

The Helping Hand, Volume 142, No. 2
March - May 2026
Social Teachings of the Church

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Steve Osborn, Editor

The purposes of *The Helping Hand in Bible Study* are:

- to provide for adults and older youth a quarterly for personal or group use in gaining a continually renewed knowledge of the Bible, Christian beliefs and church life, particularly that characteristic of Seventh Day Baptists.
- to enable such study of Christian convictions as will develop the students' abilities to share their faith.
- to strengthen appreciation of Seventh Day Baptist heritage and conviction of the Sabbath's truths.
- to nurture moral and spiritual aspects of daily living and decision-making.
- to provide resources for daily devotions.
- to encourage the educational ministry of Seventh Day Baptists around the world.

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Correspondence:

Correspondence about content may be sent to: Editor Steve Osborn, The Helping Hand, 6358 Stagecoach Ave., Firestone, CO 80504. You may also reach him by email: HelpingHandEditor@gmail.com.

Editor's Page

The spring quarter is an intriguing study of social issues and gives opportunity to consider how the church brings Christ to bear on these issues in our day and time.

Unit I: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors.

Five lessons that challenge learners to work together toward common ends in the home, the community, and relationships both local and global on the basis of mutual love and respect. Our responsibility to and for one another extends to minding our own bodily health, serving one another as to serve Christ, understanding the God-given diversity in the world's populace, and "one anothering" each other toward a lasting peace.

Unit II: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Family and Community.

Four lessons on the promise of eternal life as well as our obligations in this life. Lesson 6 focuses on the promise of bodily resurrection for followers of Jesus. Resurrection faith empowers the believer to honor the order God has provided through the appointment of leaders, yet also emboldens us to stand up to leaders who flout their God-given authority. Lessons 8 and 9 turn to the place of children in the home and their example as models of Kingdom life. Parents and caregivers are enjoined to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Unit III: Fulfilling Our Obligations to God and Society.

Five lessons on the Christian's duty to the broader society in the context of allegiance to God in Christ. In their daily rounds, believers are given opportunities to fulfill vocations, to strive toward a balance of work and rest, and to worship in Spirit and in truth. Lessons 11, 12, and 13 explore biblical perspectives on labor, individual and corporate, and biblical texts that warn against the perils of overwork and emphasize the necessity for and the joy of rest and recreation, retreating to a place apart, and setting aside a time that is holy. The quarter concludes with a lesson that emphasizes the need to assemble before the Lord God regularly and return our thanks for all good gifts from God's hands.

May God bless your faithful study of His Word this quarter!

Steve

1. Recognizing Our Debt to Others

Mark 12:28-34; James 2:14-17

Daily Bible Meditations

Denovia McKenzie

Sunday

Nehemiah 4:15-23

When the children of God work in unity, our work is effective. Unity in the body of believers pushes back the powers of darkness. The Israelites were effective in re-building the wall because each person played a part in ensuring the work was completed, while also being on guard and watchful of the enemy. How different it would have been if Nehemiah had been trying to build the wall and standing guard all by himself. As believers, each of us has an essential role in God's work. We may not all have the same gifts and abilities, but we all have an essential role in representing Christ well on earth.

Monday

Romans 15:1-17

I am so glad God's saving grace was extended beyond the walls of the Jews. His lovingkindness, expressed through Jesus Christ, makes no distinction between Jew or Gentile. The example of Jesus shows us that we, too, should welcome others into the family of Christ. We should not have a pious attitude as though we are better than others simply because we are Christians. The fact that we are Christians should compel us to take an interest in those who do not know Christ and to welcome them into His family. Even among our brothers and sisters in Christ, none of us is better than the other. If we should find that we are "stronger" than another, we should extend help, always putting others above ourselves.

Tuesday

Proverbs 3:27-32

As Christians, it is our responsibility to show love and kindness to others whenever we can. The passage reminds us not to withhold kindness from others when we have the ability to give. We should give and show love, even when the recipient has been unkind to us. What a challenge! How have you responded to the needs around you? Our call to show kindness may not always mean we are giving physical gifts or money but could mean being in constant prayer for someone or simply sharing an encouraging word.

Wednesday

Ecclesiastes 5:4-8

In confessing our sins against God, we should be mindful not merely to say what we think God wants to hear. In so doing, we may make promises or vows we cannot keep. It is not because of our

vows or promises that God saves and forgives our sins. God knows how weak and unworthy we are in our humanity—so much so that He gave Jesus as our sacrifice. It is through Jesus that our sins are forgiven. May we be reminded of this sacrifice when repenting of our sins, so that in our repentance, we do not sin further with vows we cannot fulfill.

Thursday

Philemon 10-21

Paul made it his duty to make a petition of mercy to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. How willing are we to get a “muddy” for others? Are we willing to take on the debts of the guilty by extending mercy and petitioning for mercy on their behalf? Onesimus was guilty not only of running away, but it appears he may have also stolen from Philemon. Yet, Paul regarded Onesimus’s salvation as more important; he wanted Philemon to see Onesimus in a new light. The mercy and forgiveness shown in this passage are a great example of how God shows us mercy—forgiving our sins and not holding our past against us. We should do likewise—always ready to show mercy and forgiveness to others.

Friday

James 2:14-26

Throughout Scripture, we see God’s heart for the poor and those in need. Jesus reminded us that when we give to those who are in need, we give to Him (Matthew 25:40). Whenever we are in a position to give to those who are in need, we should do so without reluctance. When God provides for us, we can be the instruments He uses to bless those in need. We should always pray for others, but we should also ask God for guidance on how we can be a blessing to them. We need not worry about how God will provide again after we have given to those in need. “If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you!” (Proverbs 19:17, NLT).

Sabbath

Mark 12:28-34

While preparing for this passage, I was reminded of the song, “They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love.” The way we love others, not only other Christians, but even and especially those who subscribe to different beliefs than ours, is how we make our light shine. The sacrificial love that is required of us is one we cannot accomplish by ourselves. We are commanded first to love God with all our hearts. When we love God, He teaches us how to love others rightly, without bitterness or selfish motives. Our love for God compels us to love others genuinely.

Study Mark 12:28-34; James 2:14-17

Background Mk 12:28-34; Phil 2:1-8; Rom. 15:1-7; Js 2:14-17

Devotional Proverbs 28:18-22

Key Verse

“To love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33).

Heart of the Lesson

We often have difficulties developing and maintaining healthy, wholesome relationships with one another. How can we build strong social bonds that sustain healthy relationships? Mark’s Gospel points to Jesus’s commands, which stress the love of God and neighbor, while James stressed how works are essential to healthy relationships.

Questions for Studying the Text

1. What actions or attitudes have you observed preventing healthy relationships from forming or lasting in families or groups?
2. Based on his question, what do you think was the motivation of the scribe in coming to Jesus in Mark 12 (compare Matthew 22:35)? How did Jesus’s answer redirect the conversation? What do you make of the scribe’s response and Jesus’ statement, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (v.34)?
3. Why do you think Jesus connected Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18? How is our love for God inseparable from love for others? Which is harder for you personally: loving God wholeheartedly or loving difficult people faithfully?
4. In James 2:14-17, what problem is identified between what someone says and does? How did James’s concern for the vulnerable reveal a breakdown in healthy relationships? What did he assume faith *should* naturally produce in relationships?
5. How did Jesus and James together show that healthy relationships are a spiritual issue, not merely a social one? If outsiders evaluated our faith only by how we treat one another, what would they conclude about the reality of our love for God?
6. What practices help align love for God with love for people? What is one concrete action you could take this week to express love to a “neighbor”?

Understanding and Living

Steve Hinton

How to Treat Others

We all have neighbors, right? That is a fair and honest statement. Some neighbors have close relationships, while others...not so much, for a variety of reasons. A question to be answered is: "What do we owe to our neighbors?" Another way we could ask that question is: "How should we treat our neighbors?" More specifically, what does the Bible say about how we should treat neighbors?

To answer this, we must first define: "What is a neighbor?" In our contemporary context, "neighbor" generally refers to someone who lives nearby. However, in the context of this passage, I believe it should be more broadly defined as "others". If that is the case, then the question boils down to: "How are we supposed to treat others? And do we owe anything to the other people we encounter during our day-to-day lives?"

When I was a child, my mother taught me many things. Among them was the concept of treating others as I wanted to be treated—in other words, treating others with respect, dignity, honesty, and politeness. There are other descriptors as well. We could say, "Be kind to others." And I

believe we can find scriptures to substantiate that train of thought. I think most of us can recall these lessons being taught to us by various adults or other influences.

What Do We Owe?

The concept of treating others well is thoroughly covered in Scripture and can clearly be seen in the encounter where the scribe approached Jesus in Mark 12:28-34. Jesus's response to the question about the greatest commandment sets the order of things. First, we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. In Matthew's version, Jesus said that "the second is *like it*, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:39). By the way Jesus stated these things, we can conclude that one complements the other. By loving our neighbor, we are demonstrating a concept that can also reflect our love for God. In the same way, if we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, we will in turn treat others accordingly.

This concept brings up questions, such as: "What, then, do we owe our neighbor," which is an interesting way to think about it, really. Contemplate that question for a moment: What do we

owe others? For me, the word “owe” is of particular importance. From a contemporary standpoint, we can view it as owing others the right to be treated well. I tend to look at it a little differently. If we truly love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, then in my view, treating others well would not even be a question. As a natural by-product of loving God, we adopt His nature—the nature of Christ—and love becomes our nature. The way we treat others would reflect that nature.

James promoted a similar concept when he wrote, “faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself” (James 2:17). And he used the example of how we treat someone in need. James was not saying that we add to our faith by what we do. He was saying that what we do is naturally shaped by our faith. Faith necessarily changes us into the image of Christ and our works demonstrate the validity of that change and thereby our faith.

Getting Practical

Let’s break this down into a practical simplistic form. Imagine you are baking a cake and only have one cup of sugar. The local grocery store is also out of sugar. As you are gathering your ingredients, there is a knock at your door.

Your next-door neighbor is there, asking if they can borrow a cup of sugar. Do you give them your sugar? After all, your child is really looking forward to that cake. There are two possible answers: 1) “Yes, you can have the sugar,” or 2) “No, sorry, I don’t have any to spare.” After all, you already have plans for that sugar. If they had been 5 minutes later, you would have already used it. We can see an opportunity here to be selfish or to share. Which answer better exemplifies that we love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength?

For another example, let’s travel back in time to the playground at school. The kid that has been bullying us all year just received word of a tragedy in his family. He begins to cry and is very upset. All the other kids have run away from him, and he is standing alone with his emotions. It would be easy to walk into the school and leave him alone; after all he is the mean kid and has hurt you multiple times. On the other hand, here is a perfect opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ by showing compassion and offering comfort to someone clearly hurting. There are a variety of principles that this scenario reflects. However, we are just

looking at this from a standpoint of loving God with our heart, soul, mind and strength. Which one demonstrates loving our neighbor as ourselves?

These examples may seem clear-cut and a bit elementary. However, when we look at them and get honest about how we have dealt with things like this in our own lives, we can see an opportunity to really analyze our hearts and actions as it pertains to treating others as a neighbor.

Do we owe it to our neighbors to love and treat them well? I do not think this is the question we should ask. The question should be: “Does the way I treat and love my neighbor reflect and demonstrate that I love God with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength?” A follow up question could be: “How often do I consider how I treat others as being reflective of my heart towards God?”

As humans we sometimes fall short of realizing how the way we treat and act toward others is directly related to the actual condition of our own hearts in relationship with Christ. If we are to truly be followers of Jesus, the way we treat our neighbors must be reflective of His nature and not our own human selfishness.

Hints for Teaching

Lesson Goals

1. **Knowing:** Critique the gap between knowing the “first commandment” (Mark 12) and putting it into practice (James 2).
2. **Loving:** Identify in one’s attitudes and motives a sincere love for God, self, and others.
3. **Serving:** Assess the immediate needs of your community and provide goods and services to meet those needs.

Teaching Activity

Distribute scenario cards such as: 1) a misunderstanding has caused distance between friends; 2) someone in your group feels overlooked; 3) a need is shared indirectly but not clearly asked for. Have pairs or small groups role-play a loving response to each scenario. Emphasize actions, tone, and listening. Afterwards, reflect as a group: What makes these scenarios difficult? What actions help restore connection? How do they reflect love for God?

Looking Forward

We have been challenged to live out love for God in the context of relationships with others. Next, we will consider our responsibility to be physically and spiritually fit for the sake of God and others.

2. Keeping Fit for the Sake of Others

Daniel 1:8-17; 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Daily Bible Meditations

Denovia McKenzie

Sunday

Proverbs 12:1-2, 10-14

God is omniscient; nothing escapes His eyes. He knows not just all our actions, but our intentions as well. When we are obedient to His commands, we will obtain favor from Him. When we work, we will reap the rewards of our faithfulness. When we are obedient to God and are disciplined in our speech, it will not be a snare to us as it is to the wicked, because we will not set a trap of lies for ourselves. Whatever work we do, or even the words we say, we should ensure that God is honored through it. May we strive to please God in our work and be disciplined to win favor from the Lord.

Monday

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

We have freedom of choice; God allows us to make decisions outside of His will and His best for us. However, those choices have consequences for us and for the body of Christ. The way we treat our physical bodies matters because they are temples of the Holy Spirit. Freedom of choice does not mean we should engage in sin. If we eat nutritious foods, we will be healthy. On the contrary, if we are constantly eating sugary foods, we may end up with cavities or even diabetes. Living within the boundaries God outlines in His Word protects us from undesired consequences. More importantly, it helps us to live lives that glorify God.

Tuesday

1 Corinthians 9:19-27

Like the Apostle Paul, we should be disciplined in our choices. We have a responsibility to tell others about Christ. However, we should not approach individuals ignorantly nor arrogantly. Before sharing the gospel, we can take time to learn and respect a person's culture so that we can be effective in our witness. Additionally, the way we live our lives is a great witness for those who look on. The choices we make in the things we do, the places we visit, and the words we say affect the way others receive our witness. True, we are not perfect and we will fall; however, sinning should not be the pattern of our lives. We should strive daily to live lives that please God.

Wednesday

Psalms 139:1-12

God knows everything about us; He knows our thoughts, motives and actions; nothing is hidden from Him. How amazing it is that

God knows everything about us, yet He still loves us. There is nothing we can do that will make God love us any less or any more than He already does. His love is without conditions. We never have to worry that God will leave us; He has promised He will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Even when we walk away from Him and try to do things our own way, He pursues us.

Thursday

Psalm 139:13-24

We have a Heavenly Father who cares deeply for each of us. There are 8.2 billion people on earth, yet He looks after each of us individually. We were all created uniquely by Him, with varying features that identify us. The world elevates some features and personalities above others. But each of us is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (v.14) by God. He did not make a mistake when He created you or me; He reminds us that the way He created us is just right and that He cares for us deeply. The world cannot define your beauty or disregard your personality because the world did not create you; God did, and His thoughts toward you are precious.

Friday

1 Timothy 4:7-12

When athletes prepare for an event, they spend hours training to ensure they are well-prepared for the task. In this passage, we are encouraged to put the same effort into pursuing godliness. While not all of us are athletes, we have all worked tirelessly at some point to achieve a temporal reward. How much more should we strive for godliness, knowing that our eternal reward is greater than anything in this life. In so doing, we should make the Word of God our final authority in all we do, not giving in to false doctrines and teachings. We should stand firm on the Word of God, ensuring we study it and pursue godliness.

Sabbath

Daniel 1:8-17

Though Daniel and his friends had been taken from their homes to live as captives in a foreign land, they were still determined to honor God. As Christians, we live in an evil world with all its temptations to stray from God’s standards. We may say to ourselves that we do not have any choice but to surrender to temptation. But, as with Daniel and his friends, we can always choose to take a stand against evil. Some of us are in school or work in environments where the temptation to surrender to evil is strong. Nonetheless, we should always strive to please God by saying no to evil; by doing so, we give Him glory and honor.

Study Daniel 1:8-17; 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Background Daniel 1; 1 Corinthians 9; 1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 2

Devotional Titus 1:5-9

Key Verse

Rather, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily training is just slightly beneficial, but godliness is beneficial for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come (1 Timothy 4:7b-8).

Heart of the Lesson

We desire to be strong and healthy in mind, body, and spirit. What can enable us to keep physically and spiritually fit? The Book of Daniel and Paul's First Letter to Timothy both stress the significance of striving for physical and spiritual fitness as pleasing to God and beneficial to others.

Questions for Studying the Text

1. In what ways have you seen poor mental, physical, or spiritual health affect families, churches, or teams? Why is it important to consider how our health impacts others?
2. How might exile, pressure to assimilate, and loss of control affect the mental, physical, and spiritual health of Daniel and his companions? Why would food from the king's table symbolize more than diet alone?
3. What does it mean that Daniel "made up his mind" not to defile himself (v.8)? What risks did Daniel and his friends take by proposing an alternative plan? How did restraint and wisdom work together in Daniel's approach?
4. In what ways can we see God's involvement in Daniel's situation? How did their discipline benefit themselves, those in authority, and the wider community?
5. What does Paul's instruction to Timothy about discipline suggest about effort and intention (v.7)? How is spiritual discipline similar to physical conditioning? How did Daniel and Paul show that physical and spiritual health are interconnected?
6. Where do you invest most in your personal well-being: body, mind, or spirit? How does personal discipline enable us to serve others more effectively? How might God use your commitment to health to bless others and strengthen your witness?

Understanding and Living

Steve Hinton

For the Team

For those of you who know me, this will not come as a big surprise—I love football! I have been involved in it in some capacity since I was 7 years old. You may already be asking, “What does this have to do with our lesson?” Well, a lot as it turns out. I recall when I first started playing tackle football in seventh grade. Our coach required us to lift weights and keep track of what we ate and drank. What was the point? Well, it all came down to being in shape physically to adequately do a job.

In this case, the job was on the football field. In football, if one person does not execute his responsibility properly, it can have an adverse effect on the productivity of the team. We had to train our bodies well, not just for our own sake, but for the sake of the whole team.

For Others

Daniel and his friends had an understanding that the others in their situation lacked. They understood that by keeping themselves healthy by following God’s law, they would be in better shape to do His will. I believe this is an important concept to grasp.

Ask yourself this question: “Would I want to be on a baseball team where the players did not know how to throw?” Throwing is kind of an important part of the game, right? Just like athletes, who need to be fit to fulfill their duties, we need to be spiritually fit to do our part and work for the Kingdom of God.

Do we benefit personally from being fit or in shape? Well, certainly, the answer is yes. The follow up question is: “Do *others* benefit from us being in shape?” In our sports examples, the answer is, again, clearly yes. When was the last time you did something to benefit your own fitness with the thought of how it would affect others? I believe I have read somewhere that having others in mind as motivation is considered a good thing.

What about spiritual fitness? Do we benefit from being in healthy spiritual condition? Once again, the answer is clearly yes. Same follow up question: “Do others benefit from us as individuals being spiritually fit?” Though it may not be as obvious, the answer is a definitive yes!

Let’s take a deeper look at this concept. Ask yourself another question: “How well

can I share the Word of God with others if I've never read it?" The answer is, of course, not very well. To carry out instructions or purpose, isn't it important that we understand what that instruction and purpose is? As Christians, we often encounter people who make various claims when it comes to topics that can be viewed as being of a religious nature. If we are not fit and equipped to handle those claims, we can quickly find ourselves in a situation where we are led astray or else look for a quick exit from the conversation. However, if we are spiritually fit and competent in our understanding, we can look forward to those challenges as an opportunity to affect the other person positively for the Kingdom of Heaven.

One of the examples Daniel set was prioritizing what is in accordance with God's will above man's societal conventions. In 1 Timothy 4: 7–8, we learn of a directive to Timothy that is like what Daniel and his friends achieved by holding fast and doing what was right rather than what was "typical." Essentially, Paul was telling Timothy to reject that which cannot be proven as good, but to work instead for what is godly. In these verses

we are reminded that godly fitness is superior to physical fitness. Physical fitness has benefits that are limited and temporary. However, godliness yields profitability for all things both today and for eternity.

Proper Motivation

In these two cases, Daniel and Timothy, we see evidence that there is an emphasis on the benefit to others. Yes, we will benefit. However, it is greater when what we do also benefits others. It is a concept we see time and again in Scripture. So, now we get back to the questions. When was the last time you did something for your own physical, mental, or spiritual health? When was the last time you did it with the primary motivation being to benefit others?

I think of my own schooling. I recall when I first started classes in SDBU. I was very motivated to complete the program. Looking back, that initial motivation had more to do with me and my family than serving God and benefiting others. Those first few classes were tough and took a lot out of me mentally, physically, and spiritually. At some point, my motivation shifted. I began looking it as first following God's will and then

seeking ways to use my training to benefit others. Once the motivation lined up with what God tells us should motivate us, things improved greatly and more opportunities for service arose.

One thing I have realized over the past several years is that when I follow God's will over my own, things have a way of benefitting not only myself but others as well. Sometimes, we need to be reminded that following Christ means placing others above ourselves. We have a perfect example of this in Scripture; His name is Jesus. His motivation was to obey His Father and His obedience provided for us a path back to the Father that had been interrupted by sin.

Scripture tells us to be healthy—healthy body, healthy mind, and healthy spirit. When all three of those things are occurring at the same time, we can feel complete. When one area is sick, the other two are affected as well. It is important that we strive to be healthy in all three aspects of our lives—not just for our own benefit, but for the glory of God and the benefit of those we are impacting for the Kingdom on a daily basis.

Hints for Teaching

Lesson Goals

1. **Knowing:** Map the interdependence of physical and spiritual health at every life stage.
2. **Loving:** Honor one's body as a spiritual practice.
3. **Serving:** Inventory daily habits and make adjustments to optimize their physical and spiritual well-being.

Teaching Activity

Consider the following case studies with the questions, "What imbalance is present? What disciplines are missing? How would balance benefit others?": 1) A leader is spiritually knowledgeable but physically exhausted; 2) A believer prioritizes physical health but neglects spiritual growth; 3) A church struggles because key members lack emotional resilience. Invite participants to commit to a "training plan" by writing down one spiritual discipline to strengthen, one physical habit to support it, and one person or group this will help them to serve.

Looking Forward

We have understood how disciplining ourselves physically and spiritually can benefit others as well. Next, we will be confronted with the command to generosity.

3. Helping Neighbors in Need

Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Matthew 25:42-45

Daily Bible Meditations

Gem Barton

Sunday

Psalm 12

We live in a world where the wealthy control the majority of the earth's resources while the needs of the poor go largely unaddressed. The psalmist, David, was confident that God will defend the needy amid all the wickedness of the world. Since we are God's hands and feet here on the earth, we must use the resources with which God has blessed us to help those in need. We must also help those in need of spiritual healing and justice get the help they need. Proverbs 19:17 says, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them."

Monday

Luke 12:13-21, 33-34

Jesus taught a valuable lesson about storing up wealth on earth. The rich man rebuilt his barns to store his excess, not realizing that his life was about to end, and that his accumulated wealth would be of no use to him. Today we call accumulation of excess items "hoarding". We have things that we have not used in ages and are still reluctant to give them to someone who can use them. We are encouraged to give to the needs of others. In so doing, we can store up wealth in a place where moth or rust cannot destroy it, neither can thieves break in and steal it (Matthew 6:19).

Tuesday

Leviticus 19:11-18

God requires us to treat our neighbors fairly and justly. But who are our neighbors? Jesus responded to this question by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. Jesus asked the lawyer who was a neighbor to the one who fell among thieves. His answer was the one that showed mercy. He was admonished to do the same. Our neighbors are not just those who live next to us. We must be merciful (neighborly) to everyone we meet and love our neighbor as we love ourselves (v.18). In what ways can we demonstrate genuine love and concern for everyone we meet?

Wednesday

James 2:8-13

For us to fulfill the royal law, we must love our neighbors as we love ourselves. The other side of this coin is showing favorit-

ism. If we find ourselves favoring one person over another, we are committing a sin. Earlier in this chapter, James described favoritism. He said it is to welcome a person who is nicely dressed and seat them in the best seat while allowing the poor man in filthy clothes to stand or to sit on the floor. We must intentionally keep these laws; they reflect God's character. If we keep all and break one, James warns us that we are guilty of all (v.10).

Thursday

Luke 10:25-37

Everyone is potentially our neighbor. This may be a lot to take in, but as we revisit the parable that Jesus taught the lawyer, we will learn more about neighborly actions. In the parable, Jesus highlighted the behaviors of the priest and the Levite, who both knew the law but bypassed the man who needed help. The Samaritan, who would have been less likely to stop to help a Jew, did. The Samaritan's care of the man who needed help demonstrates the actions of a true neighbor more than simply living nearby. We are challenged to take care of the needs of everyone we meet; they are all our neighbors.

Friday

Deuteronomy 15:4-11

The children of Israel were commanded to be compassionate to the ones among them who were in need. They were required to be open-handed rather than hard-hearted and tight-fisted. When our resources are limited and we struggle to meet the needs of our own families, it may seem impossible to take care of the needs of the poor. But the Israelites were commanded to give generously, without a grudging heart. The command came with a promise attached; God said if they did this, the work of their hands would be blessed. Does this apply to us? Yes, it does.

Sabbath

Matthew 25:41-45

Every time we give food, drink, clothing, shelter, or deliverance to a stranger, we are doing it unto Jesus. Another place, Scripture says, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2, NIV). We must see Christ in the people around us, even those who seem pesky. There are many scams in our society that can make us cautious to invite strangers in our space or to even give financially. We should not let this prevent us from meeting needs of strangers; but let us trust the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Study Deuteronomy 15:4-11; Matthew 25:41-45

Background Deut 15; Matt 25; Lk 10; James 1:27; 2:14-17

Devotional Exodus 20:12-17

Key Verse

“For the poor will not cease to exist in the land; therefore I am commanding you, saying, ‘You shall fully open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land’” (Deuteronomy 15:11).

Heart of the Lesson

We sometimes have doubts and uncertainties about helping those who turn to us for assistance. What determines our willingness and standards for helping others? The Deuteronomy passage and the verses from Matthew 25 reveal God’s command to give generously to those in need.

Questions for Studying the Text

1. When someone asks you for help, what factors most influence your decision to respond—or not? What doubts, fears, or uncertainties most often keep you from helping others in need?
2. What conditions were connected to there being “no poor” among God’s people (Deuteronomy 15:4–5)? What attitudes and actions were forbidden when encountering a brother in need (v.7-9)? How do these warnings reveal common human excuses for withholding help?
3. In what manner are God’s people to give (v.10-11)? What motivation for generosity is offered? What would it look like to give “without a grudging heart” in your current stage of life?
4. Who was speaking in the Matthew 25 passage and in what setting did this teaching occur? What needs are mentioned that were ignored by those being addressed? Why was neglect to be treated as seriously as active wrongdoing?
5. What does Jesus’s identification with “the least of these” (v.45) reveal about God’s view of human dignity? How might Jesus be inviting you to see Him in people you normally overlook?
6. How do these passages challenge the way you think about personal resources such as money, time, or energy? How can you discern wise generosity without using caution as an excuse for inaction? What is one practical step you can take this week to respond more faithfully to a neighbor in need?

Understanding and Living Jennifer Lewis-Berg

What an incredible world we are a part of these days. Every kind of knowledge and many solutions are at our technical fingertips. Access to the answers to any question about any subject is instantaneous. We can know what is going on all around the world. We see the results of loss, of war, of displacement, of grinding poverty and despair. We know what is out there and what needs to be done. And yet, stepping outside our comfort zones does not happen. Pulling the trigger on generosity, particularly in giving of our time and effort, often does not come at all.

God's Generous Attitude

We sometimes have doubts and uncertainties about helping those who turn to us for assistance. What determines our willingness and standards for helping others? According to christianitypath.com, "Helping those who are vulnerable and in need is a crucial teaching in the Bible. God calls us to care for orphans, widows, and the oppressed. We are reminded that these individuals often have no one to advocate for them. By extending our hands and hearts to help those who are struggling, we fulfill God's command to love and to do justice. Embracing the marginalized strengthens our faith and serves as an expression of God's compassion."

Give generously—this is a strong admonition. We can plug this into almost every part of our lives. As so many scriptures tell us, the poor will always be with us. It is vital as believers that we know not only what God admonishes us to do, but why and how we are to do it. Repeatedly in the Old Testament, God's people were instructed in detail about generosity. "Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to" (Deuteronomy 15:10, NIV).

When we have a grudging heart, with an impatient and irritated attitude towards those who "impose" themselves on us with their experiences of poverty and homelessness, and with our frustration with being obligated to help them, we are in direct opposition to God's command. And, like every other admonishment that comes from God to us, it is literally for our own good to be generous, to step outside of ourselves, and think kindly towards others.

We need to seek spiritual exercises where we are in pursuit of God's will and not our own. If we never go to the gym, it is difficult to bench press 100 pounds. If we never get into the

swimming pool, it is hard to perfect the Australian Crawl. We need to rely on the Holy Spirit to motivate our use of certain generosity muscles. It gets easier to sit around and do nothing if we never get out of the chair. We must look outside of our comfortable lives and develop the muscles that strengthen our generosity towards others.

Biblical Economic Justice

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17, NIV). We are commanded to follow the principles of economic justice, emphasizing fairness, equity, and the moral responsibility to care for the poor and vulnerable. Justice means that all people have access to a dignified life. Today the working poor, who have two to three jobs, are oppressed and exploited by their rich employers who hoard wealth and live indulgent lives. James called the church’s preference for the rich “sin” (James 2:9). While John wrote, “If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?” (1 John 3:17, NIV).

We may recognize a discrepancy between our twenty-first century idea of economic fairness and justice and that which

is proclaimed in both testaments of the Bible. We may be more likely to rationalize not getting involved with helping others when we subscribe to the idea that everyone has what they deserve. Those who work for what they have deserve more and those who seem to avoid responsibility deserve whatever they get. Our modern culture does not place random acts of kindness and generosity high on any list. The notion of defending “the weak and the fatherless; uphold[ing] the cause of the poor and the oppressed” (Psalm 82:3, NIV) seems to have little or no value in our current society.

The Joy of Sharing with Others

We are not instructed to perform generous acts simply so that we can feel better about ourselves. Reaching outside of ourselves to give to someone else mirrors Christ’s loving generosity to us. What was a basic trait of our perfect Savior—living a life for others—can be crafted and developed within each of us. And it is the Holy Spirit who will nurture and care for that unselfishness in us.

How do we respond emotionally when we see a person who is homeless, hungry, or in need? What is the difference between feeling pity and joy? Can we practice replacing our pity or even hesitation with actions

that create joy within us? Can we put aside, even temporarily, our need to have feelings about generosity? Can we realize that the very nature of the generous act is its own reward? “Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done” (Proverbs 19:17, NIV)

Strategies for Justice

God sees our kindness and our actions towards others. As believers, we are encouraged to act together in community. When we gather with purpose to help others, we gain strength by combining ideas and resources. Working in groups will result in broader and more successful outreach. As a church group, we can connect with other community groups to assist those deserving of our help.

In Luke 10, Jesus clearly illustrated, in telling the parable of the Good Samaritan, that we are to show unconditional mercy to those in need of our help. It does not matter who they are—if their culture, tribe, or politics differs from ours. It is our responsibility as Christians to step out in faith and work towards supporting and encouraging those in our community who have little or nothing. We need to begin a discussion within our churches and look for ways to implement plans to support the work of justice in our communities.

Hints for Teaching

Lesson Goals

1. **Knowing:** Compare God’s definition of economic justice with a twenty-first-century perspective.
2. **Loving:** Discover true joy in sharing with others without expecting anything in return.
3. **Serving:** Implement a strategy that addresses a specific injustice in your community.

Teaching Activity

Ask participants to silently complete this sentence: “I hesitate to help someone in need when...” Invite volunteers to share responses (no names or explanations required). Create a list of common themes. Which reasons came up most often? Which of these are practical concerns, and which are heart issues? How might these concerns have existed in biblical times as well? Invite volunteers to share one intention on seeing Christ in others. Close with a prayer asking God for: open hearts; wise discernment; courage to give generously and joyfully.

Looking Forward

We have challenged our fears and doubts about helping those in need. Next, Peter and Paul will confront our racial and social biases with God’s impartiality and acceptance.

4. All Are One in Christ

Acts 10:9-15, 30-35; Galatians 3:28-29

Daily Bible Meditations

Gem Barton

Sunday

1 Samuel 18:1-5

We sometimes have friends that feel more like family. At age 11, I had a classmate whose mother had died and her father had remarried to an unkind lady. My friend and her siblings were ill-treated—even being deprived of food. One day, my friend lost consciousness at school and I accompanied her to the hospital. From that day we became inseparable; I even shared my meals with her. Decades later, we still enjoy the bond of friendship. From that experience, I can understand the immediate bond between Jonathan and David that was sealed by a covenant. I pray we can all enjoy a soul-bonding relationship like theirs.

Monday

1 John 4:7-16

John, urged his readers to “perfect” (or fulfill) the love of God by loving one another. This seems appropriate because John was known as the one who was loved by Jesus (John 13:23). Love is an action that is ongoing. We cannot love today and not love tomorrow. God taught us how to love by the way He loved us. He sent His only Son to bear our sin by His death on the cross; that is the supreme act of love! John declared that one who does not love does not know God because God is love (v.8). How can we show love to those around us today? Is there anyone you are struggling to love? How can God’s love inspire you?

Tuesday

1 John 4:17-21

Did you notice how John pointed out that our love for God is expressed in the way we love each other? When Jesus was asked which is the greatest commandment, He answered that loving the Lord with all your heart is the first and greatest commandment and loving your neighbor as yourself is the second (Matthew 22:36-40). This led John to say that if we say we love God and cannot show love to our brother or sister we are lying (v. 20). Let us make it a priority this week to love God by being obedient to His Word and by loving each other as we love ourselves.

Wednesday

Isaiah 56:3-8

God is sovereign—all things are possible with Him. God is impartial—what He has done for others He can do for you. God

says He will restore all people to Himself, and that one day everyone will worship Him. There is room for the stranger and the eunuch, once they have decided to serve God and honor the Sabbath. God declared through the prophet, Isaiah, that just as He gathered the remnant of Israel, He will gather others unto Himself. Let us praise God today for including us in His plan for salvation and for granting us the privilege of worshiping Him.

Thursday

Psalm 133–134

David described the unity of believers as a beautiful experience. He likened that fellowship to the anointing oil that was poured on Aaron's head that ran down to the hem of his garment and to the dew that descends on Mount Zion. Have you ever experienced a congregation of believers in united worship? Lanny Wolfe expressed it well with the lyrics, "I love the thrill that I feel when I get together with God's wonderful people." I hope we can experience that thrill this Sabbath as we respond to the psalmist's call to worship and bless the Lord in the sanctuary (Psalm 134:2).

Friday

Galatians 3:25-29

We are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Are we praising God today that we are no longer under a "schoolmaster"—having to purchase an animal to sacrifice each time we sin. When I think of the inconvenience and how much it would have cost to present a sacrifice, I am grateful to God that we are now no longer in need of the Law to be our guardian. There is beauty in the inclusiveness of the gospel of Christ. There is no special treatment for Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female. We all belong together to Christ.

Sabbath

Acts 10:9-15, 30-35

This is one of my favorite narratives in the Bible. I particularly like how God spoke with both Peter and Cornelius about this "evangelistic outreach". It brought together Jews and Gentiles. If God had not spoken to Peter in a dream, he may not have gone to Cornelius's house. Have you ever met a person who does all the right things but has not acknowledged Jesus as their Savior? What would be our responsibility in such a situation? God accepts us all, so we must be prepared to tell everyone about Jesus—especially those who come from a different demographic.

Study Acts 10:9-15, 30-35; Galatians 3:28-29

Background Ruth 1; Jn 4; Acts 10:1–11:18; Rom 1; Gal 3:28-29

Devotional Colossians 3:1-11

Key Verse

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

Heart of the Lesson

Racial and social biases disrupt relationships among people. How can we learn to accept and respect one another's uniqueness and differences? Peter's vision in Acts and Paul's spiritual revelations in Galatians clearly indicate God's impartiality and acceptance of all persons in Christ Jesus.

Questions for Studying the Text

1. In what ways have you seen racial, social, or cultural bias disrupt unity within churches, schools, or families?
2. What details stand out in Peter's vision (Acts 10:9-15)? What emotions or reactions did Peter express? How did he justify his resistance to God's command? What does this reveal about his beliefs and upbringing?
3. What events led to Peter's understanding of the vision? How does Peter's statement in Acts 10:34 challenge ideas of favoritism, superiority, or exclusion? What does this passage reveal about God's character?
4. What biases and prejudices are represented in Paul's list of divisions (Galatians 3:28)? How does belonging to Christ redefine identity and inheritance? Does Galatians 3:28 erase human differences, or does it redefine how we value them? Explain.
5. How do Peter's experience and Paul's teaching reinforce the same spiritual truth from different perspectives? How can we honor people's uniqueness without treating differences as barriers? Where might God be calling you—like Peter—to step outside your comfort zone?
6. What would change in your daily life if you truly believed that every person you encounter is fully accepted by God? What specific action will you take this week to demonstrate that "all are one in Christ"?

Understanding and Living Jennifer Lewis-Berg

Ending Prejudice

There is a distinct contrast between Old Testament teaching regarding association with non-Jews and the stories of Jesus and the early church. In the former days, Jews were shielded by the Law, which instructed and protected the people of God against external threats. Within the New Testament, God's impartiality and acceptance of all persons in Christ Jesus is clearly indicated.

Paul argued for the priority of God's promise to Abraham and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, and about the provisional function of the Law in relation to God's promise (Galatians 3). He concluded, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

Peter's vision in Acts 10 confirmed this with the declaration, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy" (v.15). His subsequent encounter with Cornelius led Peter to declare, "God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him" (v.34b-35). Rather than a change, we can see in this the fulfillment of God's original promise to Abraham: "And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3c).

Openness and Love

One of society's greatest sins is racial and social prejudice and the discrimination that follows. Despite all our cultural and social advances, we are still able to perfect the narrow bias that keeps us separate from each other. Our intolerances and prejudices are born out of fear: someone is different and therefore less than we are; someone else's culture pushes up against our natural belief that our own ways are best. We are uncomfortable with people who make us squirm. We feel safe among those who are like us. Our culture nurtures those fears and enforces them as normal and intolerance of those we deem as less than us as acceptable.

To live Christ-centered lives, we need to step across the barriers that society has created to insulate one group from the "other." What does it take to change old notions that separate us from those who make us uncomfortable? How do we shake off ideas that we have been taught, replacing the reinforcing behaviors that keep us from opening ourselves to others? The early church shared their daily lives—eating as well as worshipping together—and created opportunities for encouragement and support. Their shared goals and beliefs drew them together and gave opportunities for spiritual growth.

Love for God and love for neighbors are the greatest commandments that God gives. Loving our neighbors is, biblically speaking, hospitality. Neighbors might start out as strangers, as in the case of the Good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37. In verse 36, Jesus asked his questioner which of the three passers-by had literally become the neighbor to the robbery victim. The idea is that neighbors are not just those who live next door, but those we meet along life's journey. How do we as believers demonstrate that love with more than just actions? How do we incorporate attitudes that foster openness and inclusion?

Having a Plan

Hospitality is central to the church's obligations to neighbors, family, and all of society. Hospitality is an outward display of generosity, openness, and acceptance. Hospitality demonstrates inclusion. Hospitality represents an open door—a welcoming and gracious extension of a loving attitude. Though we may not say it, throwing open the doors of hospitality demonstrates the embrace of God's love. Hospitality became the foundation for evangelism and community for the early church.

Hospitality not only extends out from the community of believers. It builds and strengthens the community within. Not only

are we honoring God when we extend hospitality to others, we are blessing ourselves within the generosity of our Christian community. Our actions can be infectious. Our inclusion can broaden our expression of God's love within and without our own fellowships.

Knowing, Loving and Serving

How do we define "others" when it relates to ourselves and our communities? How does this definition shift if we are considered as "others" or not? If we might be guilty of looking at "others" differently, how can we understand that and have a plan to communicate our congregation's commitment to being one in Christ? We need to see that the world that exists outside our church community needs us to recognize them, be open to them, and welcome them. We cannot merely sit and wait for others to come to us. We need to reach out in our communities, seeking opportunities to demonstrate Christian hospitality.

Demonstrating hospitality begins with the actions of individuals within the church body. We first need to check our own personal attitudes towards others. How can we participate within the collective body with a stingy, closed view of those outside our group? It may take a leap towards a paradigm shift. It can be as simple as recognizing

how we would feel if we were kept at a distance, ignored, or stepped around. We need to allow our own experiences to help us recognize if we have been guilty of “othering” fellow believers. As we step outside our comfort zones and seek ways to show God’s love to others, our racial and social biases may inhibit an easy transition. Let us pray for insight into our blind spots regarding people we may consider “other.”

A place to start is forming alliances across the wider family of God for the sake of dismantling racism and discrimination. It is imperative that the Christian Church leads out within our society as an instrument for change. We are required to act on our beliefs. We cannot just talk about it and agree that something needs to happen. Hospitality was an important part of the young Christian Church and its ministry. Christ made it very clear, both in parable and command: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40, NIV). When we serve others, we serve Christ. Let’s stretch our hospitality muscles by reaching beyond our own communities and extending ourselves out into our world.

Hints for Teaching

Lesson Goals

1. **Knowing:** Design a plan for reconciliation with “the other” rooted in Christian love.
2. **Loving:** Offer personal and corporate prayers of confession for lack of love for the “other.”
3. **Serving:** Form alliances across the wider family of God for the sake of dismantling racism.

Teaching Activity

Place a large piece of butcher paper on the table or wall and have participants create a group mural titled, “One in Christ” by adding scenes or words that describe God’s breaking down of barriers. As they draw, ask participants to list labels people often receive that create barriers (race, class, gender, reputation, education, past mistakes, etc.). Which labels carry the most power in our society? How does being “in Christ” change the way we see these labels? Which labels do you, personally, struggle to let go of?

Looking Forward

Our unity in Christ and God’s acceptance of all people break down barriers that threaten to divide us. Next, we will learn to pursue knowledge and wisdom that result in God’s peace.

5. World Peace through Mutual Understanding

Isaiah 2:2-4; Acts 17:26-28

Daily Bible Meditations

Gem Barton

Sunday

John 18:28-38

Jesus was taken to Pilate to be judged according to the Roman Law because Rome alone had the power to execute (v.31). The crucifixion of Jesus was prophesied hundreds of years before by many prophets, mostly the prophet Isaiah. Jesus Himself prophesied about the Gentile involvement in His crucifixion (Luke 18:32). He was referring to the Romans. Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. We, His followers, are just passing through this earth. We are His kingdom people; we need to live by kingdom principles; we need to apply kingdom principles to our lives as we live in this dark world.

Monday

Numbers 6:22-26

God wanted to bestow peace upon His people. He instructed Moses to tell Aaron and his sons, the priests, to bless the people with a special blessing He had scripted. The three aspects of that blessing are: the Lord will bless and keep; the Lord will make His face shine and be gracious; and the Lord will lift his countenance and give peace. The wonderful part is that God Himself would bless His people (v.27) when the priests blessed them in His name. Since Christ is our only and ultimate high priest, He will bless us daily and give us peace that only comes from Him.

Tuesday

Psalms 46

God is our refuge and strength. He is always ready to help us when we are in trouble—even when earthquakes and other catastrophic storms come. As I am writing this, Jamaica and some other Caribbean islands have been ravaged by Hurricane Melissa. The structural damages and death toll are still being assessed. This one thing we all are assured of is that whatever is happening in our lives, God is in the midst (v.5-9). God instructs us to “be still” (v.10); this is a difficult task when we are agitated by circumstances. Let’s trust Him, be still, and see Him be exalted among the nations.

Wednesday

Amos 9:7-12

God created every nation of this universe. He is in control of all aspects of the earth. Does the importance to God of any one

nation of the earth cause Him to care any less for the others? Just as He delivered the nation of Israel from captivity, He also delivered others. The descendants of Jacob were important to God, so He promised to restore a remnant, even as He promised to destroy the sinful nation of Israel along with all other nations (v.8). God will not allow sin and rebellion to continue among the people He created. This is a warning to us; God loves us but will not condone sin.

Thursday

Revelation 21:21-27

This is a beautiful description of the New Jerusalem—the gates made of pearls, the streets of shimmering gold. God and Jesus are the Temple. God’s glory and Jesus, the lamp, illuminate the city making it so there is no need for sun or moon. There will be no evil or dishonesty in the city. All the nations will bring glory and honor but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life would be welcomed in. I want to be there, don’t you? Are you ensuring that your name is written in the book? Are you helping your friends, loved ones, and everyone you meet get their names into that book?

Friday

Isaiah 2:1-5

The prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the last days. He saw the mountain of the Lord’s house looming above the other mountains. It will be the most important place on earth and people from all over the world will be going there to worship. For those of us who love to worship God, this will be a joyous occasion. Those who are affected by wars will be grateful for God’s mediation between nations and settling of international disputes. No more will nation be fighting against nation. I am looking forward to this time, when all will be peaceful and safe. How about you?

Sabbath

Acts 17:22-28

The Apostle Paul encountered an altar with the inscription “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (v.23). Paul then declared to the Athenians who God is, informing them that God made the world and all that is in it. He also told them that God is the Lord of heaven and earth, and that He does not live in man-made temples. God created all the nations of the earth with one blood. His purpose was for all nations to seek Him. For in Him we live and move and have our being. Since we are connected by His blood, let us unite in our worship of God.

Study Isaiah 2:2-4; Acts 17:26-28

Background Isa 2; 11:6-10; Jn 18:28-38; Acts 17; Ephesians 4

Devotional Revelation 5:8-14

Key Verse

And many peoples will come and say, “Come, let’s go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; So that He may teach us about His ways, And that we may walk in His paths.” For the law will go out from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).

Heart of the Lesson

The pursuit of knowledge leads some to become arrogant in their opinions and others to feel ostracized. What is the characteristic of a search for wisdom that facilitates peace and mutual understanding in a community of learning? Isaiah defined knowledge and peace that are fully realized in God, while Paul made clear that God’s peaceable wisdom is made known to us through Jesus Christ.

Questions for Studying the Text

1. When have you seen the pursuit of knowledge lead to arrogance or exclusion? What can pursuing wisdom with the goal of peace and mutual understanding rather than being “right” look like?
2. What images did Isaiah use to describe the “mountain of the house of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:2). What might these images communicate about God’s authority and accessibility?
3. In the Isaiah passage, what words indicate inclusivity or universality? What is the relationship between learning God’s ways and walking in them? How is knowledge connected to peace rather than power or dominance?
4. How did Paul’s speech in Acts 17:26-28 challenge ideas of cultural, intellectual, or spiritual superiority? Why is humility essential if people are truly seeking God? How does remembering that we all “live and move and exist” in God shape the way we treat those who think differently?
5. How does Jesus Christ help bridge Isaiah’s vision of future peace with Paul’s present call to seek God? Where might God be inviting you to learn differently—not just to know more, but to love better? What is one concrete way you will contribute to a peaceable community of learning this week?

Understanding and Living Jennifer Lewis-Berg

Peaceable Wisdom

It is only through the pursuit of God that we can gain any knowledge from Him. And it is only through that knowledge that mankind will have any chance to live the peace that God wants for us. “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord...He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths” (Isaiah 2:3). The believers of old drew strength from the idea that the wisdom that could be gained would go out from Zion. Peaceable Wisdom means acquiring mutual understanding in a community of learning. In the Old Testament, Isaiah stressed that knowledge and peace can be fully realized through God. In the New Testament, Paul made clear that God’s peaceable wisdom is revealed through Jesus Christ.

“Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14, NIV). Well, as William Shakespeare would say, “there’s the rub.” Pursuing peace is a seemingly impossible task. Without God, peace between people exists as a wispy vapor—flimsy of structure, fleeting, impossible to grasp in human hands for any length of time. History shows war and discord to be natural results of human behavior, and real, lasting peace to be unattainable.

The only way to achieve peace in our lives is through God. And the only way to achieve peace in the world is through God. Otherwise, it is an experiment that always fails. Yet we persist, in our personal relationships, within our communities, and globally, to believe that mankind can accomplish lasting harmony and coexistence on our own.

In Acts 17, Paul, speaking to a largely Greek audience, quoted two Greek poets—“For in him we live and move and have our being” (Epimenides, sixth century BC); and “We are his offspring” (Aratus, third century BC)—establishing a shared perspective with his Greek audience; namely that gods made of stone and gold are inadequate purveyors of meaning and purpose for life. Paul made it clear that God’s peaceable wisdom is made known to us through Jesus Christ. God is the Creator of all. He does not live in statues or temples and needs nothing from man. He created man so that man would need Him and seek after Him. We do not have to look far. God always makes Himself available to His creation, through the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. Man needs nothing more than a desire to connect with God.

Listen With an Open Heart

“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness” (James 3:17-18, NIV). According to Matthew Henry, wisdom from above “is sincere, and open, and steady, and uniform, and consistent with itself” (accessed online).

Prayer can open a heart to wisdom from God. Even the briefest prayer can soften feelings that might otherwise drive a strong wedge between us and others. We need to pray for discernment regarding the state of our hearts and courageously ask the Spirit to soften it as needed. What do we see in other people that might remind us of our own stubborn, defensive, critical nature? Are we more likely to develop an attitude when someone else’s behavior mirrors our negative attitudes? We must develop the ability to listen to others with open hearts.

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,

says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:17-21, ESV).

Because our lives are a series of encounters with others, it is essential that we learn to internalize the wisdom from God and cultivate actions and habits that display a genuine increase in our own faithfulness and forgiveness with acts of love, joy, and self-control. In other words, let our actions speak volumes for the changes God has made in us.

Creating Peace Within Context

It is obvious that the lack of peace in the world includes a lack of mutual understanding. When we believe we are right, the last thing we want to do is back off and be open to understanding another’s views or values. But our animosities and prejudices are learned, not instinctive. A new way of approaching conflict and resolution can also be learned. As believers, we must actively pursue knowledge with openness and patience for others whose own pursuits of knowledge may not sit in harmony with our own. Trying to meet others halfway and looking at

other interpretations are steps towards establishing some peace. When we examine ourselves, can we see ourselves as stubborn, defensive, or otherwise closed off to others? Can we, as Christians, practice and learn new skills of openness, patience, and seeing the other side of situations? Is it possible for peaceful coexistence to be more important than taking a stand and being “right”—not when it comes to the gospel, obviously, but with other, secondary truths.

Ultimately, what is “right” is about what God wants for us. Wisdom that results in lasting peace can only come from the worship, study, and teaching that comes from God. The unknown may only be known through the Lord of heaven and earth; and He can only be known through Jesus Christ.

What are some of the steps that can be taken in the direction of providing lasting peace? Within our groups, we can begin a discussion towards acknowledging problems and initiating solutions. We need to be willing to create peace plans within our churches for a specific context in which an unresolved conflict exists, as well as ideas for situations at home, at work, at school, and within our communities.

Hints for Teaching

Lesson Goals

1. **Knowing:** Examine the assumption that God’s peaceable wisdom is made known through Christ.
2. **Loving:** Listen to others with an open heart.
3. **Serving:** Create a peace plan for a specific context in which an unresolved conflict exists.

Teaching Activity

Choose a low stakes statement for which people can take opposite sides (e.g. “People learn best through experience rather than instruction.”). Have pairs share their perspectives, first through debate and then through careful listening and trying to accurately summarize the view of the other. How did it feel to be listened to without being challenged? Which was more difficult—explaining your view or honoring someone else’s? Discuss how peace grows where people feel understood. Invite the group to create a list titled: “Practices for a Peaceable Community of Learning.”

Looking Back

In this Unit, we have been challenged to work together toward common ends in the home, the community, and relationships both local and global on the basis of mutual love and respect.

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Contributors

Daily Bible Meditations

Gabriela L. Alonzo is a member of the Iglesia Bautista Cristiana del Septimo Dia (Seventh Day Baptist Christian Church) and Trustee Member of the SDB Memorial Fund.

Gem Barton lives in Roosevelt NY with her husband and three young adult children. She worships at Agape SDB Church, Queens NY where she teaches adult Sabbath School, chairs the Board of Christian Education and serves the Treasury. She previously served Kitty SDB Church and Guyana SDB Conference, Georgetown Guyana. I am an early childhood educator with NYC DOE.

Denovia McKenzie is a passionate believer in Jesus Christ. She takes the Word and work of God seriously. She desires to use her gift of writing and speaking to bring glory to God. Denovia is a member of the Open Arms SDB Church, North York, ON.

Lisa Moore came to Christ at the age of 14 and has passionately pursued a deeper relationship with God ever since. In 2000, the Holy Spirit guided her to join the New York City Seventh Day Baptist Church, after she embraced the significance of Sabbath observance for believers. With joy, Lisa shares God's love, serves the Lord in music ministry, teaches Sabbath School, and is a dedicated member of the Trustee Board.

Understanding and Living

David Fox lives with his wife (Rachel) and two elementary-aged daughters (Elyse and Kathryn) in central Ohio. David is a graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta (2014) and is passionate about building God's Kingdom through serving local churches and training healthy leaders.

Steve Hinton is the Pastor of the First Seventh Day Baptist Church of Hebron in Coudersport, Pa. He and his wife, Lori, have 3 Children and 4 Grandchildren. He is a graduate of SDBU Ministry Leadership Program. Steve also serves on the CSADR Standing committee for the SDB General Conference.

Chaplain (MAJ-Ret.) Jerry Johnson, D. Min., retired from the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps in June 2024 after representing SDBs in the military for 20 years, and is now a Staff Chaplain for Christus Health Santa Rosa District in the San Antonio, TX area and a D. Min. Mentor for Columbia Biblical Seminary and School of Missions in SC.

Jennifer Lewis-Berg is active in the Riverside (CA) SDB church and lives in Riverside, California with her husband, Kurt. She is a retired school counselor and music teacher.

Next Quarter's Lessons

June - August 2026

The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses

Unit I – Faithful Witnesses Testify to God's Promises

1. Deborah, A Leader in a National Emergency
Judges 4:4-10, 14, 21-22 June 6
2. Hannah, a Godly Mother 1 Samuel 1:1-28 June 13
3. Jonathan and David, A Noble Friendship 1 Samuel 18:1-4;
20:16-17, 32-34, 42; 2 Samuel 1:26-27; 21:7 June 20
4. Amos, A Herdsman Called of God to Be a Prophet
Amos 1:1; 2:11-12; 3:7-8; 7:10-15 June 27

Unit II – Faithful Witnesses Say “Yes” to Jesus Christ

5. The Believing Centurion, A Gentile Whose Faith Jesus Commended
Matthew 8:5-13 July 4
6. Simon Peter, From Weakness to Strength Mark 8:27-29;
Luke 22:31-34; John 18:25-27; 21:15-17 July 11
7. Zacchaeus, The Publican Luke 19:1-10 July 18
8. Mary, The Mother of Jesus
Luke 2:15-19; John 2:1-5; 19:25-27 July 25

Unit III – Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News

9. Thomas, The Honest Doubter
John 11:14-16; 14:5-8; 20:24-29; 21:1-2 Aug. 1
10. Stephen, An Early Interpreter of Christianity
Acts 6:7-10; 7:54-60 Aug. 8
11. Saul of Tarsus, How a Pharisee Became a Christian
Acts 22:3-15 Aug. 15
12. Timothy, The Influence of Home Training
2 Timothy 1:1-6; 3:14-16 Aug. 22
13. Lydia, Judged to Be Faithful Acts 16:11-15, 40 Aug. 29