

# Bible Lessons



*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*

—Proverbs 25:11

Volume 55, No. 1  
January • February • March

2023

*Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People*

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*Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church.  
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## THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR THE 1st QUARTER, 2023

### A WORD FITLY SPOKEN

It is difficult to fully appreciate the power of “a word fitly spoken.” Godly counsel given at a critical time, words of comfort from someone who has “been there before,” companionship to the lonely, a hug, a card in the mail, a phone call, or simply a friendly smile at the store – all have the power to rescue a soul drowning in grief or wandering in confusion.

There are many wonderful examples of “a word spoken in due season” throughout the scriptures, as well as times that a lending hand and heart did far more than could be imagined at the time. Good words and good deeds, done in the name of the Lord, spread endless ripples for generations. The total benefit is incalculable!

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.*

—Proverbs 25:11

—Bro. Clifford Cole

### JANUARY 1, 2023

#### HOLDING UP THE HANDS OF MOSES

**Exodus 17:8** Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.

10 So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

11 And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.

12 But Moses' hands *were* heavy; and they took a stone, and put *it* under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.

13 And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

**Exodus 18:12** And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God.

13 And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses sat to judge the people: and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.

14 And when Moses' father in law saw all that he did to the people, he said, What is this thing that thou doest to the people? why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even? (*See also verses 15-18.*)

19 Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God:

20 And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do.

21 Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them, *to be* rulers of thousands, *and* rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens:

22 And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, *that* every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear *the burden* with thee.

23 If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace.

24 So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said.

25 And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

26 And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves.

**MEMORY VERSE:** And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken. —Ecclesiastes 4:12

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Moses, God’s chosen servant to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Canaan land, needed help desperately more than once. While fighting Amalek, Israel prevailed as long as Moses held up his hand. When Moses wearied, however, and let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. Aaron and Hur sat Moses down on a stone and stood on both sides, holding up his hands until the sun went down. Not long after the battle, Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, observed how Moses was over-encumbered with all of the problems the people brought daily to him. Jethro wisely counseled Moses to appoint God-fearing men to help with the great burden of judging the people.

### **WORD DEFINITIONS**

Exodus 17:9 **“Amalek”**: The posterity of Esau who hated Jacob because of the birthright and blessing bestowed upon him many years prior.

Exodus 17:10 **“Rod of God”**: Moses’ rod, most likely a shepherd’s crook, which was instrumental in many of the miracles God wrought through Moses. This staff became known as the “rod of God.”

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Israel had only recently made their exodus from Egypt. The rod in Moses’ hand was instrumental in parting the Red Sea, in striking the rock to bring forth water to drink, and was now raised against Amalek in battle.

After the battle, Jethro brought Moses’ wife and sons to join Moses in their journey through the wilderness. It was at that time Jethro observed Moses judging the people. Some scholars believe many of the problems brought to Moses involved the spoils of war that fell to Israel after they defeated Amalek. No doubt there were other pressing matters too, given the size of the multitude and the uncertainty in their minds regarding the journey they were on.

### **DISCUSSION:**

1. As long as Moses raised the “rod of God” in battle, Israel prevailed. What can we raise, figuratively speaking, in our battles

- today to give us victory over temptations and troubles?
2. Moses grew tired in his constant effort to raise the “rod of God” during the battle. How important is it for you and me to hold up the hands of our brothers and sisters when they grow weary, and in what ways do we do this
  3. When Aaron and Hur helped hold up Moses’ hands, how weary do you think they became by the end of the battle?
  4. What role did Jethro play in helping Moses? How important was his help?

### **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

Recently, I helped my wife set up a booth at an area Fall Festival so she could introduce folks to the products she sells. There were various activities for people to enjoy, as well as various displays and booths.

That afternoon, one of the volunteers announced a tug-of-war contest. This caught my ear, and I soon made my way to the designated area. One team of five young men had been formed, but there were only two boys and a girl, all in their early teens, on the other side. I was very interested in joining, but it was obvious we needed more help. Finally, the grandfather of one of the youth came to help, and then a middle-aged lady rounded out our numbers. The officials of the contest approved our meager six-person team against the five athletic looking young men on the other side.

After the moderator guided the middle of the rope to the center marker and ensured that the rope was taut, he stepped back and said, “Pull!” Pull we did – with all our might! It ended up being an evenly matched contest, but we finally pulled the other team our way and won.

The next round was between the team we had just pulled against and another newly formed team. This time the team we had out-pulled won. It was now rematch time, and we had to pull against our former opponents. We formed ranks again but added a few more people, as did the other team. This promised to be an interesting contest. After looking at our team and then looking at the other team, we began to have second thoughts about our ability to win.

Sure enough, the other team began to pull us slowly but steadily toward the middle marker. We tried with all our might to make the

rope go our way, but it just wasn't working. Suddenly, I caught a glimpse of someone rushing to the front of our line. He grabbed the rope and pulled mightily. Within seconds our team won again! Cheers erupted from the sidelines, as our team regained our breath. Several kidded with the losing team, happy that the underdog team had won again.

I was reminded of how much a little friendly help can mean to someone who is trying to do their best but feels themselves slipping the wrong way. The gentleman who came to our aid apparently did not want to see us lose or, at the very least, didn't want to see the other side win, since they were the heavy favorite.

There have been so many instances throughout history of a little extra help at a crucial time making a dramatic difference in the outcome. How easy it is to underestimate the power of a helping hand! While it is absolutely true that the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered, it is also true that God uses us to help too.

*"Lord, help me to always be ready with a helping hand. When I see a need, let me understand that is my cue to help. May I not be a bystander, but a participant! Amen."*

## REFLECTIONS

Have you ever faced a task that you felt personal responsibility for? One that you knew was going to be difficult and arduous? And because of your responsibility you did not feel that you could delegate it to anyone else?

My work is related to resolving issues as quickly as possible after receiving notification of the event. To get things properly fixed quickly, regardless of what may have gone wrong anywhere within the company, requires significant support from many teams and people. It often takes multiple folks working on different pieces of the issue at the same time, taking initiative to review and investigate concerns, communicating findings and results back to the conference call or meeting, leaving me to just make sure those efforts are coordinated and not causing any conflicts between activities. And when those supporting folks do it without being asked, issues get fixed even faster.

Moses often felt great responsibility for the role God had

appointed to him. He did his best to carry out that role, often attempting to complete the activities himself. His father-in-law noticed and suggested that he appoint others to assist where they could, reserving his strength and time for the most difficult issues and trusting others to properly handle the simpler items. This example is also mirrored in the holding up of his arms during the battle. He did not have to give up the rod to someone else to hold, but simply needed proper support to allow him to focus his energy into the most important part of the activity – holding the rod up. We need to look for opportunities to provide support to our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, supporting each other and even being willing to be supported.

—Bro. Eric Doolittle

**JANUARY 8, 2023**

**ABIGAIL, A WOMAN OF GOOD UNDERSTANDING**

**1 Samuel 25:2** And *there was* a man in Maon, whose possessions *were* in Carmel; and the man *was* very great, and he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats: and he was shearing his sheep in Carmel.

3 Now the name of the man *was* Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and *she was* a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man *was* churlish and evil in his doings; and he *was* of the house of Caleb.

4 And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep.

5 And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name:

10 And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who *is* David? and who *is* the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master.

11 Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give *it* unto men, whom I know not whence they *be*?

12 So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings.



13 And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men; and two hundred abode by the stuff.

14 But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them.

15 But the men *were* very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields:

16 They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep.

17 Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he *is such* a son of Belial, that *a man* cannot speak to him.

18 Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched *corn*, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid *them* on asses.

23 And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground,

24 And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, *upon me let this iniquity be*: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid.

25 Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, *even* Nabal: for as his name *is*, so *is* he; Nabal *is* his name, and folly *is* with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send.

26 Now therefore, my lord, *as* the LORD liveth, and *as* thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to *shed* blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal.

28 I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee *all* thy days.

32 And David said to Abigail, Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel,

which sent thee this day to meet me:

33 And blessed *be* thy advice, and blessed *be* thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to *shed* blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.

35 So David received of her hand *that* which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.

**MEMORY VERSE:** She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue *is* the law of kindness. —Proverbs 31:26

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Nabal made a serious mistake when he angered David and his six hundred hungry men. When she was informed of the circumstances, her immediate reaction was to load up enough food to turn off the “hangry” switch in David and his friends. She wisely reminded David that he would be much better off letting the LORD revenge him of the wrong than to avenge himself. David accepted her counsel and sent her back home in peace.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

1 Samuel 25:3 “**Nabal**”: dolt (*Strong’s Dictionary*). The definition of “dolt” is too harsh to print. If Nabal lived up to his name his household suffered much.

1 Samuel 25:3 “**Abigail**”: source of joy (*Strong’s Dictionary*).

1 Samuel 25:16 “**They were a wall unto us**”: David and his men protected Nabal and his household from the attacks of the Bedouins, etc. They were as safe with David’s men around them as if they had been dwelling in a walled town (*Albert Barnes Commentary*).

1 Samuel 25:35 “**Accepted thy person**”: I am well pleased with you and what you have said.

### LESSON BACKGROUND

David and his men held camp near Nabal and his men long enough for them all to become acquainted. As time went on, David and his men grew short on rations. Underestimating Nabal’s lack of understanding and not grasping the full extent of his folly, David

assumed that an embassy of his men requesting food of Nabal would be well received. Regrettably, David was wrong on all accounts.

Nabal and David were actually distant kin—both of the tribe of Judah. This fact apparently had no effect on Nabal, judging from his remark, “Who is David?”

Nabal’s men were well aware of how much David’s men protected them from harm. How could Nabal also not know of this protection? He probably did but chose to not let it get in the way of his churlish and selfish habits.

### **DISCUSSION:**

1. What could have happened to Nabal and his household had David and his men not been dissuaded from their purpose?
2. What was Nabal’s reputation among his servants? How did Nabal’s servants regard Abigail?
3. What did Abigail do after hearing the report Nabal’s servant brought her concerning David’s request of Nabal?
4. Besides bringing food to David and his men, describe the steps Abigail took when she saw David coming toward her.
5. How valuable was Abigail’s advice to David, at the immediate time and also for the future?

### **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

God blessed Abigail with the wisdom, humility, and courage to meet David and his men just in time. Had she not made haste to prepare a feast for the hungry men and had she not personally gone to meet David, Nabal’s life, as well as the lives of all his male servants, would have been forfeit. She gathered much food, all of which was already prepared and ready to eat, with the exception of cooking the meat.

When Abigail saw David, she dismounted, bowed herself before David, immediately taking the blame for not knowing of David’s circumstances. An immediate apology, rather than an immediate defense, can do much good, and it helped knock the keen edge off of David’s anger. Abigail did not behave herself in an unseemly manner in an effort to distract David, nor did she conduct herself haughtily,

which would have further angered David; instead, she was vulnerable and humble.

By the LORD's help, Abigail walked a fine line by validating David's concern for himself and his men. She did not pamper him with unwarranted pity, nor did she speak condescendingly to him. Both extremes would have come across as disingenuous, possibly causing harm in the short term and most definitely would have been wrong in the long term. Sincere validation is very important in conflict. A simple and direct acknowledgement of our adversaries' position goes a long way in the healing process.

Once she had David's attention and she could tell that he would listen to her, Abigail began to reason with David's better judgment and strong sense of justice. Rather than using guilt tactics, she reinforced the positive things she knew David stood for by reminding him that he had been allowing God to be his defense. She reminded David of God's call on him, and how God would take care of him.

*"Lord, when it falls my lot to help someone avoid a dangerous path, give me the grace and wisdom to do and say what you would if you were present. Amen!"*

## REFLECTIONS

The wisdom of Abigail reminds me of a similar situation that I witnessed while substituting for a receptionist at a middle school. An angry mother entered the office, having many harsh words and demanding to see the principal. The principal was nearby, overheard her conversation, quietly stepped in, and asked if he could be of assistance to her. She laid out paperwork and demanded to know why she had not been informed of a meeting that was to be held between her and her child's teacher. The principal then asked her to be seated while he took the papers and went to make inquiry.

When he returned to the office, he knelt on one knee beside her chair. Just this action alone caused her angry countenance to instantly change. Incidentally, the misunderstanding was actually on her part, as she had simply forgotten the meeting. But in all of this he was neither derogatory nor condescending because of her mistake. They were able to reschedule the meeting, and she walked out of the school building with a smile on her face. I think I was

standing there with my mouth open in shock as to what had transpired. The charged atmosphere could have ignited into a fiery confrontation. But instead, the wisdom of the principal completely diffused the entire situation. My estimation of this prudent man increased exponentially that day.

Had Abigail failed to act in calmness and humility, there would have been unnecessary loss of life; maybe even her own. “A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.”

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

**JANUARY 15, 2023**

### **JONATHAN, A TRUE FRIEND**

**1 Samuel 18:1** And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that *was* upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

**1 Samuel 19:2** But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret *place*, and hide thyself:

4 And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works *have been* to thee-ward very good:

6 And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain.

7 And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

**1 Samuel 20:1** And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what *is* mine iniquity? and what *is* my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?

4 Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I

will even do *it* for thee.

5 And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to morrow *is* the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third *day* at even.

6 If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked *leave* of me that he might run to Bethlehem his city: for *there is* a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.

7 If he say thus, *It is* well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, *then* be sure that evil is determined by him.

8 Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the LORD with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldst thou bring me to thy father?

9 And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee?

10 Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what *if* thy father answer thee roughly?

11 And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field.

12 And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, *or* the third *day*, and, behold, *if there be* good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee;

13 The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father *to do* thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father.

14 And thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not:

15 But *also* thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.

16 So Jonathan made *a covenant* with the house of David, *saying*, Let the LORD even require *it* at the hand of David's enemies.

17 And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

(See also *I Samuel 23:15*)

**MEMORY VERSE:** And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.

—1 Samuel 23:18

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** The story of Jonathan and David is one of unparalleled love and respect. Jonathan could have been jealous of David, but he loved him as his own soul. Time and again, Jonathan ran interference for David, incurring his father’s wrath more than once. Jonathan knew that the LORD’s hand was on David and readily accepted the fact that David would one day be king. When Jonathan and King Saul died in battle, David mourned the loss of the greatest earthly friend he would ever have.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

1 Samuel 18:1 **“Knit”**: to tie in love, make a league, join together.

1 Samuel 18:3 **“Covenant”**: to choose and create a friendship or confederacy by passing between pieces of flesh [of a sacrifice].

1 Samuel 20:12 **“Sound”**: to penetrate the truth, to examine intimately, to find out, search out, and to try.

### LESSON BACKGROUND

After killing Goliath, David was called to the king for a friendly visit. Saul inquired who he was and most likely asked him several other questions. It would have been so interesting to have been privy to their conversation, but, alas, we don’t know much more about it. What we do know, however, is that Jonathan was present. He probably heard everything David and Saul talked about and may have joined in the conversation. The scriptures tell us that “the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David,” and “Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” This wonderful friendship formed quickly, but it endured until death parted them years later.

### DISCUSSION:

1. Why did Jonathan choose to be friends with someone he knew would someday sit on the throne in his stead?

2. How much room is there for selfishness in a friendship?
3. In what way(s) did Jonathan help David and make his life less difficult?
4. In the long run, was Jonathan better off or worse off by befriending David?
5. Who do we stand a chance of helping to become a great instrument for God by “being a Jonathan”?

## COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

German Olympic long jumper, Luz Long, befriended Jesse Owens, the track star from Ohio State University, at an unlikely time. Luz and Jessie were among the competitors in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany. During the qualifying jumps, Luz noticed that Jesse fouled out in his first two jumping attempts by slightly overstepping the boundary line in his jumps. Luz grabbed a towel and placed it next to the jumping lane, a few inches back from the mark. He indicated to Jesse that he should focus on the towel as his launch point. The towel worked, and Jesse qualified to compete in the long jump.

One by one, the other competitors were eliminated, leaving Luz and Jesse as the finalists for the gold medal. Luz made a great jump, followed by an even greater jump by Jesse. Luz then made an even further jump, followed by a record-breaking jump by Jesse. Luz then tried with all he had to beat Jesse’s last jump, but somehow misstepped during his launch and fouled out. This was Luz’s last jump, so he knew that Jesse already had the medal. He walked up to Jesse, however, and encouraged him to do his best – he was rooting for him! Jesse made his final jump and broke his previous record.

The crowd went wild with delight, appreciating what they had just witnessed. Luz Long, the favorite in Germany, and touted by the Third Reich as the “obvious” winner in the long jump, had befriended a young black athlete that he knew could possibly beat him on his own turf. To everyone’s astonishment, Luz then linked arms with Jesse and ran a victory lap around the track, waving to the crowd.

Luz and Jesse remained fast friends for the next seven years, corresponding regularly until Luz’s death on the battlefield in 1943. The example these two athletes set for sportsmanship, friendship, and helping one another shines on today.



*“Lord, when I see my brother struggling, help me to not just think of myself. Help me to be willing to lift someone up and be happy for them. Help me to remember we both lose if I take the other path! Amen.”*

## REFLECTIONS

God designed us to be in relationship with one another. We touch and influence others’ lives, some more and some less, and God’s hand orders the people that move in and out of our lives.

Some people will only be our acquaintances. Maybe there is no opportunity or interest to develop a relationship. Others will be friends that we make time for because we enjoy their company. Then there are the select few that we allow into our inner sanctum. Those people who we trust the most become our best friends.

God ordered all these relationships and they each play a part in shaping us. We influence one another by our words and actions, and the degree of influence we have correlates with our level of intimacy. We have a low degree of influence with those that are only acquaintances, yet it is still possible to touch their lives with our words and deeds. Our influence is measurably stronger within our circle of friends that we spend more time with. Just as “evil communications corrupt good manners,” the reverse is also true, and we can encourage one another with godly conversation and conduct.

The highest degree of influence we can have is with our best friends. As Jonathan, who had the opportunity to encourage David at critical times, may we use our opportunities to encourage those God puts in our lives. Perhaps there are steps we could take that would lift a relationship into a higher degree of influence, and thereby, serve others with a greater capacity for good in the kingdom of God.

—Sis. Sarah L. Herron

**JANUARY 22, 2023**

## NAAMAN AND THE LITTLE MAID

**2 Kings 5:1** Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man

in valour, *but he was* a leper.

2 And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife.

3 And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord *were* with the prophet that *is* in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.

4 And *one* went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that *is* of the land of Israel.

5 And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand *pieces* of gold, and ten changes of raiment.

6 And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have *therewith* sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.

7 And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, *Am* I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

8 And it was *so*, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.

9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

10 And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

11 But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

12 *Are* not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My

father, *if* the prophet had bid thee *do some* great thing, wouldst thou not have done *it*? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

**MEMORY VERSE:** In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both *shall be* alike good.  
—Ecclesiastes 11:6

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Isn't it wonderful that Naaman listened to the advice of his wife's little maid servant? It mattered not that he was the captain of the host of Syria, one of the most feared armies in that day. It also was of no consequence that the little girl was an Israelite, further lessening any influence she could possibly have. By daring to have hope in the God of Israel, however, and by humbling himself to take advice from his own servants when he felt slighted by the Elisha's servant, he was healed.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

2 Kings 5:1 "**Leper**": Leprosy in Bible times began with little specks on the eyelids and on the palms of the hands, and gradually spread over different parts of the body, bleaching the hair white wherever it showed itself, crusting the affected parts with shining scales, and causing swellings and sores. It slowly ate its way through the tissues, to the bones and joints, and even to the marrow, rotting the whole body piecemeal. The lungs, the organs of speech and hearing, and the eyes, were attacked in turn, till at last consumption or dropsy brought welcome death. (*Smith Bible Dictionary*)

2 Kings 5:5 "**Ten talents of silver**": \$20,00 in silver; "**six thousand pieces of gold**": \$60,000 in gold. (*The Living Bible*)

### LESSON BACKGROUND

Some historians take what is said in 2 Kings 5:1 literally, giving credit to Namaan as the one who drew his bow at a venture and

killed Ahab, the king of Israel in battle. Whatever the case may be, we do know that Namaan's master, the king of Syria, held him in the highest regard. When word reached the king of Syria that there was a possibility of Namaan getting healed of leprosy, he wasted no time in doing all he could to secure the healing.

The little maid servant of Namaan's wife was brought to Syria during one of their raids on Israel, possibly after the battle in which Ahab lost his life. She may have never seen her family and childhood friends again.

### **DISCUSSION:**

1. What would be the "normal" way to feel toward someone holding you captive against your will?
2. When the maid voiced her confidence to her mistress that Elisha would heal her master, what risk was she taking?
3. How could the maid be assured that all Namaan had to do was ask, and he would be healed?
4. Why can we be assured that all we have to do is ask, and God will grant our petitions for ourselves and for others?
5. Why couldn't money buy Namaan's healing? What obstacles did he have to overcome to get healed?
6. What would have happened if Namaan hadn't listened to his servant's encouragement to obey the prophet's directions to dip seven times in the Jordan River?
7. How important was "a word in due season" from those who cared for Namaan, despite his loathsome disease and his great anger when he felt slighted by the prophet?

### **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

It would be difficult to find someone who had more cause to feel insignificant than the little maid of Namaan's wife. She was young, a servant, and in bondage as an Israelite. Her parents must have taught this girl that the LORD could and would help anyone who came to him.

When Namaan started showing signs of leprosy, he may have tried for a time to hide it from others. Naturally, his wife was among the first to know of it. She was heartbroken over the prospect of her

husband being a leper.

We are not told how much time passed from when Hannah was taken captive, and when she began to speak openly about her desire for Namaan to see the prophet in her home country. It could have been a few days, or even a few weeks. Whatever the time, she did not let her own hurtful circumstances hinder her concern for Namaan. She shared her conviction that if Namaan could only visit the prophet he would be healed.

The maid's faith and testimony was strong enough that the king of Syria sent \$80,000 worth of silver and gold to the king of Israel to "heal" his servant, Namaan. We know that this gift was unnecessary and misguided, but, nonetheless, Namaan was eventually healed when he obeyed the directive of yet another servant to dip seven times in the Jordan river. It's amazing that a young Israelite servant girl could have enough influence to convince anyone of anything, yet she turned the hearts of a mighty general and his king.

*"May the LORD of heaven and earth grant me the boldness to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to all! It may appear that no one is interested, but who can tell who might be ready and willing? I may feel insignificant and unappreciated, even as Hannah must have felt, but may I not hold back! Amen."*

## REFLECTIONS

The narrative of today's lesson is of a foreign war hero with a well-known name, and a little captive maid who has no recorded name. God often chose unnamed people with no significant power of their own to shape the course of biblical events. Throughout the scripture, there were many familiar names of individuals in the unfolding plan of God. Yet, the weaving of numerous miracles, or the powerful examples of faith, or the messages still ringing true, included persons unknown.

There was a young lad, who had an offering of five loaves and two fish. Though unnamed, he will forever be a part of the miracle of feeding five thousand.

There was also an unnamed woman who suffered twelve years and spent all she had on physicians, but she had heard of the miraculous healings of Jesus. In trembling faith, she said, "If I may but touch the hem of His garment, I shall be whole." This

demonstration of faith has ministered to generations and still speaks of faith today.

Then, there were the shepherds who will forever be anonymous, yet who heralded the greatest message to the whole world. “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” These lowly shepherds will forever be a witness of the heavenly host who praised God and declared “peace on earth, good will toward men.”

The nameless little maid was referenced only once in the narrative, yet the influence of her formative years is apparent. She knew the true God; she knew the Prophet. This knowledge not only sustained her in captivity, but also impacted and changed the lives of her master and mistress. The question on the table today is: Am I willing to be an unnamed soldier for the cross?

—Sis. Maxine Busbee

**JANUARY 29, 2023**

### **PRAYING FOR SAUL THE PERSECUTOR**

**Acts 9:1** And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought *him* into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I *am here*, Lord.

11 And the Lord *said* unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for *one* called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting *his* hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, *even* Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

**MEMORY VERSE:** For *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. —I Samuel 16:7b

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Saul of Tarsus developed a reputation as a relentless persecutor of the followers of Jesus. It was because of this reputation that Ananias questioned the Lord's directive to go to Saul and pray for him, even after the Lord revealed that Saul was praying. When the Lord further explained to Ananias that Saul would be shown the great things he would suffer for the name of Jesus, Ananias knew it was now safe to approach Saul.

## WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 9:1 **“Saul”**: means “desired” in Hebrew. His Roman name, Paul, means “little. Some say Paul was 4’-6” tall. (*Matthew Henry*)

Acts 9:3 **“Damascus”**: the capital of Syria. This large city is about 120 miles northeast of Jerusalem in the midst of a very fertile plain. It is a seven or eight day journey from Jerusalem by foot. (*Adam Clarke*)

Acts 9:5 **“Kick against the pricks”**: The prick is understood to mean the ox goad. To kick against it was to only bring personal injury to ones’ self. The goad would not be harmed. (*Albert Barnes*)

Acts 9:10 **“Ananias”**: Some believe Ananias was a native of Damascus who had recently been saved and was now serving as a minister in the local congregation. (*Matthew Henry*)

## LESSON BACKGROUND

“As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison” (Acts 8:3). The fact that Saul hauled both men and women to prison shows the fervor with which he went about doing what he thought was the will of God.

Since the early morning church started among original practitioners of the law of Moses, those who remained strict adherents to the law, they saw the early church as “wayward” members of their original faith and in serious need of correction. They felt that extreme measures should be used, if necessary, to curb the rising influence of this “rebellion.” Saul was among the number who viewed the believers as a real threat to the customs and traditions of the elders; that is why he consented to the death of Stephen.

We don’t know for sure how much time passed between Stephen’s martyrdom to Saul’s Damascus Road experience, but it seems Saul had risen in the ranks as a Pharisee in the interim. By the time we pick up the story of Saul on the way to Damascus, he had enough authority to hunt down the wayward as far away as Damascus.



## DISCUSSION:

1. When Saul was struck down he said, “Who art thou, Lord?” Why did he use those words?
2. Why did Jesus ask Saul, “Why persecutest thou me, and what were some of the “pricks” Jesus reminded him of?”
3. How does it affect us today to realize that Jesus takes our sufferings and persecutions personally?
4. Saul fasted food and water for three days after he was struck down. Why did he do this and how did his fasting affect the Lord?
5. Why did Ananias address Saul as “Brother Saul” when he first entered the house?
6. Regarding our memory verse, why is it so important that we rely on what the Lord sees and not our own perceptions?

## COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

“Hurting people hurt people!” When someone lashes out at others in their inward pain, those actions are usually perceived as directed at a specific individual, or group of people. Sometimes, however, when looking deeper into the root cause of the outburst, we understand that the individual causing all of the commotion is in deep, inward pain. First responders, medical personnel, counselor’s, therapists, teachers, pastors, etc., often come to this realization because the people they are dealing with can be in great physical, emotional, or spiritual pain. They understand that the hurting person’s natural reaction to the pain is to strike out at anyone within reach, often the very one trying to help them.

Saul of Tarsus was probably in tremendous emotional and spiritual turmoil. He had consented to the death of Stephen and stood by while he was pelted with stones. He heard Stephen’s last words, a prayer for the Lord to “lay not this sin to their charge.” Based on the words of Jesus to him on the road to Damascus, “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,” Saul probably had a hard time reconciling everything in his mind. “How could a man [Stephen] pray for those stoning him instead of cursing them like I would have?” Saul no doubt had many conflicting thoughts and emotions about the whole situation concerning this new group of rebellious

upstarts.

When Ananias received the call from the Lord to pray for Saul, he had no way of seeing Saul's inward struggles and could not wrap his mind around the possibility that Saul would ever change. Thankfully, the Lord was able to convince him otherwise. By the time Ananias entered the house, he was able to address Saul as "Brother Saul."

Ananias could have asked a hundred people if he should visit Saul and received as many "No!" responses. He was taking a great risk, based on human reasoning. After all, this is Saul of Tarsus we are talking about, right? When God speaks and asks us to reach out to someone, there is always a possibility of being rejected or even harmed in some way. We also can feel a need to guard our "good reputation." Am I willing to take the risk if I receive such a call?

*"Lord, I realize I may be called upon one day to reach out to a "Saul." It may come as a complete surprise, but help me to be as willing as Ananias was in the end. Help me to not worry so much about myself, but to look outside of me long enough to see some of the potential in "Saul" that you see! Amen."*

## REFLECTIONS

Ananias probably had many thoughts and concerns on his way from his home where he had been commanded of the Lord to go see Saul. He may have still been a bit apprehensive that he'd heard the Lord clearly. He may have been witness to the stoning of Stephen. He may have been considering the words of Jesus "Love your enemies... do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which...persecute you" (*Matthew 5:44*).

Words fitly spoken are always the truth spoken in love, and both love and truth are vital to ensure the word being spoken is appropriate for the situation. Before a difficult discussion, we tend to want to rehearse our argument and try to anticipate how the other person might respond—but we don't have to. Instead, we should be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Whenever we are faced with an unknown situation, it's always safe to meditate on the word of God.

The first word Ananias used to address Saul was "brother." I'm sure this was inspired by the Lord, no doubt as a result of Ananias remembering the words of Jesus. The salutation struck Saul/Paul enough for him to mention it in each of the Biblical accounts of

Ananias praying that Paul receive his sight. The Lord knows exactly what words the people in our lives need to hear, what affect those words will have, and just the right time they need to hear them. Rather than relying on human reasoning, meditate on God's word, and trust the Lord to inspire you and fill your mouth.

—Sis. Serena Johnson

**FEBRUARY 5, 2023**

**BARNABAS, SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT**

**Acts 9:19** And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

21 But all that heard *him* were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:

24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket.

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him, and brought *him* to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.

29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him.

30 *Which* when the brethren knew, they brought him down to

Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

**Acts 11:19** Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul:

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

**MEMORY VERSE:** *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.* —Philippians 2:3-4

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Barnabas introduced Saul to the disciples in Jerusalem, at a time when those in Jerusalem were afraid to believe Saul could really be a disciple. Later, after Saul was accepted by the disciples in Jerusalem, they helped him escape from the Grecians, who wanted to kill him, by bringing him down to Caesarea. They sent Saul back home to Tarsus from there. After four years passed, Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Saul back with him to Antioch to help minister to the new group of believers there.

## WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 9:29 “**Grecians**”: Hellenistic Jews who lived in Grecian cities, spoke the Greek language, and used the Septuagint version for their scriptures. (*Adam Clarke*)

Acts 11:20 “**Antioch**”: the third largest city in the Roman Empire, with only Rome and Alexandria being larger. Some suppose that Luke and Theophilus, to whom the book of Luke is dedicated, were also from Antioch. The success of the gospel in Antioch was such that the name “Christian” was used first in Antioch. (*Matthew Henry*)

Acts 11:25 “**Tarsus**”: a Roman port city in South-central modern day Turkey. Tarsus was about 87 miles West-Northwest of Antioch.

## LESSON BACKGROUND

We first hear of Barnabas in Acts 4:36-37. “And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, *and* of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.” Barnabas’ willingness to sell property for the benefit of the gospel was notable enough for him to be singled out from among the many who did so. It’s possible he was the first to sell his possessions and others followed suit.

Barnabas was among the first to believe Saul when he came to Jerusalem to join himself to the disciples. This willingness to believe in others, despite the hesitation of the majority, sheds even more light on the grace of God at work in his heart. He lived up to the meaning of his name, “The son of consolation.”

Acts 11:24 in our lesson reminds us that “he was a good man,” and much used of the Lord. He found it necessary, however, to have more help in the work at Antioch. He was humble enough to seek out a fellow laborer. It seems that the Lord impressed upon him to find Saul, some distance away at Tarsus, to ask him to help him in the work at Antioch. A good man will not hesitate to lift someone else up, even when there is a chance of their own position eventually being diminished as a result.

## **DISCUSSION:**

1. When Saul first went back to Jerusalem as a new believer, the disciples there could not believe his story. Why do you suppose Barnabas was able to believe Saul's testimony enough to calm the fears of the other disciples?
2. How did the church as a whole benefit from the willingness of Barnabas to go out of his way to formally introduce Saul to the disciples at Jerusalem and later put forth a great effort to bring Saul back from Tarsus to work at Antioch?
3. When the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to His people, no two individuals will have the exact same calling or manifestation of these gifts. How do we benefit from God's wisdom in setting up His church in this manner?
4. How does one gift of the Spirit aid other gifts of the Spirit for the mutual benefit of all?
5. What would it be like to not have the gift of consolation and encouragement in the body of Christ?
6. How would some of the other gifts of the Spirit be hindered, endangered, or even lost altogether if the gift of consolation and encouragement was non-existent?
7. Describe how you have benefited by a "Barnabas" encouraging you at a critical time.

## **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

"Just one more time, Auntie," pled Milton. "Can you loan me just \$150?" His aunt and uncle had already loaned him money in the past, but that loaned money, used in for his candy making ventures, had all failed. "Okay, Milton, one last time. I'll loan you \$150, but this is it!"

How thankful I am that Milton's aunt relented that "one last time"! Milton Hershey went on to perfect the mass production of milk chocolate. It's doubtful he could have kept at it if he hadn't had that one last boost, but, fortunately for him, and so many others, the help came when it was needed most.

Milton's milk chocolate factory employed many folks that might not otherwise have had a job during the depression era. In fact, Milton claimed that he never once laid off a person during the

depression.

Milton and his wife built a small town around the milk chocolate factory. They outfitted it with every conceivable convenience and necessity. The school they started there is still in operation. You can visit the city of Hershey, Pennsylvania today - and be sure to take the factory tour if you love chocolate.

The question will have to go unanswered as to whether someone else would have eventually helped Milton when he was down and out and seemingly, a failure. What we do know is that one person believed in him enough to give him one last chance.

When no one else stepped forward to help Paul, Barnabas believed in him enough to “step out on a limb” and extend a hand of friendship and trust. It’s impossible to calculate how many have benefited from this one deed of selflessness and good will. Paul’s preaching reached thousands, and the writings of Paul have reached millions! Barnabas did not have to help Paul. He could have used the excuse of being “too busy preaching and teaching the gospel.” Why, then, did he feel compelled to take time for one man that had such a sullied reputation?

*“Lord, help me to listen to your quiet nudge when you prompt me to give someone a chance. Help me to believe in the possibilities you already see so clearly through your omniscience! Help me to not short-circuit your plans for anyone, despite the fact they may have a “reputation” that hinders others from reaching out to them. Amen!”*

## REFLECTIONS

I have fond memories from my childhood of traveling to meetings and revivals and singing in church with my family. Although somewhat reserved, I was always able to make friends and really enjoyed the times I could reconnect with familiar faces and worship with children my age. However, as I entered my late teens, for various reasons, my family did not visit other congregations as often as before, and I lost contact with several of my friends.

As I entered adulthood and began attending revivals more regularly, I hoped to reacquaint myself with many from my childhood, all now young adults. This was quite difficult for me and very awkward, but I vividly remember one event that was a definite blessing to me! One year I attended the state assembly meeting and

an old family friend a few years older welcomed me with a warm smile and several words of encouragement, and even went so far as to reintroduce me to several of the young people my age. All this was done as if I had always been a part of the group with no time lost, and that welcome has stayed with me to this day. Little did I know that just a few short years later that friend would become a dear in-law! Sometimes, a simple smile and encouraging word—especially to those that may not be a part of the "group"—can go a long way and often reaps a harvest with unknown impact. Only God knows how impactful the encouragement you give today will affect the world tomorrow!

—Bro. Fari Matthews

**FEBRUARY 12, 2023**

**ONLY LUKE IS WITH ME**

**2 Timothy 4:6** For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

9 Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me:

10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

12 And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.

13 The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring *with thee*, and the books, *but* especially the parchments.

14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works:

15 Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

16 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook



me: *I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge.

17 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

18 And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

—2 Timothy 4:11

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** “Only Luke is with me.” What a statement! The rest of Paul’s fellow laborers had gone to other places for various reasons. How thankful Paul must have been for one faithful friend that refused to leave!

### WORD DEFINITIONS

2 Timothy 4:10 “**Present world**”: secular or business affairs that took Demas away from the work of the gospel.

2 Timothy 4:11 **Mark**: John Mark, Barnabas’ nephew, had left Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Paul thought it best to not take Mark with them on a later missionary trip. Paul and John Mark were by this time reconciled, however, and Paul desired his company and help.

2 Timothy 4:13 “**Books**”: some scholars believe these were copies of Paul’s writings. “**Parchments**”: most likely the Jewish scriptures and the Septuagint. Paul may have wished to give these to fellow believers with the understanding that his death was eminent (*Adam Clarke*).

2 Timothy 4:14 “**Alexander the Coppersmith**”: most likely the same Alexander in Acts 19:33 who stood up to make a defense for Paul, himself, and the other believers.

2 Timothy 4:16 “**At my first answer**”: Paul’s initial defense in court when he was arrested the second time. (*Adam Clarke*)

## LESSON BACKGROUND

Paul was originally a prisoner in Caesarea for two years, brought to Festus for trial, then sent to Rome to await trial before Caesar, where he was acquitted after another two years. During the two-year wait in Rome, he was under house arrest, living in a private house, and able to receive guests freely.

After Paul's release, he was able to move about freely in Rome for another two years. When a fire broke out in Rome that destroyed over seventy percent of the city, Nero blamed the Roman Christians for the tragedy. Many of the Christians were arrested, including Paul. It is believed that Paul was incarcerated in the Mamertine prison, one of the worst places imaginable. His final imprisonment lasted from AD 64 to roughly AD 68. It was toward the end of Paul's second imprisonment that he wished to see Timothy before he died.

### DISCUSSION:

1. What does it mean to feel forsaken by someone?
2. Does the person that forsakes someone fully comprehend the effect it has on the one they left?
3. One man, Luke, decided to stay with Paul, even though everyone else had either gone their way, or had not yet come to be with Paul. At that point in time, how important was Luke to Paul?
4. Paul requested that Timothy bring John Mark with him, "for he is profitable to me for the ministry." Evidently, Paul and John Mark had been reconciled from their earlier conflict when Paul did not wish to bring him along on the second missionary journey. How important is reconciliation?
5. Alexander the Coppersmith did Paul "much evil." Some believe that this is the Alexander that once stood with Paul at the riot in Ephesus. For some reason, Alexander later turned into a "false brother." Why would Alexander do this?
6. How much value do we place on staying faithful to God, and to our fellow brother?

### COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

What if my friendship to someone was the last one remaining in

their mind? This thought sends a shudder through my spirit. What if I then somehow found myself too busy at a critical time and they were left feeling that absolutely no one cared for them anymore? This may happen more than we care to think about. Too many people take their own lives because they feel there is no point in living any more. How sad!!

A few years ago, a group of women were painting a school banner in the high school hallway. The women had to make frequent trips into the nearby restroom to clean their brushes. They noticed a girl standing by herself in the restroom, crying. Most of the women, out of awkwardness, pretended to not see the girl, but one of the ladies remembered what depression was like and recognized that the girl could be battling it also.

Walking up to the girl, the women asked if she was okay. "No, I'm not okay," the girl responded. They could not talk long, however, since the school day was almost over, and the girl had to catch her ride home. "Here is my number. Text me when you are able," the woman said. The two texted several hours into the night. The next morning, the girl told the woman that had she not stopped to talk with her that she would have probably gone through with taking her own life.

We never know when we may be the friend someone needs at a critical time. It's possible for someone to feel like no one cares anymore. When the Lord puts an urge in your heart to speak to someone, send a text, or to stand by them in difficulty when no one else seems to care, follow through with it.

*"Dear Heavenly Father, help me to remember what it's like to feel no one understands – no one cares what I'm going through. Thank you for the times you sent someone to stand by me in times of distress. Help me to return the favor to someone else today when they feel they are all alone. May I be your hand extended! Amen."*

## REFLECTIONS

Have you ever felt all alone? Felt like there is no one that understands, no one that you can talk to or share the things that you are dealing with, or that will stand beside you in life's darkest hour? That is a very lonely and dark place to be in!

Paul no doubt experienced those feelings when he said, "No man

stood with me at my first answer"! And perhaps he was reminded of those feelings as different ones were leaving him, some for other places and some who were forsaking him all together. Thankfully, Luke was still with him.

I remember a time when we had our first child, and my wife had some complications in childbirth. The nurse that was attending her was not very understanding and insisted that she get up shortly afterwards. When she did get up, she passed out and would have hit the floor had we not caught her. My wife's family were in the next room, and it was such a comfort to have them there, but it was late and they all soon had to leave to go home. We were young, the environment was so foreign to us, and I still remember that feeling of being so alone, but God stood by us.

Later on in life, I had another experience that caused me to fall on my knees and cry out to God. He spoke these words that I will never forget. He said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"!

Those words have comforted me through some of my life's darkest hours, and I can truly say He has never left me nor forsaken me! He wants to do the same for you!

You need never be "alone" as long as you let God into your life. There is nothing that you cannot tell Him, nothing that He does not understand, and nothing that He cannot help you with, if you will let Him. When the way ahead looks dark, there is no greater comfort than hearing Him speak those words, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee"!

—Bro. Curtis Williams

**FEBRUARY 19, 2023**

**LETTERS FROM PAUL**

**Galatians 4:19** My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

20 I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

**Ephesians 1:15** Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

21 But that ye also may know my affairs, *and* how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things:

22 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and *that* he might comfort your hearts.

23 Peace *be* to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen. To the Ephesians written from Rome, by Tychicus.

**Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

2 Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,

5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;

8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

9 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;

10 That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

**Colossians 2:1** For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and *for* them at Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

5 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

**1Timothy 1:1** Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, *which is* our hope;

2 Unto Timothy, *my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*(See also 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4)*

**MEMORY VERSE:** For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ. —Colossians 2:5

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** The apostle Paul wrote to seven of the churches he visited on his missionary journeys; many also feel he wrote the book Hebrews. He also wrote to individuals he loved and mentored in the faith. He was a prolific writer, writing fourteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. We are just as thankful for the other thirteen books written by the Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Jude.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

Galatians 4:19 **“Until Christ be formed in you”**: until they repent from their backslidden state.

Philippians 1:8 **“Bowels of Jesus Christ”**: inward affection and tender mercy.

Colossians 2:1 **“As many as have not seen my face in the flesh”**: those whom Paul had not had the opportunity to meet. Those not living at Colosse or Laodicea. (*Adam Clarke*)

Colossians 2:4 **“Beguile you with enticing words”**: referring to the Greek philosophers. (*Albert Barnes & Adam Clarke*)

### LESSON BACKGROUND

The Apostle Paul wrote to some of the various places he visited on his missionary journeys. These letters speak of his affection for them, much as a father would feel toward his children. Paul warns of the many dangers threatening the spiritual life of those newly converted to the faith of Jesus. Greek philosophy, false brethren, the cares and snares of this present life – all of the challenges facing the followers of Jesus were of great concern to Paul.

A few of Paul’s preserved writings were to specific individuals, such as Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Paul longed for Timothy and

Titus' spiritual success and did everything in his power to promote their well-being. Paul encouraged Philemon to accept as a brother the young man, Onesimus, who had run away from him while a slave in his household. Paul offered to repay any debt Onesimus owed Philemon by running away.

## **DISCUSSION:**

1. What is the best way to describe how Paul must have felt toward the Galatian church?
2. Why was Paul thankful regarding the report he had received of the church in Ephesus?
3. Where was Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians?
4. Paul didn't know if he would ever see the church at Ephesus again. Knowing this, why would he still be concerned for those he might never see again?
5. If we meet someone today, have a good spiritual conversation with them, and then part ways with the understanding we may never see each other again, what can we do regarding their spiritual welfare?
6. What is it like to long after someone "in the bowels of Jesus Christ"? How can this longing be manifested, and what is its effect?
7. Paul told the church in Colossians that he was "absent in the flesh, yet with them in the spirit." Even so, he took joy in their order and steadfastness in spirit. How is it possible to have this kind of relationship, and exhibit this level of concern, with an individual, or group of people, without being present with them bodily?

## **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

One of my brothers, while still quite young, asked our grandmother something that had been on his mind: "Grandmother, you have a lot of grandchildren. How can you love all of us at the same time? Grandmother, leaning on her hoe handle and smiling replied quietly, "Well, each time one of you was born, my heart just got a little larger!" My brother was satisfied with Grandmother's answer. He knew it had to be true, because he had already felt

Grandmother's love himself, and he saw it in action toward his siblings and cousins. Grandmother had a quiet way with her words, and with the way her smiling eyes would look at us, that convinced us all she loved us!

Although Grandmother was a busy woman, she took time to write to friends and family she could not see often. Three of our aunts lived in California. They received frequent letters from Grandmother. I'm sure they talked on the phone as well, and thoroughly enjoyed it, but a letter was something they could keep and treasure forever.

Our sister also had a way of expressing her love to family members. She took thousands of pictures of immediate and distant family members and organized them into photo albums that fill multiple book cases. She also wrote daily in her journal. She took pictures of all of us, and she wrote about all of us. The pictures and writings were of common, everyday life – but they are so valuable now! Our sister is gone to her reward, but we draw comfort from her expressions of love that live on. We can see it in the pictures and can read about it in her journal. My brother-in-law, on my last birthday, sent me one of her journal entries about me years ago while we were both still living at home. She wrote of a time she saw my bedroom light on well after midnight. When she checked on me, she saw me on my knees fast asleep and my Bible open on my bed. She quietly turned off the light and later chronicled in her journal, "He needs a wife"!

*"Lord, help me to express my love for others in some meaningful way! Help me to not just assume they know how much I care, but help me to tell them often, "I love you!" We have so much pain in this world. Help me to lessen it as much, and as often as I can with my expressions of love! Amen."*

## REFLECTIONS

When reading through Paul's epistles, it's as if we dare to peer into the envelopes of personally addressed letters to explore their contents. And yet, there's something strikingly familiar, personal, and relevant about each of them, as if they were actually written unto me! It quickly becomes evident that these letters were motivated by a profound love and are so much more than the sentimental ramblings of a distant, lonely friend. These words were



purposeful and timely. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they carried with them a power and weight of conviction so strong that even those who scorned Paul's speaking and presence were obliged to acknowledge the great effect of his letters. (2 Corinthians 10:10) I have no doubt that the yearning Paul felt as the Spirit moved upon his heart and mind were akin to the fire David said burned within him in his meditations. (Psalms 39:3) Paul found himself nearly continually thinking of and burdened for those he had begotten in the faith and for whom he travailed night and day. At the same time, our all-seeing God was looking down through the ages and thinking of us! As in the case of the letters unto Philemon and the churches at Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse, God turned Paul's willingness to be a prisoner of the Lord, unable to see the beloved saints face to face, into the means of writing and preserving these inspired thoughts for our benefit still today!

—Bro. Clint Doolittle

**FEBRUARY 26, 2023**

### **AQUILA AND PRISCILLA'S TIMELY COUNSEL**

**Acts 18:1** After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

18 And Paul *after this* tarried *there* yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn *his* head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, *and* mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.

25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.

26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when

Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia [the country containing the city of Corinth], the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace:

28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, *and that* publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

*(See also Acts 18:4-17 and Acts 19:1-10.)*

**MEMORY VERSE:** A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word *spoken* in due season, how good *is it!* —Proverbs 15:23

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** Paul preached the gospel in Corinth for a year and a half before meeting intense opposition. When the Lord was finished with him there, he took Aquila and Priscilla with him to Ephesus. While in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos, who knew only the baptism of John, speaking boldly to the people. They took Apollos aside and instructed him more perfectly in the truth they had come to understand through Paul’s ministry. Blessed with the full measure of God’s grace, after heeding the council of Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos felt led to go to Corinth to preach the gospel. Paul had previously left Corinth for new fields of labor, but the Lord blessed the ministry of Apollos there.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 18:24 “**A certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria**”: Apollos was a Jew by birth, but lived in Alexandria, a Roman port city located in Egypt. It is highly unlikely that Apollos ever saw Jesus, but only heard of Jesus eminent arrival. Apollos believed the prophecies concerning Jesus coming.

Acts 18:25 “**Knowing only the baptism of John**”: Apollos had been instructed in the preparation of the way of the Lord through repentance, by the preaching of John Baptist. He had, not, however, heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its fulness.

Acts 18:27 “**Achaia**”: a small country East of the Southern part of Italy. The city of Corinth was in Achaia.

## LESSON BACKGROUND

Paul's work in Corinth came to a close after a year and a half, partly because of the intense persecution he suffered there, and partially through the call of the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel in other places.

The new group of believers in Corinth still needed help and encouragement after Paul left. Some of this encouragement later came through the ministry of Apollos. Apollos, however, first needed to have the whole gospel expounded unto him "more perfectly." This is where Aquila and Priscilla entered the picture in such an important way.

Aquila and Priscilla may not have been "front line" gospel workers like Paul, Barnabas, and later, Apollos, but they were very vital in helping Apollos get started in his critical role in Corinth.

Paul later wrote, "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (I Corinthians 3:6). Paul helped start the work in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla counseled and taught Apollos the way more perfectly, and then Apollos was led to labor in Corinth to help "water" the seed Paul had sown. Meanwhile, Paul was busy in other gospel fields.

### DISCUSSION:

1. It seems Paul met Aquila and Priscilla when he first came to Corinth. Since they worked together in the tent making trade in Corinth for over a year and a half, how well do you suppose they got to know each other? What would Paul have been able to impart to them during this time?
2. Is there any way Aquila and Priscilla could have had any idea how vital a role they would eventually have in Corinth?
3. Why did Aquila and Priscilla leave Corinth with Paul? What does it suggest about their thoughts of remaining in Corinth?
4. When Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos preaching and teaching in Ephesus, knowing only the Baptism of John Baptist, how easy would it have been to dismiss him and his ministry since he obviously "didn't know" the whole gospel story as they had been privileged to understand?

5. Today, is it possible to underestimate the potential in God’s call on others when it appears they lack understanding in certain areas?
6. What are some “wrong ways” to approach situations where there is a “deficiency” in our opinion in someone’s ministry, such as Apollos demonstrated in the temple at Ephesus?
7. In what ways can a “deficiency” be approached that gives a chance for positive results?
8. Is there any way we can comprehend the potential of anyone’s gift, regardless of what that gift of the Holy Spirit is?

### **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

Moses and Susan Carver, German immigrants in Diamond, Missouri, had no idea that the frail boy they raised after the death of his mother would later become a renowned scientist recognized worldwide for his work in agriculture and botany.

When he was a week old, George, his sister, and his mother were kidnapped by night raiders. Moses hired a man to find them. Alas, only George was found. George was returned to the Carvers to be raised as their own son. Susan taught George to read and write and encouraged him to learn all he could. Moses and Susan could have squelched George’s natural curiosity and great desire to learn, but instead sent him to school in Neosho, Missouri, ten miles South.

At the age of 13, George attended school in Fort Scott, Kansas, and various other schools, before finally graduating from high school in Minneapolis, Kansas. George then studied art and piano at Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa. His art teacher, Etta Budd, recognizing his abilities in painting flowers and plants, encouraged him to enroll in botany at Iowa State Agricultural College (now known as Iowa State University) in Ames, Iowa. George received his Master of Science degree at Iowa State in 1896. George briefly taught as the first black faculty member at Iowa State University.

Not long after completing his degree at Iowa State, George was invited by Booker T. Washington to head up the Agriculture Department at the Tuskegee Institute, now known as Tuskegee University. George accepted and taught at Tuskegee Institute for the next forty-seven years, even though he had lucrative job offers from many others that could have brought him considerable wealth.

There is much more to the story of George Washington Carver, but time and space do not permit us to do his legacy true justice . We owe much to Dr. Carver, and much to the husband and wife, Moses and Susan Carver, who were interested enough in a young, sickly boy to help him along when he might not have made it at all otherwise.

Aquila and Priscilla could have also passed up the opportunity to take the young man, Apollos, into their hearts and lives. It took time to get to know Apollos, and to mentor him in the ways of the Lord. Time –the one thing we all feel such a lack of these days.

*“Father in Heaven, help me to take the time today to notice the one that is struggling along the way. You see their potential, when I only see their mistakes and missteps. Lord, help me to not be a discouragement or hinderance, but a helper and encourager! Amen.”*

## REFLECTIONS

“Lift up your eyes and look on the fields for they are white and ready to harvest” (John 4:35b). Just as Aquila and Priscilla seized the opportunity to counsel Apollos in "the way of God more perfectly," that led to his important ministry, today we are faced with such challenges. Through the leadership of the Holy Ghost, we can have a profound effect on the future of the work of God. The Spirit of God can and will give us wisdom in guiding and nurturing souls if we depend on God and not our human understanding. These souls can become an essential part of the laborers for Christ in His fields.

There is a great need for dedicated workers for God in His fields. We can be instrumental in fulfilling this need, not only by going into the fields ourselves, but in mentoring others as well. No doubt, many have been turned away from working for the Lord in His fields by unwise counsel and dealings. We want to be an encouragement and a help to those who would sacrifice their time and talents for God's work. We can learn a lot from this lesson about how Aquila and Priscilla worked with Apollos. Perhaps many souls would not have had a chance to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ if Aquila and Priscilla handled him in a different way. May God help us to depend on his wisdom and not our own as we work with others in the furthering of His kingdom.

—Sis. Doris Clay

MARCH 5, 2022

THE CARPENTER ENCOURAGED THE GOLDSMITH

**Isaiah 35:3** Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.

4 Say to them *that are* of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come *with vengeance, even God with a recompence*; he will come and save you.

6 They helped every one his neighbour; and *every one* said to his brother, Be of good courage.

7 So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, *and* he that smootheth *with* the hammer him that smote the anvil, saying, It is ready for the sodering: and he fastened it with nails, *that* it should not be moved.

**Nehemiah 4:19** And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work *is* great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.

20 In what place *therefore* ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.

**1 Corinthians 12:12** For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ.

13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14 For the body is not one member, but many.

15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17 If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling?

18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19 And if they were all one member, where *were* the body?

20 But now *are they* many members, yet but one body.

21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

22 Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:

23 And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness.

24 For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked:

25 That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another.

26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

**MEMORY VERSE:** They helped everyone his neighbour; and *every one* said to his brother, Be of good courage. —Isaiah 41:6

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** It is incredible how much encouragement we can be to one another. God made it that way, and He wants it to be in full force all the time. The devil, however, tries to thwart it whenever possible. When we have each other's "back," the power through this cohesion is much more effective than individual, independent efforts. Just as an eight-cylinder engine has the power of eight collective cylinders, with each piston firing in the proper order, the body of Christ working together is a powerful entity. If each piston in a large engine had to work independently in separate one-cylinder engines, the harmony and unified power simply would not exist.

We cannot physically be together in one place at the same time, all the time, but when we have the same spirit and intent, we remain in unity with the brethren. If, however, a spirit of independence enters into our thought patterns, and then into our actions, that unity is broken, if not speedily rebuked in Jesus' name.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

Isaiah 35:3 "**Weak hands, and feeble knees**": figurative speech for faint heartedness. If the literal hands and knees are weak, there is no power to fight the enemy or flee from danger.

Isaiah 41:7 “**Smootheth with the hammer**”: craftsmen used smaller hammers to finish out the work of the rough metal casting. The finishing work was done with more care and precision than the initial larger hammers wrought.

Isaiah 41:7 “**Him that smote the anvil**”: the craftsman that uses a larger hammer, or maul, to bend hot metal into its rough shape. The blows are severe and the marks left behind are later required to be finished up with the smoothing hammer.

Nehemiah 4:19 “**Separated upon the wall**”: there were numerous work crews, with each crew building their section of the wall. The distance was not so great that they could not see adjoining crews, but there was still separation enough that they would have to travel some distance to aid one another in an enemy attack.

1 Corinthians 12:22 “**Which seem to be more feeble**”: The internal organs, when afflicted, are often debilitated and can even cause death. These members of the body are not regarded as handsome or comely to look upon but are utterly necessary. The outward members, such as a muscular arm, beautiful hair, a winning smile, fair complexion, etc., are good to look upon. However, if these outward members are injured, or afflicted, they will not necessarily cause death as often as heart disease, lung disease, or intestinal problems (*Condensed from Adam Clarke and Albert Barnes*).

## LESSON BACKGROUND

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, various parables and stories were used by the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles to illustrate the necessity of encouraging one another. Isaiah 41 speaks of the various craftsmen encouraging one another in their respective roles. Nehemiah 4 tells of the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. The workers were spread out around the perimeter of the wall. Nehemiah counseled them to encourage one another and to be careful to come to one another’s aid in the event of an enemy attack. They were not in competition with one another but were working toward a common goal to rebuild the wall.

The Apostle Paul used the body to illustrate how each member of the body is important, no matter how insignificant one member might seem in comparison to another. The human body actually hurts all over when one of its smallest members is injured or



afflicted. So are we to feel pain when our brother or sister is hurting.

## **DISCUSSION:**

1. How important is it to verbally reassure and encourage one another?
2. What can happen if words of discouragement, instead of encouragement, are used when conversing with someone already discouraged?
3. If different trades working on a large building project quarrel with one another, how successful will any of their efforts be?
4. When separated geographically from one another, how can we be an encouragement one to another?
5. How successful would an athlete be if one member of his/her body tried to be “more important” than any of the other members?
6. Describe how the various members of the human body cooperate successfully? What is the result of “perfect coordination”?
7. How can we, being several members of the collective body of Christ, best help one another?
8. What does the devil do to try to hinder the efforts of Christ’s body? What can we do to thwart his efforts?

## **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

Team sporting events are usually won by the team that works best together, not by the team who has the “best” player. I remember the times my brothers, cousins, and I would team up against Daddy and his brothers in a game of basketball. We thought our youth and energy would win the day, but our older competitors simply passed the ball around quickly and made several baskets before our young, heroic efforts could accomplish anything.

When athletes or workers coordinate successfully, encouragement is necessarily part of the process. Why? Without encouragement, individuals will start to feel isolated and unimportant. If the feeling of being unimportant persists long enough, bad things start to happen.

Years ago, a certain young man worked at a company that had

some challenges regarding encouragement. The young man did his best, but at times, even his best efforts were not good enough. He was called into the conference room one day to meet with his immediate boss, as well as the supervisor above him. The verbal “whipping” stung harshly. His two supervisors went through a long list of complaints they had been saving for a few years. The shop foreman, who was not present at the meeting, later commented that he saw the light absent from the young man’s eyes after he left the meeting.

After a few months, the young man left for another job. To his surprise, the environment at his new employment was totally different. The supervisor was approachable and appreciative of everyone’s contribution in the workplace. Everyone worked together well and enjoyed their jobs. Workers would even play practical jokes on the boss occasionally, but everyone simply enjoyed the comradery instead of getting edgy and offended.

The young man worked at the new job for about a year and a half before leaving to start his own business. During two separate job exit interviews, the young man was told that he was the best help they had ever worked with. Neither of the two men who gave the exit interviews knew what the other said, nor did they know that less than two years earlier the young man had been told he was one of the “worst workers around.”

What made the difference in the two job situations? I believe the young man would tell you that the difference in the two work environments was that one made him “one of the worst” and the other made him “one of the best.” One environment hindered success through criticism, while the other fostered it through encouragement.

*“Lord, help me to be an encouragement to everyone around me, rather than a ‘wet blanket’ of discouragement to anyone! Help me to not add to someone’s spiritual discouragement through my lack of being a friend! May I remember that I don’t live on an island. Amen.”*

## REFLECTIONS

A couple things pop into my mind when reading through the lesson. The first thing is the picture that we have probably all have seen of two small boys and a wagon with a calf in it—one boy in the

front and the other at the back of the wagon. The picture has the caption, "You pushing or pulling back there?" The other is an old adage that says, "Many hands make light work."

I have been blessed many times in my life by working with others on a common goal. These types of experiences create settings where trust and confidence can be greatly enhanced. Skills can be passed from one person to another. Leadership, craftsmanship, experience, thoroughness, cooperation, and fellowship are all words that I would use to describe the benefit of collaborating together for a common goal/purpose. Many times I have come away feeling enriched and empowered to tackle something in my own personal arena.

Cooperative effort can produce amazing results. I would challenge everyone to resist the tendency to withdraw from bringing your "fishes and barley" and pour yourself willingly into service to the Lord.

"For if there be first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to that a man hath, *and* not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor 8:12).

—Bro. Dan Adams

**MARCH 12, 2023**

### **A CUP OF WATER IN MY NAME**

**Matthew 25:31** When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats:

33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw

we thee an hungred, and fed *thee*? or thirsty, and gave *thee* drink?

38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took *thee* in? or naked, and clothed *thee*?

39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.

**Mark 9:38** And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us.

39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.

40 For he that is not against us is on our part.

41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.

**John 14:12** Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

14 If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*.

**MEMORY VERSE:** For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. —Hebrews 6:10

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** We are ambassadors for Christ. What we do for others, we do for Jesus. It has the same affect and authority as if Jesus did it. This is difficult to wrap our minds around, but when the scriptures are considered, we find it is so. Jesus is no longer here in the flesh and does not physically walk among those who need help – but we are here. Jesus expects us to carry on where he left off. We have the full backing of Heaven when the name of Jesus is invoked.

## WORD DEFINITIONS

Mark 9:41 “**Whosoever**”: everyone can be counted in that number, not just the wealthy, popular, or favored individuals. The

least advantaged person in the whole world is not exempt from this “whosoever”!

Mark 9:41 **“Shall give”**: to offer freely, without thought of receiving anything in return.

Mark 9:41 **“Cup of water”**: the smallest act, such as offering someone a drink, can be a great blessing to someone in a desperate time.

Mark 9:41 **“In my name”**: giving as unto Christ, not just for the sake of humanitarianism. (*Condensed from Albert Barnes*)

Mark 9:41 **“Because ye belong to Christ”**: Christ died for us. We cannot repay our debt to Him, but we can help someone else.

Mark 9:41 **“Verily”**: I solemnly give you this promise.

Mark 9:41 **“He shall not lose his reward”**: God will recompense with far more than we give away. Who can outgive God?

## LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus taught the people a doctrine totally foreign to one they had slipped into over the past several generations—doing just enough good works to get by. “If it isn’t strictly commanded in the law, I’m not obligated to do it”—or—“If the law doesn’t forbid me doing it, I am free to do it.”

The doctrine Jesus brought taught the people that God wants us to think more of others and less of ourselves. He wants us to understand that God notices everything we do for others in His name and counts it as doing it to Him. At the last day, we will all give account for what we did with the opportunities in our lifetime to help our fellow man. Those who sought to further God’s cause by helping others in Jesus’ name will be called to stand on God’s right hand. Those who looked the other way and chose to do what would benefit themselves instead, will be told to stand on God’s left hand.

Perhaps this is one of the reasons Jesus spoke of the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this parable, the religious leaders had a chance to help the man who was robbed and beaten, but they had “more important things to do,” and “didn’t want to get their hands dirty” with the “terrible-looking man” lying beside the road. “Too bad for him,” some of them may have thought, as they hurried on their way to their next appointment.

## **DISCUSSION:**

1. How much advance notice will Jesus give before He returns, so that folks will have a chance to get their priorities straight and learn to treat others as Jesus expects?
2. We read where Jesus will divide everyone into two distinct categories – goats and sheep. Why did Jesus choose these two animals to illustrate the differences in the way He will regard people at the last day?
3. Why will some folks wonder why they are guilty of omission at the last day, and say, “Lord, when did I not help you?”
4. It sounds as if those who are told at the last day that they did the will of their Heavenly Father will not remember all of the times they helped others in Jesus’ name. How could this be?
5. What kind of blessing can we expect to receive if we keep an accurate account of what we did to help others?
6. Jesus told his disciples, “...and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12b). What did God work through the apostles after Jesus ascended back to Heaven?
7. Who can calculate the power of one kind deed when it is passed on to others in Jesus’ name?

## **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

Abraham entertained “angels unaware” when the LORD and two angels visited him on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah. Not long after, Lot invited the two angels into his home for the night, fearing for their safety. It seems that neither Abraham nor Lot comprehended, at least at first, who their visitors were.

What would the outcome have been if Abraham had not treated his guests as he should have? The LORD asked, after they had eaten, “Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?” (Gen. 18:17b). Why did the LORD ask this question rhetorically? We don’t know for sure, but it seems the LORD was a little hesitant to reveal his true intentions, yet still hopeful Abraham would take the news to heart and intercede for Lot and his family.

If Abraham had been a little less earnest in his welcome by giving his heavenly guests just enough hospitality to get by, the LORD may not have mentioned His intention to visit Sodom and Gomorrah. The

LORD would have been correct in hiding his intentions if Abraham had behaved less than he did, for it was also necessary for Abraham to extend himself yet again to intercede with the LORD – not just once or twice, but five times. Abraham did not disappoint the LORD, and the LORD accepted his intercession at face value. Perhaps one of the reasons God values the little things so much, like giving a cup of water to someone in need, is that He recognizes the same concern is necessary to intercede for a soul.

Lot invited the two “visitors” to Sodom into his home and insisted they spend the night indoors rather than on the street like they first mentioned. He could have held his peace when they told him they would sleep on the street, but would they have interpreted his silence as not caring enough for them? Would they have come back and escorted him and his family out of the city? I hope so, but we don’t really know. Fortunately for them, Lot *did* care a great deal what happened to his visitors, and the angels *did* take them out of the city.

Our attitude and attention toward hospitality and unselfishly caring for others does something for us we may not at first recognize. It sets a *tone* in our spirit, which then enables and/or causes us to take the *next* step of making intercession for others.

*“Lord, help me to be attentive to the small things that may not seem all that important at the time. When someone wants to “just talk,” help me to instead listen with my heart and not begrudge the time. Amen!”*

## REFLECTIONS

I seem to hear the song writer saying, “I am only an earthen vessel that Jesus may use as He will, whether much I may do in His vineyard, or small be the place that I fill.” Did not the servant say to his master Naaman, “If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?” (II Kings 5:13). Why is it that people tend to gravitate toward things that appear to have great significance? Jesus did many miracles, but He also went about simply doing good. The Word says, “John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true” (John 10:41).

It has been said, “You may not preach like Peter, you may not pray like Paul.” We often think or say, “If I could preach... If I could

sing... If I had a million dollars, I could... I could... I could; but we can learn from the example of Peter who said to the lame man, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee." Let us make use of what we have.

Small things go a long way, whether it's a word of kindness, a smile, holding a door for someone, speaking to a stranger instead of looking past them, or lightly pushing the brake instead of the gas when a car signals to move into our lane. These things seem unimportant but can mean so much.

Let us have an attitude of servitude as we go along the way. We are unprofitable servants. Rebecca of old said, "Drink my lord, and I will draw water for thy camels also." This was said to a stranger.

Years ago in Wichita, we were having a meeting, and after service a sister, who was a visitor, happened to be in the kitchen. As I ventured by that way, she asked if she could get me anything, a sandwich, or something else. I marveled that she, being a visitor, offered to serve me. Had she forgotten that she was a visitor or did she just have such an attitude of servitude that she simply switched into serving mode everywhere she went? May God help us that whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, that all will be done to the glory of God.

—Bro. E. E. Gracey

**MARCH 19, 2023**

### **SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME UNTO ME**

**Isaiah 11:6** The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

7 And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

8 And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD.

**Matthew 18:1** At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?



2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

**Mark 10:13** And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and *his* disciples rebuked those that brought *them*.

14 But when Jesus saw *it*, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

15 Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.

16 And he took them up in his arms, put *his* hands upon them, and blessed them.

**John 3:1** There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

**MEMORY VERSE:** The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

—Isaiah 11:6

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** God, in His great wisdom, uses little children to illustrate our dependency on Him as His children. He wants us to be dependent, trusting, innocent, guileless, forgiving, and humble. As spiritual babes, we are unable to defend ourselves in our own strength and wisdom. We cannot manufacture our own spiritual food and shelter. Most of all, we cannot find our way alone. As we mature spiritually, our strength increases “by reason of use.” Neither are we to ever lose the characteristics of a child regarding our attitudes and interaction with others. Rather, we are to look out for those who come after us, lest we should hinder or offend them in any way. We will be held accountable.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

Isaiah 11:6-7 “**Wolf and lamb**”: The five illustrations of predatory animals living peacefully with domesticated animals is an analogy of how salvation and sanctification replaces hard hearts with new hearts that harm no one.

Isaiah 11:8 “**Asp**”: adder, or venomous serpent.

“**Cockatrice den**”: the home of a venomous serpent. It can also mean the pupil of the serpent’s eye, which, while he is in the mouth of his den, sparkles and glitters like a crystal or gem. This can be a temptation to a small child to pick it up (*Adam Clarke, condensed*).

Matthew 18:6 “**Millstone**”: a large, heavy, disc shaped stone turned by mules to grind grain.

John 3:1 “**Ruler of the Jews**”: member of the Grand Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a group of smaller courts, each comprised of 23 judges. The Grand Sanhedrin comprised of 71 judges and was similar to our Supreme Court in the United States. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, was apparently a member of the Grand Sanhedrin (*Adam Clarke; various internet sources*).

## LESSON BACKGROUND

Children are naturally innocent and harmless. This also makes them vulnerable to predatory spirits and other dangers. Jesus taught, and reaffirmed the prophecy, that salvation exchanges our carnal, beast-like nature for a childlike nature. He gives us a new heart of flesh to replace the old heart of stone.

Jesus warned that it is dreadfully wrong to harm a child. He takes personal offense at anyone hurting or offending another person, but if someone harms a child, the consequences are especially severe.

God chose the childlike nature to symbolize his work on a heart. The spirit of the world will never recognize, nor can it appreciate the significance of this wise choice. The world will always clamor after a different ideal – one that lifts up and glorifies self. In a word, this world will always glorify pride. The child nature, in sharp contrast, is the epitome of humility and dependence.

### DISCUSSION:

1. Isaiah 11:6-8 speaks of the carnal nature that behaves like a wolf, leopard, lion, bear, and asp (*serpent*). Describe the attributes of these beasts of prey.
2. These same verses also describe the new, godly nature, as illustrated by a lamb, kid [*baby goat*], calf, fatling [*stall fed cattle*], child, cow, and ox. What are the attributes of these examples?
3. What are we to be converted from? To what likeness are we to be converted to? Can we convert ourselves? How does our conversion take place?
4. What is the importance of us having a converted child-like nature, as it pertains to the way we interact with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and with everyone else in life?
5. What impact does God want to have on the world around us through our childlike nature?
6. What did Jesus have to say about any of his “little ones that believe in me” being offended?

## COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

One of our grandsons, Everett, had a new little brother, Lincoln, enter his life not long ago. He did not know exactly what to think about it all at first, but it didn't take long for him to warm up to the idea.

When Lincoln was only a few days old, Everett woke up early one morning and saw his baby brother asleep not far away. Everett, smiling, said, "I see him"! He curled up next to his brother and fell asleep again. I have a picture of the two boys sound asleep, lying peacefully next to each other.

What helped Everett develop warm feelings for his little brother so quickly? I'm sure he started to comprehend a little more the concept of having a playmate, but I think there was something more. An innocent, helpless baby tugs at the heart strings of about anyone. God made it that way for a purpose, didn't He? He knew that babies would need nurturing and protection for quite some time before they could fend for themselves. How better to elicit that love and care from someone capable of giving it, than to be innocent and helpless? Infants cannot offer any monetary reward, or even help with the many tasks required for their upkeep, until they are able to walk, talk, and understand the simple concepts taught them by their parents.

In a manner of speaking, new Christians are just as helpless, as human babies and need nurturing by the Bride of Christ, His Church. The care and love shown to babes in Christ by fellow Christians is natural. It does not have to be "worked up" or prompted into action. It's also quite natural for spiritual siblings to look out for one another as they journey through life, and mature in Christ.

One of the deepest hurts in life is when one family member hurts or offends another family member. Likewise, when a brother or sister hurts or offends a fellow brother or sister in Christ, the pain is deep. It can hurt much worse than an offense from someone not professing Christ. Often, these hurts are unintentional. However, when they do happen, the Lord wants to see the hurt attended to as quickly as possible. To ignore the offense is unacceptable in God's eyes. Thankfully, the nature of God's people is to right the wrongs and to ask forgiveness whenever necessary.

*“Heavenly Father, help me to have the nurturing spirit of the Bride of Christ as you designed. Help me to demonstrate to my fellow brother and sister in Christ the love and concern I have for them. Give me the empathy and discernment to ‘have their back’ when they get into difficulty. Amen.”*

## REFLECTIONS

Do you wonder why God’s word says that a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of God? In our Christian walk there are some innocent characteristics that children have which are beneficial for adults. Some of them are humility, dependence, teachability, unbiasedness and forgiveness. If we are not careful, these characteristics will not be as evident in our lives as God desires them to be. Sometimes as adults, we are "hardened" by the circumstances and experiences of life. With God’s help we can remain as little children and exhibit these virtues as we journey through this life. Our faith and confidence in God must be just like a young child that has supreme confidence in his/her parents to provide for and soothe their every need, trouble, and disappointment. I am reminded of a children’s song.

*My God is so great, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing my God cannot do.*

*My God is so great, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing my God cannot do.*

*(repeated for emphasis)*

*The mountains are his, the rivers are His, the  
stars are His handiwork, too.*

*My God is so great, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing my God cannot do, For you!*

Take note of a couple things; the second phrase is a repeat of the first for emphasis. Great, strong and mighty are repeated three times over! Lastly, note the phrase, “there’s nothing my God cannot do.” May it be our desire to have and maintain a childlike faith that is not daunted by all the cares and troubles of this life.

– Bro. Tavis Brown

**MARCH 26, 2023**

**THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP**

**Ecclesiastes 4:9** Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.

11 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?

12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

**Hebrews 10:24** And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

**Ephesians 5:19** Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

**Colossians 3:12** Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

**MEMORY VERSE:** Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. —Proverbs 27:17

**CENTRAL THOUGHT:** As the crowning jewel of God’s creation, we were made in the likeness of His image. We are designed to crave social interaction – some of us need more, some need less, but all need some. Without it, we can be driven to literal distraction. This is why solitary confinement is deemed one of the worst punishments that can be dealt a human. When we gather together in public worship, we find a great blessing in praising and worshipping our Heavenly Father collectively. The different gifts in the body, working in concert, are brought to the fullest measure.

### WORD DEFINITIONS

Ecclesiastes 4:12 **“Threefold cord”**: “This is well illustrated by the fable of the dying father, who, to shew his sons the advantages of union, gave them a bundle of twigs, which could not be broken when bound together, but were easily snapped asunder one by one.” (*Excerpt from TSK Cross References*)

Hebrews 10:25 **“Assembling of ourselves together”**: most likely, the meetings referred to here were the smaller, private meetings held during the time of persecution of the early morning church.

Proverbs 27:17 **“A man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”**: “Good men's graces are sharpened by converse with those that are good, and bad men's lusts and passions are sharpened by converse with those that are bad, as iron is sharpened by its like, especially by the file.

### LESSON BACKGROUND

The scriptures in our lesson illustrate the value of not hiding from our brothers and sisters in Christ. This refers to both public worship and to private conversations. Public worship is much like a full orchestra with all of the different instruments contributing to the whole. While a lone violin or cello is beautiful in its own right, it is even more beautiful when accompanied by all the other instruments! Regarding private conversations, it is proper to be prudent and not say too much to others, but there are also disadvantages and dangers in being too introverted. Those who love us the most cannot give us the support we may long for if they know nothing of our

struggle. It is necessary sometimes to be open and vulnerable with friends we can trust.

## **DISCUSSION:**

1. How much more enjoyable is it to share a task with someone else, rather than do it all alone, especially if the job is difficult, or unpleasant?
2. The military often employs the “buddy system.” How does the buddy system work, and how effective is it?
3. Ecclesiastes 4:11 shares a trick that has saved lives on numerous occasions. Why is it so effective?
4. Ecclesiastes 4:12 shares yet another secret about team work. How does this one work, and how well?
5. Solitary confinement is intended to be a severe form of punishment. Why is this?
6. In the context of Hebrews 10:24, how is the word “provoked” best applied? How effective is it?
7. Hebrews 10:25 shares a great caution. What can be some of the effects of ignoring the cautionary advice? What are the blessings of giving heed to the caution?
8. Ephesians 5:19 mentions singing. How much more enjoyable, both physically and emotionally, is it to sing with others, whether in a small or large group as compared to only singing by yourself all the time?
9. What are the benefits when we find the grace and love spoken about in Colossians 3?

## **COMMENTS AND APPLICATION**

Some time ago, a man became disillusioned with public worship. It's not known exactly why he started coming less and less to services, but eventually he stopped coming altogether. The pastor of the congregation came to visit the man. The man knew why his pastor had come but did not have the heart to speak about it.

Inviting the pastor inside, the man led the way into the family room and pulled up chairs in front of the fireplace. Neither of the



men spoke, but sat for some time, silently contemplating the dancing flames.

The pastor finally reached for the fire poker, selected a glowing coal, and pulled it away by itself. The once red-hot coal soon began to cool and turn dark. Seeing this, the pastor again extended the poker and slid the black coal back into the fire. The coal once again resumed its red glow.

Without saying a word, the pastor arose and walked toward the door. The man followed his pastor and finally spoke. "Pastor, I'll be there the next time the doors are open. I now see my foolishness. I cannot make it on my own. My coal has grown cold. I need to be in services. Thank you so much for coming and thank you for the fiery sermon!"

*"Lord, help me to value the opportunity to attend public worship services with your people! Help me to understand more and more that I cannot have all the gifts of the body myself, but that I can enjoy them all when I gather with your people. Please help me to not neglect worshiping with your people! Amen."*

## REFLECTIONS

Inside man is a deep-seated need and desire to connect with others, no doubt as a result of being made in the image of our Heavenly Father. We see this attribute in God back in the Garden of Eden as He would come down in the cool of the day to spend time with man.

The Bible does tell us to not forsake the gathering of ourselves together. Is this a simple reference to encourage us to make sure we get to church on Sunday morning? To check the box on our "get to heaven" list? No, it is much, much more!

We are told to not only make sure we attend the gatherings together, but also to be conversant with each other prior to, encouraging and provoking each other to be ready as the day draws nearer and nearer.

If we consider the church as the body of the bride of Christ, how impactful would it be if the body did not have strong joints? Recent studies on life expectancy have shown that if a person can stand on one foot, with the other foot behind the knee of their weight bearing leg, and balance for 10 seconds, they have a higher life expectancy of

those who can't. In fact, those who can't balance on the leg for 10 seconds are twice as likely to die within the next decade.

And why is balance such an indicator of life expectancy more than flexibility, strength, or aerobic fitness? Because balance requires all the body to work together. The brain sends instruction to the various body parts when to move, what direction to move, and how far and how fast. The muscles provide the strength to make the movements. The tendons and ligaments provide the support and structure via which the force of the muscles is applied to the skeletal system. If these various systems do not work together, the body cannot move and function as it should and then we stumble and fall, and many times suffer harm. But if we exercise in a way that promotes using the body as a unit, we build up the capability of our bodies to work as they should, especially as we age.

Consider what is required to have church services, to hold a meeting, to conduct weddings and funerals and young people gatherings. There is the work to prepare the facilities and grounds. There is work required to be ready for the recording and broadcasting of the messages via the internet where applicable. There is work to plan the length and duration of the meetings. There is work required to prepare meals and food for the various types of gatherings. If there are going to be special songs, there is work required to practice and be ready. And all this work requires the individual members of the church to be willing to come together and exercise their various strengths and talents for the benefit of the group. From small social gatherings that build friendships to the large meetings, we need to be ready to come together and help do our part, no matter how small it may seem.

May we work to exercise ourselves in keeping the body of Christ moving steadily down the path of righteousness as time passes. As the word says, let's look for opportunities to come together and strengthen each other, to encourage each other, and to lift each other up as we go about our lives.

Isaiah 35:3-4 says, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you."

—Bro. Eric Doolittle



