

## **By Our Fruits We are Known: Follow the Lamb!** **Matthew 7:16-20**

### **Background for the Leader**

Studying the scriptures with prayer to guide you is the key to understanding the symbolism of the Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God, as well as of knowing how God wants us to glorify Him. For the lessons in the Bible Study/Prayer strand, it is recommended that you use a formational, rather than an informational or instructional, approach to the reading and study of the scriptures for the lessons. To do this, direct each person present to seek a private, secluded spot in the building in which to be alone with God for a few minutes and let him reveal what He wants to say to her personally through the given passage. After ample time for individual prayer, reading, response, and reflection, reconvene the group and ask participants to share their thoughts about the passage on a volunteer basis. As leader, ask God to use you as a facilitator to lead others to a deeper, more personal level of understanding of the Bible as they learn to listen for and respond to God's voice.

### **A Note to the Leader**

To prepare for this lesson in advance, you will need to:

1. Locate a picture of Jesus holding a lamb in His arms with which to introduce the theme.
2. Prepare copies of the theme and lesson scriptures and the theme hymn for all who might be present. (*Note: Please be aware of copyright issues for all songs and hymns. Before you photocopy any song, make sure that your church has a license to copy. For more information contact Christian Copyright Licensing International, 17201 NE Sacramento St., Portland, OR 97230; 503/257-2230; 1-800-234-2446, or visit their website at [www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com).)*)
3. Make individual copies of the list of Biblical references for Activity Four and have enough Bibles for individual use at hand, or prepare handouts of the typed or handwritten texts for the given passages.

If your time allotment for the lesson is not sufficient for inclusion of all five activities provided, it is recommended that you give priority to the Activities in this order: 1 and 2, 3, 5, and 4.

### **Leading the Bible Study**

#### **Activity One: Theme Scriptures**

Display the picture of the Good Shepherd. Discuss what it represents and what feelings it evokes. Read the theme scriptures together, keeping these things in mind:

- Isaiah 40:11 contains the prophecy of Isaiah, as foretold during the Exile in Babylon, to comfort and encourage the Israelites who were taken by force from their promised land.
- I Peter 5:2 is part of a letter from Simon Peter to early Christians, in which he instructs the church elders in their roles.
- Revelation 7:17 is a portion of John's vision of the second coming of Christ and the consummation of the Kingdom of God. Discuss how the passages relate to each other and their relativity in our world and individual lives today.

*(Suggestions: All of the passages signify the caring love of Jesus as the role model. Shepherds impart comfort and consolation and protect lives. In our world there are many who need that kind of care. As followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, we can ask God to direct us to the flock He would have us tend.)*

**Activity Two:** Lesson Scripture

Distribute copies of the lesson scripture: Mathew 7: 16-20. Explain the procedures for individual study by the formational approach, reminding participants to let God's message fill their open minds. The previous discussion of the theme scriptures should help to prepare participants for this activity. After approximately ten minutes of silent study, reassemble the group and encourage volunteer sharing of individual responses.

**Activity Three:** By Our Fruits We Follow and Glorify the Lamb!

Jesus said that false prophets, like bad trees, bore bad fruit, whereas His followers were like good trees bearing good fruit. Divide participants into two small groups. Have one group brainstorm a list of "bad fruits that are prevalent in the world today, tempting people to depart from the teachings of Jesus Christ. Ask the other group to list the good fruits that good shepherds display in order to follow Christ and lead others to him. The second group should be mindful of the fact that good fruits are the natural or spontaneous products of trees that are good, and like good works, are the joyful results -- not the means -- of salvation. Share, discuss, and add to these lists in the whole group. *(Suggestions: Bad fruits—drug dealing; pressure to become overachievers; stress on popularity; physical and emotional abuse; terrorism; ignoring the sick, hungry, and homeless; etc. Good fruits — inviting others to church; tithing; praying regularly; participating in prayer and Bible Study groups; loving your neighbor as yourself; etc. )*

**Activity Four:** Jesus as Both Shepherd and Lamb

Jesus Christ is portrayed in the Bible as both shepherd and lamb. Distribute the following list of Biblical passages or the prepared texts of the passages. As a group, read each passage, determine if it relates to Jesus as the Good Shepherd or as the Lamb of God, and identify the chief characteristic or attribute associated with the symbol in that passage. Reinforce the understanding that Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, loved and cared so much for His flock that He gave His own earthly life for their salvation in the manner of the sacrificial lamb required by Old Testament law for the atonement of sins. In verses that relate to Jesus the Lamb of God, stress what is told about how He is glorified.

**Passages:** John 10:11, Isaiah 53:7, John 10:14 Psalm 23: 1-3, Genesis 49: 22-24, John 1:29, Revelation 5:11-13, Revelation 12:10-11.

**Activity Five:** Theme Hymn and Prayer

Distribute copies of the theme hymn for group singing and then close the lesson with prayer, using the following one, if desired.

*Dear Heavenly Father,*

*John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, made known to us in his recorded Gospel how you loved the world so much that you gave your only begotten son as a sacrificial lamb for the forgiveness of our sins and for our eternal life. We thank you for that love and for that incomparable gift. We live in hope and expectation of His second coming when we will dwell with Him and glorify Him forever. We thank you for the shepherd's care that He gave to others while on earth, and ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in trying to follow the example that He provided, bearing the fruits that will lead others to become part of His protected flock. Help us to love as He loved. In His holy name we pray. Amen.*

**About the Writer**

Mary Franklin is Past President of Women's Ministry at First Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Russellville, Arkansas. She serves as teacher of the Seekers, an adult Sunday School class, and leader of a weekday Bible Study group. Mary is a semi-retired educator who works part-time as a consultant in school reforms and writes as a hobby. Her address is 103 West K Street, Apt. A, Russellville, Arkansas 72801-3454. Her email address is [mrfranklin@cox-internet.com](mailto:mrfranklin@cox-internet.com)

**By Our Fruits We are Known: Follow the Lamb!**  
**Matthew 7:16-20**

My church family is blessed by the talents of two master woodworkers. Bob Benson carves beautiful designs into handmade rocking chairs which grace homes from the rich and famous (like Wayne Newton, General Tommy Franks and many of the Dallas Cowboys) to the beautiful (like our granddaughter Madelyn Faith!).

A.C. Stutler builds glorious furniture with glowing woodgrains that beg to be touched by an appreciative hand. The timeless beauty of Stickley style Mission reproductions or rustic Texas tables are accompanied by a grin and a modest "It was just firewood," from A.C.

One unique table rests on a section of an upside-down peach tree. This tree was cut down because, after several years, it had yet to bear one peach.

Are you bearing fruit? Is it good or bad? Jesus' words are plain and simple here. By our fruit, we are known.

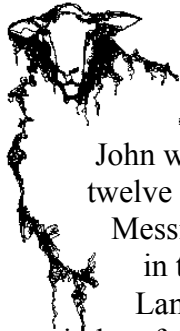
**PRAYER:**

*We prayer, Loving God, that we might bear the good fruit that shows others your love and grace. Be patient with us when we fail to do your work. Continue to use us, inspite of our failures. Thank you for loving and caring for us. Amen.*

Susan Horner  
Trinity North Region

# God Grants Us Peace on Our Journey: Follow the Lamb!

## John 14:27-31



### Background for the Leader

John was well qualified to relate the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was one of the first of the twelve disciples to meet Jesus personally and believed at once that He was the expected Messiah. With his friend and fellow fisherman, Andrew, he was beside John the Baptist in the wilderness when Jesus walked by. The Baptist proclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!” and John and Andrew became his followers immediately, spending the remainder of the day in fellowship with him. Some time after that, when Jesus was in Capernaum, He found Andrew and his brother Simon, whom Jesus renamed Peter, casting their fishing nets in the Sea of Galilee. After asking that they follow him to become fishers of men, He encountered John and James mending their nets in the boat with their father, Zebedee. At Christ’s invitation, those brothers also became His disciples.

It is evident from the scriptural accounts of the disciples that John experienced a close relationship with Jesus. He was one of the only three disciples (Peter and James being the other two) to be present with Jesus in some of the most pivotal moments of his life and ministry — at the Transfiguration on the mountain, when the daughter of the synagogue leader was raised from death, and as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane where they were to keep watch. With Peter, he was sent by Jesus to prepare for the Passover meal that was to be the Last Supper. He was a witness to the crucifixion, at which time Jesus asked him to take care of his mother after his death. It is recorded that she did indeed live with John in his home as her Son had requested. These incidents suggest the trust that Jesus had in John.

John outlived the other disciples and was a major figure in the first century development of the Christian church. He spent his last years in exile on the island of Patmos. He not only wrote the Gospel According to John, but three epistles (1, 2, and 3 John) to early Christian believers, and the Book of Revelation. New Testament references to John depict him as an apostle of love and ardent seeker of the truth. In the Gospel According to John, he labeled himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

*A Prayer for the Leader: God, grant me the wisdom, the understanding, and the love typified by the Apostle John, to lead my sister Christians in this study of your peace. Through your Holy Spirit fill us with that peace, so that we may take it with us from this place and use it to comfort and brighten the lives of those around us. Amen.*

### A Note to the Leader

To prepare for all five activities in advance of the meeting date:

1. Prepare individual handouts of the text for this lesson (John 14:17-21), or have Bibles ready for individual use.
2. Assign readers for Activity One and give them copies of the scripts they will read.
3. Write the discussion topics for Activity Three on separate cards or slips of paper.
4. Have chalkboard, white board, or a large sheet of newsprint or butcher paper and appropriate marker ready for Activity Four.

It is recommended that you preview all of the activities provided for this lesson and select those that are the most appropriate in terms of time constraints, size of group, and background experiences and interests of your members.

## **Leading the Bible Study**

**Activity One:** The Peace of God (5 minutes)

**Reader 1:** In several books of the Bible, God is referred to as the “God of Peace” and there are many passages which indicate that God intends for us to be people of peace – meaning not only an absence of war, terrorism, or other worldly conflicts -- but also inner peace – peace of mind and peace in our hearts.

**Reader 2:** These are some of the verses that illustrate that intent:

**Philippians 4:7** – And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Psalms 119:165** – Great peace have those who love Your law, And nothing causes them to stumble.

**Isaiah 26:3** – You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.

**John 16:33a** – These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace.

**Romans 5:1** – Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**2 Corinthians 13:11a,b** – Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

**Colossians 3:15** – And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful.

**Reader 1:** If we contemplate the words in those passages, we can understand better what the peace of God is like. First of all, it is one of the blessings we receive through Jesus Christ once we have undeniably accepted him as our Savior.

**Reader 2:** And although it is difficult for the human mind to comprehend, that peace of heart and mind can be ours as long as we put our trust and faith in Jesus. If we love God’s law, and if we truly love God, we will love his law because it is one of love and freedom. That kind of peace helps to keep us from stumbling.

**Reader 1:** Jesus said that God’s law could be summarized as two commandments: to love God completely and to love your neighbor as yourself.

**Reader 2:** Keeping those two commandments does go hand-in-hand with having the peace of God. Jesus gave us the perfect example of that kind of love.

**Activity Two:** Lesson Scripture (20 minutes)

Discuss John’s background leading to his writing of the Gospel. Distribute Bibles or copies of

the text for this lesson (John 14: 27-31) and, if you are using the formational approach to Bible study have participants find their private places of meditation to “pray the scriptures.” (*Note: see the Bible study entitled “By Our Fruits We Are Known” for a description of the formational approach*). In approximately ten minutes call the group back together to share their insights on a volunteer basis.

**Activity Three:** Peace on Our Journeys (15 minutes)

Point out that the peace of Jesus was sufficient for comforting his disciples about his pending absence from them, although He knew the ordeal He would soon face. He asked them to be happy that He was going to the Father. Ask those present to think about their own journeys of faith and growth as Christians. How did the peace that Jesus told the disciples that He would leave in their hearts and minds help them through their own personal trials? Display the topics (stages in the journey of life and faith and their typical problems), and ask participants to select one to discuss briefly. (*Suggestions: peer pressures of the teen years, adjusting to a partner in a new marriage, responsibilities of parenthood, frustrations in a job outside the home, insecurities in being a witness for Christ, ups and downs of discovering your own identity, coping with changes that accompany aging, etc.* )

**Activity Four:** Follow the Lamb in Peace! (15 minutes)

Lead the group in construction of a web, or semantic map, of the concept of the peace of God that is given to us:

1. Begin by drawing a rectangle or oval in the center of the sheet of paper or board and writing the topic, The Peace of God, within that shape;
2. Toward the corners of the paper or board, write the labels for categories of information that participants suggest for inclusion, such as What it Is Like, How We Obtain It, How We Spread It, and Why We Need It;
3. Draw lines to connect each category listed with the topic in the center;
4. Under or around the name of each category, write the responses offered by individuals of detailed information. (*For example, the category of “Why We Need It” might include the details - to make us happier, to enrich our lives, to be right with God, to be all that we can be.*)

**Activity Five:** Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

*Dear God, through your undeserved and boundless grace, you offer us your peace – the peace that Jesus assured his disciples He would leave in the hearts and minds of believers. The peace that surpasses understanding. The peace that lifts our burdens, calms our anxieties, strengthens our faith and hope, and makes us more at one with you. Through your Holy Spirit, may we keep that peace within us always and in the greatest of gratitude. Amen.*

**About the Writer**

Mary Franklin is Past President of Women’s Ministry at First Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Russellville, Arkansas. She serves as teacher of the Seekers, an adult Sunday School class, and leader of a weekday Bible Study group. Mary is a semi-retired educator who works part-time as a consultant in school reforms and writes as a hobby. Her address is 103 West K Street, Apt. A, Russellville, Arkansas 72801-3454. Her email address is [mrfranklin@cox-internet.com](mailto:mrfranklin@cox-internet.com)

## **God Grants Us Peace for the Journey: Follow the Lamb!**

### **John 14:27-31**

Our twins, Anthony and Bethany, are 12 years old now, a strong oak of a young man and a graceful willow of a young woman. At two weeks of age, our precious tiny bundles enjoyed their first stay of many in the church nursery. I recently asked them if they remembered ever being afraid that we wouldn't come back to pick them up from the nursery. With typical near-teen wisdom, they replied that they did not because they knew we loved them, and we promised we would come back.

While savoring a moment of parental pleasure in a sea of life's uncertainties, I thought of Jesus' words, "Don't be worried or afraid...I'm going away and I am coming back." Our good shepherd told us these things before they happen, so that when they do, we will believe!

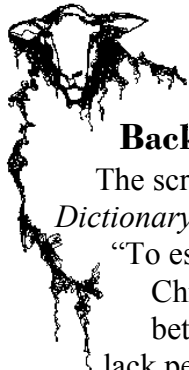
We can rest safely and securely in the comfort of His peace which that world cannot offer.

#### **PRAYER:**

*Often it feels as if you are far from me, O Lord. I want to know and feel your presence daily. Help me to see you in the little things all around me...the sunrise or sunset, the laughter of children, the stories of the elderly, your word proclaimed or sung in worship, and in prayers prayed. Thank you for walking with me through life. Amen.*

Susan Horner  
Longview, Texas





## **Clothed in Righteousness: Follow the Lamb!**

### **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

#### **Background for the Leader**

The scripture for this lesson, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, is all about reconciliation. *The Dictionary-Concordance of the New Revised Standard Version* defines reconciliation as: “To establish a state of peace between two persons, or between God and man through Christ.” In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul was explicitly referring to peace between God and man, the word man meaning all people on earth. Does humankind lack peace with God? If so, then are we at war with God? Technically, yes. Some theologians express the relationship in exactly that way, as a state of war. Since the fall from grace by Adam and Eve, God’s human creations have struggled against a sinful nature that destroys our harmony with God – our being right with God. In the days before Christ came to earth, people attempted to restore the oneness with God through ritualistic sacrifices that were offered before the Jewish High Priest for the atonement of their sins. Then God gave humanity the greatest gift the world has ever known – His own Son, who was at once both human and divine, to become the sacrificial lamb. The gift was free, yet the price was high. To be forgiven and receive reconciliation requires only our belief in Jesus Christ and acceptance of Him as our Savior and Lord. For this, the cost was His life, and He paid it willingly on our behalf.

*A Prayer for the Leader: Heavenly Father, guide me as I prepare for this lesson about your miraculous grace that reconciles us through Christ. Help me to fully understand the magnitude of that gift, then lead me as I present the lesson to our group, directing my thoughts and my words to impart the message that you would have us receive. Amen.*

#### **A Note for the Leader**

To prepare for this lesson in advance:

1. Have Bibles or copies of the text on hand for individual use.
2. Obtain a picture or drawing of a Roman soldier outfitted for battle to use for the third activity and assign Ephesians 6: 11-17 to a reader; (For additional information about the armor and its comparison to God’s protection, see *Be Rich!* by Warren W. Wiersbe, Chariot Victor Publishing, 1979).
3. Prepare a chart containing two columns: Soldier’s Clothing and the Protection It Provided and the Christian’s Clothing and the Protection It Provides for Activity Four (on handouts if the activity is to be done individually or in small groups) or on poster board or large sheet of paper (for a whole group activity).
4. Have copies of the antiphonal reading made for the closing activity. The completion of all five activities will require approximately one hour.

If you need to shorten the lesson, preview all activities and their approximate length in minutes (given in parentheses following the activity title), and select those you will use.

## Leading the Bible Study

### Activity One: Lesson Scripture (15 minutes)

After sharing whatever information you deem to be appropriate for your group from the *Background for the Leader* section, it is recommended that you first read the scripture for this lesson together in the whole group and discuss the following questions:

- What does the expression “in Christ” mean?
- How do we become completely new?
- In light of our sinful natures, why would God freely give us reconciliation through Christ?
- What did Paul mean when he said that God did not count our trespasses against us?
- Why and how does reconciliation make us ambassadors for Christ?
- How did God make Jesus “be sin” for our sakes?

### Activity Two: Meditation on the Lesson Scripture (15 minutes)

Dismiss the group for private, individual prayer, re-reading, and personal reflection of the passage from the formational approach. (*Note: see the Bible study entitled “By Our Fruits We Are Known” for a description of the formation approach*). After about five minutes, reconvene the group to share individual insights.

### Activity Three: Clothed in Righteousness (5 minutes)

Using the picture or drawing of a Roman soldier as a visual aid to understand fully the analogies in Paul’s description of the armor of God, ask the person responsible to read Ephesians 6: 11-17 aloud, then share the following information with those present. If the group is large enough, you may want to copy descriptions of the separate pieces of armor on slips of paper for different individuals to read.

**Information for the Leader:** In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul used various pieces of the battle attire of a Roman soldier to explain the armor of God. Citizens of that area were very familiar with the uniforms of the Roman soldiers who occupied the land and therefore easily understood the comparisons and appreciated the significance of God’s protection. Paul admonished the Ephesians to wear the armor of God as protection against evil or sin that separates us from God. He specifically referred to the devil as the force who appeals to humans’ sinful nature in the attempt to destroy their righteousness or the peace of their reconciliation with God.

**The Roman Soldier’s Armor:** *The belt of truth, translated in the KJV as “having your loins girt about with truth,” referred to the girdle around a soldier’s waist that held the other pieces worn on the upper body together. It also had an attachment that held the soldier’s sword. The breastplate covered the soldier’s body in both front and back from his neck to his waist and was made of heavy metal plates or chains. On his feet, the soldier wore sandals with hobnails in the soles designed to give him better footing when engaged in fighting. His shield was made of wood, but covered with tough leather to protect him, as he held it in front of his body, from spears and arrows. It was common practice in those days for soldiers to dip their arrows sometimes in a flammable substance and ignite them before shooting them. Roman shields were*

*constructed to interlock around the edges so that a long line of side-by-side soldiers could defend themselves against the enemy in a solid wall. A helmet made of a hard material covered the head for resistance against impact. The sword worn in the belt was short and sharp and intended for hand-to-hand combat. Thus outfitted, the soldier was clothed from head to toe with protection for his body and life against the enemy who intended to destroy him.*

**Activity Four:** Follow the Lamb! (10 minutes)

Using the prepared chart which lists the pieces of a Roman soldier's armor, the protection each piece provided, and the Bible-specified Christian's clothing, compare how Christians who are clothed in the righteousness of God are as equipped and ready to follow the Lamb as the soldier was for battle. This activity can be discussed by assigning each item to small groups or individuals, or by leading the whole group, item by item. Notes about the Christian's protection should be added to that part of the chart as responses from participants are offered.

**Sample Chart:**

**Soldier's Clothing/Protection**

belt to hold other parts of his armor in place and to hold his sword in readiness for battle

breastplate of heavy metal to prevent sharp objects from piercing his heart or lungs

sandals with hobnailed soles to provide firm footing in battle

leather-covered wooden shield to deflect arrows, ignited arrows, and spears and further protect his body

helmet to prevent head injuries

short, sharp sword for fighting

**Christian's Clothing/Protection**

belt of truth

breastplate of righteousness

shoes for your feet that will help you proclaim the gospel of peace

shield of faith

helmet of salvation

sword of the Spirit/word of God

**Sample Responses of Christian Protection:**

Belt of the Truth sets the Christian free from his/her sinfulness and allows reconciliation with God. It also holds the weapon that defeats the devil – faith in Jesus Christ.

Breastplate of Righteousness covers the Christian completely, enabling that person's rebirth and empowerment through the grace of God.

Shoes to Strengthen his/her feet so that she or he is ready and able to go forth,

proclaiming the good news heard first by shepherds on a hillside, long, long ago: Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men!

Shield of Faith deflects the temptations of Satan, even the fiery ones that could go straight to Christian's hearts, because the Lamb of God rescued the world from sin and nothing can separate his followers from the love of God. As a body of believers, the church provides additional strength in which its members are interlocked in faith.

Helmet of Salvation protects the head and thus the mind of a Christian from harm and focused on following Jesus.

The Christian's weapons in hand-to-hand fighting with the devil are the Word of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They provide sharp, decisive defense against all temptations.

**Activity Five:** Antiphonal Response (5 minutes)

As a closing prayer lead the group in oral reading of the following response:

**Leader:** Lord, in reconciling us you have made us new.

**People:** **Because we are in Christ, everything old has passed away.**

**Leader:** You have entrusted the message of reconciliation to us,

**People:** **And not counted our sins, wiping our slates clean.**

**Leader:** You have made us ambassadors for Christ,

**People** **The Savior who was without sin, yet became sin, so that our sins could be pardoned.**

**All:** **Now grant us your peace as we cloth ourselves in your armor and set forth to proclaim the good news. Amen.**

**About the Writer**

Mary Franklin is Past President of Women's Ministry at First Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Russellville, Arkansas. She serves as teacher of the Seekers, an adult Sunday School class, and leader of a weekday Bible Study group. Mary is a semi-retired educator who works part-time as a consultant in school reforms and writes as a hobby. Her address is 103 West K Street, Apt. A, Russellville, Arkansas 72801-3454. Her email address is [mrfranklin@cox-internet.com](mailto:mrfranklin@cox-internet.com)

## **CLOTHED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: FOLLOW THE LAMB!**

### **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

The Webster dictionary defines righteous as doing what is right, just, upright, or godly. So in order for us to be clothed in righteousness, we must surround ourselves daily with the love of Christ. This should be our motive for living each day. We must seek God's will for our lives so that we become a new creation altogether. When we allow Christ's love in our hearts our previous moral condition will pass away and Christ will take control of our lives.

As long as we allow ourselves to be unsettled by guilt, frustrated or confused we cannot be at peace with ourselves or discover true peace in our relationships or situations with others. However, if we allow the love of Christ to cloth us in righteousness we will seek to communicate His peace and no longer see people from a competitive or negative point of view.

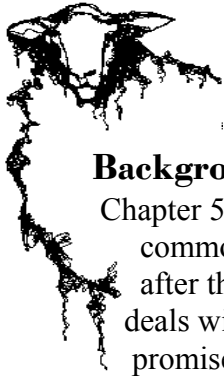
Each new day is an opportunity for us to begin anew, to seek forgiveness, and pray for God's wisdom so that by our words and deeds we might aim to bring others to know Jesus Christ. We are to consider ourselves Christ's ambassadors - His personal representatives here on earth. The Lamb of God, who knew no sin, is our perfect example to follow. Therefore, the challenge for us is to arise each day, clothe ourselves with righteousness, and follow the example of the Lamb.

How did you dress today?

#### **PRAYER:**

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who is our perfect example of righteous living. We ask for forgiveness of our sin and pray for wisdom so that we might communicate love and peace in our life today. Help us to take time every day and prepare our minds and hearts to accept your guidance in order for us to clothe ourselves with righteousness. Amen.*

Willetta Everett  
White River Region



## **By Example He Leads: Follow the Lamb!**

### **Isaiah 53:1-6**

#### **Background for the Leader**

Chapter 53 of the Book of Isaiah is part of what is known as Second Isaiah. It is commonly believed by Biblical scholars to have been written during and/or shortly after the exile of the Israelites in Babylon in the sixth century B.C. Second Isaiah deals with several themes: the existence of one true God, the God of Israel; the promise that in God's time the Israelites would be released to return to their promised homeland through the intervention of the Persian King Cyrus; and the anticipation of the Servant of the Lord. Isaiah 53:1-6 is a portion of one of the Servant Songs that describe and extol the one who will deliver the people from their bondage to sin. This servant who will bear the sins of the world is pictured as righteous, yet humble and rejected. Like a lamb, He is to be led to the slaughter, yet silently and not crying out in protest. In the Servant Songs, the prophet reveals God's plan for our salvation. Whereas the Temple ritual required the blood of a sacrificial lamb to atone for human sins, the Suffering Servant will offer eternal life, through his own death, for all of the sheep who "have gone astray." The prophecy of Second Isaiah foretold through these songs contains profound theology. They depict the Servant of the Lord becoming the sacrificial lamb at the altar, and the shepherd whose life is given for his flock. In them, the savior is not prophesied as a militant leader in the image of the former judges and kings who will lead the remnant of Israel in defeating their enemies in battle, restoring their grandeur and status as a great nation. In stark contrast, He is to be unaccepted by many, and even despised. Yet He will be the means by which humanity's reconciliation with God will be possible.

It was the next few verses, Isaiah 53:7-8, that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip, an early deacon and apostle of the first century church, encountered him. Luke relates in *The Acts of the Apostles* that when the Ethiopian asked Philip to explain the scripture to him, Philip witnessed how Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, and the Ethiopian became a convert to Christianity.

**Prayer for the Leader:** *Father, as I study your word in preparation and leadership of this lesson, I ask for the love, patience, wisdom, and humility that Jesus displayed as the perfect example of a true servant of God. Guide my thoughts, words, and actions as I try to be an example to others. Amen.*

#### **A Note to the Leader**

Prepare for this lesson in advance by previewing all of the given activities and gathering the materials needed for those that you choose to use in accordance with the interests and study needs of your group and the amount of time scheduled for the lesson.

1. Activity One requires Bibles or copies of the scripture for the lesson for distribution to all of those present.
2. Activity Two will require paper and pencils or pens for the recorders in two small groups to use.
3. Activity Three necessitates an index card or slip of paper and a pen or pencil for each

- person.
4. Readers should be appointed for Activity Four and given copies of their assigned lines.

## Leading the Bible Study

### Activity One: Lesson Scripture (20 minutes)

Distribute Bibles or copies of the passage for this lesson and direct participants to their self-selected places of formational study. (*Note: see the Bible study entitled “By Our Fruits We Are Known” for a description of the formation approach*). Allow approximately 10–15 minutes for private meditation, then reassemble the group for volunteer sharing of their thoughts.

### Activity Two: Follow the Lamb! (15 minutes)

Instruct those present to consider the information from the lesson scripture as well as what they know about the life of Jesus from the New Testament in completing this activity. Divide them into two small groups. One group will brainstorm about the words of Jesus while the other will consider his deeds. Ask each group to list five of the most important items (words or deeds) that gave us examples to follow – By example He leads: Follow the Lamb! In reporting to the whole group, brief reasons should be given of why each item was selected, in terms of the example for us to follow. (*Some suggested items: **Words** – The Lord’s Prayer/it taught us how to pray; the Sermon on the Mount/basic qualities of those who follow Jesus; the Great Commission/spreading of the gospel; the two great commandments/loving God and your neighbor; the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane/ask that God’s will, not ours, be done; the parable of the Good Samaritan/loving your enemies; the parable of the Prodigal Son/rejoice when the lost are saved. **Deeds** – his death on the cross/the ultimate sacrifice for others; the blessing of the children/they are to be cherished; the feeding of the five thousand/faith in what God can do; his temptation by Satan/determination to please God can defeat Satan; his training of the twelve disciples/through them Jesus taught us how to carry on his work on earth; his forgiveness of the sins of followers/we must forgive others if we are to be forgiven; his miracles of healing/God cares about our welfare and wants us to be whole.*)

### Activity Three: By His Example (10 minutes)

In the honest attempt to follow the examples Jesus provided as the Servant of the Lord and the Good Shepherd, ask all those present, in careful consideration, to think of three things they should do this year as his more faithful followers. These may be acts of ministry to others, moves toward reconciliation with another person, increased giving to the church, an additional service for the church, a volunteer job in the community, etc. Allow 5-7 minutes for completion, then ask members to place their lists in a place at home where they can be reviewed often, and to pray frequently for guidance as they make these changes in their lives.

### Activity Four: Servant Songs (15 minutes)

Share background information about the Servant Songs of Isaiah with the group, then present the following examples with the assigned readers.

**Leader:** The prophet-writer of Second Isaiah was very concerned about the reconciliation of God and God’s chosen people. He envisioned their ultimate deliverance through a

Servant of the Lord whom he portrayed as an individual, but one who might also be thought of in terms of the Israelite nation. What theologians have labeled the Servant Songs are found in Isaiah 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:4-11, and 52:13—53:12.

**Reader 1:** From the first song (NRSV): “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. . . . He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.”

**Reader 2:** From the second song (NRSV): “Listen to me. O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother’s womb he named me. . . . and he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’ But I said, ‘I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.’”

**Reader 1:** Excerpts from the song in Isaiah 50 (NRSV): “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens – awakens my ear to listen to those who are taught. . . . I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near.”

**Reader 2:** The final Servant Song includes the verses of our scripture for this lesson. These are some verses that precede that passage (NRSV): “See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. . . . so shall he startle many nations, kings shall shut their mouths because of him.” The verses following the ones we studied today that Philip explained to the Ethiopian are these: “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.”

**Activity Five:** Closing Prayer (1-2 minutes)

*Most gracious, loving Father, although our disobedient and sinful human natures keep us from being the flawless example that Jesus was, give us the will and the strength to keep trying day after day to be more and more like Him in his obedience to you, his love of you and all people on earth, and in his words and deeds. Now hear our silent prayers for help in doing the things that we know will make us better Christians who follow the example of the Lamb. (PAUSE). Amen.*

**About the Writer**

Mary Franklin is Past President of Women’s Ministry at First Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Russellville, Arkansas. She serves as teacher of the Seekers, an adult Sunday School class and leader of a weekday Bible Study group. Mary is a semi-retired educator who works part-time as a consultant in school reforms and writes as a hobby. Her address is 103 West K Street, Apt. A, Russellville, Arkansas 72801-3454. Her email address is [mrfranklin@cox-internet.com](mailto:mrfranklin@cox-internet.com)



## **BY EXAMPLE HE LEADS: FOLLOW THE LAMB!**

### **Isaiah 53:1-6**

When I was a young girl growing up, my friends and I would play a game called 'Follow the Leader'. It was fun and exciting to try and do everything exactly like our 'leader'.

As adults we often forget that we also have a Leader, the Lamb of God, who lived on earth and experienced life and death for us. This scripture says in verse 2 that He had no form nor comeliness (no royalty or kingly pomp). He was despised, rejected and forsaken by human beings; He knew pain, grief and sorrow. In other words, Jesus was human like us but yet He knew no sin. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the punishment that brings peace for us was upon Him. Therefore, Christ, in His boundless sympathy with us actually took our sins as His own and with the stripes made us whole. How can we, as Christians, read and study this passage and not follow the example of our Leader?

All of us sin and like sheep go astray from time to time. It is because of our human nature, that it is so very important to take time to read and study the Bible and seek forgiveness of our sins daily.

Where are you looking for your example? Are you looking backward at worldly things instead of upward to the Lamb for your leader? We should be as little children joyful and excited about following the example of the Lamb our Leader! Are you willing to accept the challenge as a follower of the Lamb today?

#### **PRAYER:**

*Heavenly Father, thank you for providing us with your Son, our example. Help us to think, act and react as a follower of the Lamb today, doing whatever we can to serve others. Forgive us when we go astray. Through the Supreme Example, we know where we came from and where we are going, therefore, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by following in the footsteps of the Lamb. Amen.*

Willetta Everett  
White River Region



## Let Your Light Shine: Glorify the Lamb! Matthew 5:13-16

### Background for the Leader

Find a quiet space to read the scripture. Be sure to have pen and paper in hand. After getting still and comfortable, slowly read the text out loud. If it is familiar to you, try to imagine that it is not. After reading the text, ask God to speak to you through this scripture revealing all that God would have you to hear in it. Take your paper and make a list of words that stand out in your memory from your reading. Read the scripture again and end by thanking God for speaking to you through the Living Word.

Take a moment to pray for the women for whom you will facilitate discussion. Name their names if you know them.

**Notes from Writer** (*Please be sure you have done the above personal study and prayer before reading the following*):

The following personal thoughts of the writer are provided to aid you in leading this Bible study. Please be sure to follow your own personal study to know where the Holy Spirit is guiding you and the group. Use these thoughts, if needed, as further discussion material.

What does it mean to be salt of the earth? With refrigeration so handy to us in the United States, we may have lost sight of the real need for salt as a preservative - the primary use for salt at the time of the writing of this scripture. It is possible to lead an entire study on the idea of acting as a preservative in our world. However, we can also turn the idea around and think of salt in terms of how we use it today, bringing home the idea of being salt of the earth to our Bible study participants. The primary use of salt today is to add flavor to our food. So, what if we think of salt in the way Eugene Peterson interprets this scripture in *The Message*, "You are here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth." It would be interesting to see where a discussion would lead in asking how we can bring out "God-flavors" in our world.

The activities of this particular study will focus more on the image of light in this scripture. What does it mean to be the light of the world? Presumably, the images and interpretations of light have changed very little since the time Jesus spoke those words. Darkness is still darkness and light is light. It is a strong metaphor that is used often in many places. We see these images played out in books, movies, television shows, and in our rituals in church services.

In John 1:9, Jesus is said to be, "The true light, which enlightens everyone." This leads us to assume that Jesus is saying that He shares his light with us. The light that we are able to shine from on top of that hill is the very light of Jesus Christ. It has been given to us freely. All we have to do is accept it and then allow it to shine. The scripture seems to be pointing out how ridiculous it is when we, after being given such an incredible and loving gift, continue to hide the light and refuse to share it with the world.

What does sharing that light with the world really mean? The text tells us clearly that in letting our light shine for others, we will help them to see the glory of God. Glorify the Lamb! We do have to pause and ask ourselves to dig deeper into the metaphor. How do we let our lights shine? Verse 16 states, "so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in

heaven.” Our works do not save us. We know that salvation is a gift of grace; however, we also know that through the love for us by the Light, we will want to respond in love by doing as He commanded. Our works show the world the love that flows between Jesus and ourselves. We will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and bring into community those who are outcasts. In short, we will do unto the “least of these” as Jesus demanded we do. To Glorify the Lamb, we will reach out in service and through mission. In doing so, each of our tiny little lights grows brighter and stronger and shines from the hilltops in this dark, dark world. Let your light shine! Glorify the Lamb!

### **A Note to the Leader**

Choose from the following activities as time and your desired focus permits. You may have had insights come to you through your personal study (above) which will help in choosing activities or which may even lead you to create new ones. Use your personal study and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making these decisions and aiding you in facilitating discussion among the group.

As the facilitator, be sure to practice good listening skills, especially during *Searching the Word*. Through your personal study and then listening to the group’s discussion, be prepared to connect the activities back to scripture and focus on the highlights which seem to be coming up again and again.

Materials Needed: A recording of “You are the Light of the World” from the Godspell Soundtrack, index cards, paper, pens, Bibles, a dry erase board or newsprint with markers, a small candle with wax guard for each participant, and matches or lighter.

### **Leading the Bible Study**

As participants arrive have “You are the Light of the World” from the *Godspell* Soundtrack playing on a tape player or CD player. Be sure the space is inviting and materials are prepared for the opening activity.

#### **Activity One: Pictionary!**

Have a dry erase board or newsprint set up in the meeting space with several different color markers from which to choose. Divide the group into two teams and play the following game.

Each team will take turns having one player draw a picture to represent a word or phrase you have shown her. (Be sure to write the words in big, bold letters on index cards prior to the meeting.) Her teammates will try to guess the word/phrase. She will have one minute to complete this task. If her team guesses correctly, that team receives a point. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. (You may wish to have a small token for the winners, a piece of hard candy, for example.)

You can use the following list of words/phrases and/or build your own list based on your personal study.

- Salt
- Good works

- ☛ Darkness
- ☛ Bushel basket
- ☛ All people
- ☛ Hiding
- ☛ Light
- ☛ Glory

### **Activity Two: Searching the Word**

Divide into groups of three or four. Instruct each group to choose one person to lead them in prayer, one person to read the scripture aloud, and one person to act as scribe, taking notes on what the group says. Once these positions are filled, the prayer leader should lead her group in a prayer asking God to speak through the scripture to each of them.

Next, the reader should slowly read Matthew 5:13-16 aloud. Following the reading of the word, the group should begin sharing words or phrases that jumped out at them. The scribe should compile a list.

Instruct the groups to use these words and phrases as beacons pointing them to the truth that the Holy Spirit is shining for them through these particular words. Allow time for discussion. After a few minutes of discussion, ask each group to share the highlights of their discussion with the larger group. *(See Notes from Writer for additional discussion material if needed.)*

### **Activity Three: Connecting to the Theme**

Facilitate a discussion using the following questions:

- ☛ In what ways does this scripture connect to our larger theme of “Be Shepherds of God’s Flock: Glorify the Lamb”?
- ☛ In what ways does this scripture lead us in Mission/Service/Outreach? Allow time for discussion after each question. *(See Notes from Writer for additional discussion material if needed.)*

Lead the group in brainstorming ideas for Mission/Service/Outreach in your local area using Matthew 5:13-16 as your project scripture. Be sure to write these ideas on a dry erase board or newsprint so that everyone can see them.

### **Activity Four: Worship**

Give a small candle to each participant. If possible, be in a space that will be completely dark once the lights are turned off. Gather the group into a circle and ask one of them to be in charge of turning off the lights upon your request. Stand in the center of the circle making sure you also have a candle with matches.

**Say:** *As Shepherds of God’s Flock, we are called to Glorify the Lamb. We see in this Living Word that in order to do that, we must let our light shine in this dark world. (Ask for the lights to be turned off, wait for a few seconds so that the group can feel the darkness, then light your one candle. Holding it in hand, continue . . .) Jesus said that we have indeed been given the light, his light. It is our choice whether we will share that light with the world and Glorify the Lamb by serving his flock. One little light can do a lot. Imagine what all of our lights together will do.*

Light one person's candle in the circle and instruct her to light the next person's and so on. As they send the light around the circle, lead the group in singing *This Little Light of Mine*.

**Activity Five: Closing Prayer**

With candles still lit in the dark room, lead the group in prayer using the following one or one of your own.

*God, giver of light, we stand here full of thanksgiving that you share your light with us even though you know everything about us. We want to be light bearers in this world, but sometimes we hide our light instead. Thank you for continuing to give us the light anyway. Help us as we leave this place to be beacons of light shining to everyone that we meet. Amen.*

**About the Writer**

Tiffany Hall McClung is an ordained Cumberland Presbyterian minister. She is currently focusing on being a full-time mom to son, Ian. She also volunteers with the youth group at First CP of Savannah, TN where her husband, Andy, is pastor. She preaches once a month for a PCUSA congregation in the area and refers to herself as the "roving preacher" available to fill pulpits when needed. Tiffany is a member of the General Assembly Council and a Vision Enabler for Touch the Future. When she isn't changing diapers or preparing sermons, she enjoys creative writing, reading, and travelling just about anywhere.

## **Let Your Light Shine**

### **Matthew 5:13-15**

*A Year with C.S. Lewis* is my morning devotional. The January 29-February 3 devotions are taken from the essay "A Slip of the Tongue" printed in *The Weight of Glory*. In this essay, Lewis speaks about going through the motions of prayers, devotions, receiving communion, all the while listening to an inside voice that urges caution. "It tells me to be careful, to keep my head, not go too far, not to burn my boats. I come into the presence of God with a great fear lest anything should happen to me within that presence which will prove too intolerably inconvenient when I have come out into my 'ordinary' life." Lewis goes on to say, "Our temptation is to look eagerly for the minimum that will be accepted."\*

We ARE the salt of the earth and we ARE the light of the world. Yet Jesus knows it is easy to withhold the salt and hide the light under the basket. He knows it is our nature to look for the minimum. What "minimum" baskets hide our light? I would suggest that guilt and duty are baskets. Guilt and duty encourage us to do "something" but usually the minimum...just enough to get rid of the guilt and sense of duty. Guilt and duty also encourage good intentions. Do I go to the food pantry because I want to be salt and light, or is it to ease that gnawing guilt or fulfill some inner duty? Another "minimum" basket is morality. We rake people over the coals because they are not moral. Just look at what they are doing. Yet, what do we expect of those who do not know Christ? It is easier to want them to behave rather than show them the light that will truly change their lives.

We ARE the salt of the earth and we ARE the light of the world. Yet because we are afraid to be too strong a seasoning or light, we back off all together. We are afraid to be fools for Christ. We minimize the effect the salt and light within us can have on others. We use baskets to cover our lights and hold onto our seasoning so tightly that it loses all its flavor. Jesus said, "Don't hide it under a basket."

We must come to the realization that our lives are not neutral. Either we reflect the light of Christ which positively affects those who see it, or the light is covered and the affect is negative for anyone who is looking. How do we season with the salt of Christ or let His light shine? Take a moment to consider a few questions: Where do I withhold the salt? What baskets cover my light? Where am I doing the minimum...just getting by? These are important questions to contemplate if we are intentionally going to season and shine.

#### **PRAYER:**

*Lord, help me to not be satisfied with the minimum. Help me to be bold and be strong, so I may see the baskets hiding the light and take them off. Help me to not hold onto the salt shaker, but to sprinkle liberally over all I see. Amen.*

JoAnn Shugert  
Missouri River Region

\* *A Year with C.S. Lewis*, ©2003, HarperCollins, pps 32-33.

## **Be Shepherds to God's Flock: The Kingdom is Near! Luke 10:2-9**



### **Background for Leader**

Find a quiet space to read the scripture. Be sure to have pen and paper in hand. After getting still and comfortable, slowly read the text out loud. If it is familiar to you, try to imagine that it is not. After reading the text, ask God to speak to you through this scripture revealing all that God would have you to hear in it. Take your paper and make a list of words that stand out in your memory from your reading. Read the scripture again and end by thanking God for speaking to you through the Living Word.

Take a moment to pray for the women for whom you will facilitate discussion. Name their names if you know them.

**Notes from Writer** (*Please be sure you have done the above personal study and prayer before reading the following*):

The following personal thoughts of the writer are provided to aid you in leading the Bible study. Please be sure to follow your own personal study to know where the Holy Spirit is guiding you and the group. Use these thoughts, if needed, as further discussion material.

There is so much covered in these short eight verses. There are lots of questions that can arise. For example, what in the world could Jesus have meant when He said, "I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves"? Was He simply speaking of the difficulties of this life on earth or was He speaking of the larger evil that remains unseen, but is nonetheless present? This one verse provides plenty of discussion potential. When have we felt like lambs among the wolves? When have we been the wolves?

There are also a lot of questions that can arise when reading verse 4. Why would Christ send out disciples without anything at all? He says to not even take sandals! Are we to take this literally and believe that Jesus would have us live a life of poverty without any material possessions? Or could He have been simply trying to make a larger point, one that tells us that there are good people in the world who will allow God to work through them and help us along our way?

One of my personal favorite moments in this scripture is when Jesus says in verse 5, "first say, 'Peace to this house!'" Always, Jesus brings peace first and foremost. Before we go any further, before we make any other choices or try to bring in more laborers for the harvest, first and foremost, there must be peace. He is indeed the King of Peace!

Our Bible study, however, focuses more on the final words of the given scripture. In verse 9, Jesus says to tell the people, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." Now, hold on to your pencil because this is good stuff. Look at the previous words of the text, He is saying that you enter a town, eat with them, and cure the sick and then say those words. Do you know what this means? It means that we bring the kingdom of God near when we do these things! You and me! Amazing! As we seek to learn better ways to reach out to others, to be Shepherds of God's Flock, to share the good news of Christ with the world, we can rest assured that we are acting as agents for our very Creator and bringing the kingdom of God to everyone we meet.

This can also raise some questions about what happens when we fail to do God's will.

When we act in ways that are not Christ-like, when we present ourselves in an ungodly manner, does this mean that we are keeping the kingdom of God from others? Yes, according to this scripture we have that kind of power given to us by Jesus Himself. It would do us all very well to keep that in mind every moment of our lives. With that at the forefront of our thinking, surely we will continue to Glorify the Lamb!

### **A Note to the Leader**

Choose from the following activities as time and your desired focus permits. You may have had insights come to you through your personal study (above) which will help in choosing activities or which may even lead you to create new ones. Use your personal study and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making these decisions and aiding you in facilitating discussion among the group.

As the facilitator, be sure to practice good listening skills, especially during *Searching the Word*. Through your personal study and then listening to the group's discussion, be prepared to connect the activities back to scripture and focus on the highlights which seem to be coming up again and again.

Materials Needed: Magazines, scissors, a dry erase board or newsprint, markers, pens, paper, Bibles, copies of "Here I Am, Lord," small scrap papers for each participant, a table, candles, and matches.

### **Leading the Bible Study**

As participants arrive have various magazines available to participants and instruct them to search through the magazines for one or two images which symbolize a time in life when another person represented Christ to them. Provide scissors for them to cut the pictures out. Ask them to keep their images a secret until the whole group arrives.

#### **Activity One:** Opening

Once all the participants have arrived and had an opportunity to pick one or two images from a magazine, ask everyone to sit in a circle and share their pictures and a story about what the image represents. (For a more structured activity, inform the participants that you will be the time keeper and that each person will be timed for two minutes as they relate their stories. During the two minutes, encourage the participant to fill up her time. You can ask questions to help if someone is stuck, but do allow for silence as well. Do not move on to the next person until the two minutes is up.) As leader, you should go first.

#### **Activity Two:** Searching the Word

Divide into three smaller groups. Instruct the groups to choose one person to lead them in prayer, one person to read the scripture aloud, and one person to act as scribe, taking notes on what the group says. Once they have appointed these positions, give each of the three groups an assignment of verses to work with. Group 1 will take Luke 10:2-3; Group 2 will take Luke 10:4-6; and Group 3 will take Luke 10:7-9.

Once assignments have been made, ask the prayer leaders to lead her group in a prayer asking God to speak through the scripture to each one of them. Next, the reader should slowly



read the assigned text aloud. Following the reading of the word, the group should work together to re-write the verses in their own words. The scribe should take down the new interpretation.

When each group has finished, ask the larger group to come together and share the verses with one another. Allow time for discussion and insights that came as the work was being done. *(See Notes from Writer for additional discussion material if needed.)*

### **Activity Three: Connecting to the Theme**

Have written on a dry erase board or newsprint: “The Kingdom is Near!”

Ask the following questions:

- In the scripture that we have been studying, what is it that brings the “kingdom of God near to you” (v. 9)?
- In what ways is this group participating in bringing the kingdom of God near?

Allow time for discussion after each question. *(See Notes from Writer for additional discussion material if needed.)* Take notes on the board or newsprint so that the group can see what they are saying. If time permits, lead the group in naming ways each individual can work to bring the kingdom of God near to others and Glorify the Lamb!

### **Activity Four: Worship**

Have copies of “Here I Am, Lord” for participants. Gather in a circle around a small table holding a lit candle. Give out the small pieces of paper to the group. Also, hand out the song to participants.

**Say:** *We call ourselves Shepherds of the Flock, but the Lord says the labourers are few. Jesus is here among us and asking what we will do to bring in that plentiful harvest. Let’s take time to tell Him what we are willing to do in order to bring the kingdom of God near to everyone we meet and Glorify the Lamb. Please write on your piece of paper a way in which you will work to do this starting right now. In a moment we will sing “Here I Am, Lord” and as you are ready, please bring your promises forward to the table at that time. We will lay them at the light of Christ and know that He will give us strength to fulfill our promises.*

Lead the group in singing the hymn and allow time for participants to leave their promises on the table. Assure them that no one will read them.

### **Activity Five: Closing Prayer**

Either lead the group in prayer or ask someone else to lead the group using the following prayer or another.

***God who calls us where we are, we hear you calling and want to answer. We hear you calling, but sometimes knowing how to answer is so difficult. You tell us that the harvest is plentiful. Give us the courage to believe that to be true! You tell us that through us the kingdom has come near. Give us the strength to live that out each and every day! Here we are, God, send us, send us now. Amen.***

**About the Writer**

Tiffany Hall McClung is an ordained Cumberland Presbyterian minister. She is currently focussing on being a full-time mom to son, Ian. She also volunteers with the youth group at First CP of Savannah, TN where her husband, Andy, is pastor. She preaches once a month for a PCUSA congregation in the area and refers to herself as the “roving preacher” available to fill pulpits when needed. Tiffany is a member of the General Assembly Council and a Vision Enabler for Touch the Future. When she isn’t changing diapers or preparing sermons, she enjoys creative writing, reading, and travelling just about anywhere.

## **Commissioning** **Luke 10:2-9**

“But, I’m not a missionary,” we claim when we hear this passage. I can pray for them (when I remember), and I can send money (well, not much), but don’t ask me to go. Yet, we are told we are the salt and light of the world. We need to salt the harvest and let the light within us shine to lead and guide those who are lost.

Jesus is very simple with His instructions:

**Pray!** (We need more workers.)

**Go...now!** (No excuses!)

**Be brave!** (There are wolves out there.)

**Trust!** (Don’t take a lot of stuff with you.)

**Rush!** (Don’t stop along the way.)

**Bless!** (Trust Jesus with what that blessing will do.)

**Be content!** (Don’t keep looking for more or better; take what you are given.)

**Receive!** (The hospitality really comes from Jesus.)

**Heal!** (No ‘buts’ about it. It is unnatural, but do it!)

**Shine!** (The Kingdom of God can be seen in your words and deeds.)

We don’t need to be foreign missionaries to do what Jesus says to do. We can start in our own backyards. Go...now!

### **PRAYER:**

*Lord of the Harvest, help me get over my fears, lack of trust, busyness, pride, and fault-finding ways. Help me to respond to You and just go. Let Your light within me shine to those all around. Amen*

JoAnn Shugert  
Missouri River Region



## **Rebuild the Children of God: Shepherd the Flock** **Acts 15:15-18**

### **Background for Leader**

Find a quiet space to read the scripture. Be sure to have pen and paper in hand. After getting still and comfortable, slowly read the text out loud. If it is familiar to you, try to imagine that it is not. After reading the text, ask God to speak to you through this scripture revealing all that God would have you to hear in it. Take your paper and make a list of words that stand out in your memory from your reading. Read the scripture again and end by thanking God for speaking to you through the Living Word.

Take a moment to pray for the women for whom you will facilitate discussion. Name their names if you know them.

**Notes from Writer** (*Please be sure you have done the above personal study and prayer before reading the following*):

The following personal thoughts of the writer are provided to aid you in leading this Bible study. Please be sure to follow your own personal study to know where the Holy Spirit is guiding you and the group. Use these thoughts, if needed, as further discussion material.

This passage can be a little confusing because it is a quote of another scripture from the Old Testament. Here, James is quoting Amos 9:11-12. (If you have not already read this, please do.) He pulls in the words of the prophet to make clear the point that God has always planned for the Gentiles to be included. It isn't a new plan that was just thought up, God has "been making these things known from long ago" (v. 17-18).

Because it is prophetic writing, at first glimpse it may present difficulty in getting to the point of the writer. However, if we delve a little deeper (and read a few notes from the *HarperCollins Study Bible*), we quickly realize that what we are reading about is our very salvation. We are a fallen people. Sin entered into our world and it brought the house down with it. We need salvation, we need a Savior. Only God can provide that and in this scripture we see that God promises to come in and rebuild our fallen lives for us.

When thinking about Mission/Service/Outreach, it is especially important to pay close attention to the first portion of verse 17, "so that all other peoples may seek the Lord – even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called." ALL OTHER PEOPLES, no one is left out, not even the Gentiles. That is to say, in our day and age, even those with whom we are very uncomfortable, even those of whom we are very afraid, even those by whom we are disgusted, we are to reach out as dwellings of God on this earth to ALL of them and help them to rebuild their lives as well.

All of the people of earth are children of God. If we fail to see a child of God when we look into any face, then we have failed as Shepherds of God's Flock. When we allow our broken lives to be rebuilt and stand tall before the world - going from having been rebuilt to working with God to rebuild others, we are Glorifying the Lamb in all that we do.

## A Note to the Leader

Choose from the following activities as time and your desired focus permits. You may have had insights come to you through your personal study (above) which will help in choosing activities or which may even lead you to create new ones. Use your personal study and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making these decisions and aiding you in facilitating discussion among the group.

As the facilitator, be sure to practice good listening skills, especially during *Searching the Word*. Through your personal study and then listening to the group's discussion, be prepared to connect the activities back to scripture and focus on the highlights which seem to be coming up again and again.

Materials Needed: The game Jenga, pens, paper, Bibles, newsprint or a dry erase board with markers, copies of "They'll Know We are Christians by Our Love" for each participant. *(Note: Please be aware of copyright issues for all songs and hymns. Before you photocopy any song, make sure that your church has a license to copy. For more information contact Christian Copyright Licensing International, 17201 NE Sacramento St., Portland, OR 97230; 503/257-2230; 1-800-234-2446.)*

### Leading the Bible Study

#### Activity One: Jenga!

As participants arrive provide a stacking game such as Jenga for participants to play as they gather for the Bible study. Allow the participants time to play the game, adding other players as they arrive. It is not important to follow the rules of the game, but to allow each person a chance to remove a block without collapsing the tower. Play until everyone has arrived and had a turn. Rebuild the tower each time it falls and begin again.

#### Activity Two: Finding Meaning

Ask each participant to take one of the blocks and hold it in her hand as she finds a partner. **Say:** *As we played that game, holes were often left in the tower which was once strong. In what ways can those holes and the tower be like our life with Christ? In what ways does sin leave holes in our lives? In what ways does the world work to tear down the tower which is the strength of God?*

#### Activity Three: Searching the Word

Divide into small groups of three or four. Instruct each group to choose one person to lead them in prayer, one person to read the scripture aloud, and one person to act as scribe, taking notes on what the group says. Once these positions are filled, the prayer leader should lead her group in a prayer asking God to speak through the scripture to each of them. Then have the reader slowly read Acts 15:15-18 aloud.

Have the following questions written on newsprint or a dry erase board so that all the groups can see them. Ask the groups to discuss the questions and think of any other questions that come to them in their discussion. The scribe should take notes so that they can share their discussion experience with the larger group. *(See Notes from Writer for additional discussion material and ideas for answers if needed.)*

- What do you think that God means (speaking through the prophet) by saying that David's dwelling has fallen?
- What are ways in which we use the word "fallen" in our Christian life?
- God says that God will "set it up" again. What does this mean to you?
- What does it mean to us Gentiles to know that God "has been making these things known from long ago"?

Bring the groups together again and allow time for sharing. Be sure to allow exploration of new questions that were raised in the small groups.

#### **Activity Four:** Connecting to the Theme

*Ask: What does God hope to accomplish through setting up the dwelling of David again? (v. 17) (Say: We each have holes in our lives put there by sin. We are in need of a Savior because we cannot save ourselves. God rebuilds our lives through the love of Jesus Christ. But, God does expect something in return. In rebuilding our lives, God uses us to show others the path to salvation. Our "rebuilt dwelling places" should be a sign to all people, even those who are outcasts, that salvation is available to them just as much as it is to us.)*

Allow time for discussion of the question as well as a discussion of ways in which each of us can be "dwelling places" used by God to show others the way to salvation. Be sure to write these ideas on a dry erase board or newsprint so that everyone can see them.

An additional idea could be your group committing to participate in a project such as Habitat for Humanity where you actually help build a home for a family in need. Another project idea would be joining Builder's Fellowship, either as a group or individually, for the building of new churches in our denomination. (Contact the Board of Missions or go to their website at [www.cumberland.org](http://www.cumberland.org) and follow the links to Board of Missions to find out more about Builder's Fellowship.)

#### **Activity Five:** Worship

Have participants form a circle around a table where you have two levels of the Jenga tower completed. Ask them to be sure to have their own block in hand for the worship experience. Hand out copies of "They Will Know We are Christians by Our Love." *(Say: Only God can rebuild our fallen houses. Glory be to God, though, that God actually uses us to do that. It is too easy to participate in ripping people's houses, their lives, apart instead of participating in the work of God to rebuild lives here on this earth. If we are going to be Shepherds of God's Flock, if we are going to Glorify the Lamb, then we must allow our salvation to shine and stand tall as a tower as a witness to the world. We also must get to work doing all that God has asked us to do. So, now let's rebuild our tower as a symbol to God that we will open ourselves to God to be used to rebuild lives today, tomorrow, and always.)*

Lead the group in singing "They Will Know We are Christians by Our Love" as each participant adds her block to the tower. If there are extra blocks, ask them to continue adding while singing until the tower is complete.

#### **Activity Six:** Closing Prayer

Either lead the group in prayer or ask someone else to lead the group using the following prayer or another.

*God, rebuilder of lives, we do want all the world to know we are Christians by our love. It isn't easy, though, God, because we live in a fallen world of fallen houses of fallen lives. Use us, O Shepherd of our hearts, to shepherd your flock and stand tall as a once fallen person now rebuilt by your love. Amen.*

**About the Writer**

Tiffany Hall McClung is an ordained Cumberland Presbyterian minister. She is currently focussing on being a full-time mom to son, Ian. She also volunteers with the youth group at First CP of Savannah, TN where her husband, Andy, is pastor. She preaches once a month for a PCUSA congregation in the area and refers to herself as the “roving preacher” available to fill pulpits when needed. Tiffany is a member of the General Assembly Council and a Vision Enabler for Touch the Future. When she isn't changing diapers or preparing sermons, she enjoys creative writing, reading, and travelling just about anywhere.

## **People of God** **Acts 15:15-18**

There has always been confusion about how an individual comes into a personal relationship with God by having his/her sins forgiven. Then, as now, many were asking, "Can I receive salvation by placing my faith in Jesus Christ and in His work on the cross in dying for my sins, or is there something else I need to do, some religious work or ritual in addition to what Jesus has done?" That question was one Apostle Paul had to answer over and over again. As He says in vs. 11 that you must not add anything to being saved through the grace of God: "No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

For the sake of unity in Christ we are urged to seek middle ground where we can remain harmonious. Paul and James, two of the most divergent thinkers in the Bible, learned how to lead through the Holy Spirit. In this passage, we see that the Spirit of God showed the council how time tends to change hearts of individuals. Let God be the judge of all people in every situation with every decision.

Every day, in all seasons good and bad, that is the business of God. God is able to open and close doors, both to nations and individuals. God is using all of our personal histories, everyone around us, all the crime and violence, terrorism, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, everything, so as to accomplish God's purpose of making a people for himself. God is very much at work among God's children. That is how God is pursuing the plan of redemption. Trust the Lord for the grace to change the things we can and the serenity to accept the differences that cannot be changed. We need to think like Jesus, "Your kingdom come, your will be done. On earth as it is in heaven". (Matt 6:10)

What about you? Are your intentions to seek out and know the God of the ages who knows your heart? He knows you better than you will ever know yourself, and He still loves you. Are you helping others to know Him through who you are? Since it is God's purpose that no one should perish but have the salvation Jesus has freely given, our purpose should be no less than to serve others so they will know this wonderful, redeeming love.

### **PRAYER:**

*Heavenly Father, we come to you when we are still powerless because Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God, you demonstrate your love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. We glorify you, Lamb of God, for your sweet sacrifice. Help us this hour to direct ourselves to become aware of your intended mission for our lives. Amen.*

Pat Freeland  
Seekers of Joy Region



## **Glorify the Lamb! Be Doers of the Word**

### **James 1: 22-27**



#### **Background for the Leader**

Find a quiet space to read the scripture. Be sure to have pen and paper in hand. After getting still and comfortable, slowly read the text out loud. If it is familiar to you, try to imagine that it is not. After reading the text, ask God to speak to you through this scripture revealing all that God would have you to hear in it. Take your paper and make a list of words that stand out in your memory from your reading. Read the scripture again and end by thanking God for speaking to you through the Living Word.

Take a moment to pray for the women for whom you will facilitate discussion. Name their names if you know them.

**Notes from Writer** (*Please be sure you have done the above personal study and prayer before reading the following*):

The following personal thoughts of the writer are provided to aid you in leading this Bible study. Please be sure to follow your own personal study to know where the Holy Spirit is guiding you and the group. Use these thoughts, if needed, as further discussion material.

This is one of those scriptures that can sometimes make us wonder if the Bible is saying that our works lead to our salvation. It is my opinion that this is not what James is saying at all. As Cumberland Presbyterians, we know that our salvation comes to us only through the grace of Jesus Christ. So, what does it mean to us to be “doers of the word” and to “care for orphans and widows”?

While there is much discussion material in the ideas of how easily we can forget who we really are and how easily we can forget what God’s Word tells us (v. 24), this Bible study is focusing on the simple fact that we are called to do, not just to speak.

In focussing on Mission/Service/Outreach, we cannot forget that Christ has called us to be His hands and feet on this earth. We are called to do! So, how do we reconcile that with the notion of salvation through works? It is so simple and yet so complicated.

We are saved through the grace of Jesus Christ. We are shown unbelievable acts of love through our Creator. And we are called to work. Our works, our doing, does not save us, but our love for God does create in us a desire to do God’s work. If others look at our lives and do not see us doing the Word, but only hear us speaking the Word, then they cannot possibly see a true love of God in our lives. When we love someone, we show it; it comes down to that simple fact. If we love God and God’s Word, then we will show it. We will reach out and take care of those whom God loves. We will take care of those who need it most. We will work for justice in this unjust world. We will keep ourselves “unstained” by it. Praise be to God. In doing the Word, Glory does come to the Lamb!

#### **A Note to the Leader**

Choose from the following activities as time and your desired focus permits. You may have had insights come to you through your personal study (above) which will help in choosing

activities or which may even lead you to create new ones. Use your personal study and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making these decisions and aiding you in facilitating discussion among the group.

As the facilitator, be sure to practice good listening skills, especially during *Searching the Word*. Through your personal study and then listening to the group's discussion, be prepared to connect the activities back to scripture and focus on the highlights which seem to be coming up again and again.

Materials Needed: Index cards, Bibles, pens, newsprint or dry erase board with markers, a copy of James 1:22-27 typed double space for each participant.

## **Leading the Bible Study**

As participants arrive you may want to have some inviting music playing as participants arrive. Be sure that your materials are prepared for the activities so that you can spend this time in fellowship with the participants.

### **Activity One: Opening**

Prior to the meeting, create a game of Charades by writing words on index cards in big, bold letters. The words you choose should be action words such as Eat, Baby-sit, Pray, etc. (The idea here is to "do the word.")

Divide the group into two teams. Each team will take turns having one player act out the word that you present to her from the index card. Her teammates will try to guess the word/phrase. She will have one minute to complete this task. If her team guesses correctly, that team receives a point. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. (You may wish to have a small token for the winners such as a piece of hard candy.)

### **Activity Two: Searching the Word**

Prior to the meeting, type James 1: 22-27 double spaced and have a copy of it for each participant.

Divide into small groups of three or four. Instruct each group to choose one person to lead them in prayer, one person to read the scripture aloud, and one person to act as scribe, taking notes on what the group says. Once these positions are filled, the prayer leader should lead her group in a prayer asking God to speak through the scripture to each of them.

Next, ask the participants to read the scripture silently, marking words which are repeated or which stand out to them. Once they have had time to do this, ask the scripture reader to slowly read the text aloud. Then, ask the group to silently look over the text once more, marking any other words which stand out to them.

Once the groups have had time to do this, ask them to share with one another the things which they marked and have the scribe take notes in order to share with the larger group.

After a few minutes of discussion time, ask each small group to share with everyone else the Word reflected to them in their study. (*See Notes from Writer for additional discussion material if needed.*)

### **Activity Three: Connecting to the Theme:**

*Say: Let's focus for just a minute on the theme for the year, "Be Shepherds of God's*

*Flock: Glorify the Lamb”. Looking at verse 22 and verse 27, in what ways does this scripture reflect to us how to do this?*

Allow time for discussion. Be sure someone is writing ideas on the dry erase board or newsprint.

#### **Activity Four: Worship**

Rather than experiencing worship together in your meeting space, prior to the meeting, you should have arranged a mission project in your local area. Once the group has had time to reflect on the scripture, then get up and go and be “Doers of the Word.”

Ideas for projects can range from picking up litter around the church building to building a Habitat for Humanity home. Or, you may want to take literally scripture and take gifts, and love, as you visit children in an orphanage, or doing the same for residents of a nursing home. This is an opportunity for the Living Word to truly come alive.

Whether you decide to share the details with the participants prior to this meeting or to keep those details a surprise, be sure your participants are dressed appropriately and prepared for the time that it will involve.

#### ***About the Writer***

*Tiffany Hall McClung is an ordained Cumberland Presbyterian minister. She is currently focusing on being a full-time mom to son, Ian. She also volunteers with the youth group at First CP of Savannah, TN where her husband, Andy, is pastor. She preaches once a month for a PCUSA congregation in the area and refers to herself as the “roving preacher” available to fill pulpits when needed. Tiffany is a member of the General Assembly Council and a Vision Enabler for Touch the Future. When she isn’t changing diapers or preparing sermons, she enjoys creative writing, reading, and travelling just about anywhere.*

## **The Father Has Compassion for His Children**

### **James 1:27**

There are two kinds of religion –Bad (self serving) and Pure (what God requires). The “Bad” religion is characterized by rituals and habits, no deep felt meaning, and it’s external (not allowing God to dwell within). The “Pure” religions is characterized by love, joy, and compassion.

Pure religion requires action. We must be doers, not just hearers only. Pure religion is practical and involves showing our love. We are not called to “share our faith,” but rather we are called to share our love and teach our faith.

Religion is a four-letter word...Love. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

- What a changed world we could live in if parents loved their children more than themselves; themselves more than alcohol, drugs, money or a better car or home.
- What a changed world we could live in if we gave our lives to God and our family rather than wanting someone else’s wife, husband, car, home, job or life.
- What a changed world we could live in if our priorities where God, family, and then self; if church attendance was a priority rather than some place other to go when there is no soccer, football, car races or just the opportunity to “veg out” in front of the T.V. If we would make sure we filled the Church like we do those huge stadiums what a changed world we would have. Where is our religion?

God, our Father, calls us to a religion that is pure and faultless, faithful to helping orphans and widows when they need us. We are called to keep ourselves close to God so that we are not swallowed up by all the things in life that draw us away from our personal relationship with God. Being pure in our religion requires a commitment, and that is what is lacking in so many areas of life today. We weigh in on the “Bad” kind of religion more than the “Pure”. James speaks of our temptations for pure religion as the natural progression of living for God on planet earth. The Bible teaches that God will help us overcome our personal sin.

Through Christian maturity we learn to turn our defeats into victories. The most encouraging part is that God is willing to give us the wisdom we need in the midst of our difficulties. Wisdom helps us to understand how to use the circumstances for our good and God’s glory. We need to respond to the trials and temptations with “pure “ religion, which allows us to see the privilege and importance of the position God has given us in life – regardless of the difficulties. We can live a life of “pure” religion and the final product will be a life that reflects His glory.

#### **PRAYER:**

*Heavenly Father, we come to you knowing that we have not loved you completely; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not listened to others with our full attention...we have not gone out of our way to help others unless it is convenient. The world doesn’t seem to work well when we are at the center of it, Lord. We do things we shouldn’t and fail to do what we should. Help us this hour to direct our thoughts to become aware of your intended mission for our lives. Amen.*

Pat Freeland Jones  
Seekers of Joy Region

## Encouragement in Christ Philippians 2:1-8



### Background for the Leader

May you experience encouragement in Christ as you prepare and lead this Bible study.

### A Note to the Leader

The numbered planning steps correspond to the numbered activity suggestions below.

1. Be ready to read or have someone else read the suggested Scripture (Isaiah 40:11; John 10:2-4,11).
2. Make copies of the choral reading based on Philippians 2:1-8 in the second activity.
3. Print on index cards or small squares of paper the titles and Scripture references in the third activity. If possible gather pictures to accompany each Scripture reference and tape the title and reference at the bottom of the picture. (The preschool or children's Sunday School classes may have a teaching picture file where you can borrow these pictures. Or you might find the pictures in a large Bible, mark the pictures with tabs, and turn to them as a member tells about that example of Jesus.) Provide Bibles, a chalkboard, dry erase board, or large piece of paper and chalk or markers.
4. Print each scrambled word below on a strip of construction paper or cardboard. Do not print the solution (in brackets).

- mategrenneocu [*encouragement*]
- olincnotsao [*consolation*]
- rhisagn [*sharing*]
- spomsnocia [*compassion*]
- ymashytp [*sympathy*]
- voel [*love*]
- cardoc [*accord*]
- eon nmid [*one mind*]

5. Plan to post the unscrambled key words where everyone will be able to see them.
6. Prepare to guide the discussion of the ideas in the sixth activity.
7. As an alternate or additional activity you may choose to read and discuss Jan Karon's *The Trellis and the Seed*, which is a book of encouragement. [Jan Karon, *The Trellis and the Seed: A Book of Encouragement for all Ages*, New York: Viking, Penguin Group, 2003]
8. Decide how to use the words of the hymn *May the Mind of Christ My Savior* as a closing prayer. (*Note: Please be aware of copyright issues for all songs and hymns. Before you photocopy any song, make sure that your church has a license to copy. For more information contact Christian Copyright Licensing International, 17201 NE Sacramento St., Portland, OR 97230; 503/257-2230; 1-800-234-2446 or visit their website at [www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com).*) You may choose to ask a soloist to sing the hymn or invite all members to sing or read the words of the hymn as a prayer. Provide the hymn words from the eighth activity or a hymnal such as *Sing Joyfully* that contains this hymn. Enlist an accompanist if needed.

## Leading the Program

### Activity One: Consider the Shepherd Image as A Source of Encouragement

Read or ask someone to read Isaiah 40:11 and John 10:2-4,11. Ask members to form pairs and talk about this question: “How do these verses and the image of Jesus as our shepherd offer you encouragement?” After time for discussion, invite pairs to share their responses with the larger group. *(Answers may include the following: Jesus cares about us and provides for all of our needs, Jesus gives us strength when we are weak and unable to carry on in our own strength, Jesus knows each one of us personally and calls us by our names, Jesus guides us and we can trust His guidance, Jesus gave His life for us.)*

Remind members that this year’s theme is “Be Shepherds of God’s Flock: Glorify the Lamb.” Even though Paul does not use the Shepherd image in Philippians 2:1-8, this passage offers encouragement as we glorify the Lamb and shepherd God’s flock.

### Activity Two: Read Philippians 2:1-8 as A Choral Reading

Give each member a copy of the choral reading. Designate groups 1 and 2 for the reading and note that all are to read the last section. Guide members to participate by nodding toward each group for its turn.

**Group 1:** “If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete;

**Group 2:** Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

**Group 1:** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

**Group 2:** Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

**Group 1:** Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

**Group 2:** Who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

**Group 1:** But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

**All:** He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

After the reading, invite members to look through the choral reading and find words or phrases that are especially encouraging to them. Note that even though Philippians 2:1 begins, “If there is any encouragement in Christ,” Paul is actually saying, “Because there is encouragement in Christ,” or “Of course there is encouragement in Christ, so . . .” Offer a brief prayer thanking God for the encouragement we receive through God’s Word and Christ.

### Activity Three: Discover Examples of the Mind of Christ

Suggest that since Paul asks his readers to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus we need to recall some examples of what Jesus was like. Hand out the titles and Scripture references (and pictures if available) to individuals or pairs.

- ☛ Jesus’ first bed was a manger (Luke 2:5-7)
- ☛ Jesus obeys God and parents (Luke 2:48-52)
- ☛ Jesus resists temptation (Matthew 4:8-10)

- ☛ Jesus announces His ministry (Luke 4:16-21)
- ☛ Jesus heals people (Matthew 15:29-31)
- ☛ Jesus feeds people (Matthew 15:32-38)
- ☛ Jesus teaches people (Luke 15:3-7)
- ☛ Jesus blesses children (Mark 10:13-16)
- ☛ Jesus answers questions (Mark 12:28-31)
- ☛ Jesus washes followers' feet (John 13:12-17)
- ☛ Jesus prays for followers (John 17:1,20-21)
- ☛ Jesus prays in garden (Luke 22:39-42)
- ☛ Jesus dies on cross (Mark 15:24,29-30,37)
- ☛ Jesus assures followers after His resurrection (Luke 24:36-49)
- ☛ Jesus sends out disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)

Make sure each individual or pair has a Bible. Ask members to read the assigned Scriptures and be ready to share with the group what the Bible passage tells us about the mind of Christ. List a brief summary of what each person shares on a chalkboard, dry erase board, or large piece of paper. Ask members if they have other favorite stories about Jesus that illustrate His example we should follow. If so add those summaries to your list.

#### **Activity Four: Unscramble Key Words**

Form eight groups and give each group one of the scrambled words. (Groups could be one or two persons or more depending on the number of members present). Ask each group to unscramble its word, talk about various meanings of the word, and print the key word and its meanings on the back of the strip of paper. If you notice as groups work that they are having trouble unscrambling their words, suggest that they look at the first two stanzas of the printed choral reading for clues.

Ask each group to show its unscrambled key word and some meanings of the word. Invite the whole group to look at the list of examples of the mind of Christ (third activity) to find examples from Christ's life that match the key words. Tape the key words near the summary list you made for the third activity.

#### **Activity Five: Evaluate Ourselves Based on the Key Words**

Suggest that from time to time we need to evaluate ourselves based on the example of Christ and the key words we unscrambled. Tell members that you will point to a key word and ask them to silently evaluate themselves on a scale from one to five. Ask each member to place one hand beside her with fingers and thumb folded under her palm where only she will be aware of her movement. Five will be the highest rating. For example, when you point to the word *encouragement* a member should extend her thumb and all four fingers if she feels that she is the very best encourager that she could possibly be at all times. If she feels that she does a fair job of encouraging others some of the time she should extend two fingers. If she feels that she never encourages anyone, she should keep her thumb and all the fingers folded. Make sure that each member understands that this is a time of private evaluation just between herself and God. Point to and say each key word, pausing to give members time for evaluation.

#### **Activity Six: Talk About the Source of Our Encouragement and Strength**

Suggest the following: "Self-evaluation could be discouraging because we do not

measure up to Christ's example. It's unlikely that any of us scored five on all of the key words. However, it may be encouraging to remember that Paul listed humility as one of the desired characteristics exemplified by Jesus. Paul said, 'Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves' (Philippians 2:3). A part of humility is realizing that we cannot live out the mind of Christ in our own strength, but this is possible because of the strength, encouragement, and love that Christ wants to give us. If we have any encouragement in Christ (and we do) then we can live out the characteristics named in Philippians 2:1-8."

Refer to the list of key words again and encourage members to discuss what difference it would make in our Women's Ministry, in our church, and in our world if we lived with Christ's help the qualities of encouragement, consolation, sharing, compassion, sympathy, love, accord, and one mind.

**Activity Seven:** Read *The Trellis and the Seed*

Read the book and show the illustrations. Use the following questions for discussion:

- What discouraged the little seed or caused it to doubt its ability to grow and flower?
- What are some factors that may discourage us and cause us to doubt our ability to blossom?
- What helped the little seed to fulfill its potential?
- What are some factors that encourage us and help us to fulfill our calling to have and live the mind of Christ?"

**Activity Eight:** Use A Hymn as a Closing Prayer

Use the words of the hymn *May the Mind of Christ My Savior* which is based on Philippians 2:1-8 as a closing prayer.

"May the mind of Christ my Savior/ Live in me from day to day,  
By His love and pow'r controlling,/ All I do and say.  
May the Word of God dwell richly/ In my heart from hour to hour,  
So that all may see I triumph/ Only thru His power.  
May I run the race before me,/ Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus/ As I onward go."

(*May the Mind of Christ My Savior*, Words by Kate B. Wilkinson, *Sing Joyfully*, Carol Stream, IL: Tabernacle Publishing Company, 1989, page 402)

**About the Writer**

Beth Cole is a member of the Lawrenceburg Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Lawrenceburg, TN where her husband is pastor. Beth and Dwayne have two adult children, Kimberly and Kevin. Beth is a Christian Education Consultant for the denomination. Her address is 242 Admiral Circle, Lawrenceburg, TN 38464. Her email address is [bethscole@aol.com](mailto:bethscole@aol.com)



## **Encouragement In Christ**

### **Philippians 2:1-8**

Paul is writing to the Philippian Church from a prison cell. Rather than sitting there having a pity party for himself, Paul is thinking about his friends in the Church at Philippi. Realizing what we have in Christ gives us an internal strength to walk through any situation. We are united with Christ through His death on the cross when we accept Him. It is more than just a matter of being saved. It is the ability of living daily in an intimate personal relationship with Christ the Savior.

Having a relationship with Christ gives us particular benefits and fruits of salvation. We have encouragement to help us through our daily tasks. We have comfort in His love and assurance in the knowledge that through His death on the cross we are forgiven for our sins. We no longer have to walk burdened down with our sins and failures. We have fellowship with Him through the spirit, and with it we can know that we will never be alone. His word tells us that He will never leave us or forsake us. In Christ we have tenderness and compassion for our relationships with one another. Paul reminds us not to be selfish or conceited in things we do, but to look beyond ourselves and see the needs of others. We need to have the attitude of Jesus Christ. He did not exalt himself. He took the nature of a servant.

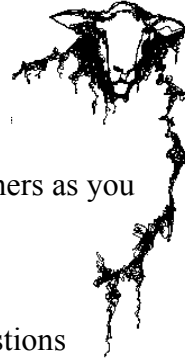
It is easier to focus on our needs than the needs of those around us. We were challenged in a Sunday School class some time ago to pray for others and not pray for ourselves for just one week. The results were amazing. We found it was hard to leave ourselves out of our prayers. As we focused on the needs of others in our class our problems seemed to become smaller. I feel sure that as Paul focused on the needs of his fellow Christians friends, his prison cell seemed to be less of an obstacle to his Christian faith. In Philippians 4:11 Paul says, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." (NIV) When we learn to walk daily in Christ we can do the same. We must remember to keep our focus on Christ, because no matter what the obstacle is in our life, if He can't take care of it, no one else can either. Nothing is impossible with God.

#### **PRAYER:**

*Lord, help us to remember that you live in us, walk with us, and love us. Help us to keep looking up to you for encouragement to continue to live the Christian life that you have called us to. In Christ's name. Amen*

Martha Chambers  
Hands of Harvest Region

## **Encourage One Another** **Hebrews 3:13-14; 10:23-25; 12:1-2**



### **Background for the Leader**

May God encourage you and help you exercise your call to encourage others as you prepare and lead this Bible study.

### **A Note to the Leader**

The numbered planning steps correspond to the numbered activity suggestions below. Choose among the activities based upon the amount of time, interests, needs, and learning styles of your group.

1. Read through the suggested exercises and make sure they would be safe for your members. Practice each exercise so you can lead it in a relaxed way as you encourage everyone to participate in the fun. You may want to play a tape or CD of lively music during the exercises.
2. Prepare to lead the discussion about the benefits of physical exercise.
3. Prepare to read or ask another member to read Hebrews 3:13-14; 10:23-25; 12:1-2. If possible, read from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* since this translation makes the exercise analogy clearer than other translations. No matter which translation you choose you may want to provide copies of the Scriptures for members to follow along as you read and for the fourth activity. Provide a chalkboard, large sheet of paper, or dry-erase board and chalk or marker. Prepare to lead the discussion based on the summary and questions offered below.
4. You will need the chalkboard, paper, dry-erase board and chalk or marker again. Prepare to lead the discussion from the ideas suggested.
5. Provide index cards (at least two or three for each member) and pencils or pens.
6. Make a list of names and addresses of shut-ins or others in your church community who may need encouragement. Provide note cards or plain paper, envelopes, and pens.
7. Plan to join one of the circles described so you can also be an encourager and encouraged. Prepare to lead the time of prayer.

### **Leading the Program**

#### **Activity One:** Involve Members in Simple Exercises

Invite group members to join you in the following exercises. Ask members to have an arm's length of space between them and the next person. Demonstrate each exercise as you call out the numbers and instructions with a spirit of playfulness.

- Touch your nose. Remain seated with your arms at your sides. On the count of 1 raise your right hand to your nose. On 2 return your hand to your side. On 3 raise your left hand to your nose. On 4 return your hand to your side. Repeat 5 times.
- Stretch your arms. Remain seated with your arms at your sides. On the count of 1 raise and stretch out arms at shoulder height. On the count of 2 raise both arms and touch the top of your head with your fingers. On the count of 3 return your

arms to shoulder height. On the count of 4 return your arms to your sides. Repeat 5 times.

- Bend and circle. Ask members to stand. On the count of 1 bend your head and shoulders forward. On 2 bend to the right. On 3 bend backward. On 4 bend to the left. Repeat 5 times.
- Touch your knees or toes. Members will need to stand with arms at shoulder height and may choose whether to touch their knees or toes. On the count of 1 stretch your right hand to your left knee or toes. On 2 stand up straight with arms at shoulder height. On 3 stretch your left hand to your right knee or toes. On 4 stand up straight. Repeat 5 times.
- Touch a friend's shoulder. Stand facing a partner with your arms at shoulder height. On the count of 1 reach your right hand to touch and pat your partner's right shoulder as you smile. On 2 return your hand to your side. On 3 reach your left hand to pat your partner's left shoulder as you smile. On 4 return your hand to your side.

**Activity Two:** Talk About the Benefits of Exercising

Say: "Now that we've warmed up with some exercises, I'd like for us to list possible benefits of exercising. Some of us may suggest benefits from our own experience while others share what we've heard or read as encouragement to exercise." (*Members may suggest some of the following and other benefits: flexibility, weight management, cardiovascular health, strength, relief of stress, social relations, overall satisfaction.*) Ask: "Are these benefits of exercise most effective when we read or hear about them, intend to exercise, or actually engage in the exercises? Why or why not?"

**Activity Three:** Relate the Benefits of Physical Exercise to the Exercise of Our Faith.

Suggest that just as we must actually do physical exercise to reap its benefits, our faith also must be active. The writer of Hebrews had quite a bit to say about exercising our faith. Ask members to listen as you or another member read Hebrews 3:13-14; 10:23-25; 12:1-2 and listen for words and phrases that remind them of the exercise metaphor. If you have made copies of the Scripture passages, distribute those now. Read the passages slowly with expression, placing special emphasis on words that relate to exercising. After reading the Scriptures, as members mention words or phrases print them on a large sheet of paper, a chalkboard or dry-erase board. (*Ideas might include the following depending on which translation you used: hold firm, lay aside the weight, run the race, stay on your toes, don't lose your grip, don't quit, just do it.*) Talk further about each idea. We are to hold firm (not lose our grip) on what we believe. Our confidence and strength is grounded, not in our own strength, but in the trustworthiness and faithfulness of God. (You may want to read Hebrews 6:17-19 to emphasize that God is always true to God's promises and is the source of our encouragement and hope.) Because we are concerned for our own and others' spiritual welfare, we should lay aside our sins and everything that would slow us down in exercising our faith. Because Christ is our partner, we are never left alone in our struggles. Worshiping God with others is one of the important ways to strengthen our faith. The active life of faith is kept alive as Christians who care about one another meet together in worship. Meeting together for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship is just as necessary for a healthy faith as exercising is beneficial for our physical health. The writer of Hebrews

emphasizes the necessity of exercising our faith today, while there is still time.

**Activity Four:** Discover the Call to Encourage One Another

Invite members to form groups of two or three and listen or look for calls to encourage one another in Hebrews 3:13-14 and 10:23-25. If you distributed copies of the Scripture for the third activity, members can search the Scriptures or they may listen as you or another member read those passages again. After groups have found words, ask them to call them out while you print them on the large sheet of paper, chalkboard, or dry-erase board.

Suggest that we may have found words in some translations that we often think of in negative ways but they have positive meanings in these passages. For example, though we may think of *exhort* as scold or insist it can also mean to encourage or advise strongly. Ask: “When or how often does the writer say we are to exhort or encourage one another?” (*every day*) Even though we may use the word *provoke* to mean to irritate or aggravate, it here means to stir up or to excite to action. Ask: “What does the writer say that we are to stir up or excite others to do?” (*to love and do good deeds, to be thoughtful and do helpful things*)

Ask pairs or groups to discuss ways our example can encourage others. They may want to start their discussion by talking about how another person’s example encourages them. Invite the groups to share what they discussed.

Note that we find in the Book of Job an example of the effect of encouraging another person. Job’s friend Eliphaz said to Job as Job was undergoing terrible trials, “Your words have supported those who were stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees” (Job 4:4). Invite members who wish to do so to tell about a time when a person’s presence or words supported them when they were stumbling.

**Activity Five:** Explore Creative Ways to Encourage One Another

Mention: “We have heard how the writer of Hebrews calls us to be encouragers. Let’s see how creative we can be in thinking of ways to encourage one another.” Give each member two or three index cards and a pencil or pen. Tell them that extra cards are available if needed. Invite members to write on each card a creative idea for encouraging another person. The idea might be something either an individual or your women’s ministry group could do. The idea might be an example of a way someone has encouraged her. Note that this is a kind of written brainstorming so there are no limits and no wrong ideas. Give members time to write their ideas on the cards.

Collect the cards, mix them up, pass them around, asking each member to take two or three cards. Encourage members to listen for creative ideas they could practice as other members read the ideas from the cards they are holding. Ask, “How can we use our creative ideas to carry out this year’s women’s ministry theme: Be Shepherds of God’s Flock: Glorify the Lamb?” You may want to guide a discussion of ideas your group wants to begin to use immediately. Keep the cards where individual members or your group can draw from them when they need ideas for encouraging others.

**Activity Six:** Write Notes to Persons Who Need Encouragement

Encourage members to take a note card and envelope and write a note of encouragement to a shut-in or other person they know who needs a word of encouragement. Make available the list of names and addresses you made, but make clear that notes may also be written to other people. You may want to provide time during the meeting for members to write these notes or

ask them to write their notes at home.

**Activity Seven: Encourage One Another and Pray**

Ask members to form two circles, one inside the other, with members in the two circles facing each other. Ask each member to find a partner in the facing circle. Each member may exercise her call to encourage one another by placing her hand on the shoulder of her partner and speaking words of encouragement. Her partner will then speak words of encouragement to her.

Invite members to join in a time of silent prayer for their partners and others in the group. In closing offer a spoken prayer asking God to help us hold firmly to our faith, to encourage us, and to strengthen us to encourage one another.

**About the Writer**

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## **Encourage One Another**

### **Hebrews 3:13-14**

This passage reminds us how much we need each other as Christians. In 1988 a dear friend of mine moved away. Before leaving she gave me two simple gifts. One, an African Violet with many pretty blooms, the other a sour dough bread starter. I had confidence that I could keep the African Violet alive to remember her by, but I had my doubts at keeping the bread starter going. Before very long the flower began to wither and eventually died. On the other hand, I believe God truly blessed the bread starter. I have been able to keep it alive for 16 years and been able to give encouragement to many people through a gift of a simple loaf of bread. I continue to remember my friend each time I bake bread. So many times God has impressed on my spirit to make bread for someone, and I have been the one encouraged through their response.

Hebrews tells us to encourage each other daily as long as it is called Today. We are living in the day of divine grace and opportunity to trust God. The Bible teaches us that this time won't last forever. Many hearts are hardened by sins deceitfulness. We need to encourage one another as Christians to hold on firmly to the confidence we had in Christ when we were first saved.

We see people who accept Christ and walk with a new excitement at first, but as time goes on they grow cold. Living a Christian life may be like a roller coaster to some. We climb to the top, only to quickly be brought down again. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging us as Christians to be there to help others not give up. The Bible does not teach us that living a Christian life is easy, but it does promise us many blessings. It teaches us that we can share in Christ by walking with Him daily and holding on to our faith in Him.

We can use words of encouragement to help those that are weak in their faith. The older Christians can share their faith experiences with the younger to help them learn to trust God more. The more difficulties we walk through in faith with Christ, the more we learn to trust Him. As we look back to see where we've been with the help of Christ, looking ahead gets easier. We learn to walk in confidence with Christ fully trusting Him to lead and let us follow. It may be as simple as taking a loaf of bread to someone in need, or it may be just to call someone to let them know you care. When we see someone losing their excitement, we need to encourage them to hold firmly to their faith in Christ.

#### **PRAYER:**

*Dear Lord, Thank you for the encouragement in your word and for Christians whom you have sent to encourage us. Help us to reach out to those that are hurting and bring them to you for healing both spiritual and physical. In your name. Amen*

Martha Chambers  
Hands of Harvest Region

## Walking in the Light 1 John 1:5-7



### Background for the Leader

May the light of God's love shine upon you as you prepare to encourage others to walk in that light.

### A Note to the Leader

If possible, plan to meet in a room where you can turn off the lights and the members can experience being in darkness. Gather and display on a table at the front of the room several items that give light such as an electric or oil lamp, candles including one large candle, flashlights, tap light, or a small model of a lighthouse. These items are suggested for use in the fourth activity. The numbered planning steps correspond to the numbered activity suggestions below.

1. Think of an experience of being in the dark that you can share if members need help getting started.
2. Arrange for someone to turn off all the lights in the room when you give the signal. Be familiar with the ideas you will summarize about the darkness; if you need a light for your notes, use a small flashlight. It will be helpful to practice in the darkened room ahead of time.
3. Arrange a signal for the person to turn on all the lights. Be ready to share the ideas about the light and to lead the discussion about God as light. Enlist two readers for the reading of 1 John 1:5-7. Ask the first reader to stand on one side of the room and the other reader on the opposite side of the room.
4. Make copies of the assignments for the three groups. Provide Bibles and pencils or pens for making notes.
5. You may want to print the questions for discussion on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper, or you may copy a set of questions onto a piece of paper for each group to use.
6. Gather small candles and holders such as those your church uses in a candlelight service. Have a match or lighter available for lighting the first candle. Ask two members to give out the candles at the appropriate time. Ask two other members to turn off the lights and start music on the CD, tape player, or piano. Possible suggestions for music include the praise chorus "Shine, Jesus, Shine" or the hymns "The Light of the World Is Jesus" or "Stepping in the Light."

### Leading the Program

#### Activity One: Talk About Darkness

Invite members to tell about an experience of being in the dark and how they felt and what happened. (*Members might tell of a power failure, getting up in the night in a dark house, being on a dark road, being in a cave with all lights turned off, or stumbling around and bumping into people or objects*).

#### Activity Two: Experience Darkness

Signal to the person you asked to turn off the lights. Give members an opportunity to sit

quietly in the darkness for a few moments. People may giggle or whisper in possible discomfort when you first turn off the lights. Just wait this out until there is a sense of stillness. Ask members to think about what might happen if they got up and tried to move around in the darkness.

Share some of the following ideas and Scriptures: From the very beginning, the Bible speaks about darkness in contrast to light. In Genesis 1:1-2 we read, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.”

John wrote. “People loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19) and “If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going” (John 12:35). John also wrote about the darkness in 1 John: “If we say that we have fellowship with God while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true” (1 John 1:6) and “Whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness” (1 John 2:11). John knew that the darkness of sin and hatred in our lives would destroy fellowship with God and with others. Perhaps we too have experienced that truth. Let’s pause in the darkness for a time when each of us can silently confess the darkness in our own lives to God. That darkness may be fear, anger, hatred, hostility, or other sins that hinder our fellowship with God and with people. Whatever that darkness is in our lives, let’s silently confess and offer it to God. (Give adequate time for silent reflection and confession.)

Then read the following assurance of forgiveness, “If we confess our sins, He who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Continue, “Because of God’s assurance of forgiveness and cleansing, darkness is not the end of the story. We do not have to remain in the dark.”

### **Activity Three:** Experience the Light

Signal for the lights to be turned on. Give a few moments for members to adjust to the light and then ask for reflections on the experience of being in the dark, hearing the Scriptures about darkness, and having the opportunity to confess the darkness in our lives.

Share some of the following: From the beginning the Bible also speaks of light and God as the light. Immediately after describing the deep darkness, the writer of Genesis records, “God said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness” (Genesis 1:3-4). David said, “You are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord lightens my darkness” (2 Samuel 22:29). John wrote of Jesus, “What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:3-5).

Ask members to listen as readers read 1 John 1:5-7 and be prepared to talk about what it means to them that God is light and there is no darkness at all in God.

**Reader 1:** “This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all.

**Reader 2:** If we say that we have fellowship with Him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true;

**Readers 1 and 2:** But if we walk in the light as He himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”



Ask: “What does it mean to you that God is light and there is no darkness at all in God?”  
*(Members may share some of these ideas: Light reveals. God wants to reveal God’s self to us. God wants to be known by us. The light reveals our sins and imperfections. God’s light guides us. God’s light can be trusted because there is no darkness in it.)*

**Activity Four: Learn More About the Light**

Form three groups and give each group one of the following assignments:

**Group 1: God gives us light**

Read the following Scriptures. Talk together about what each Scripture says and what that means to your life. Choose from the table one of the items that we associate with light. Decide how you will share this symbol of light and what you have learned from the Scriptures with the larger group.

Psalm 4:6; Psalm 18:28; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 56:13; Psalm 119:105; 1 John 1:5

**Group 2: Jesus is the Light**

Read the following Scriptures. Talk together about what each Scripture says and what that means to your life. Choose from the table one of the items that we associate with light. Decide how you will share this symbol of light and what you have learned from the Scriptures with the larger group.

Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:13-14,16; John 8:12; John 12:46; 2 Corinthians 4:6

**Group 3: We are to walk in the light**

Read the following Scriptures. Talk together about what each Scripture says and what that means to your life. Choose from the table one of the items that we associate with light. Decide how you will share this symbol of light and what you have learned from the Scriptures with the larger group.

Isaiah 2:5; Isaiah 60:1; Matthew 5:14-16; John 12:36; Ephesians 5:8; 1 John 1:7-9; 1 Peter 2:9

Give groups time to work together and then to share with the larger group.

**Activity Five: Relate Fellowship and Walking in the Light**

Note that John spoke in 1 John 1:5-7 of fellowship with God and with one another. In fact, he seems to see fellowship with God and with others as two sides of the same coin; they cannot be separated. When John spoke of walking in the darkness or the light, he was talking about the way we choose to live our lives. It’s like the expression we use, “She walks the walk.” John also equated walking in the light with being in fellowship with God and others. Form the same three groups as in the fourth activity, and ask the groups to discuss these questions:

- What is the relationship between walking in the light and living in fellowship with God and others? Is it possible to have one without the other? Why or why not?
- How can we as individuals and a women’s ministry group strengthen our fellowship with God and with others? Do any of the Scriptures you read or heard in the previous activity help you to answer this question?

When groups have had adequate time together, ask all to share their discussion of the first set of questions. Then ask them to share reflections on the second set of questions. Ask all to consider: “What is the relationship between walking in the light and our call to be shepherds of God’s flock? How can walking in the light and in fellowship with God strengthen the possibility of our being shepherds of God’s flock?”

**Activity Six: Make A Commitment to Walk in the Light**

Say something like the following: “Today (or tonight) we have sat in the darkness and confessed our own darkness to God. We have also experienced the light of God’s love for us and fellowship with one another. I imagine that each of us would say that we like the light better than the darkness. As a response to our commitment to walk in the light and to walk in fellowship with God and with others, we will each light a candle.”

Ask the designated members to give each member a candle and holder. Invite members to join you in a circle. Give the signal for the lights to be turned off and the music begun.

Light a large candle on the table as you say, “*This candle represents Jesus, the Light of the world.*” Light your candle from that candle, then light the candle of the person on each side of you and indicate that members should then pass the light on to the persons beside them. When all the candles are lighted, say, “*Let’s walk in the light of God*” and lead members in walking slowly and silently around in the circle.

You may want to close with a prayer or with the singing of a praise chorus or hymn that carries out the theme of light.

**About the Writer**

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## **Walking in the Light**

### **1 John 1:5-7**

*Walking in the light...but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.*

Every time I read these Bible verses, I remember when my daughter Lidia was small. In the evening, when we were all sitting in the family-room she would want to go to her room to find something she needed. She would always say "Will you come with me please?, it is dark" and my reply was also always the same: "you know where the light switch is, you can turn it on and you will be able to see. Her answer to that was: "Mami, you are my light and if I go with you, even if I trip and fall, you will help me up and then we keep going"...

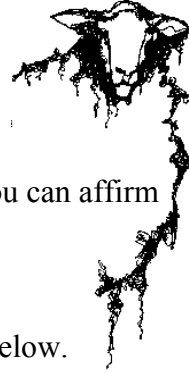
This is what God is for each of us; a Light and a Support. He is our light and if we walk with Him, no matter what trips us or how often we fall during our daily lives, He will always be there to pick us up. He illuminates our lives. When we live with Him and in Him, we also live with others.

#### **PRAYER:**

*Our Father, thank you for making us able to walk in your light, to walk with Jesus as a companion of our way, allowing us to have fellowship with one another, knowing that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. Through Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

Rosy Aja  
Florida Regions

## Affirm One Another Galatians 2:1-2,7-9



### Background for the Leader

May God affirm you as the unique person God made and loves so that you can affirm others.

### A Note to the Leader

The numbered planning steps correspond to the numbered activity suggestions below.

1. Be prepared to share the information and lead the discussion.
2. Become familiar with the background material so you can share it comfortably. Print the questions in the second activity on a large sheet of paper, chalkboard, or dry-erase board leaving space between the questions to record answers. You may want to provide members with Bibles or copies of Galatians 2:1-2,7-9.
3. Sketch one of each of these body parts on a separate piece of construction paper or poster board: foot, ear, eye, head. Print on the back of the foot, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body." On the back of the ear print, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body." On the back of the eye print, "Hand, I have no need of you." On the back of the head print: "Feet, I have no need of you." Enlist four members to hold the body parts and to read the Scripture on the back dramatically when you name that body part in the reading from 1 Corinthians 12:12,14-21,24b-27. It would be helpful to rehearse this reading before the meeting. On a two-page sheet of newspaper want-ads or another large sheet of paper draw a simple shape of a person. Make obvious the head, body, arms, and legs. Draw a simple face of ears, eyes, nose, and mouth. Cut around the outline shape. If you have a large group make enough person shapes for each eight persons. Provide several pairs of scissors.
4. Provide enough sheets of lined or unlined paper and pens or pencils for each member. If you have a large group of members you may want to form groups of six to eight persons for the fourth activity.
5. Prepare to share the closing remarks in a warm encouraging way.

### Leading the Program

#### Activity One: Recall and Thank God for Those Who Have Encouraged Us

Suggest: "Barak had Deborah. King Josiah had Huldah the prophetess. Timothy had Paul. John Mark had Barnabas. Apollos had Priscilla and Aquilla. Deborah, Paul, Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquilla were all encouragers who helped their friends to recognize how God was working in their lives and to use their gifts for God."

Form groups of three or four members. Invite members to recall persons who have helped them recognize their God-given gifts and encouraged them to use these gifts. Suggest that each member tell others in her group about her encourager. When members have had adequate time to share in their groups, invite members to pray silently thanking God for their encouragers.

#### Activity Two: Read and Interpret Galatians 2:1-2,7-9

Use the following background to aid an understanding of the Scripture. “We know from the New Testament that there were conflicts in the early Church just as there are often conflicts in churches today. One conflict that arose in the early Church was about what was necessary to become a follower of Jesus. One group believed that it was necessary to first become a Jew and obey all of the Jewish laws to become a Christian. However, as Paul preached to the Gentiles, he became convinced that these non-Jews did not need to become proselytes to Judaism to become followers of Jesus. Paul believed that God’s grace was sufficient to save those who confessed their sin and believed in Jesus. We need to be reminded of this background to understand the passage that is the basis of our Bible study found in Galatians 2.

Call attention to the questions below and ask members to watch or listen for answers. If you made copies of the verses, distribute them now. Read Galatians 2:1-2,7-9 slowly, but with expression.

Guide discussion of the questions. Possible answers are in parentheses, but there are other appropriate responses. Record responses as they are discussed.

- Who were some people who accepted and encouraged Paul? (*Barnabas, Titus, James, Peter, and John*)
- What were the difficulties in this situation? (*Some were preaching that the Gentiles must first become Jews before becoming followers of Jesus and that Gentile males must be circumcised according to the law of Moses. Paul believed that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised but were saved by God’s grace. Paul felt led by God to go up to Jerusalem to resolve this conflict and to make sure that his ministry was not in vain.*)
- How were the difficulties resolved? How was that possible? (*The leaders recognized that God had given both Paul and Peter the same gospel—good news. The same God was working in both Peter and Paul. God had graced both Paul and Peter with gifts to be used in spreading the gospel and building up the church. The missions of both Peter and Paul were recognized and accepted. The mission of Peter, James, and John would be primarily to the Jews while Paul’s mission would be primarily to the Gentiles with no requirement for circumcision or adherence to the whole Jewish law. Peter, James, and John gave Paul and Barnabas handshakes, a symbol of fellowship. This solution was possible only through the grace and work of God and the willingness of those involved to recognize God at work in one another and in the lives of those to whom they preached.*)
- What were the results of the solution to the difficulties? (*Fellowship was restored or strengthened. The personalities, strengths, and gifts of each person were affirmed. Mutual support was pledged. All involved were encouraged in their God-given ministry. The mission of the church was expanded and more people were saved.*)
- What can we learn from this passage for our lives and ministries today? (*God’s power at work is greater than the differences between human individuals. However, God has chosen to work through human instruments. It is only by God’s power and God’s Spirit that we are energized to do God’s work. See Philippians 2:13 and Ephesians 3:20-21. There is only one gospel—that God loved us and gave God’s Son for us and we are saved by grace when we repent and trust our lives to Christ. God gives each one of us different personalities, abilities, gifts, and opportunities to minister. Each one of us is needed in God’s work. We all need the support of others as we seek to find our place in God’s work. The church and its mission are strongest and more people become followers of*

*Jesus when Christians cooperate and support one another.)*

**Activity Three:** All Parts of the Body are Important

Tell the group: “Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12 about the importance of every person in the church using his or her gifts. He used the analogy of the parts of the human body to emphasize this truth.”

Ask the members with the foot, ear, eye, and head you prepared to stand in front of the group. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12,14-21,24b-27, pausing for the foot, ear, eye, and head to read their parts.

Guide a discussion using the following ideas: “How do you think Paul’s analogy of the body relates to Paul’s having his mission to the Gentiles supported by Peter, James and John? *(Each person’s ministry is important; each ministry is given and graced by God; no one can feel that her ministry is not important nor can she boast that her ministry is most significant.)* Paul spoke about the importance of each of us using our spiritual gifts. How would you define spiritual gifts? *(Spiritual gifts are abilities given by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the church to do Christ’s work in the world.)* What spiritual gifts come to your mind? *(Lists of various gifts are found in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11,27-31; Ephesians 4:11-13.)* God not only gives us a variety of spiritual gifts, but also unique personalities, interests, abilities, talents, and skills. Each of these is important in the body and work of the church.”

Give each group of eight a person shape. Ask someone in the group to cut the shape into eight puzzle pieces (or the number of persons in their group) and give each person in the group a piece. As group members cooperate to work their puzzle, ask them to talk about how they can encourage one another to find and use their unique gifts, personalities, interests, abilities, and talents to serve God and others.

When the puzzles are completed, invite groups to share their reflections. (You may want to mention the following if group members don’t include them: pray and seek God’s guidance, read Bible passages about persons who used their gifts and abilities to serve God, take a spiritual gifts inventory, be on the lookout for needs and opportunities to serve in your church and community, talk with people about ways to use your gifts, join with others who have similar interests.) Encourage members to share also about how working the puzzle helped them to see the need for every person and her unique contributions.

**Activity Four:** Affirm One Another

Give each member a sheet of paper and a pencil or pen and ask her to write her name at the bottom of the sheet of paper. Say: “We have learned that Peter, James, and John affirmed Paul and his mission. Now we have the opportunity to affirm one another. Pass the paper with your name at the bottom to the person on your right. At the top of the paper you receive, write a statement of affirmation about that person. Your affirmation could be a particular gift or ability you see in this person, gratitude for a ministry or service she provides, or other words of encouragement and support. When you have finished, fold down the top of the paper so what you have written is covered and pass it on to the person on your right. Continue writing statements of affirmation, folding, and passing the papers until your paper comes back to you.” You may give time for members to read silently the affirmations others have written or ask members to take them home and read them later.

### **Activity Five: The Challenge to Affirm Others**

Close with something like the following: “Be assured that there is no one else just like you. God loves you. *The Lamb*, a poem by William Blake, asks: ‘Little Lamb, who made thee? Doest thou know who made thee?’

God made you, and God loves you. God has graced you with special gifts, talents, abilities, and opportunities for service that make you the wonderful person you are. ‘It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for His good pleasure’ (Philippians 2:13). Our body would not be complete without you and what you contribute to our group. Through our care of one another and our mutual support of one another’s personalities, gifts, and areas of service, God is able to do more with and through us than we could ever do by ourselves. The body of Christ is strengthened and more people can hear about and experience the love of Christ through our lives. Accept the challenge to be shepherds of God’s flock and glorify the Lamb! As we go, let’s extend to one another the hand of Christian fellowship and encouragement and affirm one another.”

#### **About the Writer**

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## **Rejoice in Your Salvation**

### **Galatians 2:7-9**

*...when they recognized the grace given to me...Gal 3:7b*

The letter of Paul to the Galatians tells us in a very understandable way the real meaning of the New Testament: through the Spirit, by faith, we're sanctified by the grace given to us by God, and then living in obedience to Him.

Paul mentioned several times that he was what he was by the grace of God. He was aware that he was an instrument chosen by God to bring God's name before the Gentiles, and that God's grace was given to him, to bring them the news of the boundless riches of Christ.

We, as daughters of God, feeling the blessing of His grace in our lives, may experience today, what Paul did among the Gentiles a long time ago.

By the grace given to us by God, we can teach our children and youth the right path to a healthy Christian life. By the grace given to us by God, we can proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ wherever we are. By the grace given to us by God, we (as someone said once) may be the change we want to see in the world, and by this, we are helping the world to be a better place to live.

**PRAYER:**

*O God, our father, give us grace to share your word with others. This we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Rosy Aja  
Florida Region