

# February 2025

February 2, 2025

Text: Matthew 5:38-48

*“Extreme Love”*

Have you ever been happily reading the Bible and suddenly- boom! - come across a text that you wish were not there? This week’s focal text is one of those. It doesn’t match up with the world in which we live. It doesn’t match up with life as we know it. It doesn’t match up with the way we have lived our own lives.

I have run out of excuses. I must confess that I have pretty much ignored this teaching of Jesus. What about you?

Who are my enemies whom I have failed to love? Often, they are the folks I don’t enjoy being around - culturally, politically, spiritually. I avoid having to love them simply by ignoring them. Often, they are the folks who have the nerve to think I might be wrong - theologically, nationally, and racially. How could they possibly think I am wrong?

Loving someone is not the same as agreeing with them. Note Matthew 5:45. God sends sunshine on those who follow Him and those who disobey Him. God sends rain for the good folks and for the evil folks.

Loving is not easy. Part of the struggle is determining what is the loving thing to do. We love a child, so we correct that child’s misbehavior. Or is it the loving thing to let the child do what he or she wants to do? This kind of decision kicks up several notches when we try to correct an adult... another political view...or another nation.

Sometimes, we make the wrong decision about what is loving. God knows us better than we know ourselves, and God is looking at the motive for our actions. Was love intended?

This is Black History Month. How can I observe that in a way that shows love? Loving others is one way to take Jesus’ mission into the world. I don’t know about you, but this text is not easy for me.

## **What Someone Else Has Said:**

In *Ancient Wisdom in Modern Verse* (Resource Publications), S T Kimbrough, Jr. quotes Maximus the Confessor (c. 580-662 AD): “Just as the thought of fire does not warm the body, so faith without love does not actualize the light of spiritual knowledge in the soul.”

## **Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You love me, O Lord, and call me to love even the unlovable. Equip me for this hard task...”



February 9, 2025

Text: Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14

*“Jesus’ Upside-Down Kingdom”*

Children are dependent on others for food and clothing. Children are dependent on teachers who can help them learn basic facts. Children are dependent on those who can protect them from hidden evils. Children are dependent. So, who does Jesus say is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Children! Dependent! (Matthew 18:4)

This spirit and attitude are in such contradiction to most of our modern values! We value the ability to handle things by ourselves. We value those who have significant influence and power. We value the one who is strong and self-sufficient. Jesus says that those sorts of people might not even make it into God’s kingdom. (Matthew 18:3)

It is in one’s humble acknowledgment of dependence that shows one’s readiness for kingdom living. One might say that it is in knowing that I cannot save myself that I am saved.

And every one of us is worth the sacrifice made by God. Look at the second text in this week’s lesson (Matthew 18:10-14). Ninety-nine sheep are safe and secure; only one has gone astray. That’s not a bad batting average - 99 hits in 100 times at bat! Frankly, I suspect I’d be willing to settle for that being good enough.

But Jesus says, “Not so fast! There is one missing!” And the shepherd goes looking for the one that is missing. I look around me and wonder, “Who is the one who has strayed away from God’s flock?” And what am I doing to rescue that one? ...Or am I that one?

These two teachings from Jesus certainly let me know that the values of God’s Kingdom are not like the values of the world. If the secular community is not looking at the Church and asking, “Why in the world do you waste your time doing stuff like that?” We might ponder whether or not our Church life is in the pattern of God’s Kingdom. If what the Church is doing makes sense

by worldly values, we need to ask ourselves if we have wandered away from kingdom values.

Dependent children. One stray sheep. No wonder this session today is called "Jesus' Upside-Down Kingdom"!

#### **What Someone Else Has Said:**

M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (Touchstone), has written: "The individual journey through the stages of spiritual development is also a journey into and out of culture."

#### **Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Help me to be a child, O God, and to know my dependence on You..."

### **February 16, 2025**

**Text: Matthew 18:15-35**

#### **"Discipleship on Purpose"**

These verses are, in many ways, about forgiveness. The New Testament word translated as "forgive" is *aphieēmi*. Literally, it means "to send forth." In other words, when I forgive someone, it is not that I do not recognize or acknowledge that I have been wronged. I do recognize and acknowledge it, but I *send it forth*. I send it away.

Forgiving someone is not something we do on automatic pilot. It is intentional, or, as our session title puts it, "Discipleship on Purpose."

This happened a long time ago, but I think I remember most of this correctly. I was in the tenth grade, and Mr. Brown gave us a test in our History class. I was still trying to complete the exam, so I looked up and saw my friend Paul reading the textbook. This was a closed-book exam! In a moment of shock, I got up and went to Mr. Brown and told him that Paul was cheating. Paul was the son of the high school principal, so I knew he would be in big trouble. Mr. Brown looked at me with a strange countenance and said, "Paul has already completed and turned in the exam. He is just reading for his own pleasure and learning."

When class was over, I told Paul what I had done. He patted me on the back and said, "That's okay. You did what you thought you should do." I was forgiven, and a life-long friendship was preserved.

Forgiveness has great power. And, as the parable in Matthew 18:23-35 shows, the absence of forgiveness also has great power.

To forgive someone is a blessing for the one forgiven, but it is also a blessing for the one who does the forgiving.

Matthew 18:15-20 shows the centrality of forgiveness in the life of the Church. Every effort is made to get the wrong-doer to admit the wrong, so the door is opened for forgiveness. To fail to seek forgiveness in this account leads to separation from the Church. Admission of guilt and forgiveness are central to the life of faith.

#### **What Someone Else Has Said:**

In a novel by Lina Chern, *Play the Fool*, (Bantam Books), the lead character is quoted as saying and thinking: "'He said that?' I sank into the chair. Max's forgiveness was even worse than his anger. At least I deserved his anger."

#### **Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord God, grant the forgiveness that gives me a fresh start..."

### **February 23, 2025**

**Texts: Matthew 6:19-24; Acts 2:42-47**

#### **"Where Is Your Heart?"**

Okay, the truth is that I like puns. Although my English teacher sister says puns are the lowest form of humor, I love them! What do you think of this one?

*A man said that he only believed 12 ½ percent of the Bible. He said he was an eighth-theist.*

The truth is that most of us do pick and choose the portions of the Bible that we value and seek to obey. My guess is that few of us would choose this week's focal texts as biblical principles around which to organize life.

When I looked at Matthew 6:24, I figured that I ought to look around and find a translation that makes me more comfortable. How about the *New Revised Standard Version* and the *Common English Bible*? They translate that I cannot serve God and wealth. Not a problem. I am not wealthy, so I am in the clear.

But then there is that troublesome translation by the *Twentieth Century New Testament*. In that version, Matthew 6:24 says, "You cannot serve both God and Money." Oops. I do have money, and I use it to do all sorts of things I want to do.

Maybe I should stick with the *King James Version*: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." That gives me some wiggle room because I don't even know what "mammon" is.

So, I go to my Greek-English dictionary. How does it translate that bothersome word "*mammōnas*"? Oops again. The word literally means "avarice." Selfish use of money without regard for others. Protecting every dollar you have. Finding every way possible to get more money. Thinking of yourself first. Selfish. My way or the highway. Guess who's number one.

I think this verse is part of the Bible that I want to set aside. Surely, Matthew was not thinking about me when he wrote that verse.

#### **What Someone Else Has Said:**

Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order*, (Harper and Brothers), wrote: "Even this property which belongs to (us) does not belong to (us) unconditionally, since it is held under God... With respect to God, (we) are always a steward."

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Creator God, the Giver of all goodness, You have entrusted us with responsibility for the care, nurture, and sharing of the fullness of Your creation..."

# March 2025

## March 2, 2025

Texts: Mark 5:25-34; Matthew 5:1-3  
*"From Despair to Hope"*

This week begins a walk with the Beatitudes. My ability with the Aramaic language is, shall we say, rather limited. In fact, let's be honest. My knowledge of the Aramaic language is borderline non-existent. This means that I am limited when it comes to reading what Jesus said as He spoke Aramaic. I am dependent on what knowledgeable translators have done.

The most common translations say that in the Beatitudes, our Lord gave us a series of blessings, noting things that would indeed bless us. Some translators say, "Happy are those who..." A few scholars indicate that the word usually rendered as "Blessed" comes from a root word meaning "on the right track" or "shift gears in order to do it right."

The woman in the Mark passage (Mark 5:25-34) certainly got on the right track when she trusted that Jesus could help her. She didn't try to say all the right words; she didn't double-check to see if she was doing it right; she didn't bring great spiritual strength to the moment. She simply trusted.

There is in this healing story one ingredient that is often overlooked. Mark 5:27 says that the woman with the hemorrhages had heard about Jesus. She was moved to her own level of trusting Jesus because of what others had told her or shown her. I am left to wonder if others are ever moved to trust Jesus because of what they hear me say or see me do. When others look at my life and at my decisions, what do they learn of Jesus?

The funny thing is that those people whose witness had inspired this woman to trust Jesus probably had no idea they had been of such benefit (blessing) to her. It was a large crowd (v. 24), and there is no evidence in the text that she knew any of these people. What about them led her to believe that Jesus could heal her? Is there anything about my life that would move someone to follow Jesus?

All the woman did was touch Jesus' cloak. She did not even come to him face to face but "Came up behind him in the crowd." The details of our experiences with Jesus vary from person to person, but the common factor "for being on the right track" is trust.

### What Someone Else Has Said:

Ken and Pat Birt, *A Journey of Love and Miracles* (iUniverse), wrote, "When good comes your way, regardless of what you call it, stop and thank God for His blessings."

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Your gifts, O God, are many..."

## March 9, 2025

Texts: Luke 7:11-17; Matthew 5:4  
*"From Grief to Joy"*

Isn't it interesting that when Jesus brought this young man back to life (Luke 7:15), the crowd's reaction was fear (v. 16)? (Some translations say "awestruck.") The truth is that often when God does an unexpected miracle, we don't know how to respond.

When I read this lesson from Luke, I had a memory of my wife's death. Then, I pondered our son's unexpected death a few years later. Where was the compassion of Jesus? Why wasn't my grief turned into joy?

Then, I recalled what my friend Eddie said when he called to tell me about the death of Ann, his closest friend. He said, "I knew you would understand how hard this is because you, too, have lost a loved one."

Then, I remembered what a couple said when their young adult son died suddenly. His mother told me, "You kept coming to church when your son died, so we are going to try to do the same."

Then, I asked a close relative what was the best thing anyone said to him when his mother died. He hesitated and said, "I don't remember anything helpful anyone said."

I apologize for getting so much of my personal story into this session. It has dawned on me that, at some level, my grief turned to a kind of joy when God was able to use my experience to be a support or help for another. There is a joy in helping others. On the other hand, I must acknowledge that I have not always been that person who helps. God wanted to use me to support someone else, and I didn't get it done.

God wants to use us to help others in times of loss. When that happens, there is joy. When that does not happen, grief carries the day.

What is your story?

### What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Don't Look Back* (Abingdon Press), Will Willimon has written: "Loss tends to be ambiguous. By God's redemptive work, in even the saddest losses, something may be gained."

### Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord Jesus, around me, there are people who are hurting. Use me as an instrument of Your compassion so that the heaviness of grief may be lifted into the freshness of joy..."



March 16, 2025

Texts: Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 5:5

*“From Pride to Humility”*

Sometimes, when we begin a study of a biblical text, we wonder if there is some hidden meaning. We ponder, “What is the context in which this text appears?” We ask, “What is the implication for how I live my life?” We dig to find a deeper level of meaning.

Not so for this week’s focal text. Our Lord is clear and pointed in telling this story. The point of the parable is transparent. When I read this text, I have no hiding place. Ego and self-pride stand in the way of my justification. It is when I acknowledge my sin that God has room to save me.

When we humble ourselves and admit our sin, we are exalted (Luke 18:14). The New Testament word for exalted is *hupsōs*. The roots for that word are Greek words meaning high elevation, above and beyond, height, and altitude. An honest admission that we need God’s mercy is the key to receiving that forgiving mercy.

In this story, the Pharisee has a pretty good track record for doing good things: fasting and tithing (v. 12). Wouldn’t you think that would make God happy? The Pharisee had lived a life that separated him from crooks and cheaters (v. 11). Wouldn’t you think that would make God happy?

The problem was not that the Pharisee did good things—thank Goodness he did—but that he thought such behavior was his ticket into God’s favor. The only ticket into God’s favor is the grace of God.

Notice that the man who was justified simply went back home (v. 14). He went back to where he went about his daily chores, where he worked on family relationships, and where life went on in ordinary ways. He had no badge that said, “One of God’s favorites.” He was made right by God’s grace and now went back to the places where he had, by his own admission, lived a life of sin, of brokenness.

Wouldn’t you like to know how things went for this man once he returned home? I have to ask myself: “What do I do with a new beginning that God gives me?”

**What Someone Else Has Said:**

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper One), wrote: “The Christian does not think that God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us.”

**Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayers begin: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner...”

March 23, 2025

Texts: Matthew 15:1-20; Matthew 5:6

*“From Ritual to Righteousness”*

If, after reading the first part of this week’s focal text, you are not sure what Jesus was trying to teach, don’t worry. You are in good company. The disciples did not understand either.

After Jesus had addressed the scribes and Pharisees (vv. 1-9) and then had given an explanation to the whole crowd (vv. 10-11), he said a little more to the disciples (vv. 12-14). Then it was that Peter spoke up and said, “Explain all this stuff to us” (v. 15).

Isn’t that something we all have wanted to say from time to time? “Explain all this stuff to us.” If the Bible is God’s Holy Word, we want to understand it, but sometimes, like Peter and the other disciples, we need a little more digging.

In our culture, washing hands before eating is a matter of hygiene and good health. In the time of Jesus, washing hands before a meal was a religious ritual. In effect, Jesus is saying that the value of a religious rite or religious discipline is not in simply doing it; its value is to be measured by the quality of life it produces. If our religious habits do not shape us to live lives of love, justice, and peace, they are of no more value than what we flush down the toilet (v. 17).

What religious disciplines do you observe? Regular attendance at worship? Systematic reading of Scripture? Thorough times of prayer? Complete avoidance of vulgar language? Frequent trips to the offering plate? Habitual prayer before every meal? Careful selection of what to wear on Sunday? Uh, steady reading of these *Adult Bible Study* commentaries?

I heard someone say, “Sunday cannot really be measured until Monday.” Was the sermon any good? I won’t know until I see how I live my life on Monday. Did I learn anything in Sunday School? I won’t know until I see how I live my life on Monday. Did I meet Jesus at the Communion Table? I won’t know until I see how I live my life on Monday. Did I have genuine fellowship with all the gathered flock? I won’t know until I see how I live my life on Monday.

And you?

**What Someone Else Has Said:**

In *Do I Stay Christian?* (St. Martin’s Essentials), Brian D. McLaren has written: “If you have the inner fire to stay in the struggle, may you know that you are walking a path that reformers, prophets, mystics, and sages have walked before you, including a fellow who grew up in Nazareth of Galilee and died just outside Jerusalem.”

**Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Holy One, I confess that sometimes I settle for less than You call me to be...”

March 30, 2025

Texts: Mark 7:5-15; Matthew 5:8

*“From Empty Worship to Pure Hearts”*

The Beatitude that mirrors the account of Jesus admonishing the scribes and Pharisees (Mark 7:5-15 and last week’s text, Matthew 15:1-20) is “Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.”

*The New Testament in Basic English* translates that verse as “Blessed are the clean in heart.” J. B. Phillips, in *The New Testament in Modern English*, renders “Happy are the utterly sincere...” *The Amplified New Testament* has “Blessed - happy, enviably fortunate, and spiritually prosperous...are the pure in heart...” *The Cotton Patch Version* by Clarence Jordan paraphrases it this way: “Those whose motives are pure are God’s people, for they will have spiritual insight.” *The Common English Bible* says, “Happy are people who have pure hearts...”

No matter how it is translated, this Beatitude makes it clear that our relationship with God is not a matter of “checking all of the spiritual boxes” but is a matter of intent. I may not get it all done correctly, but if my intent, my heart, seeks God rather than my own satisfactions, then God’s presence will come alive for me.

Some students of the Bible contrast the way that Mark (Mark 7:21-22) describes what happens when our intent is selfish with the way Matthew (Matthew 15:19) labels those wrong-doings. Mark has a longer list! Matthew (writing chiefly to a Jewish audience) notes actions and thoughts that violate the Ten Commandments. Mark, on the other hand, addresses a broader readership and spells out a dozen ways we separate ourselves from God’s will. It would not be a bad translation simply to put my name in lieu of these lists. How about you?

I am very active in church life and affairs, so I am alert to these scribes and Pharisees, the ones who were active in religious life in their day. Jesus says that such activity is not what gets us close to God. It is not what our calendar of church meetings says about us that makes God’s presence come alive for us. Jesus is not saying, “Do away with staying busy.” Jesus is saying, “Don’t substitute busy for a heart made pure by the grace of God.”

**What Someone Else Has Said:**

Andy and Sally Langford wrote in *Living as United Methodist Christians* (Abingdon): “Spiritual disciplines, such as worship and prayer, draw us into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ, but these acts of piety are incomplete without accompanying acts of service.”

**Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “I offer my heart, O Lord...”

# April 2025

April 6, 2025

Texts: John 18:1-11; Matthew 5:9

*“From Violence to Peace”*

As I sat at my computer, ready to start typing this week’s commentary, my cell phone screeched with a loud warning. Emergency! Emergency! Take shelter! Tornado warning in your area!

I stayed for a few moments, trying to decide what to do. Finally, I got up and went to what some would call “a safe room,” a downstairs guest bathroom with no windows. I stayed there for about twenty minutes. Then came the “All clear,” and I returned to my desk and started typing. Sometimes, decisions have to be made with little warning. My instinct was to be safe, so I took shelter.

When Jesus and His disciples went to the garden near Kidron Valley, He met the soldiers and police that Judas had recruited in his betrayal of Jesus. The moment came to high alert: Emergency! Emergency! They were about to arrest Jesus, so Peter swung into action, swinging the sword that he thought would make him and Jesus safe. That violent move cut off the ear of Malcus (who was there to help the high priest). Peter did what he thought he should do in such an emergency.

Jesus then responded to the emergency with His own values. He told Peter to put the sword away (v. 11). His value was peace, not violence. In fact, according to Luke (Luke 22:51), Jesus immediately healed the ear of the man attacked by Peter.

Peace is a biblical value. If my quick count is correct, the word “peace” appears over five hundred times in the Bible. And in the Beatitude for this week (Matthew 5:9), Jesus says that peacemakers are to be called “children of God.”

Jesus knew that peace was not the way of the world. In John 14:27, when He offers the gift of peace to His followers, He acknowledges that peace is not the way the world gives.

The New Testament word most often translated as “peace” is *ěirēnē*. (Notice the name “Irene”!) Greek language students often note that the word comes from *ěirō*. That is a word that means “to join.” We are at peace when we see ourselves joined together. Jesus invites us to be joined together in love. What does “peace” mean for you?

**What Someone Else Has Said:**

In his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Allenson, Inc.), John Wesley wrote: “The peacemakers - they that out of love to God and man do all possible good to all men. Peace, in the scripture sense, implies all blessings, temporal and eternal.”

**Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Peace-loving God...”

April 13, 2025

Texts: Matthew 27:27-31; Matthew 5:10

*“From Majesty to Mocking”*

The Beatitude for this week (Matthew 5:10) makes me a little nervous. Is the Kingdom of Heaven only for those who are persecuted for righteousness sake? If so, I am in trouble. I have a hard time thinking of a time when I was persecuted because of my Christian witness.

The focal text for this Palm/Passion Sunday (Matthew 27:27-31) makes me a little nervous. These verses are about what happened to Jesus after the hoorays and hosannas of Palm Sunday. He got arrested and humiliated. I have had a few days of hip-hip hoorays, but no one thought to follow that up with personal attacks and criticism. I keep wondering: Is my witness so shallow that no one wants to shut me up?

The way Matthew tells the story makes me a little nervous. After the Palm Sunday celebration (Matthew 21:1-11), the disciples begin to disappear from the story. By the time we get to Matthew 26:69-75, even Peter has moved toward denial of Jesus. “I do not know the man!” Peter exclaimed. When has my witness made it look like I did not even know Jesus?

But thanks be to God! In the midst of all of my weakness and failure comes the word that Jesus went to be crucified for the likes of me (Matthew 27:31, 35). And, peeking ahead to next week, we know that this is not the end of the story.

If our Lord went through all of this, should we be surprised that we who follow Him may have the pain of the journey as well as the joy of victory?

When I was growing up, we often had a big to-do on Palm Sunday and made little, if any, reference to the days that followed. Most congregations now observe this day both as hosanna and horrendous.

One thing is clear in this account: Jesus did not waver in His mission. Even if we did not already know the outcome of resurrection, we would have to be grateful for His steadfastness. The example He set for focus and faithfulness should be a model for us. If all in the story were sweetness and light, we would wonder what these values mean in our own world where all is not sweetness and light. But I checked the morning paper; all is not sweetness and light in our world. And the call to us is still to a call to focus and faithfulness. So be it.

**What Someone Else Has Said:**

In *Multiplying Love* (Abingdon), Paul Chilcote writes: “The love we need to embody is the self-sacrificing love we see in Jesus.”

**Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Hosanna!...and...”

April 20, 2025

Texts: John 20:1-18; Matthew 5:11-12

*“What Kind of Witness?”*

“Happy Easter!” we greet one another. “Happy Easter!” as we celebrate the day.

That’s not the way it began for Jesus’ disciples. On that first day of the week, they were in dismay. The one whom they had followed had been executed. None of His promises seemed to be true. Death had shown more power than life. “We must have been wrong to have followed Him.”

As John tells the story (John 20:1-18), it was Mary Magdalene who made the discovery of the resurrection. When she rushed to tell the disciples, she said “Go, decorate those eggs; it’s Easter.” No! You know better than that. She said, “I have seen the Lord.”

Seeing an empty tomb did not convince the disciples that Jesus was still alive. In fact, after the ones who went to check out the tomb found it empty, they simply went back home (John 20:8-10). And Mary did not recognize the risen Lord until He called her by name (John 20:16). It is an amazing thing to think that Jesus knows us personally.

When Mary encountered the resurrected Jesus, He gave her some instructions as to what to do next. “Go and tell...” (John 20:17). Those directions still echo into our meeting with Jesus today. “Go and tell...” Go and tell with your words. Go and tell with your actions. Go and tell with your values.

This morning, I went for my annual eye exam. The doctor projected some letters on the wall and said, “Tell me what you see.” I called out the letters as best I could but missed a few when I got to the bottom line. With my glasses on, I read them well; without my glasses, I was not certain.

Tell me what you see when you see the risen Lord. I’ll tell you what I see. Your experience may be just the pair of glasses I need to see all our Lord is. Truth to tell, it is by the way that we live that we tell each other what we see. What kind of witness does my life make to the risen Lord? Do I live “Happy Easter”?

**What Someone Else Has Said:**

In *The Joy of the Gospel* (Image), Pope Francis wrote: “Christ’s resurrection everywhere calls forth seeds of that new world, even if they are cut back, they grow again, for the resurrection is already secretly woven into the fabric of this history, for Jesus did not rise in vain.”

**Prayer:**

As you prepare this lesson, begin your prayer with, “Lord Jesus, You are risen!”

April 27, 2025

Text: John 4:4-14

*“Thirst-Quenching Water”*

Several unexpected and interesting things emerged for me in this familiar story.

First, in John 4:1-2, I notice that onlookers thought Jesus was doing a lot of baptizing when it was really his disciples who were baptizing. That got me to wondering. When onlookers see how I behave, when onlookers know how the Church spends its money, or when onlookers observe me ignore some human hurt, do these onlookers think Jesus must be like that if His followers are like that? Does Jesus get credit/blame for what we are doing?

Then, in John 4:3-4, Jesus starts out on a journey to Galilee, but He had to go through Samaria. Are there times when I have had to take a side trip to get where I was going? For example, suppose I wanted to be a missionary in Brazil, I would have to go through learning Portuguese. If I want to teach a Sunday School class, I need to get there by way of studying the lesson. If I want to help someone, I must get to know them. Side trips to get where we are going.

Next, in John 4:7-9, our Lord has to cross several cultural boundaries to talk with this woman from Samaria. What barriers do I need to cross? Race? Gender? Sexual orientation? Language? Our society puts a number of such blocks into our relationships. Whom might I learn from if I would be willing to hear from “that kind of person”?

Finally, in John 4:14, the Master says that some experiences might give us a temporary kick, but we need to have a source that does not dry up - the saving grace of our Lord. Am I more attracted to some passing fad (even a religious fad!) rather than the eternal truth of our Lord? None of culture’s “hits of the moment” have everlasting power. This is not to say that we cannot enjoy these brief moments of happiness, but we should not confuse that passing moment as “gushing up to eternal life.” That everlasting water comes as a “gift of God” (v. 10).

The verses that follow our focal text tell how this woman shared the good news Jesus had given her. “Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony” (John 4:39).

It happened because they were willing to put first things first. Am I?

***What Someone Else Has Said:***

Carl Michalson in the *The Witness of Radical Faith* (Tidings), wrote: “Most of us would stand a pretty good chance of becoming saints if it were not for our neighbors. Our Lord has commanded us to love our neighbors, and when we see how difficult that is to do, it makes us wonder if we really love our Lord.”

***Prayer:***

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord Jesus, You loved folks I wouldn’t have loved. Help me become more loving...”

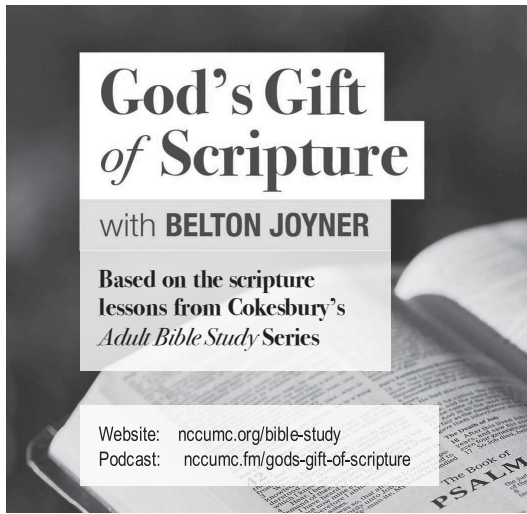
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We continue praying for the people of Western North Carolina and the Southeast affected by Hurricane Helene.

We also extend a thank you to local churches across the conference for sharing your gifts.

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