

May 2025

May 4, 2025

Text: John 5:1-15

“Healing Water”

In this week’s focal text (John 5:1-15), Jesus brings healing and new life to a man who has been ill for 38 years. Jesus does it (1) without a big show (5:8), (2) at a time when many thought it was wrong to heal (5:9-10), and (3) with acknowledgment of divine power (5:17).

Without a big show, Jesus simply tells the man to start walking with his mat. How many times have I failed to help someone because I failed to do the simplest things? For example, someone who feels excluded from a group might feel included if I simply give them a smile. For example, a clerk in a store who is burdened with ceaseless responsibilities might find new strength if I simply thank them for helping me. For example, if my relationship with someone is broken, it might be healed if I do no more than say, “I miss you.” Jesus heals this man with the simple instruction to take up his mat and walk.

At a time when many thought it was wrong to heal, Jesus knows that God is often working in times and places others might think inappropriate or sinful. For example, I don’t want to go into that risky downtown area to take food to the urban ministry pantry...but God does. For example, I don’t want to challenge that friend’s racist joke...but God does. For example, I don’t want our church building to provide housing for the homeless...but God does. Jesus sees that divine power does not always follow human boundaries.

With acknowledgment of divine power, Jesus gives credit where credit is due, calling out the presence of divine activity. Do I? For example, at the funeral of a friend, might I claim that her death was an ultimate healing? For example, when I see joy in a most unlikely place, might I celebrate God’s localized victory? For example, when some new insight breaks out of a familiar passage of Scripture, might I acknowledge that God is still alive in the Sacred Word? Jesus proclaims that God is not only a God of the past and the future but is also a God in the present tense.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *John Wesley’s Message Today* (Abingdon), Lovett Weems, Jr. quotes Dwight L. Moody: “It’s not how loud you shout or how high you jump, it’s how straight you walk when you come down that counts.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Gracious, moving, and alive God, come among us now with healing mercies...”

God’s Gift of Scripture

with **BELTON JOYNER**

Based on the scripture lessons from Cokesbury’s *Adult Bible Study Series*

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May 11, 2025

Text: John 6:16-25

“Master of the Waters”

There is a lot of mystery in this week’s focal text, but one thing is particularly obvious: Jesus showed up where He was not expected. Walking on the water! That’s not exactly what the disciples were looking for!

But our Lord is like that. He shows up when we do not think He will be around. We encounter Him sometimes when we thought we’d be on our own.

Think about it. Suppose I am bitterly angry with someone. They are an enemy in every sense of the word. I begin to plot how I can make their life miserable for them, and I enjoy it when some harm knocks on their door. Just then, Jesus shows up and says, “Love your enemies.”

And our Lord has shown up when I did not expect Him.

Think about it. My life has been lived under a cloud of despair and disappointment. Nothing seems to be going right. One misery is followed by another misery. One loss is followed by another loss. One pain is followed by another pain. Just then, Jesus shows up and I know I am not alone.

And our Lord has shown up when I did not expect Him.

Think about it. It’s Monday morning, and my week is scheduled to unfold like all the other Mondays. I eat breakfast and head to the office. Routine. I handle a few phone calls and type out a few business emails. Routine. I greet a co-worker during the morning coffee break. Routine.

Then, that co-worker stops smiling and, with intense sadness, says, “I want someone to know. My wife told me this morning that she is leaving me.” I had not expected to be so needed this morning, but my ministry of caring calls me.

And our Lord has shown up when I did not expect Him.

In John 6:21, we learn that the disciples (who had first been terrified by the unexpected Jesus) wanted to take Him into the boat. May it be so! When Our Lord shows up unexpectedly in our lives, may we welcome Him and live life together with Him.

What Someone Else Has Said:

William Willimon has written (*Why I Am a United Methodist*, Abingdon): "When we are at our Christian best, all of our activity is worship. We praise God on Sundays with the eager expectation that, if we are good enough in church, we will also praise God on Monday morning at the office, school, over the kitchen sink, or wherever we find ourselves."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "God of surprising grace, help me find Your presence in my daily walk..."

May 18, 2025

Text: John 7:37-46

"Rivers of Living Water"

This week's focal text tells about something Jesus did at the celebration of the Festival of Booths. Looking back at John 7:2 it says now that the Jewish Festival of Booths was near. The Festival of Booths or of the Festival of Tabernacles was the context of this lesson. The Festival was a time to remember when God provided shelter and harvest in the wilderness for the escaping people of Israel. Today's Jewish community refers to the holiday by its Hebrew name, *Sukkot*.

One of the closing acts of the festival was pouring water out of a pitcher, symbolizing the expectation that once the Messiah came, God would pour out the power of God's Spirit. As this ceremony unfolded, Jesus shouted out (John 7:37-38) something to the effect of, "You want water? Believe in me! You'll get rivers of water!"

On this Pentecost Sunday, we remember the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) as the assurance that this nourishing water continues to be poured out for believers. Revelation 22:1-7 describes a vision of that mighty river flowing at the end of time. I once heard an elementary-age boy say, "Jesus must have turned on a big spigot!"

Where are the dry places in your life? When are the thirsty moments in your journey? Why are there parched days in your life diary? Jesus calls for belief in Him to bring the healing water (John 7:38). "And let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture said, '*Out of believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.*'"

In the verses that follow our study text, there is an account of a division between those who saw Jesus as the Messiah and those who did not (John 7:40-44). I can understand that division because some water looks like a value, and sometimes

water looks like a tragedy. (On the day I am writing this - February 4, 2024 - torrential damaging floods in California.) The water that the Spirit of Jesus provides is healing, restorative, nourishing, comforting, and challenging. Everything wet is not from Jesus! Where do we see the fruits of that Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)? Those gifts come from the water that Jesus provides.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Daily Devotions for Die-Hard Fans* (Self-published), Ed McMinn wrote: "God instilled thirst in us to warn us of our body's need for physical water. He also gave us a spiritual thirst that can be quenched only by his presence in our lives. Without God, we are like tumbleweeds, dried out and windblown, offering the illusion of life where there is only death. Living water - water of life - is readily available in Jesus. We may drink our fill, and thus we stake our thirst and our soul's drought - forever."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Bring Your refreshing presence into my thirsty life..."

May 25, 2025

Text: John 13:1-11

"Cleansing Water"

A friend gave me a gift card so I could get a free pedicure. At the time, I was almost eighty years old and had never had a pedicure. From time to time, I had trimmed those pesky toenails, but this was my first time at a professional shop. I checked in and waited. I watched the activity all around me, and finally, when they called my name, I walked over to the waiting chair and took a seat.

The pedicurist came over. We greeted each other. She looked at me. I sat there. She stepped away to get some supplies. I sat there. She came back and just stood there. I wondered why there was such a delay. I thought to myself, "This is not much fun." I sat there. Finally, the pedicurist looked at me with a puzzled expression and said, "Sir, you will have to take off your shoes." Oh boy, rather basic for getting your toenails trimmed, don't ya think?

The disciples might have thought they knew what was going on when Jesus began washing their feet. In those days, the feet got dirty from the dusty highways and walkways. As Jesus noted (John 13:10), even if you are clean from having a good bath, your feet will still need cleaning. Even so, to have your Lord kneeling before you and offering this humble service leaves them speechless. This foot-washing was something that usually a slave did. This scene is what some have called "condescending love." That is what sets off Peter (John 13:6, 8).

Look at this moment as more than hygiene. Jesus, now aware of the pending cross (John 13:1), '*... Jesus knew that his hour had come...*'; Jesus sees that accepting His service cleans one before God. The disciples, like a man getting his first pedicure, did not know what was going on. Jesus

knew that the cross was looming before Him (John 13:1), and He knew that His sacrifice there would offer a cleansing gift to those who believed.

He looked at Judas and knew that some would not accept this gift of healing, suffering love (John 13:11); the story continues beyond our study text. In John 13:26, Jesus acknowledges before the others that Judas will betray Him. Then, our Lord calls us to be the servants who serve others (John 13:15).

Back to the pedicure shop. Once someone told me what to do, I was able to slip my feet into warm, healing water. What a gift! Accept the gift! And Jesus has invited His disciples—and us—to accept the gift of His cleansing power. Accept it. Jesus will do the cleaning.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Ernst Haenchen (*John 2*, Fortress) observes: “When as rabbi and Lord Jesus washes the feet of his disciples... the real emphasis lies on this motif of love.”

Prayer:

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

June 2025

June 1, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; 16:13-24

“Reading Other People’s Mail: Text in Context”

My first name is Frank. I only use that name in legal documents. When I need to sign papers, I usually write “F. Belton Joyner, Jr.” Because of that, I often get scam mail or bulk mail that addresses me as “Dear F.”

The choice of names is interesting. My father, myself, my son, and my first grandson all have had the name “Frank Belton.” All of us have used the name “Belton.”

I mention all of this about names because I noticed in this week’s focal text from 1 Corinthians that Paul names lots of people: Paul, Sosthenes, Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus, Aquila, and Prisca. It is clear that personal relationships in the church family were important to Paul. Those relationships were at the core of how Paul lived out his relationship with Jesus Christ.

There is an interesting use of language in 1 Corinthians 16:14, 22, 24. In two of those verses (vv. 14, 24), the apostle invites his readers to love (v. 14), and then he sends his own love (v. 24). He uses the word *agape*, the freely given love that cares for the other whether or not it is deserved. But look at v. 22, ‘*Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord. Our Lord, come!*’ Paul writes of loving or not loving Jesus and uses *philia* to describe that love. *Agape* love is given even when not deserved.

Philia’s love is given when it is deserved. Jesus Christ deserves to be loved!

Paul is pastorally generous in greeting the church in Corinth with such warmth (1 Corinthians 1:1-3). With that kind of salutation, you’d think the Corinthians were perfect as Christian people. Not so! Look at 1:10-17; it is about division in the church. Look at 3:9-15. It is about brokenness in the church. Look at 5:1-13. It is about sexual immorality. It is about boasting. Look at 8:1-13. It is about eating food that is dedicated to idols. Look at 11:27-34. It is about the abuse of the Lord’s Supper. The church in Corinth was far from perfect, but Paul greets them with affection, warmth, and love.

One way to name Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians is to say that it was authentic. He named their togetherness with love. He called out their broken places with love. He offered them new beginnings with love. There was no pretending. Such love was real.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Christian Art of Dying* (Eerdmans), Allen Verhey quotes Anders Nygren: “The four main features of *agape* are that it is unmotivated, indifferent to value, creative, and the initiator of fellowship with God.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Loving God, help me to love...”

June 8, 2025

Text: Acts 18:1-11

“Paul’s Experience in Corinth”

When we think of the apostle Paul, we usually think of his preaching or his teaching. But he also had to buy clothes, get groceries, and pay for his cell phone. Well, maybe he didn’t have a cell phone, but there were everyday expenses to be met. Occasionally, friends would help him with those expenses (2 Corinthians 11:9), but like the rest of us, he had to have some income.

How did he make a living? This week’s focal text gives us a clue. Acts 18:3 lets us know that Paul was a tentmaker. (Some scholars translate that verse to mean “harness maker.”)- It was hard work (See 1 Thessalonians 2:9). It was tiring work (See 1 Corinthians 4:12). Sometimes, it interfered with his ministry as an apostle. (See 1 Corinthians 9:6.)

Paul had many spiritual gifts, but when I remember that he was a tentmaker, I am reminded that God uses ordinary people to undertake God’s mission in the world.

“Ordinary people.” Most of us are on that list! It doesn’t give us much hiding room to avoid God’s call to witness, mission, service, and care.

This week’s study title is “Paul’s Experience in Corinth.” Acts 18:11 tells us that Paul was there in Corinth for only a year and a half. In 2 Corinthians 2:1, he describes it as a painful visit but says that he did not mean it for pain but for an expression

of “the abundant love that I have for you.” How have you ever been misunderstood? Have others sometimes questioned your motives? Paul might say, “Welcome to the club!”

In these verses describing Paul’s time in Corinth (Acts 18:1-11), we see Paul connect with Jews and Gentiles. My temptation is to relate only to those with whom I already agree. Paul shows us courage and an openness that bears much fruit (Acts 18:8).

What Someone Else Once Said:

In *A Journey of Love and Miracles* (iUniverse), Ken and Pat Birt wrote this as one of a series of suggestions for life’s journey: “Listen to your inner-self. Sometimes, a change of plans might be exactly what God directs. God works in marvelous ways, and Ken and Pat believe He does communicate with you and directs you on the correct path.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord God, I am an ordinary person, so use me as You will. Where is the Corinth of my journey? I know that I shall find You there. Lord Jesus, You have gone there ahead of me...”

June 15, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:4-17

“Baptized with the Holy Spirit”

Look at 1 Corinthians 1:15-16. Paul seems to devalue baptism. Rather than that, I think he is trying to clarify a misunderstanding that many had in that day. There were those who assumed that the person who did the baptizing then had ownership of the person who was baptized. We can see that in 1 Corinthians 1:12 where Paul gives examples of how people think they belong to the person who baptized them. “I belong to Paul,” one says. Another claims, “I belong to Apollos.” “I belong to Cephas.” It is almost like it is around here when one person shouts, “I belong to the Tar Heels,” and another yells back, “I belong to the Wolfpack!” “I belong to the Pirates,” bellows another. Finally, a talented, intelligent, attractive friend quietly says, “I belong to the Blue Devils.” (Oops, I couldn’t resist.)

Paul didn’t want people to think that anyone belonged to him. Baptism in the name of Jesus meant that the one baptized belonged to Jesus. To make any other claim divided a people who ought to find unity in Christ Jesus. Our ritual for baptism makes it clear: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” That’s the name that you bear! That tells you who owns you!

The division in the Church at Corinth really bothered Paul. That’s really the first thing he addresses in his first letter to the Corinthians. One cannot help but wonder if Paul addresses that same concern to the Church in the twenty-first century!

In 1 Corinthians 1:17, Paul acknowledges that he understands his call is to be a preacher/teacher (“proclaimer”), not one who “specializes” in baptizing. Let us learn from that! God’s call to you

may be different than God’s call to me. Laypersons may be called to ministry in the marketplace, while clergy are called to ministry in the sanctuary. I know that is an oversimplification, but you can see that it represents the variety of calls from God. Each of us must look at our life setting our insights, gifts, and opportunities, and out of all of that, come to understand God’s call upon us.

Karl Barth once described it this way: “The Christian holds the newspaper in one hand and the Bible in the other.” Wow, out of that “conversation” between the Bible and the newspaper, we learn how God can use us.

What Someone Else Once Said:

Charlie Baber (*Incompatible*, Cascade Books) quotes Martin Luther: “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by men but by God himself... For what work can man do that is greater than God’s work?”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Bring Your call to me, O God, that I might be who and want You want me to be...”

June 22, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“Scandal and Foolishness”

Years ago, when I was in college, I was sitting in a dorm group discussion. Usually, we talked about the most recent ball game or what grade we hoped to make in the English class, but on this night, we got to talking about religion. All kinds of beliefs and practices were represented. Finally, one of the Christians in our group told how he believed that God saved us through the cross of Jesus. One fellow in the group laughed and said, “That doesn’t make a bit of sense,” to which the Christian smiled and said, “Good! That means that you understand. You are right. It does not make sense!”

Paul puts it this way: “For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

The Corinthian church was not filled with folks who had a PhD degree in theology (1 Corinthians 1:26). Few of them had ever won the World Series (1:26). Not many came from prestigious families (1:26). This left them nothing upon which to boast except the power of God’s claim upon them (1:31).

The Christian in my college dorm group got it right: It doesn’t make sense. We are accustomed to measuring success, beauty, strength, and influence by the world’s standards. It does not make sense to measure life’s values by a dead man on a Roman cross. But, if I look there and see my sin nailed to that tree, I begin to accept God’s freedom-giving gift. It doesn’t make sense, but it is what God has done. I am set free for a new life!

When I come to the cross and find my sins forgiven, I have received a gift far beyond the wisdom of the world! When I come to the cross and find a “yes” for my life, I have seen and experienced God’s most amazing power.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Wallace H. Kirby (*Affirming the Ash Heap*, CSS Publishing Company) wrote, “But God took the cross and used it. If the words and deeds of Jesus could not save us from our willfulness, if the daily ministry of love could not overcome our cantankerousness, then maybe a cross could awaken our dull souls. God took the cross of Jesus, which was fashioned to destroy God’s dream, and used it for his purpose.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Loving and forgiving God...”

June 29, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-16

“Which Wisdom”

What differences do you see between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom revealed by God? There was a homeless woman who attended Bethany Church. She said, “I feel at home here.”

I remember a very wealthy man who attended Trinity Church. He said, “It is one of the few places I can go and not be made to sit at the head table.”

Then there was the man who quit Pine Valley Church because the Church Council spent so much time deciding how to give away money.

How about the time a very intoxicated member of the Mebane Church left home and tried to live in a nearby motel? He finally told the hotel’s manager to call his pastor because “he will be willing to help me.”

These are real people in real places, that I recall. It is the sort of thing that can happen when the wisdom of God’s Holy Spirit breaks into our journey (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).

We certainly remember that the church in Corinth was not perfect (for example, 1 Corinthians 1:10; 3:3; 5:1; 6:1; 8:11; 11:18). This report just in: the church you attend is not perfect either! But notice that even these incomplete believers can be captured by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Where have you seen the Spirit of God bring the wisdom of God to overcome the wisdom of the world? Where have you seen the Spirit of God lead you and your colleague believers into love and justice that the world does not understand? Where have you seen the Spirit of God bring spiritual results far beyond the worldly skills and competencies that the Church possesses?

The Holy Spirit of God that Paul celebrates in this letter to the Corinthians is still alive and well in this twenty-first century. God ain’t through with us yet!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory* (Harper Collins), Tim Alberta tells of a prayer he heard: “Lord, I pray that we would not fall into the trap of thinking we know who the right or the wrong people are, that we would extend the mercy and grace, the forgiveness and the message of Jesus to everyone,...and, Lord, may we be on mission to be a faithful presence, to communicate the gospel, that all who hear may turn and be healed.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Open me to Your wisdom, O God, that I might be a tool in this world...”

July 2025

July 6, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-22

**“Farmers and Builders:
Images of Unity”**

Look around you. Do you see anything for which you are totally responsible for its being?

I look at my shirt—a gift from my sister. I look out the window at my home—yard work done by a landscaping company. I look at the computer at which I am typing—put together by folks far wiser than I and sold to me by a clerk in a store about twenty minutes from here. I look at the Bible on my desk—generations of stories. I look at my Snoopy watch—given to me by my friend Dan. I look at the chair in the corner—it belonged to my mother-in-law. I look at the veins in my hand—blood given to my mother by a creator God. I didn’t “do” any of it, yet it somehow all comes together in this time and place. Let’s call it unity.

Think about your experience in faith. I remember family prayers. I remember my third-grade Sunday School teacher, Mrs. Rowland. I remember a week at a church camp where a counselor gave me something important to do while I, a non-swimmer, painfully watched the others splash in the river. I remember Art Brandenburg, director of the Methodist student program at my college. I remember the assurance I felt for “a good tomorrow” for my wife when she died. I remember ... well, it will be different from your journey, but none of us have come to this moment of faith all by ourselves. Faith is personal, but it is a community event. Unity.

In this focal text (1 Corinthians 3:1-22), Paul uses an image of how crops are grown by a variety of activities. He speaks of how a house is built with a range of materials, each doing something it brings to the construction. It takes all of the steps for the crops to grow. It takes all of the materials for the house to be built. But, because there is a common purpose, these varieties live together in unity. And that is the Church!

Paul planted (3:6). Apollos watered (1:6). And God gave the growth (1:6). Think about the congregation in which you share life. Who has the vision of your mission? Who can articulate that mission? Who connects with the place of the mission? Who can figure out how you are going to pay for the mission? Who has the best sense of the best time for your mission? Who has the gifts needed for your mission? All of that. They're all different. But it's Unity.

You get the idea. The mission of your congregation will unfold with the variety of abilities coming together for a common purpose. Look at 1 Corinthians 3:9, '*... we are all God's servants, working together;...*'. Meaning it is in working together that we are doing God's work.

What Someone Else Has Said:

N. T. Wright (*Paul*, Harper One) observes: "...it mattered that the followers of Jesus should find a way of living together as a single family despite the inevitable tensions that a new, but suddenly far-flung, movement would experience."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Unite us, O God, as one people..."

July 13, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

"Lawsuits"

(As you may know, if you have been following these commentaries for a while, they are written well in advance of the date for the study. Occasionally, this creates a problem. This week, for example, this commentary is being written before there is a title given to the study. For our purposes here, I have given it a title ("*Lawsuits*"), but that may not be the title that appears in the Sunday School book that you use. Thanks for understanding!)

Paul is upset that some of the Corinthian Christians are resolving their differences by going to civil court rather than working it out among themselves (1 Corinthians 6:1). Because of a translation issue, readers of the Revised Standard Version may miss some of the power of Paul's pain. In 1 Corinthians 6:5-6, the RSV refers to "believers" taking other "believers" to court. The word translated as "believers" is *adelphou*. That word literally means "brother." The translation to "believer" is an effort to avoid sexist language. Other translations (such as the New English Bible) have avoided the sexist language by rendering the word as "brother or sister."

This broader translation ("brother or sister") reveals some of the depth of Paul's anguish. Going to civil court is not just between two people who disagree; it is between two members of the same family—"brother or sister." This amplifies the torment Paul feels. The Church community is a family, and to chase one another to civil court is to tear apart a family. That pain still hurts in the twenty-first century, doesn't it?

The apostle lists a lot of things that are outside of kingdom values (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Several of these have to do with sexual relationships. One of the biggest disagreements among translators is the word *malakoi* (v. 9). Is it "effeminate"? (King James Version). Is it "male prostitutes"? (New Revised Standard Version). Is it "participants in same-sex intercourse"? (New English Bible). Is it "abusers of themselves as women"? (Interlinear Translation). Is it "homosexual offenders"? (New International Version). Perhaps the best way to understand this controversial word is to understand that it means "sexual life other than what God has intended for you."

The bottom line in this concern for kingdom living is the celebration that even though we have sinned (v. 11, "*And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and the spirit of our God.*"), God can cleanse us and give us a holy life in Christ Jesus. May it be so!

What Someone Else Has Said:

John Wesley (*Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Allenson) has said of *malakoi*: "who live in an easy and indolent way..."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord, help me to see what You have created me to be..."

July 20, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

"Honor the Holy Spirit"

What is the connection between what we had for supper and the Holy Spirit? What is the connection between sexual activity and the Holy Spirit? What is the connection between my time at the gym and the Holy Spirit?

Paul answers all three of these questions in 1 Corinthians 6:19. Your body is not your own but belongs to God, so what you do with your body is what you are doing to God. "Glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20). When I think about it, I have to say that God has chosen to live in some very unlikely places! If I knew that someone was coming to live in my house, I'd do some serious cleaning. What have I done with my body to show that I know that God comes to live there?

My grand niece-in-law (Is that who she is? She is my wife's sister's daughter's son's wife.) is a child and youth therapist. Because of confidentiality, she cannot share details, but as a generalization, she says that issues for her clients are often comparing their body image to the body images of others. We older folks do the same! So, all of us do well to hear what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:15: "Do you not know that your bodies are limbs and organs of Christ?" (New English Bible). That biblical truth surely makes a difference in how I treat and how I use my body!

I probably don't need to look much further than the mirror to see ways in which I have not honored the presence of God in my body. How about you? The broken places in the use of my body may not be the same as the broken places Paul describes in 1 Corinthians, but that does not excuse me from the self-examination he calls for in 1 Corinthians 6:15.

My teenage friend Parker taught me a game to play while driving. I am to make up a sentence using the letters on the license plate of the stopped car in front of me. The letters in order form the first letter of the words in my sentence. This afternoon, I stopped at a red light, and in front of me was a license plate with "JLH." I had been thinking about this text, so I said, "Jesus Lives Here." Amen.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In their book *God Loves Sex* (Baker Books), Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III have written: "The more we delight in inner beauty, the more we will be readily disposed to be in awe of the beauty even in an aging person. We must grow in our ability to see the body as a reflection of the glory of the unseen."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Yes! You are here, Lord..."

July 27, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

"Look Out for Each Other"

To tell you the truth, I sat in front of my computer twice without typing a single word. I could not think of a good parallel in today's culture that matched the issue Paul raised about eating food sacrificed to idols. For a vegetarian, it might be any meat. For a non-drinker, it might be any alcoholic drink. For some Christian believers, it might be eating hummus in a popular Muslim restaurant.

None of that quite rang true. What did ring true is the reality that my behavior sends a signal to others, both believers and unbelievers.

You never know. I remember something that happened to me about forty years ago. I was in Nashville, Tennessee, over five hundred miles from my home in North Carolina. I ventured into a downtown restaurant and prepared to eat. When my food was delivered, I bowed my head and offered a silent thanksgiving. The food was delicious, some kind of German food that I cannot pronounce. I finished my meal, paid the waitress, and got up to leave. When I did, a man I did not know came over to me and, after apologizing for bothering me, said, "Aren't you a preacher from North Carolina?"

Needless to say, I was stunned and must have wondered for a split second how I should respond. I nodded my head, "Yes." The man said, "My wife and I were sitting over there, and when we saw you bow your head for the blessing, we looked more closely. That is when she said, "I think that is the pastor in Durham who had Uncle Bob's funeral."

Indeed, I was. We chatted for a few minutes and went our separate ways. My mind raced back over the previous minutes. Had I done or said or acted in any way that I would not have if I had only known that someone close by knew me? Bottom line: Live your best life of love wherever you go. Paul reminds us that "love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1), and that is the spirit that is always appropriate.

I am responsible for my own behavior because of its impact on how others relate to Christ (1 Corinthians 8:11). You never know who is watching. Uh, God is.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. (*Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics*, Abingdon Press) has written: "The efficacy of grace is measured by the difference between the old life and the new."

Prayer:

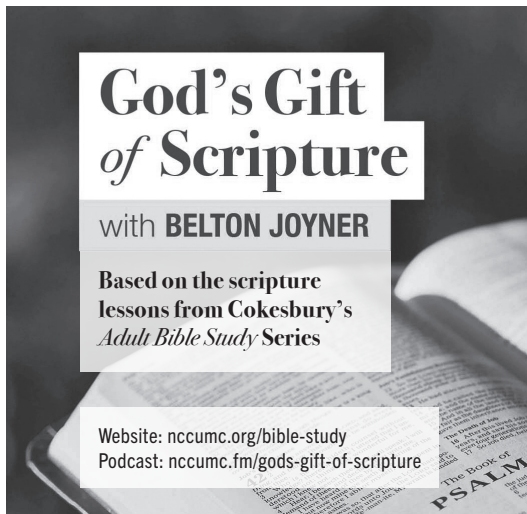
As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "O Lord, bring me the grace to be the witness You want me to be..."

A Special Thank You

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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