God would move their hearts toward good and away from evil and fully equip them to participate in the ministry of reconciliation with Paul rather than

oppose Paul. This is parallel to the kind of preparation Paul described in Ephesians 4:12 or what Scripture supplies to the people of God so that they are fully equipped for every good work (see 2 Timothy 3:17). The perfection described here is one where the people of God are sufficiently equipped to live out the gospel in their lives faithfully.

In essence, Paul prayed that the Corinthians would grow up in their faith. As they went about doing good and avoiding evil, God would equip them for greater participation in the ministry of the gospel as the church became ever more unified.

## The Value of Weakness

Linda had been a missionary and church planter for 16 years when she and two female coworkers made their way to a remote tribe. That tribe was highly patriarchal, placing little importance on women. On the plus side, this meant female missionaries were not seen as a cultural threat in the way males would have been.

The arrival of these outsiders was a matter of significant curiosity to the tribe. When Linda began to tell stories of Jesus to the women and children, several men stood on the periphery to "supervise." They acted disinterested initially, but the men began listening intently as the days passed.

One day, a bold young warrior strode to the front and announced that men were in charge. Therefore, he would tell the story, not Linda. He repeated her most recent story, getting some

details wrong. However, other men remembered the story better and corrected him. The whole tribe became interested and engaged.

Had this happened in her own culture, Linda may have been offended. But here, she saw this turn of events as a significant breakthrough: the gospel was being accepted and claimed by the “gatekeepers” of the tribal culture. In this situation, Linda had ministered in the role of one who was “weak” so that others might become “strong.” When was the last time you did so as well? —A. W.

### C. Paul's Purpose (v. 10)

**10a. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness.**

The opening *therefore* introduces Paul's expanded explanation of why he wrote this letter rather than waiting to deliver the message in person. Paul wants the Corinthians to listen to the letter's sharp words so that he does not have to exercise his apostolic authority when he visits. The responsibility of those who occupy leadership positions in the church includes giving an account to God for the souls of those they served (see Hebrews 13:17). Sometimes, this responsibility requires reproving and rebuking those who oppose the truth (see 2 Timothy 4:2).

Spiritual health is essential, and some Corinthians had lost their sense of the gospel. Some continued their divisive practices, and others had not repented of their sexual immorality (2 Corinthians 12:20-21). If the church allowed such behavior to go unchallenged, the result would be a spreading spiritual cancer, as some would see such toleration as permission. Thus Paul's sharp tone.

#### What Do You Think?

How do believers discern whether or not a rebuke is necessary for the health of their congregation?

#### Digging Deeper

How do Scriptures like Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3-4; Galatians 6:1; and 1 Timothy 5:20 inform believers' approach to carrying out a rebuke?

**10b. According to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.**

Even so, Paul's purpose was not to destroy the Corinthians but to edify them (compare 2 Corinthians 10:8). Again, he states the ultimate validation of his apostleship: *the power which the Lord hath given him*. God's goal was and is the making of disciples who grow in maturity (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2; Hebrews 5:11-6:3). But when disobedience abounded, and the gospel was subverted, Paul intended to use his authority to tear down evil in the congregation. Yet, that was and is a last-ditch solution, and it was not the response that Paul desired. Therefore, he wrote this letter to prepare the Corinthians for his visit, call them to self-examination, and remind them of his desire for their growth in the gospel.

## III. Exhortation

(2 Corinthians 13:11)

### A. Invitation to Community (v. 11a)

**11a. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace.**

Paul concluded by reaffirming his relationship with the Corinthian audience. They were his siblings (*brethren*) in Christ. He had not given up on them. On the contrary, he remained connected to them as part of the family of God. Paul loved the Corinthians not only as spiritual siblings but also as their spiritual father (1 Corinthians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 6:13; 12:14).

With such familial affection, Paul concluded this section with five brief and pointed challenges. The first of his challenges is found in the word translated *farewell*. The underlying Greek also occurs in its identical form in Philippians 3:1 and 4:4 (twice). There the translation is the imperative “rejoice,” and that is the sense here.

The second challenge, to *be perfect*, translates the verb form of the noun translated “perfection” in 2 Corinthians 13:9, above. This command echoes Jesus' imperative to “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), although a different word

is translated there. We know, of course, that perfection in this life is unattainable since all have sinned (Romans 3:23). But that doesn't mean that the standard should be lowered!

The third command, *be of good comfort*, seems to be a condensed version of 2 Corinthians 1:4-6 (see also 2 Corinthians 2:7; 7:6-7). The fourth command, *be of one mind*, stresses the importance of church unity (also Philippians 2:2, 5; 4:2). This can speak to doctrinal unity, but also essential is a shared humility that lives worthy of the gospel. Such unity will achieve the fifth imperative: *live in peace* (see Mark 9:50; 1 Thessalonians 5:13).

### What Do You Think?

How can believers eliminate hindrances that prevent life with "one mind" and "in peace" with other believers?

### Digging Deeper

What Scriptures come to mind in this regard?

## B. Assurance of God's Presence (v. 11b)

### 11b. And the God of love and peace shall be with you.

Paul writes of the God "of peace" several times in his letters (Romans 16:20; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:16). But this is the only time he writes of *the God of love and peace*. The practice of the five imperatives would shape the Corinthian church along those two lines. God had not given up on the Corinthian church, nor had Paul. On the contrary, both were committed to the church.

## Conclusion

### A. Taking Inventory

Many congregations are in turmoil, and the times in which we live are perilous. Faith is under attack from within and from without. In such times it is important to take inventory and examine ourselves. The contents of Paul's prayer indicate the sort of life that passes the test. Avoiding evil is not enough in and of itself. Evil must be replaced with doing what is right. To avoid evil without replacing it with good is to leave one open to the situation

described in Matthew 12:43-45. An unexamined faith, some have said, is not worth living. Paul calls us to submit to a process of discernment by which we try our hearts (compare Psalm 139:23-24). Are we seeking to do good? Are we seeking to avoid evil? Are we pursuing maturity in Christ? Are we seeking to be equipped to do good and participate in the ministry of reconciliation?

This process will be painful but will build us up, not destroy us. We pursue this self-examination with the confidence that we are loved by God and with the assurance that the gospel is true. God is for us rather than against us. We pursue love and peace because God is the God of love and peace. Some have called this goal "the ability to think God's thoughts after Him." God responds to the prayers that ask for the strength to do good, the courage to avoid evil, and the power to participate in the ministry of the gospel as fully equipped disciples of Jesus.

This necessary self-examination requires a familial bond, a desire for maturity, a striving toward perfection, mutual encouragement, a shared commitment to live out the meaning of the gospel, and peaceful practices. An examined faith can flourish in that kind of church. Without such a community, faith will suffer and perhaps die spiritually. The process begins by asking whether we know ourselves. Do we?

### What Do You Think?

What aspect of spiritual self-examination seems the most difficult for you in your current season of life?

### Digging Deeper

How will you remember that you are a beloved child of God as you take up the practice of spiritual self-examination?

## B. Prayer

O God, we ask You for the courage to examine ourselves with unvarnished honesty so that we may discern Christ in us. In the name of Your Son, who gives resurrection life, we pray. Amen.

## C. Thought to Remember

Testing yourself is not optional.

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Create activities to test physical strength, focus, problem-solving abilities, and knowledge. Ensure that all activities are appropriate to the age and skills of the learners. (Examples: To test strength, place a weight, such as a whole bag of flour, on top of a seated volunteer's ankles and have them raise their feet until their legs are parallel to the floor. To test agility, put a 6-foot line of masking tape on the floor and have a volunteer walk down the line without deviation. To test problem-solving skills, give a volunteer a riddle or brain teaser. To test knowledge, ask volunteers to answer a trivia question.)

After every volunteer has the chance to test, ask the following question for whole-class discussion: "How does it feel testing your different abilities?"

Lead into the Bible study by saying, "It is usually fun for us to test our abilities, but not as fun when we realize personal limits or weaknesses. In today's lesson, identify what is being tested, how it is being tested, and why that test is necessary."

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 13:5-6. Divide the class into four small groups: **Matthew 7:18-20 Group**, **John 13:35 Group**, **John 14:15 Group**, and **Romans 10:9 Group**. Instruct groups to read their Scripture passage and discuss how it informs self-examination regarding whether a person is "in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). After three minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to share their group's insights.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Fruit of the Spirit Test" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in pairs.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 13:7-9. Distribute a note card and pencil to each learner. Invite learners to write down the names of two or three influential spiritual mentors. Prompt learners

to consider family members, church members, and community members of all ages. After one minute, have learners explain to their partner why that mentor has been influential. Have pairs pray for the growth and encouragement of their mentors.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the "My Prayer for You" activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in one minute or less.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud 2 Corinthians 13:10-11. Divide the class into four small groups: **Perfect Wholeness Group**, **Comforting Encouragement Group**, **One Mind Group**, and **Living Peaceably Group**. Have the groups answer the following questions in small-group discussion: 1—How does 2 Corinthians 13:10-11 address the concept or attitude described in your group's name? 2—How does this concept or attitude build others up? 3—What do you need to do to develop this attitude?

Reconvene the class and have a volunteer from each group share their answers.

## Into Life

Write this question on the board:

*How did my actions and attitudes during the last week demonstrate my faith in Christ?*

Ask the class how this question can help guide them throughout the week as they discover Christ in their lives and grow in faith.

Distribute three sheets of blank letter-size printer paper to each learner. Ask them to stack the sheets and fold them to make a pamphlet. Invite learners to write the question on the board at the top of the booklet's first page. On the bottom of that page, ask them to write down the lesson's Key Text: 2 Corinthians 13:5a. Challenge participants to set aside a daily time to examine their faith. Encourage learners to create a "test question" like the one above that reflects Paul's challenge in the Key Text. Before the next lesson, invite volunteers to share what they learned from this daily examination.



# Defending Our Faith

Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 4:1-8  
Background Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

## 1 Peter 3:8-17

8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

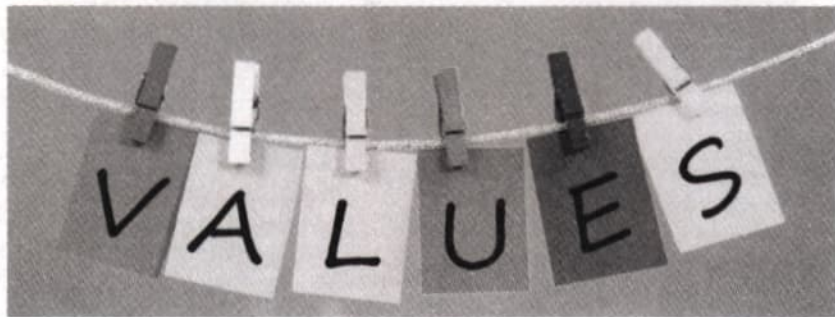
13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.



## Key Text

*For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. —1 Peter 3:17*

# Examining Our Faith

## Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the Old Testament text quoted.
2. Compare and contrast the things he or she “must do” with what he or she “must not do.”
3. State one “must do” and one “must not do” for personal focus in the week ahead.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Man’s Search for Meaning?
- B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Apostle
- C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

#### I. Right Behavior (1 Peter 3:8-12)

- A. Be a Blessing (vv. 8-9)

*Which Route?*

- B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10-12)

#### II. Confident Believers (1 Peter 3:13-17)

- A. Do Not Fear (vv. 13-14)
- B. Give an Answer (vv. 15-17)

*Faith to the End*

#### Conclusion

- A. Finding Meaning
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Man’s Search for Meaning?

*Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Shouldn’t we “get even” with those who do us wrong?* Anyone with life experience will inevitably ask these questions. We want to make sense of our suffering and find a way to deal with the resulting despair, if not eliminate it entirely.

Viktor E. Frankl’s 1946 book *Man’s Search for Meaning* details his attempts to find meaning and purpose in his experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. By the end of the book, Frankl acknowledges human evil and the capacity of suffering humans to find meaning in their experiences.

Many individuals described in Scripture suffered persecution. The various ways they reacted are timeless in their ability to instruct all future generations.

### B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Apostle

Peter was one of Jesus’ original 12 disciples (also known as “apostles”; Luke 6:13). Peter (also called Simon or Cephas; John 1:42) was known for being impulsive (examples: Matthew 14:22-28; 16:22; 26:35; Mark 9:5-6; John 18:10). In spite of that fact—or perhaps because of it—he seems to have held a special place among the Twelve. He is named first in all four listings of those Twelve (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). Jesus conferred on him “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 16:19). After Jesus’ ascension, Peter was a leader of the first-century church (see Acts 1:15-17; 2:14-40; 15:6-29). His ministry focused mainly on Jews (see Galatians 2:8). In that position, he experienced persecution (example: Acts 12:1-4), which informed his outlook regarding suffering and trials.

### C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

First Peter 5:13 reveals the likely location of where the letter was written: the city of Rome. That verse says “Babylon,” not “Rome,” but there is widespread agreement that *Babylon* is a code word for *Rome*. Historic, literal Babylon had been the great oppressor of the Jews in the sixth century BC (2 Kings 24–25). This served as Peter’s analogy to

Rome of the first century AD (compare Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; etc.), particularly under the evil Emperor Nero (reigned AD 54–68).

The letter's positive attitude toward government (1 Peter 2:13–17) may indicate that Nero's state-sponsored persecution had not yet reached full intensity (but see 4:12). In any case, Peter was not shy about confronting ruling authorities when necessary (Acts 4:19; 5:29). As one writer notes, 1 Peter is "one of the earliest Christian documents reflecting on the problem of the relation of the Christian to the state."

The letter of 1 Peter is one of two existing letters by that apostle (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1). The recipients of both letters were the various churches found in an area of northeastern Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 3:1). The first letter was likely intended to be circulated among the regions, perhaps by way of Silvanus, an assistant to Peter (1 Peter 5:12). Were the intended recipients primarily of Jewish background, primarily of Gentile background, or a roughly even split? The letter's dozen or so quotations from the Old Testament could indicate that the intended audience was primarily of Jewish background. A stronger case can be made, however, for seeing the audience as primarily Gentile in background as Peter addressed their former lives of "ignorance" (1 Peter 1:14; compare Paul's use of this same word in Ephesians 4:17–19 to refer to Gentiles).

The occasion for Peter's letter was primarily a response to the suffering of believers, particularly since more was yet to come (see 1 Peter 1:6–7; etc.). Peter could address whatever suffering his audience had or would experience because he had been "a witness of sufferings of Christ" (5:1); Peter himself had suffered for that name (Acts 12).

## I. Right Behavior

(1 Peter 3:8–12)

### A. Be a Blessing (vv. 8–9)

#### 8a. Finally, be ye all of one mind.

Verse 8 as a whole is only nine words in the original language. Five of those nine words are adjectives that describe behavior fitting for believers facing a hostile world.

The first adjective, translated as *one mind*, describes the desired unity of believers. Unity is a gift from God (Romans 15:5–6). The frequency of New Testament references to unity speaks to its importance (John 10:16; 17:11, 21–22; 1 Corinthians 1:10–12; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3, 13; Philippians 2:1–4; 4:2).

#### What Do You Think?

Why might Christians not experience God's gift of unity?

#### Digging Deeper

What scriptural evidence gives you confidence in unity as a gift, even if believers seem divided?

#### 8b. Having compassion one of another.

This is the translation of the second of the five adjectives. Were we to take the individual letters of the underlying Greek word and flip them to their sound-alike letters in the English alphabet, we would hear the word *sympathy*. The word appears in its verb form in Hebrews 4:15; 10:34.

#### 8c. Love as brethren.

Repeating the procedure from verse 8b, converting the individual letters of the underlying Greek word to their sound-alike letters in English results in hearing the word *Philadelphia*—the city of brotherly *love*. Believers are described as part of God's household or family (Matthew 12:50; John 1:12; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19; 1 John 3:1–2). Therefore, the third adjective describes the love that family members are to have for one another.

#### 8d. Be pitiful, be courteous.

This verse's fourth and fifth adjectives elaborate on how believers can live with love and compassion. The word translated *be pitiful* is also translated "tenderhearted" in Ephesians 4:32, and that is the sense here. To have heartfelt concern toward others is a crucial part of the life of a believer

## How to Say It

anthropomorphism	an-thruh-pu-mōre-fih-zm.
Polycarp	Paw-lih-karp.
Silvanus	Sil-vay-nus.
Smyrna	Smur-nuh.

(compare Colossians 3:12). Its presence reflects a life transformed by God's love (see 1 John 3:17).

To *be courteous* is probably an umbrella term that includes deference, kindness, and thinking of others more highly than oneself (compare Romans 12:16; Philippians 2; 1 Peter 5:5).

### 9a. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing.

The command regarding *not rendering evil for evil* can be found in several other passages (examples: Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; Matthew 5:39, 44; Romans 12:17, 19; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). An aspect of evil treatment the original readers had suffered or were suffering was *railing*. The idea is that of slander, reproach, or insult. Jesus himself had faced mocking and insults leading up to and during His crucifixion (Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 22:63-65). However, He did not respond to His abusers in the manner in which He was treated (see 1 Peter 2:23).

#### What Do You Think?

In which situations is it most difficult not to respond to verbal assaults?

#### Digging Deeper

In those situations, how can you lean on the Holy Spirit to guide your responses?

### 9b. But contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

It's not sufficient merely to refrain from rendering evil for evil. Rather, potential evil reactions are to be replaced with actual holy reactions (Matthew 5:44). This should not be confused with a salvation based on works, for Peter has already established salvation as God's work (1 Peter 1:3, 23). As a result of our salvation, we are to be conduits for God's blessing in the world.

#### Which Route?

He was a new Bible college professor. He knew his teaching skills needed much improvement, and negative student feedback wounded him deeply. In one feedback evaluation, a student said he should find a different line of work.

An especially painful incident occurred one

day during the college's chapel service. A student had organized a skit in which the actors mocked a clueless professor who was obviously modeled after this man. After chapel, students watched as he went up to the stage to speak to the student who had instigated the mockery. Smiling, he shook the student's hand firmly and pulled him into a side-hug. Looking the student in the eyes, the professor said, "You're a brilliant actor, Jim. God's given you a great talent. I'm glad you're my student."

Jim managed to stammer a "thanks" and went back to moving stage props. Although the skit had been mortifying, the man was confident that he had chosen the route of Jesus—the route of love, compassion, and blessing. Had you been that professor, would you have done the same? —A. W.

#### B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10-12)

### 10. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.

This verse begins with a quote from Psalm 34:12-16, supporting Peter's point regarding the right kind of behavior amid trials and difficulty. According to this psalm's superscription, David wrote this psalm during a time of personal suffering and trials, as recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. Therefore, it was an appropriate psalm to cite to an audience of believers who themselves were undergoing trials (see Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter). With this quote, Peter switches back to the negative, what-not-to-do imperatives but with greater specificity: *evil* as it comes from one's *tongue* (compare James 3:1-10).

The feature of Hebrew poetry known as *parallelism* is quite evident here. Note that the words *tongue* and *lips* are synonyms in the sense of being instruments of speech. The *evil* and *guile* they can produce are also parallel in meaning. The parallelism continues in the next verse.

#### 11a. Let him eschew evil, and do good.

Perhaps you recall from previous lessons that when Hebrew parallelism is present, then only one idea is in view, not two. Thus to *eschew evil, and do good* are to be seen as a single action. The way to avoid evil is to replace those impulses with

doing good as one action. To avoid evil without replacing it with doing good introduces the danger noted in Luke 11:24-26.

**11b. Let him seek peace, and ensue it.**

More Hebrew parallelism presents itself in this continuing quote from Psalm 34:14: to *seek peace* is the same thing as to *ensue it* (compare Matthew 5:9). God's people have peace with Him (Romans 5:1), and we are expected to seek peace in relationships with others (14:19). This is not peace "at any cost," but is peace "as much as lieth in you" (12:18). We don't yield or agree to unholy viewpoints merely to keep the peace (Matthew 10:34-36; Luke 12:51-53). God is indeed a "God of peace" (Romans 15:33; 16:20), but He also wages war (Revelation 2:16; 19:19; etc.).

**12. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.**

This verse features a literary tool called *anthropomorphism*, which is seeing God in terms of human characteristics and behavior. "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24) and, therefore, does not have a physical body. However, Peter describes the Lord figuratively as having *eyes*, *ears*, and a *face*. Peter does this to help his audience better understand the Lord's character. This technique is nothing new, being used dozens of times in both Old and New Testaments (examples: Genesis 6:8; Exodus 33:10, 20, 23; Amos 9:8; James 5:4).

## II. Confident Believers

(1 Peter 3:13-17)

### A. Do Not Fear (vv. 13-14)

**13. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?**

Another literary tool presents itself: that of the rhetorical question. Such questions are not intended to elicit an answer because the answer is obvious. The rhetorical question here contrasts an ideal situation with what was likely already being experienced by Peter's audience, per the next verse, below.

**14a. But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye.**

While Peter hoped to see good behavior receive proper recognition (see 1 Peter 2:13-14), this would not always be the case. Oppression is not inevitable for believers, but it is a possibility that all believers must prepare themselves to face—and not be surprised when it does (4:12; 1 John 3:13).

The underlying Greek word for *happy* is elsewhere translated as "blessed" (Matthew 5:3-11; James 1:12; etc.). This clarifies that Peter was not suggesting those who suffer experience a masochistic enjoyment of their own pain. Blessing comes when people hear God's word and obey His commands (Luke 11:28). The ultimate blessing comes when a person receives forgiveness for sin through faith in Christ Jesus (see Romans 4:4-8).

### What Do You Think?

What blessing have you experienced during or following suffering for righteousness' sake?

### Digging Deeper

How can you communicate the hope of blessing while not ignoring the pain another is currently experiencing?

**14b. And be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.**

This half-verse alludes to Isaiah 8:12. That section of the book where it is located details a conflict between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. When Ahaz, king of Judah, was faced with the destruction of his kingdom, the Lord promised that Judah would be protected (Isaiah 7:3-9). Even though Ahaz and his people faced destruction, they were commanded not to be afraid. They were to fear the Lord rather than earthly opponents (8:12-15).

### B. Give an Answer (vv. 15-17)

**15a. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.**

Again, the challenge was (and is) to replace what is not to be done with what should be done instead. To *sanctify* means to designate someone or something being set apart as holy (John 10:36). The underlying Greek word is also translated as "hallowed" in verses proclaiming the holiness of

God's name (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2). Given the imperative tone of the verb *sanctify* as used here, we may wonder how we mere humans can possibly *sanctify the Lord God* more than He already is sanctified! Indeed, this verb is used in its imperative tone only five times in the New Testament: here and in Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:12; John 17:17; Revelation 22:11.

The key to understanding all this is context. Words take on definite meanings only within the contexts used. Take, for instance, the word *fine*. By itself, it has no fewer than seven potential meanings! Which of the seven is intended is discovered only in the context of that word's use in a sentence and paragraph. The context of the imperative in the verse before us is found in these three words: *in your hearts*. Humans certainly do not sanctify God by literally making Him holier than He already is! What we are to change, rather, is how we view Him.

**15b. And be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.**

Colossians 4:6 says much the same thing as this verse. "Readiness" in a general New Testament sense has two aspects: we are to be ready to do good (Titus 3:1) even as we remain ready for the Son's return (Matthew 24:44; Luke 12:40). We err when we focus on either of those at the expense of the other. One error is reflected in the old description of someone who was "so heavenly minded that he was no earthly good." The other error lets a Christian's responsibility to be a change agent for social justice eclipse the need to evangelize for the life to come in eternity.

There are various areas in which Christians are to be ready. Peter specifies one of these: one's readiness to *give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you*. Notice that this isn't addressing what preachers and Bible teachers are to do on Sunday morning to people who are already saved by the blood! Rather, it applies to all Christians as they (we) interact with unbelievers in everyday life.

Notice also that Peter's imperative isn't dealing with a Christian's initiative in bringing up the subject of salvation in Jesus. Rather, the imperative

here deals with how to react when an unbeliever asks about our hope. But before the unbeliever asks about our hope, he or she needs to see that hope reflected in how we talk and behave differently from the ways the world does (1 Peter 4:3-4).

#### **15c. With meekness and fear.**

Any response that believers provide will be as effective only as the attitude with which it is given. In that light, the phrase *with meekness and fear* speaks to a low-key response. Such a demeanor is to characterize followers of Jesus (see Matthew 5:5; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12).

#### **What Do You Think?**

How do you remain ready to testify about the hope you have?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How would someone hearing you speak about your hope describe your attitude?

**16. Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.**

The New Testament has much to say about the importance of one's *conscience* as it uses that word about 30 times. The conscience can be a marvelous guide to proper thought and behavior if it is properly informed in doing so (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Romans 9:1; etc.). When functioning as God intended, it is a moral alarm system (Romans 2:15). But one's conscience can be overridden by evil desires (Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 4:2).

The word *conversation* requires a bit of attention because it does not mean today what it did when the *King James Version* was published in 1611. Today, we use that word in a narrow sense of people engaging in verbal communication. But in the *KJV* it refers more broadly to the way one lives, one's lifestyle (compare Ephesians 4:22).

**17. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.**

Proper conduct (*well doing*) in all situations is an important theme in this letter (see 1 Peter 2:15, 20; 4:19). When believers *suffer* for such conduct, the result is a powerful witness for unbelievers.

The ultimate example of suffering in this regard is Christ (see 3:18, not today's lesson text).

This verse also reveals another aspect of believers' suffering: *the will of God*. We should approach this topic with much caution because *the will of God* in some contexts means that He *causes* something to happen, but in other contexts, it means that He *permits* it to happen. God exercises His sovereign control by permitting what He does not cause. Some relevant passages to help understand the difference are Job 1:12; 2:6; Lamentations 3:32-33; Acts 14:16; 16:7; 1 Corinthians 16:7; Hebrews 6:3; 12:4-11; James 1:13-15; 4:15.

In any case, God is able to bring good out of suffering—indeed, that is His intent (Romans 8:28). God does not enjoy seeing people suffer, but He does allow it (example: Exodus 3:7-9) at times. A believer's suffering leads to faithful endurance (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:3) and a deeper relationship with Christ (Philippians 3:8-10).

### Faith to the End

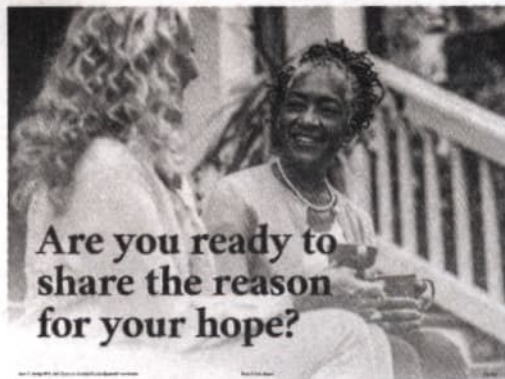
According to church history, Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John. Polycarp became the leader of the church of Smyrna (compare Revelation 2:8-11). At age 86, he was put to death by the Roman government for refusing to pray to the emperor. Given the chance to save his own life by recanting his faith, Polycarp said, "86 years have I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?" Polycarp was burned at the stake in AD 155.

Polycarp didn't do anything to deserve this death. And in facing it, he set apart Christ as his Lord to the very end. He died with a clear conscience. If those who took his life were not ashamed of their slander in this life, they will be at the final judgment. In your last days, will you have so clear a testimony of faithfulness to Christ? —A. W.

## Conclusion

### A. Finding Meaning

Few of us will experience the level of suffering endured by the martyrs of Christian history. However, that does not make Peter's directives any less applicable—quite the opposite! When faced with



**Are you ready to share the reason for your hope?**

Visual for Lesson 3. Allow learners to ponder this question before moving to those associated with verse 15c.

suffering, we may search for meaning in that experience. The question asked relentlessly is, *Why?*

That question is natural and understandable. But it must also be temporary because ultimately the *Why?* needs to change to *What's next?* This is a way that our response to suffering can also serve as a way to point people to a life of faith in Jesus. God wants the best for people. When such suffering occurs, believers should remember to be unified in demonstrating trust in God.

### What Do You Think?

What is your main takeaway from this lesson?

### Digging Deeper

What will do you this week in response to that takeaway?

### B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for being with us in all situations. Help us be unified with other believers. Show us how we can be attentive to the working of Your Spirit. Fill us with peace and humility in all the trials that we might face. We trust that You will work through us to complete Your will in the world. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Let suffering strengthen your faith.

# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Divide participants into three small groups: **Beach Group**, **Crowded Subway Group**, and **Movie Theater Group**. Based on their assigned locations, instruct groups to write two lists of appropriate behaviors and discouraged behaviors. Challenge them to include at least three do's and three don'ts.

After several minutes, ask the groups to write some guidelines for appropriate behavior in their setting, based on the behaviors they have already discussed. After a few more minutes, have the small groups share their rules with the whole group. Discuss what they discovered about rules and expectations.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, "Whether we realize it or not, everything we do is governed by rules or expectations. As we study the passage of Scripture today, consider what rules and expectations God has for His children."

## Into the Word

Have participants return to their previous groups. Assign each group one of the following texts: Matthew 5:43-48; John 13:12-17; and John 17:20-26. Have groups compare their text with 1 Peter 3:8-9 and answer these questions:

1. What is the common theme between the two passages?
2. What did Jesus do in His ministry that shows this theme in action?
3. What "must do" and "must not do" actions did you find in the passages?

Allow time for small group discussion, then ask groups to share their insights with the whole class. Based on the group discussion, create a list of *Must Do* items on the board as well as a second list of *Must Not Do* items.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "To Do

and Not to Do" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated before coming together as a whole class to discuss.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 3:10-12. As a class, discuss what these verses reveal about why we ought to follow the commands of verses 8-9. Ask volunteers to read Psalm 34 out loud. Then assign the previous three small groups these sections: Psalm 34:1-7; 34:8-14; 34:15-22. Have each group make a list of all the reasons why believers should strive to live godly lives, as indicated in their verses and 1 Peter 3:10-12. After bringing the three groups back together, create a third list titled *Why* on the board. Have the groups provide answers to fill in this new list.

Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 3:13-17. Have participants pair up. Ask the pairs to share between them examples of when they have suffered in the past, and how God turned that suffering into a blessing.

## Into Life

Review the lists written on the board earlier in the lesson. Challenge participants to choose one "must do" and one "must not do" from the verses, which they will put into practice in the week ahead. Distribute an index card and pencil to each person. Have participants write their chosen "must do" and "must not do" on the card. Invite participants to refer to their cards throughout the week. Ask participants to bring their cards and an assessment of their progress to share at the beginning of the next lesson. *Option.* If you used the alternative above, allow learners to work from their activity page.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "With Meekness and Fear" exercise from the activity page. Allow learners one minute to complete as indicated before pairing up to give their answers.

Pray with learners before dismissing class.



# Living in Faith

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 28:1-14

Background Scripture: Acts 6

## Acts 6:7-15

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines,

and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

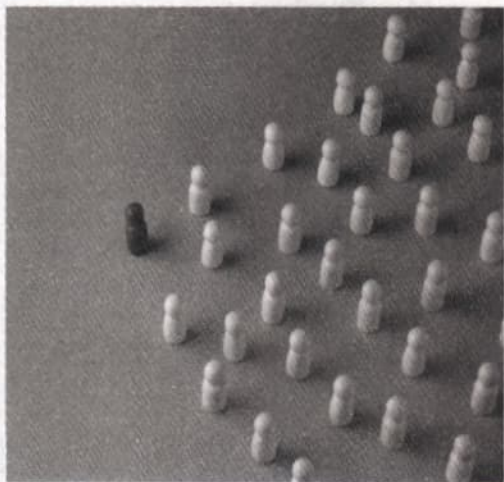
11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.



## Key Text

*Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. —Acts 6:9-10*

# Examining Our Faith

## Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1-5

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. State the charge against Stephen and its basis.
2. Critique the “ends justify the means” tactic used by Stephen’s opponents.
3. Evaluate various ways of responding or reacting when he or she faces opposition to Jesus today.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Sacred Space
- B. Lesson Context: First-Century Church
- C. Lesson Context: The Jerusalem Temple

#### I. The Growing Church (Acts 6:7-10)

- A. Disciples and Priests (v. 7)
- B. Power and Wonders (v. 8)  
*Full of Power*
- C. Wisdom and Spirit (vv. 9-10)  
*A Grandma’s Wisdom*

#### II. The Emboldened Opposition (Acts 6:11-15)

- A. The Conspiracy (vv. 11-12)
- B. The Witnesses (vv. 13-14)
- C. The Steadfast Man (v. 15)

#### Conclusion

- A. Divine Service
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Sacred Space

In the building of my childhood church, there was a room that we called the “sanctuary.” It contained pews, a high ceiling, a choir loft, a pulpit, and an organ. Each week, that room served as the location for worship services. While we infrequently used that space, certain behaviors were deemed unacceptable there. For example, holding a water balloon fight in the sanctuary was out of the question for our youth group!

The congregation established these expectations as a way to honor God. We knew, however, there was nothing holy about that room in and of itself. We believe that God dwells in His people (1 Corinthians 3:16), not buildings (Acts 17:24). But we wanted to set aside that room as a sacred space to honor and worship Him nonetheless.

Violation of the sacred space of the temple in Jerusalem was a severe matter to first-century Jewish leaders. An accusation of such a violation would lead to harsh consequences.

### B. Lesson Context: First-Century Church

After Jesus’ ascension, the number of believers increased and were “added” to the numbers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:47b; 5:14; 6:1). The expanding number of believers led them to develop habits for their gatherings and expectations for how they would treat each other (see 2:42-47a; 4:32-35).

During that time, almost all believers were ethnically Jewish. However, not all had the same cultural upbringing. Some had lived in the Greek-speaking (Hellenistic) portions of the Roman Empire, while others lived in Jewish regions of Palestine. The differences between these groups of first-century Jews led to conflict regarding the treatment of widows (Acts 6:1). As a result, the apostles faced challenges while trying to oversee the church (6:2).

To ease the load for the apostles, they selected seven men to handle specific tasks (see Acts 6:3-4). The book of Acts mentions two of these seven men in further detail: Philip (8:4-40) and Stephen (6:8-8:1). In some ways, the role of these seven men was analogous to the position of deacon (see 1 Timothy 3:8-13). The word *deacon* comes from the Greek

noun *diakonos*, which is not used in Acts 6. However, a variation of that word does appear in Acts 6 and is translated as “ministry” (Acts 6:4). The term describes some aspects of the work of the apostles.

### C. Lesson Context: The Jerusalem Temple

For first-century Judaism, the temple in Jerusalem served as the faith’s physical and spiritual center. The temple complex was the focus of the people’s worship and served as the headquarters for religious leadership.

Several versions of the Jewish temple existed. Construction on the first began in about 966 BC during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 6:1). After 13 years, Solomon’s Temple was completed (7:1) and dedicated (1 Kings 8). During his reign, the temple became a place to worship God and store valuable artifacts. As such, it was a notable place for enemy forces to plunder (example: 14:25-28).

In 597 BC, the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem, took the people into exile, and looted Solomon’s Temple (2 Kings 24:10-14). In 586 BC, the Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s Temple and took the remaining artifacts from the temple (25:8-17).

There would be attempts to rebuild this place of worship. In 538 BC, the Persian king Cyrus allowed Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (see Ezra 1:1-4; 6:1-12; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23). Under the oversight of Zerubbabel (see Ezra 3:2, 8; 4:2), construction faced delays. Eventually, it was finished, and the temple was dedicated in 515 BC (see 5:1-6:22). That temple—sometimes called Zerubbabel’s Temple—was smaller and less impressive than the temple of Solomon’s day (see Haggai 2:3).

Over time, Zerubbabel’s Temple experienced harsh treatment. Greek king Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes (reigned 175-164 BC), desecrated that temple and took its treasures (see nonbiblical 1 Maccabees 1:20-28). His actions led the people to revolt to free Jerusalem and the temple from foreign powers.

Their freedom was temporary. In 63 BC, Roman general Pompey desecrated the temple and its sacred artifacts. Although in shambles, the temple was not entirely demolished. It needed renovation and restoration.

The temple mentioned in the Gospels was the one renovated by Herod the Great (reigned 47-4 BC). Work on that temple began in around 20 BC (compare John 2:20). Construction on the temple complex was completed in about AD 64. The first-century Jewish leaders were not about to let anyone else again defile their holy place. They were especially not going to allow anyone to speak harshly against the building and its associated customs.

## I. The Growing Church

(Acts 6:7-10)

### A. Disciples and Priests (v. 7)

**7. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

This verse reveals two important aspects regarding the growth of the first-century church. First, the church’s development was caused by the dramatic spread of *the word of God* (see also Acts 12:24; 19:20). As the influence of the gospel message *increased* among people, so did *the number of the disciples*. When the gospel falls on willing hearts, spiritual fruit will result, often in multiples (see Luke 8:8, 15).

Second, that their number *multiplied . . . greatly* implies that the *Jerusalem* church underwent rapid numerical growth. Comparing the number of

### How to Say It

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Alexandrians	Al-ex-an-dree-unz.
Antiochus	An-tie-oh-kus.
Cilicia	Sih-lish-i-uh.
Cyrenians	Sigh-ree-nee-unz.
<i>diakonos</i> (Greek)	dee-ah-ko-nawss.
Epiphanes	lh-piff-a-nee-z.
Hellenistic	Heh-lah-nih-stik.
Herod	Hair-ud.
Josephus	Jo-see-fus.
Sadducees	Sad-you-see-z.
Sanhedrin	San-huh-drun or San-heed-run.
Zerubbabel	Zeh-rub-uh-bul.

believers in the first chapters of the book of Acts reveals this expansion (see Acts 1:15; 2:41; 4:4).

Counted among these believers were *priests*. These men served in the temple when their lot was chosen (example: Luke 1:5, 8-10). They differed from the elite religious ruling class of the Sanhedrin. Instead, these priests would have been relatively poor. They would not have profited much from the wealth created by the temple.

The text does not indicate how many priests numbered in a *great company*. The first-century historian Josephus estimated that there were 20,000 priests at the time. We can assume that the number of believers among the priesthood numbered at least in the hundreds. Only a short time had passed since Jesus' ascension, but the gospel message found fertile soil for growth in Jerusalem.

#### What Do You Think?

How do you follow the Spirit's leading in helping make disciples in your neighborhood?

#### Digging Deeper

How can your congregation be a conduit for the spread of the gospel in your neighborhood and town?

### B. Power and Wonders (v. 8)

#### 8. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

*Great wonders and miracles* had been attributed to Jesus (examples: John 2:11; 11:46-47; Acts 2:22) and the apostles (examples: 2:43; 5:12). When the apostles did these things, it confirmed the presence of God's grace and the empowerment of His servants (see 2 Corinthians 12:12).

The book of Acts does not reveal the kind of miraculous work that Stephen did *among the people*. The apostles healed and restored people suffering from both physical and spiritual ailments (examples: Acts 3:1-10; 5:14-16). Therefore, it is likely that Stephen did similarly. Although Stephen was not an apostle, he had been chosen by God to give witness to salvation (compare Hebrews 2:3-4). Stephen was "full of *faith* and of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:5). His life demonstrated the spiritual *power* that had been promised by Jesus (1:8).

#### What Do You Think?

In what ways can believers develop spiritual power?

#### Digging Deeper

How can mature believers leverage their power to encourage the spiritual growth of newer believers?

### Full of Power

Bodybuilder Ethan Andrews triumphantly lifted his arms in celebration. He had broken his personal bench press record. A commentator proclaimed afterward, "Andrews is a man who is full of power." This power came through hard work and dedication to the sport. Andrews developed strength and power through grueling hours in the weight room.

The book of Acts describes Stephen as being full of power. However, his power differed from that of a bodybuilder. The athlete attains *physical* power through many hours in the weight room. Stephen, however, received *spiritual* power through his faith in Christ Jesus.

Because of God's grace, we are "full of power" to proclaim the gospel. Christ is the source of that power. We're simply "earthen vessels" to express it (2 Corinthians 4:7). Whose notoriety do you seek to enhance through an expression of your power?

—D. D.

### C. Wisdom and Spirit (vv. 9-10)

#### 9. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

After the exile that began in 586 BC, the need arose for synagogues among the Jewish people. These were locations for prayer and teaching of Scripture (examples: Matthew 4:23; Acts 13:14-15; 15:21). For more information on synagogues, see the commentary on Luke 7:4-5, lesson 7.

The underlying Greek text is unclear regarding the number of synagogues mentioned in this verse. One proposal is that this verse describes one *synagogue* attended by different groups of Jewish people.

Another option is that the verse describes multiple synagogues, each frequented by a different

group. Paul tells of the existence of more than one synagogue in Jerusalem (Acts 24:11-12). Therefore, it is possible that the groups mentioned in this verse each attended different synagogues. They all, however, had a certain dispute with Stephen.

*Libertines* were Jewish people who had been liberated from slavery or who were descendants of those freed. These people were different from free-born citizens of the Roman Empire who had never experienced enslavement. Other groups included *Cyrenians* from northern Africa, *Alexandrians* from Egypt, and people from *Cilicia* and *Asia*, both located in modern-day Turkey.

Stephen's teachings gave these groups a reason for *disputing*. If he had only performed miracles and served food (compare Acts 6:2-3), it is unlikely that these groups would have had any dispute. However, what led to conflict with the synagogue members were his words.

Stephen undoubtedly followed Peter and John in proclaiming God's salvation in Jesus the Messiah (compare Acts 3:12-26). However, the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem did not want anyone to preach that message (4:13-18). Jesus' promises to His followers regarding opposition (Luke 21:12-15) were coming true.

**10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.**

That the synagogue members *were not able to resist* Stephen does not mean that they agreed with that message. Rather, they had no answer to his teachings. They had opposed the leading of God's Spirit. They were "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:51).

Stephen had been chosen because he was "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). His irrefutable words were a direct fulfillment of Jesus' promises to His disciples (Luke 21:15).

### What Do You Think?

What steps will you take to ensure that your speech is filled with wisdom?

### Digging Deeper

How do Proverbs 15:1-2; Ephesians 4:29-32; Colossians 4:5-6; and James 1:19; 3:13-18 inform your answer?

## A Grandma's Wisdom

Eliana loved to sit in Grandma Sophia's living room and inquire about her grandma's life. The elder had 77 years' worth of entertaining and educating stories. She had been an active member of a local church congregation for her entire adult life. As Eliana grew and faced life's difficulties, she could always count on her grandma to offer biblical wisdom. Grandma Sophia's wisdom came because she had spent her whole life studying Scripture and seeking God.

It's no wonder that Stephen's opponents could not answer him. God's Spirit had filled Stephen with the wisdom of God. If the thought of speaking about Jesus makes you uncomfortable, be encouraged! The all-wise God can (and will) give you wisdom regarding how and when to speak as you have prepared yourself to do so. What progress are you making in that regard? —D. D.

## II. The Emboldened Opposition

(Acts 6:11-15)

### A. The Conspiracy (vv. 11-12)

**11. Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.**

Stephen's wisdom did not sit well with the religious leaders. Unable to win an argument with him, they took a different approach to quiet him. Certain *men* were secretly persuaded (*suborned*) to speak up against Stephen regarding his teachings.

The charge of *blasphemous words* came from their understanding of Stephen's teaching regarding the Law of *Moses*. Their accusation had severe consequences for Stephen. The Law of Moses prohibited blasphemous language *against God* and the leaders of Israel (Exodus 20:7; 22:28).

**12. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.**

*The council* refers to the Sanhedrin, a 70-member "supreme court" for matters regarding Jewish law. The group consisted of chief priests, *elders*, and *scribes* (Mark 15:1). Members of the Sadducees and Pharisees were also likely part of the council to some extent (see Acts 23:6). The group carried



Visual for Lesson 4. Point to this visual as you ask the class to consider how God's Spirit provides faith for them to stand out to the world.

significant influence in first-century Judaism. They had the power to level consequences for offenders of the law (examples: John 9:22; Acts 15:17-40). Any claim that would have *stirred up the people* and the religious leaders would have been significant.

#### B. The Witnesses (vv. 13-14)

**13. And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law.**

A *false testimony* would have been scandalous. The Law of Moses states, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16; compare Deuteronomy 19:16-18). Luke does not say whether the Sanhedrin encouraged these *witnesses*. If they had, the council would have been guilty of supporting the attacks on Stephen.

The Sanhedrin met in a chamber connected to the temple. The charge that they heard was that Stephen was preaching threats *against this holy place*. In the view of the Sanhedrin, this was a *blasphemous* act by Stephen. Blasphemy was a severe offense with serious consequences (see Leviticus 24:10-16). A similar accusation was brought against the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:7-11).

**14a. For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place.**

Their claims had a grain of truth. *Jesus* had indeed prophesied regarding the destruction of *this place*, the temple (Luke 21:5-6). He had also proclaimed, "Destroy this temple, and in three

days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). The apostle John, however, interpreted this statement as a metaphor for Jesus' body (2:21).

Jesus never claimed that He himself would be the one to destroy the temple. However, He had faced charges similar to the ones brought before Stephen (see Matthew 26:60-61; 27:40; Mark 14:57-58). The point of Jesus' teachings was to serve as prophetic reminders regarding the temporary nature of the temple (see Matthew 24:25-18). In AD 70, Jesus' prophecies regarding the temple were fulfilled when Roman commander Titus destroyed the temple.

**14b. And shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.**

Some of the *customs* described in the Law of *Moses* included circumcision (Leviticus 12:3) and dietary practices (see Leviticus 11; 17). These things were a way for the Jewish people to separate themselves from Gentiles. Therefore, any teachings regarding a *change* to these things would affect their unique identity as a people.

Jesus' teaching transformed or set aside these customs. One way is found in His teaching on food and spiritual defilement. The Law of Moses indicates that consuming certain foods makes a person unclean (Leviticus 11; 17). However, Jesus taught that what a person eats does not lead to defilement (Matthew 15:17-20; Mark 7:14-23).

Jesus did not seek to abolish the Law of Moses. Instead, His teachings and entire ministry fulfilled the law and the other writings of Scripture (Matthew 5:17). All parts of Hebrew Scripture—the writings of Moses, the prophets, the psalms, and the wisdom literature—served as guideposts that point people to Jesus. Rather than nullify these Scriptures, Jesus fulfilled them through His life, death, and resurrection (see Luke 24:27, 44).

The charges regarding Stephen's teachings (see Acts 6:14a-14b, above) were intended to unify the factions of the Sanhedrin against him. The temple was the primary economic engine of Jerusalem. It provided wealth for many people (example: Matthew 21:12). Because Sadducees were elite members of the priesthood, they benefited from the wealth created by the temple.

The Pharisees, however, were on board for dif-

ferent reasons. Their interpretations of the law depended on their traditions (example: Mark 7:3-4). The prospect of the temple's destruction and the law's annulment threatened the power and influence of these parties. This threat to vested interests was what motivated the arrest of Jesus as well (John 11:48).

### C. The Steadfast Man (v. 15)

**15. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.**

The New Testament describes angels as appearing like men (examples: Luke 24:4; John 20:11-12). However, no other instances regarding the angelic countenance of a human are provided in the New Testament. The phrase *the face of an angel* highlights the supernatural nature of the expression on Stephen's face. His facial expression should have been a clue to the divine approval of his teachings.

The description also reveals the intimacy that Stephen had with God. Other people in Scripture experienced a change in their countenance after they had a personal experience with the glory of God (examples: Exodus 34:29; Luke 9:29).

Stephen began his speech to the Sanhedrin by referring to "the God of glory" (Acts 7:2). As he concluded, Stephen's first view of Heaven would be to see "the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God" (7:55). That vision was the final straw for the Sanhedrin as he was stoned to death by mob action (7:56-8:1a).

#### What Do You Think?

How do your actions, attitudes, and expressions indicate to others that you are a follower of Christ?

#### Digging Deeper

What are the limitations to judging spiritual status based on outward markers?

## Conclusion

### A. Divine Service

What should the Christian's response be to attacks and insults to faith? Such attacks might include name-calling, harsh remarks, or judgment

regarding our use of time, energy, and resources. These abuses might even come from coworkers, friends, or family members.

The verbal attacks on Stephen led to a physical attack that resulted in his death. It is unlikely that we will experience the same end as Stephen. However, his manner of living can inform our behavior—whether or not attacks on our faith result.

Stephen was a student of Scripture, demonstrated by his speech before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:2-54). Not only did he know the *facts* of Scripture, but he also knew how Jesus *fulfilled* all of Scripture. This knowledge led him to display confidence and hope during his interaction with the Sanhedrin. He proclaimed the gospel with the hope that they would believe in Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

Most of all, Stephen faced his final crisis with peace and poise. He displayed a sense of peace that comes from a knowledge of God's will and power. The false accusations did not deter Stephen; he trusted that it was all a part of God's plan.

Consider the example of Stephen the next time you pray. Ask the Lord for wisdom, power, and peace. When we practice and display these attributes, we can better serve the Lord, especially in the face of criticism or attacks from the world.

#### What Do You Think?

How does today's lesson inform your thoughts and behaviors for the upcoming Holy Week?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to seek God's wisdom, power, and peace as you invite someone to Easter services?

### B. Prayer

Lord, You are the God of wisdom, power, and peace. Give us the wisdom to know how to navigate a world that increasingly despises You. Show us the power of Your Spirit at work in and through us. Fill us with peace to face whatever circumstances we might face. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

God's wisdom, power, and peace will overcome the harshest opponents.

# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Ask learners to suggest incidents about people falsely accused. Write a sentence on the board summarizing each incident. After volunteers share, ask the following questions in a whole-class discussion: 1—How did the accused respond to the accusation? 2—How did the accused respond when the accusation was revealed to be false?

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Worst-Case Scenario” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in groups of three to complete as indicated.

Lead into the lesson by saying, “There may be times when we face a situation that seems unjust or unfair. Our response reveals the nature of our faith in the Lord. Consider Stephen’s response to accusations and how you might have responded.”

## Into the Word

Before class, recruit a volunteer to present a three-minute presentation on Stephen’s life, death, and ministry. Encourage the volunteer to read Acts 6:1–8:3. The volunteer can also use online resources in preparation. Ensure the presentation covers the following questions: 1—How was Stephen chosen for ministry? 2—What were the main points of his speech before the Sanhedrin? 3—What resulted from his death?

Announce a Bible-marking activity. Provide copies of Acts 6:7–15 for those who do not want to write in their Bibles. Provide handouts (you create) with these instructions:

- Underline any words or phrases that describe Stephen.
- Double underline the accusations brought against Stephen.
- Draw a question mark around any words or phrases you would like to study further.
- Draw a circle around any mention of or allusion to the Jerusalem Temple or the Law of Moses.

Slowly read the Scripture aloud (or ask volun-

teers to do so) at least twice and as many as four times. As the Scripture is read, class members should mark their copies in the ways noted.

After the final reading, divide the class into pairs to discuss the following questions: 1—What are some words or phrases that describe Stephen? 2—What were the main points of the accusations brought against him? 3—What elements of truth might have been in the accusations?

*Option.* Divide the class into four groups and have each group read the assigned Scripture text: **Joseph Group** (Genesis 39:1–20), **Daniel Group** (Daniel 6:1–24), **Mordecai Group** (Esther 3:1–14), **Jesus Group** (Mark 14:53–65). After each group reads the assigned Scripture, have each answer the following questions: 1—Who was the accused? 2—What was the accusation? 3—Who was the accuser? 4—What were the results of the accusation? 5—What does this story have in common with the account of Stephen?

## Into Life

Divide learners into groups of three and have them answer the following questions: 1—Who are the people you will interact with in the upcoming week? 2—What opportunities will you have to boldly share the gospel with them? 3—What are possible worst-case scenarios that could result from your gospel presentation? 4—How would you respond to these results? 5—How should believers respond when facing opposition to the gospel?

Distribute an index card and pen to each learner and have them write their evaluation of their group’s response to question 4. Encourage learners to consider biblical standards and examples in their evaluation. Conclude by having group members pray for courage and boldness to share the gospel.

*Alternative.* Distribute the “Responses and Reactions” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing conclusions in small groups.



# The Resurrection: Key to Faith

Devotional Reading: Exodus 14:10-14, 21-23, 26-31  
Background Scripture: Mark 16

## Mark 16:1-8

1 And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

2 And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

3 And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?

4 And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.

5 And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.

6 And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.

7 But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

8 And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.



## Key Text

*He saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. —Mark 16:6*

# Examining Our Faith

## Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1-5

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the women's encounter with the man at Jesus' empty tomb.
2. Explain the significance of the time elements of the text.
3. Make a commitment not to allow fear to result in failure to speak up when doing so is necessary.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Abrupt Endings
- B. Lesson Context: Mark, the Man
- C. Lesson Context: Mark, the Gospel

#### I. The Women (Mark 16:1-4)

- A. Intention (v. 1)
- B. Timing (v. 2)
- C. Trouble (vv. 3-4)

#### II. The Messenger (Mark 16:5-8)

- A. Angelic Appearance (v. 5)
- B. Remarkable Report (vv. 6-7)

*Great Expectations*

- C. Fearful Flight (v. 8)

*Fleeing or Faith?*

#### Conclusion

- A. Singular Event
- B. Vital Reality
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Abrupt Endings

My wife had just finished reading Beatrix Potter's classic *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* to our children. Surprised by its ending, my wife exclaimed, "That's it? That's the end?"

The book tells the story of Peter, a playful and disobedient young rabbit who decides to steal vegetables from the garden of Mr. McGregor. Peter is discovered but flees before Mr. McGregor can catch him. In Peter's hurry to escape, he leaves behind his jacket and shoes.

Once Peter returns home, he doesn't tell his mother about his escape. Instead, he goes straight to bed. Peter's mother wonders why her son lost his jacket and shoes. In the book's closing pages, the reader learns that Mr. McGregor used Peter's jacket and shoes to create a scarecrow, and the story ends at that point. The story's abrupt conclusion leaves the reader wondering whether Peter faced any consequences for his mischievous actions.

Abrupt endings can both frustrate and entice audiences. Clever storytellers use these endings to their advantage because audience members can be challenged to imagine the outcome. As you read today's Scripture, think about why the writer of this Gospel might have decided to end his account the way that he did.

### B. Lesson Context: Mark, the Man

Tradition tells us that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark, an associate of Peter and Paul (see Acts 12:12; 1 Peter 5:13). This man was not an apostle. But he was a close relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), who probably convinced Paul (Saul) to take John Mark on that apostle's first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). John Mark abandoned the trip before its conclusion (13:13). This put him in disfavor with Paul (15:36-39), although the two later reconciled (2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Students propose that Mark's Gospel account is based on Peter's firsthand experiences with the person and ministry of Jesus, given the closeness of Mark to Peter in light of Peter calling him "my son" (1 Peter 5:13).

### C. Lesson Context: Mark, the Gospel

Although Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four, its narrative packs a punch! Students frequently call it "the Gospel of action." This designation stems from the fact that Mark jumps quickly from scene to scene to chronicle Jesus' ministry.

The Gospel's description of the last week of Jesus' ministry highlights its inclination toward action. Of the nearly 700 verses of the Gospel, 241 of them—more than one-third of the Gospel—recount events from that week (Mark 11:1–16:8). In describing scenes from that week, the Gospel jumps quickly between scenes. Mark tells us how Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Sunday (11:1–11) and taught others regarding righteousness (11:12–25; 12:28–34). On that Thursday, He ate a final meal (14:12–31) before He was arrested (14:43–52) and tried (14:53–65; 15:1–15). Finally, on that Friday, He was crucified and killed at the hands of Roman soldiers (15:16–41).

Friday evening of that week, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin, approached Pontius Pilate to ask for Jesus' body (Mark 15:43). Before granting the request, Pilate wanted confirmation that Jesus was truly dead (15:44–45). There was to be no doubt on the part of Pilate that Jesus was indeed dead. Once Pilate received this verification, Joseph took Jesus' body and prepared it for burial.

To begin the burial proceedings, Joseph wrapped Jesus' body in linen (Mark 15:46a). The Gospels do not indicate whether or not Jesus' body was washed as was customary at this time (example: Acts 9:37). Joseph then placed the body in a rock tomb sealed with a stone (Mark 15:46b). After the burial, two women observed the burial location (15:47). They would return after Sabbath to finish caring for Jesus' body.

Some students believe that the original ending to this Gospel came at Mark 16:8 and that Mark 16:9–20 was a later addition in the decades after Mark wrote. Much of the information in verses 9–20 is reflected in the other Gospels (Matthew 28:19–20; Luke 24:13–43, 50–51; John 20:14–18). In this lesson, we will engage in a *what-if*. What if Mark did end at verse 8? What could that abrupt ending teach us today?

## I. The Women

(Mark 16:1–4)

### A. Intention (v. 1)

**1. And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.**

Jesus died on a Friday, the day of preparation for the Sabbath (Mark 15:37–42). The Law of Moses prohibited work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 23:3). Therefore, the burial process (see Lesson Context) would have to wait until *the sabbath was past*. The task of treating the body of Jesus would fall to the women, some of whom were at the crucifixion (Mark 15:40; John 19:25) and subsequently had seen the tomb's location (Mark 15:47; compare Matthew 27:61; Luke 23:55–56).

The name *Mary* was common in the first century AD. By one estimate, one in four women in Palestine was so named at that time. The Gospels mention several women named Mary, so it is easy to confuse them.

One of the women with that name was *Mary Magdalene*, who became a devoted follower of Jesus after He freed her from spiritual oppression (see Luke 8:1–2). The designation *Magdalene* was not a family name. Instead, it indicates that she likely came from the town of Magdala (compare Matthew 15:39).

The second *Mary* is unknown to us. One possibility is that she is "*the mother of James the less and of Joseph*" (Mark 15:40, 47). Another possibility is that she was "*the wife of Cleophas*" (John 19:25).

Matthew's account of the burial mentions a woman who is "*the mother of Zebedee's children*" (Matthew 27:56). This woman could be *Salome*, thus making her the mother of James and John (compare 4:21; Mark 15:40).

*Sweet spices* combatted the stench of decaying flesh (compare John 11:39). These treatments were an essential part of the burial process (19:39–40). The women prepared these things before the Sabbath (Luke 23:55–56). They waited for the conclusion of that day of rest to return to the grave and *anoint* the remains of Jesus.

### What Do You Think?

In what ways will you show devotion to the Lord, even if doing so requires personal discomfort?

### Digging Deeper

How can you encourage that level of devotion among other believers?

## B. Timing (v. 2)

**2. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.**

The phrases *very early in the morning* and *at the rising of the sun* reveal the eagerness of the women to complete their tasks. We assume that they set out just before sunrise, in the dim, pre-dawn light (compare John 20:1). The women were confident of their destination, having been there two days earlier (see comments on Mark 16:1, above).

## C. Trouble (vv. 3-4)

**3. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?**

What the women seemed to have forgotten up to this point is that a massive disk-shaped *stone* sealed the entrance to the grave (Matthew 27:60-61; Mark 15:46-47). Several strong individuals would be needed to *roll it away* from the entryway. The women's question reveals that they belatedly realized that they would not be able to move it.

The women's question also reveals the attitudes and behaviors of Jesus' followers. The disciples fled at Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:50). Peter, in particular, denied having known Jesus (John 18:15-18, 25-27). Others likely hid out of fear for what might happen to them (compare 20:19). Because of their grief, shame, or fear, some of Jesus' followers had distanced themselves from being associated with Him (contrast 19:38-42). They would not be of any help in removing *the stone from the door of the sepulchre*.

**4. And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.**

The Gospel accounts of Mark, Luke, and John do not reveal how *the stone was rolled away*. They only report that the stone was no longer blocking

the tomb's entrance when the women arrived (here and Luke 24:2; John 20:1). Matthew, however, discloses that "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door" (Matthew 28:2). The massive nature of this *very great* stone is also noted in Matthew 27:60.

### What Do You Think?

In what ways has your faith been strengthened by an experience during a funeral service or at a cemetery?

### Digging Deeper

How can your acts of comforting a grieving person strengthen your faith?

## II. The Messenger

(Mark 16:5-8)

### A. Angelic Appearance (v. 5)

**5. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.**

Mark's Gospel does not provide further identifying information regarding the *young man sitting in the sepulchre*. However, we can determine his nature from the other Gospel accounts.

Matthew 28:2 describes him as an "angel of the Lord." Luke identifies "two men . . . in shining garments" (Luke 24:4) who are "angels" (24:23); John 20:12 is similar. Scripture often describes heavenly beings in terms of the brightness of their garments (examples: Matthew 17:2; 28:3; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29-30; Acts 1:10).

The women came to the tomb to care for the body of Jesus. Instead of seeing His body, they saw an unknown visitor. The sight of this mysterious person would have been a valid reason for the women to feel *affrighted*.

### B. Remarkable Report (vv. 6-7)

**6a. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified.**

Fear is a common reaction to seeing an angelic messenger (examples: Judges 13:21-22; Matthew 28:4; Acts 10:3-4) or a supernatural occurrence

(examples: Mark 4:41; 5:15; 9:4-6). When this occurs, a form of the reminder to *be not affrighted* usually follows (examples: Judges 6:21-23; Daniel 10:10-12, 19; Luke 1:11-13, 30; 2:9-10).

The angel's designation *Jesus of Nazareth* referred to the location of Jesus' upbringing. The village of Nazareth was located about 70 miles north of Jerusalem in the hilly region west of the Sea of Galilee. Residents of that village were likely impoverished. As a result, others held them in low regard (see John 1:46). Jesus' parents were from Nazareth (Luke 2:4), and the family returned there after Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:21-23). Jesus remained in Nazareth until He began His public ministry (4:12-13).

**6b. He is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.**

The angel's proclamation that Jesus *is risen* does not mean that His spirit went to Heaven, leaving behind His dead body. The empty tomb reveals that His physical body was resurrected from the dead. His post-resurrection appearances provided further evidence of this reality (see Luke 24:37-39; John 20:27).

The resurrection should not have come as a surprise to His followers. Jesus had prophesied to them numerous times regarding His death and resurrection (examples: Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:33-34). However, His disciples rarely understood His teaching on this topic (see 9:10, 32).

Burial customs during Jesus' day began with washing the body (example: Acts 9:37). Then the body was wrapped with cloths, treated with fragrant spices and ointments, and *laid* upon a flat surface in the grave. The command to *behold* that *place where* Joseph had *laid Him* indicated that the tomb no longer contained the body of Jesus.

**What Do You Think?**

How would you respond to the claim that belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is nonessential for Christians?

**Digging Deeper**

How do John 20:24-25, 29; Acts 2:22-24; Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15; and 1 Peter 1:3-4 inform your response?

## Great Expectations

As one of the world's last remaining rainforests, the Amazon River Basin is home to an unparalleled diversity of plant and animal life. By one recent estimate, the region contains over 40,000 plant species, nearly 1,300 bird species, roughly 430 species of mammals, and approximately 2.5 million species of insects. And these numbers are only estimates; scientists discover new species each year!

When visitors to this region learn of this diversity, they expect to feel fear. A habitat with such a variety of species will indeed be overwhelming to the unfamiliar! While some threats do exist in the untamed rainforest, it is not complete chaos. Instead, the rainforest can be surprisingly peaceful. Most visitors leave the rainforest and remark on its serenity. It is a balanced and ordered ecosystem of interdependent plants and animals.

The women at the tomb expected to see Jesus' body. Their expectations changed when they were told that Jesus was no longer there. At that moment, the lives of these women began to change radically. How has your life changed because of your relationship with the risen Lord? What has not changed that should have? —O. P.

**7. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.**

The command to *go* and *tell* of the risen Lord indicates a change in emphasis for Mark. In his Gospel, he frequently mentions times when Jesus urged others to be silent regarding His identity

## How to Say It

Arimathaea	Air-uh-muh- <b>thee</b> -uh ( <i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i> ).
Barnabas	Bar-nuh-bus.
Cleophas	Klee-o-fus.
Magdala	Mag-duh-luh.
Magdalene	Mag-duh-leen or Mag-duh-lee-nee.
Pontius Pilate	Pon-shus or Pon-ti-us Pie-lut.
Salome	Suh-lo-me.
Zebedee	Zeb-eh-dee.

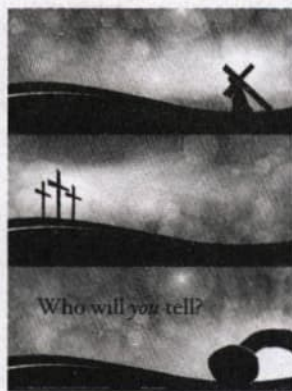
and work (Mark 3:11-12; 5:42-43; 7:36; 8:29-30; contrast 5:18-20). Now that Jesus' resurrection had occurred, His followers would not need to remain silent about Him (see 9:9).

Jesus' *disciples* had fled at His arrest (Mark 14:50). On that occasion, they were concerned for their safety. Rather than punish the disciples for leaving Jesus, the angel's message offered them a chance to reunite with their Lord.

The angel showed particular attention to *Peter* by naming him specifically. This apostle is known for his position of prominence, being named first in all listings of the apostles (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13-14) and for his impulsive behavior (examples: Mark 9:5-6; John 13:1-11). He had confidently proclaimed fidelity to Jesus, even if it led to death (Mark 14:29-31). Later that same night, however, Peter thrice denied knowing Jesus (14:66-72). Later, after Peter received the women's report, he still had to see the empty tomb for himself (Luke 24:11-12).

Before Jesus' arrest, He had prophesied that His disciples would be "offended" and "scattered" (Mark 14:27). In the same breath, however, He promised, "After that I am risen, I will go before you into *Galilee*" (14:28). The angel's message to the women indicated the pending fulfillment of Jesus' promises.

The selection of Galilee as the location of this promised reunion was made with intent. Jesus began His public ministry there (see Mark 1:9, 14).



Visual for  
Lesson 5

Before closing with prayer, encourage the class to reflect on this question throughout the week.

It was in that region that He called His first disciples (1:16-20). The angel's message sent the apostles back to where their relationship with Jesus began.

### C. Fearful Flight (v. 8)

**8. And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.**

Three strong emotions overwhelmed the women as they *went out quickly* and *fled from the sepulchre*. Their feelings were decidedly mixed; this is the only verse in the New Testament where the Greek words for *trembled*, *amazed*, and *afraid* occur together. The picture was one of uncertainty as the women found themselves in an in-between state: the empty tomb was initial evidence of a miraculous occurrence, but they had not yet seen the risen Jesus personally.

#### What Do You Think?

What is the significance of living in an "in-between" state when we have evidence of Jesus' resurrection but have not yet seen Him personally?

#### Digging Deeper

How does John 20:24-25, 29 inform your answer?

### Fleeing or Faith?

A *cenote* is a limestone sinkhole that connects to pools of water underground. Many cenotes are so deep that their exploration requires scuba equipment and training. While serving as a missionary in Mexico, I visited one such cenote. Before arriving, our guide gave us very few details about the sinkhole. When we finally arrived, we were amazed by its magnitude and beauty. Smooth, shiny rock revealed a seemingly bottomless pool of water. As I approached the edge of the cenote, I became afraid and wanted to turn and leave.

After receiving the angel's message, the women were afraid and fled from the tomb. Does fear ever prevent you from serving the Lord? When that occurs, remember the words of our resurrected Lord: "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am

he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen" (Revelation 1:17-18). Believe this and have great faith! —O. P.

## Conclusion

### A. Singular Event

Today's Scripture abruptly ends with a declaration of the women's fear. If this were all we knew of the story, we would wonder what happened next. Praise God that we know the conclusion to this story—a story that continued with Jesus' ascension to Heaven (Acts 1:1-9) and will culminate with His promised return to earth (Revelation 22:20).

The resurrection of Jesus is a singular event in history. It is distinct from other resurrections in the Bible (examples: 2 Kings 4:32-37; Luke 7:11-15; 8:49-56; John 11:38-44). Those were instances of the temporary restoration of physical life—temporary because all those people died again later. The resurrection of Jesus, by contrast, is permanent (Revelation 1:18a).

That permanence has vital implications. Death is God's penalty for sin (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12), but now the risen Jesus holds "the keys of hell and of death" (Revelation 1:18b).

Another characteristic that sets Jesus' resurrection apart from the others noted above is that His body was transformed, not merely resuscitated. After His resurrection, He appeared and disappeared in ways He had not done previously (Luke 24:31, 36, 51; John 20:19, 26), although He still had a physical body that other people could touch (Luke 24:37-43; John 20:27). The transformation of Jesus' body prefigures the promised transformation of those who belong to Him when we are raised on the last day (1 Corinthians 15:42-57).

### B. Vital Reality

From our vantage point some 2,000 years later, the empty tomb is the universal image of Christ's victory over death. The women who found the open tomb that morning had prepared themselves to be confronted with death. Instead, they were confronted with the announcement of life.

The reality of death confronts all, and we make preparations for it. We help friends and family

members with funeral planning. We purchase cemetery plots. But the best spiritual preparation is to let our thoughts dwell on resurrection life.

Jesus has promised that what was accomplished in Him on that third day will also be accomplished in us when He returns. The power of life over death that He demonstrated for himself is the same power that will instantly and forever transform us (see Philippians 3:21). Jesus is Lord over death, having conquered it. That makes Him Lord over eternal life—our eternal life.

Therefore, as we prepare for death, we keep in mind that "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). Death is our enemy, but it is ultimately a defeated enemy. When Jesus returns, we all will be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, death will be no more.

Consider the abrupt ending to verse 8 as an invitation to proclaim the good news of the resurrected Christ. The women at the tomb that morning ran in fear; our task today is to run in joy with the message of the empty tomb. May we ever proclaim Christ's victory over death; may we never lose sight of the fact that His victory is ours as well—for eternity. Death could not permanently silence Jesus or obstruct God's plan. Will fear silence you from sharing this good news?

#### What Do You Think?

How do you deal with feelings of fear that may arise when sharing the news of Jesus' resurrection?

#### Digging Deeper

Who can you recruit as an accountability partner to encourage your faith?

### C. Prayer

God of resurrection, where there is death, You bring life. We hope for the day when we will experience resurrection and new life. In the meantime, encourage us when we feel we cannot proclaim this good news. When fear overtakes us, keep us from forgetting that You are the source of life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### D. Thought to Remember

Fear not—Jesus has risen!

# Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

## Into the Lesson

Ask the following question for whole-class discussion: "What's the best news you've heard this week?" Allow three minutes for volunteers to give their responses as you write them on the board. Evaluate the responses by asking the following questions: 1-Why are these things considered good news? 2-To whom did you tell this good news? 3-How did others respond to this good news?

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today's Scripture recounts the best news the world has ever received. But this news was initially not received joyfully."

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Mark 16:1-8. Divide the class into equal groups. Distribute handouts with the following questions (you create) for in-group discussion: 1-Who went to the tomb? 2-Why did they go? 3-When did they go, and what was the reason for their timing? 4-How did they respond to the message they received?

*Option 1.* Before class, find a recording of the song "Was It a Morning Like This?" on an online streaming platform. After playing it for the class, ask them to list the song's lyrics that retell the events from Mark 16:1-8. Ask the following question for whole-class discussion: "How does the song help you understand this Scripture better?"

*Option 2.* Divide the class into four groups and give each group a handout (you create) with the following headers: *Question | Mark 16:1-8 | Luke 24:8-20.* Write numbers one through five vertically in the Question column. Have groups compare the two Scripture passages by writing their answers to the following questions next to the appropriate question number in column one: 1-What was the good news, and who delivered it? 2-What is surprising about who received the good news? 3-How did they react to receiving that news? 4-What did the recipients of the good

news do with it? 5-How did the news change the lives of the people who received it?

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Rest of the Story" exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated before sharing conclusions with the whole class.

## Into Life

Write the following prompt on the board:

*Sometimes I'm afraid to talk with a nonbeliever about Jesus' resurrection because . . .*

Distribute two slips of paper and a writing utensil to each learner. Have them anonymously complete the prompt on one of the slips. After one minute, collect the slips and redistribute them. Ask volunteers to read aloud responses.

Say, "Fear is one possible reason believers are afraid to talk about Jesus' resurrection. That's understandable; fear was a response of the first eyewitnesses to the empty tomb."

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1-What would have happened if the women remained silent regarding the empty tomb? 2-What happens when believers today remain silent regarding Jesus' resurrection? 3-Why do believers often fail to tell others about our resurrected Savior? 4-How can we overcome fear or apathy in this regard?

Write the following prompt on the board and have learners complete it on their second slip of paper:

*In order not to allow fear to result in failure to speak up when doing so is necessary, I will . . .*

After one minute, have volunteers share what they wrote.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Notes for a Letter" activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.