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# Faith Connections

## Bible Study Guide

*Spring*  
**25**

*Who Is Jesus?*

*The Message of  
Galatians*



# Bible Study Guide

## Contents

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### Perspectives: What Do You Believe About Jesus?

#### Unit 1: Who Is Jesus?

- 1 Mar 2 The Bread of Life**  
(John 6:25-40) 4
- 2 Mar 9 God's Son**  
(John 5:16-30) 8
- 3 Mar 16 The Light of the World**  
(John 8:12; 9:1-7, 24-25, 35-41) 12
- 4 Mar 23 The Gate**  
(John 10:1-10) 16
- 5 Mar 30 The Way, Truth, and Life**  
(John 14:1-11) 20
- 6 Apr 6 The True Vine**  
(John 15:1-17) 24
- 7 Apr 13 The Resurrection and the Life**  
(John 11:17-27, 38-45) 28
- 8 Apr 20 The Risen and Commissioning Restorer**  
(John 21:15-25) 32

#### Unit 2: The Message of Galatians

- 9 Apr 27 Crucified with Christ**  
(Galatians 2:11-21) 36
- 10 May 4 Living By Faith Through the Spirit**  
(Galatians 3:1-14, 23-28) 40
- 11 May 11 Children of God**  
(Galatians 4:1-7, 21-23, 28—5:1) 44
- 12 May 18 Freedom in the Spirit**  
(Galatians 5:13-26) 48
- 13 May 25 Life in the Spirit**  
(Galatians 6:1-15) 52

#### Key Verse Memory Back Cover

*Adult Bible Study Guide* is one of several *Faith Connections* companion products, a themed suite of resources designed to help adults discover what it means to be holy people in today's world. To order, call 1-800-877-0700.

3 Mike L. Wonch  
Editor

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# Perspectives

## What Do You Believe About Jesus?

There is a saying that proclaims, "You have to stand for something or you'll fall for anything." The meaning behind this is that if you have no values on which you stand, then you'll accept anything. You could also put it another way, "If don't believe in something, you'll believe anything." That is, if you have no firmly held beliefs on which you stand, then you're more likely to accept anything others are trying to make you believe.

Our beliefs shape our thinking and our actions. What we believe influences how we view others and the world. People listen to candidates in order to see which one most lines up with their beliefs before casting a vote. We give money to organizations that we believe are serving a worthwhile purpose. Our beliefs affect how we act toward family, friends, and those we come into contact with each day. Beliefs matter.

In the first unit of this quarter, we will be looking at passages that answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" What we believe about Jesus matters. That is not to say that we have to have perfect knowledge about Jesus or know everything there is to know about Him before we can begin and have an ongoing relationship with Him (Ephesians 2:8). However, that doesn't mean that our knowledge and belief about Jesus isn't important. Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They responded, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Obviously, Jesus was not those people, so He asked, "Who do you say I am?" And Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah" (Matthew 16:13-17). Clearly, what they believed about Jesus mattered. He was not a reincarnated prophet, or just a very wise teacher among other teachers, or, as some believe today, a made up character by people long ago. The truth is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (see Acts 4:12; Colossians 2:9-10; 1 Timothy 2:5).

As you read each passage, invite the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to who Jesus is and the ways knowing Him makes a powerful difference in your life.

May God bless you as you study His Word this quarter!

MIKE WONCH

Editor

March

2

# THE BREAD OF LIFE

*Jesus is the source of life for those who believe.*

## THE WORD

JOHN  
6:25-40

**W**hen they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

<sup>26</sup>Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. <sup>27</sup>Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him, God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

<sup>28</sup>Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

<sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

<sup>30</sup>So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup>Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

<sup>32</sup>Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

<sup>34</sup>“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

## KEY VERSE

**<sup>35</sup>Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.** <sup>36</sup>But as I told you, you have seen me, and still you do not believe. <sup>37</sup>All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me, I will never drive away. <sup>38</sup>For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent

me. <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me but raise them at the last day. <sup>40</sup>For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them at the last day."

## ENGAGE THE WORD

This passage follows one of the most well-known miracles of Jesus found in the New Testament. The feeding of the 5,000 energizes children's imagination and challenges adults to hear the message of this text. John 6:35 puts this clearly, "Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'" Both the physical and the spiritual come to mind here. Jesus offers and provides us all that we truly need.

The Lord's Prayer instructs us to pray for the kingdom of God to be on the earth as it is in heaven, followed by begging for daily bread (Matthew 6:10-11; Luke 11:2-3). I have often observed that our eyes are pointed to heaven in one moment, and in the next moment, we find ourselves at a fast food restaurant. A similar dynamic comes into play in John. This passage pulls the material and spiritual together. Both are important, but the vital issue in this passage concerns spiritual hunger and satisfaction.

### A DEEPER HUNGER

#### John 6:25-34

Those who witnessed the miracle of feeding 5,000 had questions for Jesus. He responded to them, "Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him, God the Father has placed his seal of approval" (vv. 25-27). Jesus understood that food (bread) can be satisfying and essential, yet a deeper hunger lingers. In other words, do not get caught up in and focus on the miracle of

## Did You Know?

When Jesus said, “I am the bread of life,” it was in fervent hope that the people who had seen the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 would grasp the wonder that in Jesus God had begun the final and decisive chapter in the redemption of the world. The purposes for which Israel had been raised up and chosen were now coming to fruition in the Son of God: “Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (v. 35).

the bread and miss the Son of Man. Understanding this opens life up to the power of God found in the seemingly ordinary and mundane aspects of life.

This leans toward the mystery of the incarnation as well. God arrives in a manger as a human being without ceasing to be God. When Jesus says that He is the Bread of Life, He confirms not only His divinity, but also His availability. The people were being offered access to fullness and wholeness. Jesus was much more than a miracle worker and the food He had provided was not the stuff of magic. This was God himself, the Source of Life.

Our passage makes it clear that the human tendency to “fill our stomach” can keep us from seeing the hand of God. A full stomach and an empty heart equal a hollow person. The people remembered the story of their ancestors who left Egypt for the Promised Land. As they traveled, manna was provided not by Moses, but by God. The essential thing to remember here is that “the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (v. 33). When the crowd heard this, they wanted it. The problem is not only seeing this, but living a life that reflects such a conviction about life. Food is essential, but at a deeper level, spiritual provision is even more critical. Jesus did not come to earth to satisfy our physical hunger, but to supply our deepest spiritual needs.

## THE BREAD OF LIFE

### John 6:35-40

At this point, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (v. 35). The image of the Samaritan woman standing by a well—yearning for water that satisfies—illustrates the same point Jesus is making here. She understood that Jesus was looking beyond the water toward life-transforming faith (John 4:11). Jesus wanted the crowd to see that eternity was woven into the seemingly mundane bread. This is the way that God works.

## Think About It

The people asked Jesus, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (v. 28). Unfortunately, they had missed the point. They were thinking in terms of what they could achieve by works. They didn't understand that eternal life is Christ's gift.

There are vital lessons in this part of the passage that are essential for understanding its meaning:

First, it is possible to see what God does and miss the work of God. The people ate the bread but missed the Son of Man, the one who is the Bread of Life.

Second, the fact everyone was offered and received the bread indicates that God's invitation is universal. His arms are wide open for all who will respond. This does not mean that we do not have the choice to walk away; but, it does mean that we do not have to walk away.

Third, Jesus comes to do the will of the Father. Because of this, the image of the Bread of Life not only indicates incarnation, it promises resurrection. What Jesus brings is eternal. Therefore, eternal life is offered to all who place their faith in Him.

Fourth, the Father desires us to see Jesus, but more than that, to believe. Those who continue to believe will persist to the last day. Jesus satisfies our deepest needs when we see the one who is the Bread of Life.

## REFLECT

**W**hat should our lives look like if we live like we truly believe Jesus provides for our spiritual needs?

---

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# GOD'S SON

March

# 9

*The true way to know God the Father  
is through Jesus the Son.*

## THE WORD

**JOHN  
5:16-30**

**S**o, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.<sup>17</sup> In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”<sup>18</sup> For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

### KEY VERSE

**<sup>19</sup>Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.**<sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.<sup>21</sup> For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,<sup>23</sup> that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

**<sup>24</sup>“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.**<sup>25</sup> Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.<sup>26</sup> For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.<sup>27</sup> And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

**<sup>28</sup>“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who**

are in their graves will hear his voice <sup>29</sup>and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. <sup>30</sup>By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**O**ne of the most intimate relationships in life is between a parent and a child. In fact, a strong relationship with a parent frees the child to engage the world more fully and successfully. This passage declares that Jesus is the Son of God. While there is a significant difference between the relationship of human parents and their children and the relationship between the Father and the Son, it might help us to think about this intimate relationship as we look at this critical passage.

### BREAKING THE SABBATH?

#### John 5:16-23

The passage begins with the discomfort of Jewish leaders. Once again, Jesus is acting in a manner that the leaders felt strayed from the law. Perhaps because the leaders understood that Jesus was claiming more authority than seemed warranted. We read, "In his defense, Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working'" (v. 17). Clearly, the Jews, in their zeal to protect the Sabbath, misunderstood what the Sabbath and rest meant.

It is fascinating to see the defense offered by Jesus here. First, Jesus challenges the fundamental understanding regarding work. When does God's work cease? The Jewish leaders understood that even doing good on the Sabbath was prohibited. The claim "My Father is always at his work to this day" must have challenged the leaders to their core. The second defense offends the Jewish leaders. Just as His Father was always at work, so was His Son, Jesus. Jesus possesses the authority of His Father, the great "I AM" of the scriptural narrative. The astonishing claim must

## Did You Know?

The term “Son of God” is “used in Scripture primarily to signify the unique relationship of God’s only begotten Son to the Father and the spiritual relationship made possible for all [people] to God through the atoning work of the Son” (*Beacon Dictionary of Theology* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1983], 491).

have shot through the leader’s mind. The Father and the Son are equal, not just alike, but the same. In other words, Jesus has the same authority as His Father.

Jesus takes up another part of the argument when He suggests, “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing because whatever the Father does, the Son also does” (v. 19). This verse lays out an early teaching that will become the doctrine of the Trinity. The additional reflection on the Holy Spirit will come later, but here we have a clear indication regarding Jesus. He never acts independently of the Father. What Jesus touches, the Father does as well. There is no competition between the Father and the Son. An attack on the Son is the same as an attack on the Father. Understanding this unlocks the meaning of this passage.

Jesus continues by explaining the extent of His relationship with the Father. Love binds the Father and the Son. It is in the power of this love that “greater works” will flow. The relationship between the Father and Son offers a clear understanding of God. The Father raises the dead, and the Son gives life to whom He pleases. Judgment comes from the Son through the Father. Love, life, and judgment are bound together in the relationship between the Father and Son. The Jewish leaders did not have a choice between honoring the Father and the Son. The same is true for us.

## John 5:24-30

### LIFE AND ETERNITY

The stakes are very high as Jesus continues to respond to the Jewish leaders. Jesus says that those who hear His words and believe may enjoy eternal life. It is important that we understand that eternity begins now. Those who hear and believe embrace the fullness of life, now. Accordingly, “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (v. 26). Life and eternity are bound together in the Son of God. This provides the basis for judgment.

## Think About It

“Trinity” was first used to describe the relation among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit by the early theologian Tertullian (c. AD 200). At the time, there was great disagreement about how to understand Jesus’ divinity. The church concluded that it was necessary to use terminology not found in Scripture in order to clarify the meaning of passages that were misused to teach falsehoods.

Jesus as the Son of Man (v. 27) is given authority to judge. Jesus said, “If I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.” It is true that Jesus came to redeem those who place their faith in Him (John 3:14), but He also said that “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind” (9:39). Jesus reminded the leaders, “By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me” (v. 30).

Just as the work of God is bound to the relationship between Father and Son, so our obedience to the Father as His sons and daughters exists through the depth of our relationship with the Father. Jesus admits that by himself, He can do nothing. This reminds all who follow Him that we need the help of Father and Son to continue the work of God.

Discipleship is not mere morality. Rather, obedience arises from a relationship. A person cannot honor the Father as God while denying the full deity of the Son and His office as Redeemer of the world. Father and Son are distinguishable but inseparable. Jesus is the Son of God, and in that reality and authority, He opens the door to a holy and obedient life.

## REFLECT

What does the use of “the Son of God” say about the identity of Jesus?

---

HENRY SPAULDING II

March  
**16**

# THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*Jesus Christ is the light from God who shines in the darkness to illuminate the way of life.*

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## THE WORD

**JOHN 8:12**  
**KEY VERSE**

**W**hen Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

**JOHN 9:1-7**

<sup>1</sup>As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. <sup>2</sup>His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

<sup>3</sup>“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. <sup>4</sup>As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup>While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

<sup>6</sup>After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. <sup>7</sup>“Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed and came home seeing.

**24-25**

<sup>24</sup>A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.”

<sup>25</sup>He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”

**35-41**

<sup>35</sup>Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

<sup>36</sup>“Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

<sup>37</sup>Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

<sup>38</sup>Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

<sup>39</sup>Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

<sup>40</sup>Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

<sup>41</sup>Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**J**esus is the light of the world and, as such, opens the possibility of new life to those hidden in darkness. The truth of this is spelled out in the Scripture readings that follow: Jesus opens the eyes of a blind man. The image of a blind man bound in darkness illustrates the penetrating truth of Jesus as the light.

### LIGHT OF THE WORLD

#### John 8:12

When Jesus claims to be the “light of the world,” He gives a witness to His relationship with the Father in heaven. The Pharisees understood the significance of the statement immediately. Jesus is the “I am.” With this statement, He divides those who will see the truth from those who simply will not see or understand. Throughout the Scripture, images of light abound. For example, the Feast of Tabernacles celebrates the light during the wilderness journey in Israel’s history. It calls to mind the celebration of light and revelation (Leviticus 23:33-43). John introduces the interplay of light and darkness throughout the gospel. The fundamental truth is that Jesus is the source of truth and illumination.

### A BLIND MAN SEES

#### John 9:1-7

Chapter 9 begins with the healing of a blind man. This is a symbol of the spiritual darkness that often

## Did You Know?

The Feast of Tabernacles was a joyous celebration. On the first night of the celebration, four large lampstands were placed in the Court of the Women. The light of these lampstands was so brilliant that courtyards across the city reflected the light of those burning lamps. In addition, celebrants carrying “burning torches” added even more brilliance to the evening.

surrounds us. Jesus heals the blind more than any other miracle (Matthew 9:27-31; 12:22-23; 15:30; 21:14; Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52; Luke 7:21). When Jesus gives sight, He fulfills a true messianic purpose (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7).

As Jesus approaches the man, a question emerges: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (v. 2). The theological mistake behind this question is immediately pointed out. No one sinned. The human attempt to explain and figure things out clouds the real issue, according to Jesus. Some things we will never understand, no matter how hard we try. However, the healing of the blind man clearly demonstrates the work of God. Jesus, who heals the blind, thus bringing light, is the “Light of the World” for all time.

The simplicity of this miracle shows the capacity of God to bring light to the darkness that imprisoned the man. Jesus will not be on earth forever, at least in the form depicted in this passage, and warns that the night is coming (another image of darkness) when no one can work. While on earth, as long as it is day, He will continue to do His work as the Messiah.

Jesus mixed His saliva with the clay on the ground to rub in the eyes of the sightless man. He then told him to wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam. When the man obeyed, he “came home seeing.” The simplicity of this miracle demonstrates the power of Jesus to be the light and bring the light into the darkness.

## “I WAS . . . BUT NOW!”

### John 9:24-25

The Pharisees were not happy with the healing and began to investigate the situation. They questioned whether the man was blind, until his parents confirmed it (vv. 18-23). They questioned how a sinner might have been healed. Clearly, they could not imagine grace in this moment. Their minds were unsettled by the sheer gift of light to this man who had known nothing but darkness. The clarity of his response speaks across the

## Think About It

Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with the saliva. He placed it on the man's eyes, then instructed the man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. This is traditionally understood as the pool from which the waters were taken for use in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, linking this healing miracle to the celebration. When the man washed the mud from his eyes, he could see!

## DO YOU BELIEVE?

ages, "I was blind, but now I see" (v. 25). This is the testimony of countless others throughout history—people who believe there is only darkness, until Jesus brings the light. The Pharisees could not grasp the glory of the gift. They failed to see that Jesus is the gift for all those who otherwise stand in the dark.

### John 9:35-41

It would seem the man born blind who now sees stands in the face of any theological bias seeking to deny the light of Jesus. However, the Pharisees could not be satisfied until they judged the man who could now see. For them, what could not be understood must be refused. Yet, the man who stood condemned and marginalized could see and, by faith, believed and worshiped Jesus.

Jesus says, "'For judgment, I have come into this world so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.' Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, 'What? Are we blind, too?' Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains'" (vv. 40-41). Jesus' judgment illuminates and clearly reveals those who receive light as well as those who refuse to accept it. We all understand that a physically blind man just *cannot* see, but we often miss the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees. They *will not* see. Therefore, they stand condemned by their unwillingness to see what the light clearly revealed.

Jesus offers light to those living in darkness and sight to those who are blind. The blind man believed and received more than physical sight; sadly, the Pharisee's chose to remain spiritually blind.

## REFLECT

**H**ow does Jesus help us see through the darkness and distortion of the world?

HENRY SPAULDING II

# THE GATE

March

# 23

*The only true path to God is Jesus Christ.*

---

## THE WORD

**JOHN  
10:1-10**

“**V**ery truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup>The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup>**I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.** <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have have life, and have it to the full.

## KEY VERSE

## ENGAGE THE WORD

People of that time understood that sheep were under constant threat from predators such as wolves and hyaenas. Therefore, the work of a shepherd was hard and dangerous. Fulfilling this role was a 24/7 responsibility that demanded total attention for the herd by the shepherd. The image of the shepherd would have been familiar to the original readers of this passage.

Also familiar to people of that day—common in Jewish writings and stories—was the image of shepherds who neglected their responsibilities. Frequent references are found in the prophetic writings of the shepherds of Israel who neglected their flocks, who exploited them for personal gain, or who abandoned them in times of danger (Jeremiah 50:6-7; Zechariah 11). However, God was spoken of as *the “shepherd”* of Israel (Psalms 23; 100; Ezekiel 34:11-16). Therefore, the shepherd imagery found easy resonance with the people of the culture. Jesus adopts the image of the shepherd to communicate His care and guidance to those who follow Him.

## THE ISSUE OF TRUST

### John 10:1-6

Jesus opens this passage rather abruptly by saying, “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber” (v. 1). The image painted here is one in which the sheep are herded together, probably to keep them safe, with only one way to get in or out. For those who listened, Jesus warned that any other sort of entry suggested the possibility of nefarious intentions. There is only one right way to enter through the appointed gate.

The issue is trust. The sheep cannot trust those who sneak into the enclosure. The passage reads, “The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his sheep by name and leads

## Did You Know?

This passage presents the last public discourse of Jesus recorded by John. It calls to mind the image of a Good Shepherd in contrast to false shepherds. The reader should understand through the lens of the Old Testament passages that depict and critique shepherds who fail in their responsibility to the flock of God (see Jeremiah 23:1-4; 25:32-28).

them out" (vv. 2-3). The voice of the shepherd evokes trust from the sheep. This means that the sheep will listen and follow the shepherd without fear of the outcome. The same is true for those who hear the voice of Jesus. We will follow because we trust the voice of our Shepherd. We follow because we know the Shepherd only wants what is good. While those who listen may have missed the meaning of this allegory, it is a message contemporary readers need to understand.

The Good Shepherd is a beautiful image that should resonate with all those who read the New Testament. An intimate relationship emerges between the shepherd and the sheep. When the relationship is strong and we know the voice of our shepherd, Jesus, the stranger does not have a chance. William Barclay, in his Daily Study Bible, spells out an ancient legend that partially explains why God chose Moses as the leader of his people and illuminates the calling of a shepherd. As the legend goes, while Moses was feeding his father-in-law's sheep, a young kid ran into the wilderness. Moses pursued the little sheep only to discover that it was thirsty. According to the legend, when he understood this, he took the weary lamb over his shoulders and carried him back to the herd. Whether this is true or not, it indicates a deep appreciation for the intimate connection between the shepherd and the sheep. It also reaches powerfully toward the relationship of the believer with Jesus.

## I AM THE GATE

### John 10:7-10

Jesus says, "I am the *gate* for the sheep" (emphasis added). Multiple philosophies attempt to redefine the context of this statement, each pointing to other options. But Jesus' statement flies in the face of all attempts at pluralism. Today, as was true for those in the first century, many competing voices are ringing in the ears of those who hear and read the message of this passage. People and ideas that pretend to care or to be true, but only lead to heartbreak, can fill our

## Think About It

"The shepherd has called together his flock and taken them to the pasture. Near the pasture is another enclosed place for the sheep. Here the shepherd sits in the doorway, acting as the 'gate.' The sheep can go out to the pasture or stay inside the walls of the enclosure. To go out or in is to pass by the shepherd's watchful eye" (*John in Life Application Bible Commentary* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993], 208).

minds. Amid the intellectual and spiritual laziness that offer multiple options, there is only one truth—Jesus.

Two images come to light here. First, "The one who enters by the gate is the *shepherd* of the sheep" (v. 2, emphasis added). Second, "I am the *gate*" (vv. 7, 9a, emphasis added). Jesus is both the one who enters (the shepherd) and the gate. The simple truth here is that Jesus is the only way to salvation. He is the only way to truth.

In the previous chapter, the Pharisees threw out of the synagogue the man whom Jesus had given his sight. Jesus found the man, and gave him a place in the kingdom. In this passage, Jesus speaks with divine authority when He says, "I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers." There is one way, and only one, by which access is granted into the kingdom. Jesus made that abundantly clear when He said, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" (v. 9). Jesus is the "Sheep Gate"; that is, He is the only way for us who believe. In fact, He is the only way for those who do not believe.

We tend to equate shepherd with gentleness, but there is more. Indeed, a shepherd provides attentive and gentle care to the sheep. After all, they hear and respond to the shepherd. But there is another side to the calling of a shepherd: to lead. Since he guides and protects the sheep, the shepherd is the only one with authority to lead the sheep (Matthew 28:18). Today, we are called to follow the leading of the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

Right now, as in the time of Jesus, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." The good news is that Jesus came that we "may have life, and have it to the full" (v. 10).

## REFLECT

**H**ow might the image of the loving Shepherd help us understand the nature of God?

March  
**30**

# THE WAY, TRUTH, AND LIFE

*Jesus embodies the way to God,  
reveals the truth of God, and provides life with God.*

## THE WORD

**JOHN  
14:1-11**

**“D**o not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup>You know the way to the place where I am going.”

<sup>5</sup>Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

### KEY VERSE

**“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’** <sup>7</sup>If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

<sup>8</sup>Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

<sup>9</sup>Jesus answered: “Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? <sup>10</sup>Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. <sup>11</sup>Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.”

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**F**ew people enjoy feeling lost. When lost, most of us feel stressed and anxious as we seek to get our bearings and determine the right path forward. These feelings are often enhanced when we think we were on the right path and then, suddenly, nothing looks familiar, and the path is no longer clear. When this happens, we may not know what to do, what to think, or even how to pray. How then do we get back on track?

### THE PROMISE OF JESUS' CONTINUED PRESENCE

#### **John 14:1-4**

In the last few days of Jesus' life, it is not surprising that the disciples felt lost. Although Jesus had already spoken about His pending death (John 12:1-8, 30-36), they thought all things were fine if they stayed away from those in Jerusalem who wanted to kill Jesus. But now they were in Jerusalem and Jesus has reported that He will be leaving them soon (13:1, 31-38). As before, this teaching had the disciples feeling confused, anxious, and even lost. Jesus had been their guide and they had followed Him with their whole hearts. But now, they did not understand what Jesus was saying when He tried to tell them about His death on the cross. So, they felt lost.

In response to these feelings, Jesus did two things. First, He comforted them. They did not need to have "troubled hearts" (14:1, 27), nor did they need to fear (14:27). Instead, if they trusted (believed) in God, they could trust in Jesus. Jesus knows what He is doing just as does God, and so, they can trust instead of feeling stressed and anxious. Though the disciples found little comfort in these words, we know that we certainly can. And second, the disciples could trust that Jesus' departure was for a reason. With His death, Jesus was going ahead of them to "prepare a place" for them in His "Father's house" (14:2). While it is not certain what kind of place Jesus was referring to here, what is certain is the nature of it. Because Jesus was going to pre-

## Did You Know?

The “place” that is referenced here is often misunderstood (14:2). The Greek word *monai* emphasizes that there is plenty of room for all in His Father’s house and is less about how luxurious that place will be.

## JESUS IS THE WAY

pare it, the rooms in this house will be a fitting place for Jesus’ disciples and it is a place where both Jesus and the Father would be clearly present. In essence, all of Jesus’ followers, including ourselves, will be with both Jesus and the Father once we die. So, no matter how lost we may feel, Jesus is always directing the feet of faithful believers to His presence.

### John 14:5-11

Despite Jesus’ words of comfort, Thomas was still overwhelmed about Jesus’ teachings concerning His death. His question shifts the focus from where Jesus is going to the disciples’ inability to “know the way” (14:5). Wherever Jesus is headed, what Thomas believes the disciples need is a roadmap. They needed to know the way that they should go, and a roadmap would provide that direction.

To this question, Jesus turns His lost disciples back to himself. The only roadmap that anyone needs is Jesus. He is the way. More than that, Jesus is not just the true way to the place that He is preparing, but He is also the true way to the Father. And those who follow Jesus as the true way also receive eternal life with the Son and the Father. For as Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:6). The only map one needs when one feels lost is Jesus.

Jesus then rebukes His disciples for their lack of faith. After all this time, their concerns suggest that they may not know Jesus as they should (14:7). To know Jesus is to know the Father. So, it is no wonder that they were feeling lost. By losing track of Jesus and His plans, they had lost track of the Father and His plans. But even here, once they understood who Jesus is and what He must do, they will then know with certainty the Father and His plans.

Evidently, this teaching showed the disciples to be not only lost but also disoriented. Unable to accept Jesus’ teaching at face value, Philip appealed to Jesus to

## Think About It

When Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (v. 1), He spoke with empathy. He knew what it meant to be "troubled." The same Greek word was used in the Gospels to describe His feelings at Lazarus' tomb (11:33), His thoughts about the cross (12:27), and His pain over the betrayal by Judas (13:21).

## WHEN LOST, TRUST THE WAY

show them the Father because Philip thought that that would be enough to get himself and the disciples back on track. Yet, the nature of this request shows just how truly lost and disoriented they all were. Not even Moses, who spent as much time as he did with God, ever saw God. But what about the disciples and their time with Jesus? Had they not seen enough to believe that Jesus and the Father are one? (10:30). Yet, now, Jesus is concerned that they are in no better shape than His opponents whom He urged to believe His works had come from the Father, even if they could not believe that Jesus himself is in the Father and the Father is in Him (10:37-38; 14:10-11)? So, whether Philip realized it or not, his request had already been granted. Since they knew Jesus, they had already seen the Father.

In the end, Jesus showed greater faith in His disciples than they did in Him. Jesus knew that after the resurrection His disciples would finally understand and know Him as the way, the truth, and the life. And after they experienced the resurrected Jesus, they would then begin to live out their mission. Though Jesus will be absent in the flesh, He will be present in their ministry through the Holy Spirit (14:16-17).

Because Jesus is so certain of this future for His disciples, He can even say that they will receive whatever they ask in His name because they will be seeking to glorify the Father in the Son (14:13). If only we could always see things as Jesus does, because if we did, we would not feel lost like the disciples. But if we cannot see things as Jesus does, may we, at least, trust that Jesus will show us the way.

## REFLECT

**W**hat kind of things on your spiritual journey have helped assure you that you were on the right track?

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April  
**6**

# THE TRUE VINE

*Staying connected to Jesus produces the fruit of love for God and others.*

## THE WORD

**JOHN  
15:1-17**

**“I** am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup>He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. <sup>3</sup>You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

### KEY VERSE

**“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.** <sup>6</sup>If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

<sup>9</sup>“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup>I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear

fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.<sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**J**esus is the vine and we are the branches. The goal is for us, the branches, to produce fruit. All of this seems simple enough. Yet, if we don't pay close attention to what is being stated here, we can easily read into these words good Christian concepts about "fruit bearing" that are not really being developed here. When that happens, we may miss some vital truths that are important in this passage.

### THE TRUE VINE

#### John 15:1-4

Throughout his gospel, John has developed Jesus' identity through seven "I am" sayings (6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6 and 15:1). Each saying highlights an important aspect of Jesus' identity as the "one and only" Son of God (1:14, 18; 3:16). Most tie directly to promises that God made to His people, Israel. This one is no different. Here Jesus declares that He is the "true vine" (15:1, 5). On the surface, this image invites us to imagine what we know about vines, their branches, and their ability to produce fruit. Yet, this vine is more than that. Jesus is not just any vine, but He is the *true* vine, which suggests a contrast. So, Jesus is the true vine in contrast to what? The most likely answer is Israel. In the Old Testament, the prophets refer to God's people, Israel, as a vine as well. But, instead of being alive and fruitful as God carefully planted it and nurtured it, the vine only withered and was not good for anything except for it to be consumed by fire (Ezekiel 15:2-6; 19:10-14). And even when Israel as God's vine did bear fruit, it only produced bad fruit (Isaiah 5:1-2). So, the contrast is clear. God's promises remained, but since they were not fulfilled in sinful Israel, they were now being fulfilled in the true vine, Jesus.

This then has implications for the vine's branch-

## Did You Know?

The striving and straining that is often associated with being “fruitful” misses the point. The essential need is to remain in relationship with God, to cultivate that relationship above all other things. In response to a healthy and growing relationship of trusting obedience to God, fruit is produced, love reigns, and communion with God and His people is assured.

## FRUITFULNESS AS TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

es (15:2-4). Because God is the farmer (15:1), only branches that are connected to the true vine can remain. Those branches that are not truly connected to this vine, God actively “cuts off” because those branches do not bear fruit. And those that are connected and are bearing fruit, God “prunes” to make them even more fruitful. Two principles stand out here. First, the branches must remain in the one true vine (i.e., Jesus) and the vine in the branches (15:4). And second, God’s decision to cut off or to prune branches is based on the fruitfulness of the branches.

## John 15:5-8

Implied in the previous section, but now stated here, is the identity of the branches. The branches are Jesus’ disciples (15:5). This includes not only the original disciples who have already been made ready to be fruitful (already clean, 15:3), but also all those who will be faithful disciples in the future, including us. The promise here is that true disciples will “bear much fruit” (15:5) and that their fruit “will last” (15:16). While Jesus has not yet stated what is meant by fruitfulness, two things are clear: True discipleship is an ongoing life of fruitfulness (i.e., bear much fruit) and the implications of one’s fruitfulness have eternal significance (i.e., fruit that will last). In essence, because true disciples remain continuously in Jesus, they will glorify God because of their fruitfulness (15:8).

## TRUE FRUITFULNESS

## John 15:9-17

Throughout the passage, Jesus has talked about being fruitful but has not stated what true fruitfulness is. Many likely assume that the fruit referred to here is evangelistic fruit obtained when one brings someone to Christ. Thus, the idea of “bearing much fruit” is interpreted as bringing more people to Christ and this, of course, would have eternal significance. However, a closer look at the passage suggests something else. Beginning in verse 9, Jesus states what it means

## Think About It

"The proof of discipleship is fruitbearing. This statement coincides with Jesus' teaching in the synoptic Gospels: 'By their fruit you will recognize them' (Matthew 7:20; cf. Luke 6:43-44). Just as Jesus glorified God by his life, so the disciples would glorify God by theirs" (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981], 152).

to remain in Him. There, Jesus urges His disciples to remain in His love. Then we get an example of what remaining in Jesus' love looks like. It involves keeping the Father's commands, which is best summed up in verse 12: "Love each other as I have loved you." This, too, is defined more clearly in verse 13: "To lay down one's life for one's friends." Thus, true fruitfulness in John is less about evangelistic efforts like sharing one's faith and more about growth in Christ's love, which involves both obedience and sacrifice.

To bear much lasting fruit, we must be totally dependent upon Jesus (i.e., remain in Him) and be committed to God's work in us as He expands our ability to love others the way that He has demonstrated His love for us in Jesus. That love is boldly stated in the well-known passage, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus, then, is our example of God's kind of love. Jesus laid down His life for us, His "friends" (see also 10:17-18). The key question then is: Can we do the same for one another?

Thankfully, there is one more dimension to this discussion that goes beyond obedience and sacrifice. As we remain in Christ and bear the fruit of love for one another, we ultimately find God's promised joy (15:11). This too is one of the promises that we find in the Old Testament. When God's kingdom is finally established, all people will experience joy because God's purposes for His creation will have finally come to be (Isaiah 25:9; 35:10; Zechariah 9:9). As we bear fruit together in love for one another, we already get a chance to experience that future joy here in this life.

## REFLECT

**W**hat does fruitfulness look like in the church today?

WILLIAM MALAS JR.

April  
**13**

# THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

*Jesus is life to those who believe.*

## THE WORD

**JOHN  
11:17-27**

**O**n his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.<sup>18</sup> Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,<sup>19</sup> and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.<sup>20</sup> When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

<sup>21</sup> “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.<sup>22</sup> But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

<sup>24</sup> Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

**<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;<sup>26</sup> and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”**

<sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

**38-45**

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance.<sup>39</sup> “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

<sup>40</sup> Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said,

“Father, I thank you that you have heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

<sup>43</sup>When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” <sup>44</sup>The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

<sup>45</sup>Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

### PUTTING THE STORY IN CONTEXT

**W**hen Lazarus got sick, no one was surprised that Jesus did not rush to His friend's side. Bethany was close to Jerusalem and the religious leaders there had already tried to stone Jesus (10:31, 39; 11:8). So, when it was clear that Lazarus had died (11:12), Jesus' decision to return did not make sense to His disciples. If Lazarus was dead and could no longer be healed, why would Jesus want to go somewhere which could lead to His death or the death of His disciples? But Jesus knew that God had something else planned (11:4), even if the disciples could not see it.

### DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?

#### John 11:17-27

After Jesus arrived in Bethany, it quickly became clear that Mary and Martha were not expecting anything special either. Both sisters affirmed the obvious: Jesus' presence could have made a difference for Lazarus. Had Jesus been there, they knew that their brother would not have died (11:21, 32). Martha also believed firmly that death was not the last word for her brother as she proclaimed that Lazarus “will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (11:24). These sisters were willing to affirm what we so often affirm when we are face to face with challenging situations. We know that God could have done something in the past perhaps to change our circumstances but chose not to, or He will definitely do something in the future where He will set things right. But how often are we

## Did You Know?

Lazarus came out from the grave in his grave clothes. These would have consisted of a cloth that covered the entire body that was secured by strips and a face cloth that was secured under the jaw.

convinced that God will do something right now in our present moment. All those who knew Jesus could imagine that Jesus' presence when Lazarus was sick could have changed that reality. Now, Lazarus, their brother and friend, was dead and all that they could imagine doing is to mourn his loss.

And mourn they all did, including Jesus in His own complex way (11:33, 35). What the text clearly states is that Jesus "was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (v. 33) and ultimately He even wept. Certainly, Lazarus' death deserved all the efforts by those present to comfort those grieving and to mourn their loss. This Jesus understood. Yet, the language around Jesus' response is more than just human grief. In the face of death, Jesus of all people knew death's power. And so, although His tears looked like normal grief to many (11:36), His emotions communicated to the reader of John's gospel much more, including the deep distress that He felt as He faced death itself. And Jesus may have even felt some frustration that no one understood that He was about to conquer death once and for all not just for Lazarus, but also for everyone through His own death and resurrection.

## THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS

### John 11:38-45

To the surprise of all, Jesus revealed the real reason why He had come. It was not to provide comfort to the grieving, but to change their present situation. First, He told them to remove the stone (11:39). Martha's protest only underscores her belief that any hope for Lazarus was all in the future. She could not anticipate what Jesus was about to do. In addition, opening the tomb would only bring shame as the perfumes used on the body would no longer suppress the stench of the dead body. It would also bring shame upon the family for others to see Lazarus' body in the decayed state of death. In response, Jesus asked again about her belief. Jesus had not come just to do a miracle, but to reveal "the glory of God" (11:40). And for John's

## Think About It

Of all the stories about Jesus, one of the most memorable is Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus. To be sure, Lazarus came back to this life and would then die again. Even so, the details of the story are so strong from Jesus' weeping to His powerful words, "Lazarus, come out!" All the elements of this story say so much about who Jesus is and what it means for us to experience true life both in the future and in the here and now.

gospel, no other sign fully reveals who Jesus really is and the salvation that He brings than this one. Then, with the powerful words, "Lazarus, come out!, the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face" (vv.43-44). Lazarus did not need to wait until some future time to experience God's resurrection and life. Instead, Lazarus was raised from the dead that day.

So, what becomes clear in this story is that if belief that Jesus is the "resurrection and the life" only has us hopeful for a renewed life in the future once we die, we don't yet really understand and believe who Jesus is. For John's gospel, eternal life begins when one comes to faith in Jesus (3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:40, 47, 54; 10:28; 17:2-3). After all, Jesus provides sustenance for life both right now and forever. As John illustrates throughout his gospel, Jesus is the "bread of life" (6:35, 48), the "light of life" (8:12), and the "way, truth, and the life" (14:6). It is no wonder then that Jesus proclaims here that He is the "resurrection and the life" (11:25). Even when all we see is death, when Jesus is present, there is always the hope for life in the here and now as well as in the future. When we bring to Jesus our hopes in the face of our desperate situations, we may not receive exactly what we expect in the present; however, what Jesus brings will be life for those who truly believe in Him.

## REFLECT

**R**eject on the times where God intervened in your life in ways that were greater than you expected.

WILLIAM MALAS JR.

April  
**20**

# THE RISEN AND COMMISSIONING RESTORER

*The Lord supplies our needs, restores us when we fail, and entrusts us to carry on His work.*

## THE WORD

**JOHN  
21:15-25**

**KEY VERSE**

**W**hen they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

<sup>16</sup>Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” <sup>17</sup>The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup>Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup>Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

<sup>20</sup>Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) <sup>21</sup>When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

<sup>22</sup>Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” <sup>23</sup>Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?”

<sup>24</sup>This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.

<sup>25</sup>Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

### PETER'S FAILURE

More times than we like, we find ourselves in situations where the result has us not meeting our expectations or the expectations of others. This was certainly true of Peter. Even though he firmly believed that he would lay down his life for Jesus (13:37), he ended up denying Jesus three times (18:15-18, 25-27). Yet, this failure was not the end of his story.

Anyone familiar with the gospel story knows that Peter denied Jesus after Jesus was arrested and appeared before the religious leaders. This happened even though Peter vowed that he would lay down his life for Jesus (13:37). At the heart of this greatly expressed bravado and then horrible failure was likely a level of competition amongst the disciples (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; see also Luke 22:24-30). And while John's depiction of Peter's vow is more a personal pledge, the same vow in the other gospels has a strikingly competitive quality to it. Note how Mark records Peter's statement: "Even if all fall away, I will not" (Mark 14:29; see also Matthew 26:33). These accounts suggest that Peter thinks that his love for Jesus was greater than all the rest. Not only that, when the soldiers came for Jesus, John's gospel tells us that it is Peter who brandished the sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant (John 18:10-11). Yet, after all this tough speech and his supposed act of heroism with the sword, when push came to shove, Peter was unable to put his money where his mouth was.

### PETER'S REINSTATEMENT

#### John 21:15-19

While failures like Peter's are certainly horrible and to be avoided, we need not focus on them or let them de-

## Did You Know?

Jesus commissioned Peter as a shepherd of the flock, but He did not ask, "Peter, do you love my sheep?" Instead, Jesus asked, "Do you love me?" (vv. 15, 16, 17).

Our restoration is dependent on our love for Jesus above all else. He pursues us out of love. When we accept Jesus' restorative love, the result is grace, forgiveness, and a purpose in ministry.

fine our relationship with God. Only when our failures cause us to stay turned away from God are they a problem that will damage our relationship with Him. This was true for Peter. In this scene, Jesus gently confronts Peter's failure, but also commissions him once again. To be sure, it was not pleasant and was likely embarrassing to have Jesus ask the same question three times. However, this only emphasizes the seriousness of Peter's failure along with the fullness of His forgiveness. Also, the three questions appropriately parallel Peter's three denials of Jesus earlier in John's gospel.

Besides this, the questions and the responses help highlight the nature of Peter's failure. The first question gets at the issue (21:15): "Do you love me more than these?" This question differs from the other two which leave off, "more than these." Important here is determining who are the "these" to which Jesus is referring. Most likely, Jesus is referring to the competitive nature of Peter's relationship with the other disciples. Jesus is asking Peter if he still believes that he loves Him more than all the other disciples. Peter appears to have learned his lesson when he affirms: "You know that I love you" (21:15). His competitive nature is dialed back as he merely affirms what he knows, which is that he loves his Lord. This must have met with Jesus' approval as the next two times He does not ask about the other disciples.

The focus of Jesus' commissioning also highlights the humble role that Jesus has for Peter. Jesus tells Peter to "feed my sheep" (21:16, 17; "lambs" in 21:15). Certainly, this is an important role since Jesus himself is the "Good Shepherd" (10:11) and is willing to lay down His life for the sheep. Yet, this task may have seemed to Peter as less heroic a role than what he once thought himself possible to have as Jesus' disciple. In the end, though, Peter's life would end in the same way as did Jesus' life. Peter, too, will follow Jesus to the cross as the imagery provided in John's gospel makes clear (21:18-19). Through this humble service and death, Peter will

## Think About It

Peter, even though he firmly believed that he would lay down his life for Jesus (John 13:37), ended up denying Jesus three times (John 18:15-18, 25-27). Yet, this failure was not the end of his story anymore than our failures must be the end of ours.

## THE FATE OF THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

glorify God. Like Peter, may we take our failures to our Lord and respond just as he did. May we humbly follow Jesus in whatever He calls us to do.

### John 21:20-25

Though humbled and recommissioned to shepherd the followers of Jesus, Peter could not help but to show his competitive nature once more. After his conversation with Jesus, he noticed the beloved disciple following behind them. And so, Peter asked Jesus what this disciple's fate would be (21:21). After all, Jesus just told Peter that he would eventually be crucified. Was Jesus ready to share what would happen to the beloved disciple as well? However, Jesus saw through the question and reminded Peter once again of his continued need to stop comparing his calling to what others were called to do. So once again, Jesus tells Peter: "You must follow me" (21:19, 22). The fate of this disciple or of any other disciple was not Peter's concern. To keep from failing once again, he needed to stay true to his own calling.

This is good advice for us as well. It rarely helps to compare the nature of our calling with others. Certainly, it is always helpful to talk to others about our calling and to get guidance on how best to live it out. However, when we find ourselves judging one another to see whose calling is best or more spiritual, we may fall prey to the same kinds of temptations that hindered Peter. May we remain faithful to our calling as we follow after Jesus. And when we stumble, may we quickly turn back to Jesus for forgiveness and a renewed sense of calling.

## REFLECT

**H**ave you ever been restored after stumbling in your Christian walk? If so, what did you learn from that experience?

WILLIAM MALAS JR.

April  
**27**

# CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

*By trusting Christ, we are justified and joined with Him.*

## THE WORD

**GALATIANS  
2:11-21**

**W**hen Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup>For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup>The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

<sup>14</sup>When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?

<sup>15</sup>“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles <sup>16</sup>know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup>“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! <sup>18</sup>If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

**KEY VERSE** <sup>19</sup>“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup>**I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** <sup>21</sup>I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

## ENGAGE THE WORD

Is salvation gained by faith in Christ or by obedience to the Mosaic Law? The earliest Christians embraced faith as the foundation of salvation, but Jewish pressure to rely on obedience to the law for salvation continued to challenge the young movement. Paul wrote Galatians because some legalistic-minded Jewish Christians were teaching that Gentile believers must adhere to all the customs and laws of the Jews, even dietary and circumcision regulations, in order to be saved. This false teaching threatened to undermine not only the unity of the believers, but also the very foundation of the Christian faith.

### THE CONFRONTATION

#### **Galatians 2:11-14**

As Paul worked to correct the false teaching of this “different gospel” (1:6) among the Galatian Christians, he reminded them of an earlier confrontation between himself and Peter over this very issue. Even Peter (whose Aramaic name was Cephas) had once wavered under the pressure of Jewish legalists when he was ministering to the church in Antioch. Even though Peter was arguably the most prominent apostle, Paul opposed him publicly “to his face” (v. 11) because of his inconsistency and hypocrisy. Namely, Peter had rightfully set aside the Jewish dietary laws in order to eat and fellowship with the Gentile believers in Antioch. But when some legalistic Jews from Jerusalem arrived, he withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles out of fear of rejection or perhaps even persecution from the Jews. Peter’s inconsistency and poor example, which Paul described as hypocrisy, caused other Jews including Barnabas to join him in breaking fellowship with the Gentiles.

Paul confronted Peter for failing to live out the implications of the truth of the gospel. Peter undoubtedly acknowledged and repented of his inconsistent and hypocritical behavior, which is why Paul recounted this episode for the Galatians who were facing the

## Did You Know?

Jewish zealots threatened physical violence against Jews who did not honor the separating boundaries between Jews and non-Jews. This fact might help explain why Peter drew back from the Gentiles “because he was afraid” (2:12).

## JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, NOT THE LAW

same legalistic struggle. Paul understood how hard it is to break free from old habits and patterns of thinking. But Christ calls and empowers His followers to set aside attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with a life of Christlikeness. Everyone can struggle with inconsistent and hypocritical temptations, even prominent pastors and Christian leaders like Peter and Barnabas. But it is never alright or acceptable.

### Galatians 2:15-18

The fact that obedience to “the works of the law” cannot bring about justification is so important that Paul repeated this truth three times in verse 16 alone. Paul explained how futile it is for anyone—Jew or Gentile—to seek after righteousness by following the laws of Moses or any other list of regulations. Obedience to the law does not justify and save. Salvation and righteousness come only by faith in Christ.

Verses 17-18 are difficult to interpret. Jews who were raised under the law probably objected, thinking that the teaching of salvation by faith in Christ alone (and not by obedience to the law) would only result in a freedom to sin. In other words, does justification by faith and not by the law mean that “Christ promotes sin”? (v. 17). Paul responded adamantly, “Absolutely not!” Christ’s life, death, and resurrection are the solution to sin, not the source of sin. The law could only identify sin, but Christ overcame sin and the limitations of the law through His own death and resurrection. For a believer to return to a life under the law instead of under Christ would be tantamount to rebuilding what Christ had destroyed.

Tradition and rules have often been the worst enemy of the church. Believers are often tempted to try to earn their salvation by obeying the law. But legalism is always doomed to fail. The law can only identify sin; it cannot save one from sin. Salvation is found in Christ alone.

## Think About It

Paul did not infer that a person's personality was taken away because Christ lives in him/her (2:20). Rather, he emphasized the enabling empowerment of the individual's personality through Christ's indwelling presence.

### CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST, LIVING BY FAITH

#### Galatians 2:19-21

If life can be gained by obedience to the law, then death is the result of disobedience to the law. Since no one can fully obey the law, a life under the law can only result in death. For this reason, Paul wrote, "For through the law (or "through a life of trying to obey the law") I died to the law" (v. 19). But here's the good news: When we die to the law and transfer our trust from obedience to the law to trust and obedience in Christ, Christ makes it possible for us to live for God!

Paul envisioned the Christian life as a life of unity and participation with Christ. He candidly testified how this new life consisted of Christ living in him: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (v. 20). The era of trying to earn one's salvation by doing one's best to obey the law of God is now finished. Instead, believers are united with Christ through faith so that Christ lives in them and they live in Christ.

For Paul, the essence of salvation is the empowering enablement of Christ living in us. With Christ, we die to sin and death. With Christ, we crucify our old carnal self, and place our faith and trust solely in Him. With Christ, we are raised to new life. With Christ in us, we can live a life of righteousness that pleases God. With Christ in us, we can live a life of victory over sin and death. None of this could ever happen through our own power or ability to obey the law. Otherwise, Christ died for nothing. But by faith in Him and the full devotement of our lives to Him who loved us and gave himself for us, Christ lives in and through us in victory to the glory of God. This is the grace of God at work in our life in and through Christ alone.

## REFLECT

Consider what it means for Christ to live "in and through" your life.

DANIEL G. POWERS is professor of New Testament at Nazarene Bible College.

May

4

# LIVING BY FAITH THROUGH THE SPIRIT

*Those who are born of the Spirit must continue to live by faith.*

## THE WORD

**GALATIANS  
3:1-14**

### KEY VERSES

**Y**ou foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup>I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? <sup>3</sup>Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? <sup>4</sup>Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? <sup>5</sup>So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? <sup>6</sup>So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

<sup>7</sup>Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup>Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” <sup>9</sup>So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

<sup>10</sup>For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” <sup>11</sup>Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.” <sup>12</sup>The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” <sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.” <sup>14</sup>He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

**23-28**

<sup>23</sup>Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. <sup>24</sup>So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

<sup>26</sup>So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup>for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

**P**aul had helped to create the churches in Galatia by proclaiming the message of salvation by faith in Christ alone, who was crucified on their behalf. Now Jewish legalists were teaching that their faith was not valid unless they combined their faith with obedience to all the laws of the Old Testament. In his response to this challenge, Paul set forth the foundations of his message of salvation by faith alone.

### WORKS VERSUS FAITH

#### **Galatians 3:1-5**

Using five rhetorical questions, Paul passionately reminded the Galatians of their own experience of conversion and faith in Christ. The first question is very personal: "Who has bewitched you?" The Galatians' response to the proclamation of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ had been powerful and life-transforming. How could they be so foolish to abandon what they had learned about the crucifixion of Christ?

Rhetorical questions do not require answers because the answers to the questions are so obvious. To each of Paul's rhetorical questions, the Galatians knew very well what the answer was. Indeed, they had received the Spirit by believing the message of salvation by faith, not by performing works of the law (v. 2). Moreover, they knew it would be foolish to try to complete their faith through their own human efforts when they were only able to begin their Christian life

## Did You Know?

The imagery of “clothing” in Galatians 3:27 most likely reflects the early practice of putting off old clothes and putting on a new white garment at the completion of baptism.

by the Spirit’s enablement (v. 3). Furthermore, the One who gave His Spirit to them and worked miracles among them did so because they believed what they heard, not because they observed the law (v. 5). The Galatians’ own experience testified to the reality that salvation is by faith and not by works of the law.

Believers need to pause and remember their own experience of conversion and life in Christ. The Galatians received the Spirit by believing Paul’s message by faith. They were not required to do anything except to believe, just as Jesus taught. This same truth is still in effect for believers today.

## SHARING IN THE BLESSINGS OF ABRAHAM BY FAITH

### Galatians 3:6-14

Paul moved from the Galatians’ personal experience to the testimony of Scripture. The preeminent example from Scripture that salvation is by faith and not by obedience to the law is found in none other than Abraham, the Father of the Jews. Paul quoted Genesis 15:6 to demonstrate that, just like the Galatians, Abraham’s righteousness was not gained by obedience to the law but because he believed in God. Paul’s bold conclusion was that those who have faith are children of Abraham (v. 7). When Abraham received the covenant that “all nations will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3), it was a scriptural prophecy that God would justify people because of their faith. Thus, every person can share in God’s blessings of Abraham when they share in Abraham’s faith (v. 9).

The law cannot provide this blessing. Those who follow the law must follow all of it with no exceptions. But flawless obedience is impossible. Thus, those who rely on the law find themselves under a curse because they are doomed to fail. The good news of the gospel of salvation by faith is that Christ redeemed His followers from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Taking the penalty of sin upon himself, Christ was crucified, dying to the law of sin and death. Through His death and resurrection, Christ redeemed believers

## Think About It

Paul appealed to Abraham because “Abraham’s justification proved the apostle’s case that right standing with God was entirely God’s doing, not a result of human effort” (*New Beacon Bible Commentary: Galatians* [Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2012], 180).

## UNITY IN CHRIST

so that they might share in the faith and blessings of Abraham by pouring out His Spirit upon them. Christ did for us what the law could never do: He provided forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God.

### Galatians 3:23-28

For Paul, the law fulfilled the role of a guardian until Christ opened the way of faith. In ancient times, a guardian educated and guided the ethical conduct of the sons of a household until they reached maturity. As a guardian, the law provided a framework of protection and restraint until the way of faith through Christ arrived. But it is faith in Christ, not obedience to the law, that saves a person. With the coming of Christ, Paul maintained that believers no longer needed the law as a guardian to regulate their behavior. Having been justified by faith in Jesus Christ, believers are now directly responsible to Christ to follow in His footsteps as the Spirit guides.

The contrast between life in Christ and life under the law is dramatic. Instead of living an immature life of slavery under the guardianship of the law, believers are now sons (and daughters) of God and heirs through Christ. Paul used the symbolism of baptism to remind believers of their solidarity with Christ both in His death to sin and in His resurrection to new and glorious life. This new identity of being united with Christ changed everything. No longer do former distinctions of superiority govern the believer’s life. Before Christ, one’s value was often determined by their ethnicity (Jew or Gentile), their social status (slave or free) or their gender (male or female). But in Christ, believers are all one, sharing the same blessings, responsibilities, promises, and reward.

## REFLECT

**T**ake time this week to consider what it means to “live by faith.”

# CHILDREN OF GOD

May

# 11

*When we become God's children through faith,  
we experience true freedom.*

## THE WORD

**GALATIANS  
4:1-7**

**W**hat I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate.<sup>2</sup> The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father.<sup>3</sup> So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world.<sup>4</sup> But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,<sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.<sup>6</sup> Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”<sup>7</sup> **So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.**

**21-23**

<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.<sup>23</sup>His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise.

**28-31**

<sup>28</sup>Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise.<sup>29</sup>At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.<sup>30</sup>But what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.”<sup>31</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

**GALATIANS  
5:1**

<sup>1</sup>It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

**ENGAGE THE WORD**

**P**aul assured the Galatian believers that they were children and heirs of God (3:26-29) through faith in Christ. Likewise, they were children and heirs of Abraham because they shared in Abraham's faith and blessings (v. 29). Paul urged his readers to resist the pressure of submitting themselves once again to slavery to the law, when they had been freed from the law by faith in Christ.

**ADOPTED INTO  
GOD'S FAMILY****Galatians 4:1-7**

Paul drew an analogy of childhood and inheritance to reveal the faulty logic of the Jewish false teachers. When an heir is a child, he is subject to guardians and trustees who oversee and rule over him. Even though the child is destined to possess the entire estate, he has no authority over the estate until he comes of age. Until that time, though, he is essentially a slave to the authority and instruction of his guardians. Paul's analogy depicted the believers' pre-conversion dilemma as enslaved to the "elemental spiritual forces of the world" (v. 3).

But God changed this hopeless predicament through Jesus. When God's appointed time came, God sent Jesus to redeem believers from the law by adopting them into His family as His children. God also "sent the Spirit of His Son Jesus into our hearts," giving believers the ability and authority to call God their "Father." The insinuation of Paul's analogy is that the time of slavery was the time of the works of the law, but the time of Christ is now the time of faith and adoption.

It is possible that the legalistic Jews claimed that believers must continue to obey the law because Jesus was born as a Jew under the law. Paul confirmed Jesus' Jewish background, but the purpose of Jesus' birth

## Did You Know?

“Elemental spiritual forces of the world” (v. 3) can be translated as “basic physical elements, heavenly bodies, spirits and demons, or foundational principles of life.” Regardless of how this phrase is defined, Paul believed Christ is the solution.

## CHILDREN OF PROMISE

under the law was to redeem believers from the law and to bring them into God’s family and inheritance as God’s own children. Thus, it made no logical sense for someone who was once a slave to the law, who had been adopted by faith into God’s family, to want to return to a life enslaved by the laws that Christ came to fulfill.

As God’s adopted children, we must embrace the fact that God actually chose us to be a part of His family. In doing this, God has offered us a way out of slavery to sin and unchained us to live in the freedom of His grace. Thus, since we believe by faith that Christ has set us free from the shackles of sin and death, we need to realize that we are no longer merely “sinners saved by grace.” Rather, we are children of God Almighty with all of its rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

### **Galatians 4:21-23, 28**

God promised Abraham a son, and that his offspring would be as countless as the stars (Genesis 15:4-5). When Sarah was unable to conceive, she gave Abraham her maid servant to bear him a son (Ishmael). Later, Abraham and Sarah miraculously conceived a son, whom they named Isaac. Paul compared and contrasted the two sons of Abraham as a life of slavery and human effort (“according to the flesh,” v. 23) versus a life of freedom and divine promise (“born by the power of the Spirit,” v. 29).

For Paul, those who seek salvation by works of the law are actually slaves to the law, just as Ishmael was the child of a slave woman. Such a life cannot expect anything better than what human effort is able to achieve on its own—a life full of limitations, frustration, and failure.

But what human effort cannot do, grace can. This promise, in the person of Christ, is received by faith. This is the difference between law and faith. Those who are adopted into God’s family by faith are free from slavery to the law and the limitations of human

## Think About It

As God's only-begotten Son, Jesus inherently possessed the right to call God by the name "Abba, Father." As God's adopted children, believers are enabled by the Spirit of Christ himself to also call upon God as their "Abba, Father."

## FREEDOM IN CHRIST

effort. Instead of being born into slavery, they are born into the freedom of a divine promise of blessing, strength, and empowerment from God to live lives that are holy and pleasing to God. Ultimately, this is what it truly means to be a child and heir of God.

### Galatians 4:29—5:1

Paul reassured his beleaguered readers that the believer's status as a child and heir of God does not mean they will not face opposition and struggles. In fact, children born according to the flesh have always resented and persecuted children born by the power of the Spirit (v. 29). This happened between Ishmael and Isaac, and believers should not be surprised when it happens to them.

Paul's instruction to "get rid of the slave woman and her son" (v. 30) probably encouraged the Galatian believers to expel the Jewish false teachers from their midst. Christians will often have differences of opinion about their faith. But when false teaching threatens the foundation of the Christian faith, it must not be tolerated. Paul called them to rid themselves of this challenge.

Finally, Paul urged his readers to stand firm in the face of legalism. God has enabled believers to experience true freedom in Christ. Standing firm as God's children is the task and responsibility of those who have been united with Christ in faith. As God's children, we should not desire or surrender to the yoke of slavery to sin. Freedom from sin and death by the power of Christ who lives within us should encourage and motivate Christ's followers to pursue a life of holiness and Christlikeness because we are no longer slaves to sin, but children of God.

## REFLECT

What does it mean to live life as a child of God?

DANIEL G. POWERS

May  
**18**

# FREEDOM IN THE SPIRIT

*The life of freedom that God desires for us  
is a life faithfully in step with the Spirit.*

## THE WORD

**GALATIANS  
5:13-26**

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. <sup>14</sup>For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>15</sup>If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

<sup>16</sup>So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

<sup>19</sup>The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup>idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup>and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>**Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.** <sup>26</sup>Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

## KEY VERSE

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## ENGAGE THE WORD

### FREE TO SERVE

#### Galatians 5:13-15

**S**alvation through faith in Jesus Christ sets a person free from the law of sin and death. Paul reminded the Galatian believers that their adoption into the family of God had set them on a path of freedom. But this freedom was not a license to engage in selfish, godless, and self-indulgent behavior. Instead, freedom in Christ enables believers to serve one another in love and humility. This is precisely what the Galatian believers neglected to do while they argued and bickered about the law. As a result, they faced not only a crisis of faith, but also a crisis of Christian unity.

Echoing the teaching of Jesus (Mark 12:28-31), Paul insisted that the entire law is fulfilled by the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). True freedom in Christ is the freedom to love and serve others. When Christians love and serve others, they fulfill the law. The result will be unity and health within the Christian community, instead of bickering and dissension that threaten to undermine and destroy the fellowship.

### FLESH VS. SPIRIT

#### Galatians 5:16-18

In the rest of chapter 5, Paul contrasted two ways of living, which he described with the categories of Spirit versus flesh. The way of the Spirit is the way of Christ, grace, faith, and love, while the way of the flesh is the way of the law, human effort, slavery, self-indulgence, and human weakness. “Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit, who was given to believers by faith on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit guides, enables, and fills believers with His presence to make it possible for them to live Christlike lives that are pleasing to God.

The word “flesh” does not mean that the body is inherently evil or sinful; rather, “flesh” emphasizes that humans are weak and fully dependent upon God. It is this fleshly weakness that makes humans vulnerable to sin and rebellion. The flesh opposes the Spirit when

## Did You Know?

Greek Platonic thought believed that the body was evil, while the spirit was inherently good. Paul used the word “flesh” to emphasize that humans were weak without God’s help, but they were not inherently evil.

humans choose to live as if they are not weak, but as if they are autonomous and independent of God. Thus, the way of the flesh leads to sinful, rebellious, and self-indulgent behaviors that oppose God’s intentions and purposes for humankind.

Paul called his readers to walk by the Spirit so that they can please God instead of indulging in the sinful and selfish life of the flesh. The Spirit and the flesh are in conflict with each other, traveling in diametrically opposite directions. When a person tries to gain salvation by works of the law, they elevate human effort above the empowerment of the Spirit. Even though one’s intentions might be good, the path of the law is the path of the flesh, which is inherently weak; it will only result in failure and sin. As believers, we have the freedom to choose whether or not to live according to the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. We are called as Christ’s church to live according to the Spirit, who lives in us, rather than according to the flesh that desires everything that is contrary to God’s Spirit, will, and purpose for our lives.

## ACTS OF THE FLESH

### Galatians 5:19-21

In verses 19-21, Paul described the outcome of a life that is lived according to the flesh. The list was not intended to be complete or exhaustive. Rather, it was composed undoubtedly with an eye on some of the divisive and destructive social sins and behaviors that Paul observed among the Galatian believers. In essence, these descriptions characterize what the flesh will do if it is allowed to run its course within a person’s life.

The acts of the flesh seem to be listed in four basic categories: 1) Sexual sins—sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery; 2) Spiritual sins—idolatry and witchcraft; 3) Violations of brotherly/sisterly love—hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; and 4) Sins of intemperance—drunkenness, orgies, and the like. While all

## Think About It

Love often occupies the most important role in Paul's writings. It summarizes the demand of God's law (Galatians 5:14), endures forever (1 Corinthians 13:13), and unites all the virtues of life (Colossians 3:14). Indeed, love never fails!

## FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

four areas must have been an issue for the Galatians, the longer listing of "social sins" reveals Paul's deepest concern that "violations of brotherly/sisterly love" were plaguing and threatening the unity of the believers. This list of obvious flesh-focused sins is by no means exhaustive, but it is helpful in identifying where the Spirit is often being ignored. The consequences of living according to the flesh are very sobering, for Paul declared, "Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 21).

### Galatians 5:22-26

Whereas the flesh destroys fellowship, the fruit of the Spirit creates unity, communion, and holiness. The singular noun "fruit" might be a subtle emphasis on the unity of the virtues in contrast to the divisiveness of the vices. The singular noun might also underscore the reality that the nine virtues represent a comprehensive whole that cannot and should not be divided.

The order of the virtues seems to be essentially random, but there might be significance to the listing of love as the first characteristic. Indeed, the emphasis on the love command in verse 14 makes love a natural and significant first virtue. Out of love, all the other virtues extend and expand into a life of Christlikeness in attitude and behavior.

Paul concluded his discussion with the keen reminder that the believers' old pattern of living according to the flesh had been dealt a mortal blow by their faith and commitment to Christ. Those who believe in Jesus and live by the Spirit have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Paul urges his readers to keep in step with the Spirit, trusting completely on Him to enable us to live lives that reflect Christlikeness.

## REFLECT

In what way are you experiencing "freedom in the Spirit" today?

DANIEL G. POWERS

# LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

May

# 25

*Believers are empowered by the Spirit to live for God and do good to others.*

## THE WORD

### GALATIANS 6:1-15

**B**rothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. <sup>2</sup>Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup>If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. <sup>4</sup>Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, <sup>5</sup>for each one should carry their own load. <sup>6</sup>Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.

**KEY VERSES** <sup>7</sup>Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. <sup>8</sup>**Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.** <sup>9</sup>**Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.** <sup>10</sup>Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

<sup>11</sup>See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

<sup>12</sup>Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. <sup>13</sup>Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. <sup>14</sup>May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. <sup>15</sup>Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

## ENGAGE THE WORD

In chapter 5 Paul called the Galatian believers to freedom in Christ. He urged them to avoid subjecting themselves once again to the limitations of the law and legalism because the law was unable to save. However, freedom from the law was not a license for sin and selfishness; rather, it was an opportunity for love and service to others in the power of the Spirit. In the closing chapter of Galatians, Paul described in greater detail how those who live in the Spirit should behave.

### FULFILLING THE LAW OF CHRIST

#### **Galatians 6:1-5**

Paul had already warned his readers in 5:21 that those who commit sinful acts would not inherit the kingdom of God. Now Paul addressed how the Christian community should respond when a fellow believer falls into sin. Paul recognized the need for believers to deal graciously with those who fell short in their desire to live by the Spirit. They should be restored gently and redemptively, not judgmentally. Instead of judging others, believers should carry each other's burdens, helping each other, and looking after one another. When they do this, they fulfill the law of Christ, which is to love one's neighbor as oneself (5:14).

While restoring someone who has fallen, though, believers need to guard against falling into the sin of pride. It is easy to lose perspective and deceive ourselves into believing we are superior or infallible by comparing ourselves with others. For this reason, believers need to test their own actions in relationship to the law of love.

Paul urged his readers to carry each other's burdens in verse 2, but then proclaimed that each one should carry their own load in verse 5. This is no contradiction. Believers are certainly called to express their freedom in Christ by serving others and helping those who are struggling, but they should never forget that each person is responsible before God for what

## Did You Know?

The eighth “fruit of the Spirit” was identified as “gentleness” (5:23). Those “who live by the Spirit” should exercise this same gentleness when restoring someone who has fallen into sin (6:1).

## SOWING AND REAPING

he or she has done. These are actually two sides of the same coin. We are called to help carry each other’s burdens, while remembering that each person will have to answer to God individually. We dare not try to puff ourselves up by comparing ourselves with other believers who might appear weaker. Christian discipleship is not a competition to outdo other Christians. Paul’s words call us to test our own actions and motives in helping others with the standard of Christ’s example of selfless love.

### Galatians 6:6-10

The law of Christ (the law of love) motivates believers to take every opportunity to help others in doing good. In this sense, everyone reaps what they sow. Every choice a person makes has consequences that lead either to destruction or to eternal life. When we are only motivated by actions that benefit ourselves, we are living by the flesh, and we will reap destruction. By contrast, life in the Spirit prompts believers toward acts of selfless service for others. This mode of living will reap eternal life. But one should not be deceived into believing that God can be fooled or mocked by false motives. God looks upon the heart, and He knows clearly whether our actions are driven by selfishness or by love for others.

This does not mean salvation can be earned by works of the law or by the performance of deeds of selfless service. Paul’s entire letter to the Galatians emphasized that salvation is by grace through faith and not by works. The legalistic Jews whose message Paul opposed were undoubtedly concerned that an emphasis on faith instead of on the law would result in selfish people who only worked out of self-interest. But life in the Spirit results in faith working by love for God and others. The Spirit-filled life that is characterized by a faith working by love cannot be surpassed. It inspires believers to be a blessing to others, especially those in the church (but not limited to only fellow

## Think About It

The verb in the phrase “if someone is caught in a sin” (6:1) means literally, “to ascertain something by surprise.” Believers do not try to entrap or spy on other Christians to “catch” them doing wrong. Rather, they “carry each other’s burdens” (6:2) and work to “gently restore” (6:1) those who might fall along the way.

**NOT  
CIRCUMCISION,  
BUT A NEW  
CREATION**

believers). Life in the Spirit enables Christ’s followers to love and serve God by serving others for the glory and advancement of His kingdom.

## Galatians 6:11-15

At the end of his letter, Paul wrote the last sentences like a signature of authentication.

Reiterating the points he had already emphasized in his letter, Paul contrasted the message of his opponents with his own preaching of the gospel. The Jewish legalists taught that Christians had to follow the entire Jewish law, including the requirement of circumcision to be saved. By requiring circumcision and obedience to the law for salvation, Paul’s opponents undermined the gospel truth that salvation is by faith in Christ alone, who died and was raised again for the salvation of all who believe in Him. By contrast, Paul taught that believers in Christ have died to the world and its focus on outward rituals and signs. These things no longer matter. What really matters is the new creation that Christ’s death and resurrection have made possible in the life of believers and in the world around them.

The true sign of salvation is not found in outward formalities, religious rites, or marks on the flesh. The priority of these things died with Christ on the cross. In their place has arisen a new creation brought about by the Spirit of Christ that is revealed in one’s love for God and others in Christlike service. In the end, anything other than following Christ and the Spirit’s guidance does not matter.

## REFLECT

In what ways are you opening yourself up to the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit?

DANIEL G. POWERS

# Key Verse Memory

Committing God's Word to memory is an important goal for Christians of every age. To assist you in this worthy objective, we have suggested three key verses for memorization. Select one verse to memorize each month or memorize one verse of your choosing for the quarter.

Key verses for Spring 2025:

**John 8:12**

**Galatians 2:20**

**Galatians 6:8-9**

## COMING NEXT QUARTER

### SUMMER 2025

#### **Unit 1: The Wisdom of Proverbs**

The wisdom in Proverbs provides practical teaching for our spiritual journey. In this study, we will examine some of the great wisdom passages to discover new insights for our walk with God.

#### **Unit 2: End Things**

Since the New Testament was written, people have been fascinated with end times. Through this study, we will look at what the Bible has to say about end things and how to apply these biblical passages today.

#### **Unit 3: What the Bible Says About...**

Although written thousands of years ago, the Bible still speaks to current culture. In this unit, we will explore what Scripture teaches about politics, gossip, family, and sharing our faith, and how to live holy lives in response to these truths.

