

August 2025

August 3, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

“How Not to Eat a Supper of the Lord”

When I was growing up in eastern North Carolina, most of the churches I knew anything about had Communion about four times a year. In fact, I remember a Sunday School teacher telling me we had Communion only once a quarter because we thought so highly of the service. She said, “Those places that have it all the time (she meant the Roman Catholics and Episcopalians) have made it lose its meaning because they do it so much. It is just ordinary for them.”

Do you remember the first time you took Communion? My father was pastor of a church in Siler City. He told me that I should not come down the aisle to receive the sacrament until I was old enough to understand what was going on. I still recall—about eighty years ago—the Sunday he told me that if I wanted to, I could join the others who came to kneel to receive the bread and juice. And down the aisle I went!

I think I have told you before about James. He is about four years old. On the Sundays we have Communion, his father gets up from the pew and slips out the back door to the nursery to get his son. He brings him back to the sanctuary and smiles as James runs down the aisle to take his place in line at the Communion table.

In this week’s focal text, these same kinds of issues were collecting around the Lord’s Supper. What about divisions in the Church (1 Corinthians 11:18)? What about those who sneer at the less fortunate (1 Corinthians 11:22)? How much of the experience of Communion “broadcasts” (New English Bible) the story of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:25)? What about those who come to the Table without examining the “self” they bring (1 Corinthians 11:28)? Who might be getting left out of the Holy Feast (1 Corinthians 11:33)?

If the apostle Paul was at your church the next time you have Communion, what might his observations and instructions be? Is Christ’s Table open to all? In what way is the focus of the Lord’s Supper the gifts given by Jesus Christ? What spiritual gifts happen on Communion Sunday that do not happen on other gathering occasions? In what ways is the service about individual relationships with our Lord, and in what ways is it about the community formed by our Lord? Come: “Eat this bread; drink this cup.”

What Someone Else Has Said:

Robert Goodloe (*The Sacraments in Methodism*, Methodist Publishing House) has written: “The Lord’s Supper: a memorial to Christ, a communion with his followers, a proclamation that Jesus is Lord, and an anticipation of his coming again.”

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Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your invitation to Your Table...”

August 10, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 12

“Spiritual Gifts”

Let’s start with the obvious: A gift is something that is given to you. If you deserve it, it is not a gift. If you have earned it, it is not a gift. If you have worked hard to get it, it is not a gift. And the apostle Paul says that God has given many gifts, and not everyone has the same gift (1 Corinthians 12:3-6). Even the faith to claim Jesus as Lord is a gift (1 Corinthians 12:3). No, I didn’t figure it out. God has given the gift of faith.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul identifies a number of the gifts that God gives: faith (v. 3), wisdom (v. 8), knowledge (v. 8), healing (v. 9), miracles (v. 10), prophecy (v. 10), discernment (v. 10), speaking and understanding various tongues (v. 10), apostles (v. 28), prophets (v. 28), teachers (v. 28), healing (v. 28), use of power (v. 28), assistance (v. 28), leadership (v. 28).

My guess is that as you read that list, you thought of people you know who have been given such gifts. Let’s look at some ways those gifts show up in our time and place.

Prophet? We usually think of a prophet as someone who can predict the future. The biblical understanding of prophecy is wider than that. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of someone else. Do you know persons who are speaking God’s truth as they share?

Healing? Of course, we are grateful for those who can be God’s instrument in bringing new physical beginnings for sick or injured people. But what about those whose spirit and outreach are to heal the broken places in our lives, to restore unity when we begin to choose sides?

That also is healing!

Tongues? There are indeed communities that value those who speak or interpret what seems foreign but Spirit-driven. But what about those whose gift is to explain important concepts and terms that seem beyond our comprehension? Do you know someone who can say what “eschatological soteriology” means? That is a valuable gift that helps us understand!

Leadership? We all know how blessed we are when our church leaders are gifted in administration! (Do you see the word “ministry” hidden in the word “administration”? Yes, Church Council chair, I am thinking of you! Yes, Bishop! I am thinking of you!)

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Alec Allenson, Inc.), John Wesley wrote: “The abundance of these (spiritual gifts) in the churches of Greece strongly refuted the idle learning of the Greek philosophers.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Gracious Giver of gifts...”

August 17, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“An Even Better Way”

Want to play a game? Get your class or group to find 1 Corinthians 13. Now, get them to pretend they have never seen these familiar words. What new discussion emerges?

Verse 1: What do the voices of angels sound like? When have I heard an angel speak? Isn’t a noisy gong or clanging cymbal sometimes helpful? What is Paul trying to teach us?

Verse 2: If I met someone who could explain all mysteries and whose faith could remove mountains, I’d think I had found someone clearly in touch with God. Why does Paul feel differently? What does love bring that these other values do not have?

Verse 3: If you donate huge sums to a mission project, what keeps this from being an act of ministry and service?

Verses 4-7: Do you remember three Greek words that get translated as “love”? *Eros* is erotic love. *Philia* is brotherly/sisterly love. *Agape* is the kind of love described in these verses. Can you give an example of each of these kinds of love?

Verse 13: Can you make a case that faith is greater than hope and love? Can you make a case that hope is greater than faith and love? What difference does it make if love is greater than faith and hope?

These verses are among the most familiar in the Bible. Still, we wonder: Is Love greater than Success? Is Love greater than Position? Is Love greater than Life? Every day we are making decisions that give our answer to these questions.

One day, an observer watched Mother Teresa do her dirty, difficult, and dangerous work among people with leprosy. He said to her, “I wouldn’t do that for a million dollars.” She replied, “I wouldn’t either.”

What Someone Else Has Said:

William Lawrence (*When the Church Woke*, Cascade Books) has written: “Love is humbling yourself to the needs of a neighbor...love is hearing the voices of others...love is learning truth...love speaks of justice...love has the courage to judge... and love has the humility to be judged.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Loving God, here now I offer myself to be shaped by Your love. I have seen in Christ Jesus the fullness of love; bring that love now into me that I might have it to give away...”

August 24, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-28

“Paul Teaches Christ’s Resurrection”

The apostle Paul traveled a lot, spoke a lot, and wrote a lot. What did he say was the most important thing he handed to others? In 1 Corinthians 15:3, he proclaims “of first importance” the death, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances of Christ.

We talk a lot about the resurrection during the Easter season, but although it is the shaping influence on our lives, we don’t name it often during the rest of the year. I remember what happened one winter Sunday when our pastor chose for the opening hymn “Christ, the Lord, is Risen Today.” Several of us—oops, including me—asked her if that was a typographical error. After all, it was winter, so why would we be singing that Easter hymn? After reading this week’s focal text, I think the apostle Paul would agree with our pastor’s hymn selection!

Death is often seen as the ultimate enemy of life, but what if death does not have the final word? Paul describes it as the difference between perishable and imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42). Dishonor vs. glory (v. 46). Humiliation vs. splendor (v. 43, Goodspeed translation), Disfigured vs. beautiful (v. 43, Twentieth Century NT translation), Weak vs. full of strength (v. 43, Taylor translation).

In living my life, according to which of these extremes do I live? Do I live as if Christ is still in the tomb? How would my choices be different if I lived in the truth of the resurrection?

Suppose you are watching a World Series baseball game on television. Your favorite team is playing. This is Game Seven, and the winner takes all. The score is tied, and you get nervous as the game goes into extra innings. Your phone rings, and hesitantly you answer. The caller is your good friend. He is calling you to celebrate with you how your team has won the championship. “But it’s not over,” you scream. “Oh, yes; it is!” your friend replies;

the game is over. You must be watching a taped recording of the game. You won!"

Yes. The victory is already won. The resurrection of Jesus Christ has already occurred. It is always in the present tense. We don't have to wait to see how it turns out. Let's live our lives now knowing that the game is over and Christ Jesus won!

What Someone Else Has Said:

Pope Francis (*The Joy of the Gospel*, Image) wrote: "The kingdom is here; it returns, it struggles to flourish anew...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, let your prayer begin: "Alleluia! It is Easter!"

August 31, 2025

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:35-58

"Physical Bodies and Spiritual Bodies"

In these verses, the apostle contrasts a physical body with a spiritual body. One is subject to the forces of nature; the other is subject only to the Spirit, no longer subject to the power of sin and death (v. 44).

We know all too well what it is like to live in a physical body. The unfolding mystery is what it is like to live in a spiritual body. Paul compares this uncertainty to what happens when we plant a seed (v. 37). The seed is planted, but we have only conjecture on what the plant will be like. The physical body goes away, and there is question about the resurrected body (v. 40).

The spiritual body is indeed a body, not just a ghost. That implies relationships; we already claim the joy of renewed and restored relationships and new relationships. A teenager once asked me, "Will I get to talk with John Wesley in heaven?"

Physical bodies perish. Spiritual bodies do not perish. (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). Paul starts the celebration by teasing those powers that thought they controlled us: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). Those powers (sin and law-v. 56) no longer shape us in the spiritual body.

Paul offers a caution. When we hear all this good news about the spiritual life, we are tempted to claim there is no value or meaning when we live in the physical body. Not so! Even now in the physical body we are to be "steadfast, immovable, excelling in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Because we know how the story ends, we know that our good work is not in vain (v. 58).

No one has to be left out of the gift of a spiritual body. Some Corinthians must have said, "I'm not dead yet, so how can I have a spiritual body?" Paul assures them that no one—the living or the dead—is left out. When the last trumpet is sounded, the victory is available to all. (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Thanks be to God!

Thanks be to God indeed!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In her Cambridge Bible Commentary on *I and II Corinthians*, Margaret E. Thrall has written: "...the term *spiritual* implies that our personalities will be completely controlled and directed by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, working within our own spirit so that our whole selves become perfect replicas of the character of Christ. It is the power of the Spirit of God which will continually preserve us alive in future existence..."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "What a gift, O God!..."

September 2025

September 7, 2025

Text: Genesis 18:1-15

"A Promise to Sarah"

This week's study begins a series of reflections on some of the women mentioned in the Old Testament. What gifts did they bring? How were they treated? What can we learn from them? The first study is focused on Sarah, particularly the story in Genesis 18:1-15.

The name "Sarah" in Hebrew is a feminine form of the word for prince or chief. Some have called her the matriarch of the Jewish heritage. The issue in this week's focal text is the meaning of her laugh when he heard that she and Abraham were going to have a son (Genesis 18:10). She even denied laughing (v. 15), so she must have thought that laughing would have been significant.

The most commonly used Hebrew word for "laugh" is *tsa'chaq*. (There is another word—*la'ag*—that means laughing when making fun of someone.) *tsa'chaq* can mean simply having fun, or it can mean amusement, or it can mean shock and surprise, or it can mean being playful, or it can mean to mock someone. No wonder we get confused about what Sarah was doing when she laughed. What did her laughing mean?

I wonder if the writer of Hebrews was thinking of this situation in Genesis when this verse appears in Hebrews 13:2: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Did Sarah know the significance of this surprising message about having a son?

It's not hard to understand Sarah's laughter. ("Can this prediction of my having a baby possibly be true?") When was a time when you found it difficult to accept a promise of God? When was a time you were not sure that God's promise of forgiveness could be trusted? When was a time that

you wondered if God really would give you a new beginning? When was a time when the Good News seemed too good to be true?

After the child is born—they named him Isaac—Sarah recognizes that those around her laugh in amazement (Genesis 21:5-7). This is the laughter of joy.

Sarah models for us a readiness to live out God's purposes, and God's purposes are full of surprises!

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Last Laugh* (Abingdon), William Willimon wrote: "Kierkegaard also says laughter is a prelude to faith. It is not faith, but it is a prelude to faith."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Who, me? (chuckle)...You want me to do what!? (guffaw)..."

September 14, 2025

Text: Genesis 21:8-21

"Hagar's Legacy"

The biblical accounts of God's people do not hide the reality of the multiple shortcomings of those who seek to follow God. Here is the story of Hagar. She is a slave for the wife of one of the leaders of the faith community (Genesis 16:1). A slave! She was not a hired helper; she was a slave.

When the wife of this spiritual leader realized that it looked as if she and her husband would not have children, she suggested that her husband try to get the slave girl pregnant (Genesis 16:2). (This is not a TV soap opera; this is a biblical memory!) Jealousy (Genesis 16:5). Abandoned child (Genesis 21:15-16). Depression (Genesis 21:17).

Good grief! And this is supposed to be a Book with accounts of Good News!

That illegitimate son? Look at Genesis 16:10. That sounds like good news! Jealousy? Look at Genesis 21:10-13. That sounds like good news! Abandoned child? Look at Genesis 21:16-19. That sounds like good news. Depression? Look at Genesis 21:19-20. That sounds like good news.

Over and over again, God has taken human weakness and brought a scene of good news. (Some of the Muslim community see Genesis 16:10 and Genesis 21:21 as roots of Islamic faith. In the *Quran*, Muhammad sees Arabic Muslims as descendants of Ishmael.)

In no way are these turns toward good news supposed to justify the harmful, painful - dare we say sinful? - decisions that created the circumstances. The slavery of Hagar is not justified just because God was able to make something good out of it. This story is not an excuse for us to live any way we want to, "because God can fix it." The apostle Paul recognized that temptation to sin and wrote, "What then are we to say? Should we continue to sin in order that grace may abound? By no means!" (Romans 6:1-2a.)

Hagar's legacy is one of God's sustaining presence in the midst of human brokenness.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Robert Dean McNeil (*Valiant for Truth*, OCAAP) quotes Clarence True Wilson: "'What do you mean by holiness?' I replied, 'Well, the word holiness is a contraction of the word wholeness. These people believe that the great fault of us Christians is not that we fail to hit the mark, but that we do not put our standards high enough.'"

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Reach me, Holy God, and find me when I am not where I am supposed to be..."

September 21, 2025

Text: Genesis 24:20-27, 50-56

"A Woman of Generosity and Selflessness"

Abraham sends one of his servants to find someone to marry Isaac (Genesis 24:4). The servant knows he is on the right track when Rebekah offers refreshing water to him and his camels (Genesis 24:45-46). The servant gives valuable jewelry to Rebekah and her family (Genesis 24:53-54). He thinks this seals the deal, but Rebekah's brother and mother ask that Rebekah stay for ten days, no doubt to think about the proposal to marry Isaac (Genesis 24:55). The servant insists on leaving right then and taking Rebekah with him (Genesis 24:56).

Then comes one of the most telling moments in Old Testament history. "They said, 'We will call the girl, and ask her.'" (Genesis 24:57) And they did! They asked her if she would go with the servant and then marry Isaac. Remember: this was back in a culture when decisions were made for women. This was in a time when marriages for women were arranged by the men who "legally owned" them without regard for the women's wishes. Women were simply tools to be used for the pleasure and plans of men. But Rebekah was given a choice, and she agreed to go with the servant (Genesis 24:58).

In these few verses, we have learned that Rebekah is willing to do what she can to help others. In Genesis 24:42-46, we get an account of her taking initiative to provide water both for Abraham's servant and for the man's camels. Then, she has the courage to make a decision—her choice!—about whether or not to go with this man to a new future. She said, "I will." (Genesis 24:58)

Rebekah had the spiritual gift that allowed her to be ahead of her time. Can you think of persons in our 21st-century culture who do not usually have a voice? Can you think of persons in our 21st-century culture who defy our culture in order to have the freedom to think and to speak?

What spirit and attitude can you and I have to open the door for full life for those for whom our cultural values would keep quiet?

What Someone Else Has Said:

Paul Chaloner in *This Is Esports: An Insider's Guide to the World of Pro Gaming* (Bloomsbury) has written: "I tend to feel women are held to different standards. For better or worse. I don't think this is specific to women in esports but to women in general, especially women in a male-dominated environment or in leadership positions. A man is seen as competent by the majority when taking on a new role, while a woman needs to prove she is. To be clear, I don't think it's just a gaming problem. I think it's a problem our society has everywhere. We need to shift our culture to be more respectful of others and of differences."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Thank You, Lord, for the gift of Rebekah's example. Open me to other such gifts You would give..."

September 28, 2025

Text: Genesis 29:31-30:24

"Rachel and Leah:

A Fruitful Sibling Rivalry"

These are strange verses about how God provided children for barren women, how God used non-marital relationships to conceive babies, and how two sisters kept pace with one another in producing family heirs. As complex as all this is, the story is pulled together in how the infant boys were given names that became the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. (There was also a daughter who was named Dinah.)

Are you as mystified by all this as I am? One thing is clear: the work of God and God's people is beyond my limited ability to understand!

How much of this bizarre baby business would have occurred if Leah and Rachel were not competing for Jacob's attention and affection? Have you ever done something (positive or negative) that you would not have ordinarily done, but you did it because there was someone you wanted to impress?

Throughout this account, Rachel and Leah give God credit for good things that happen to them: Genesis 29:32, Genesis 29:33, Genesis 29:35; Genesis 30:6, Genesis 30:18, Genesis 30:20, Genesis 30:23. Do you praise God only when things seem to go your way?

When I graduated from college, each graduate was called by name in alphabetical order. When my name was called, there was a tremendous outburst of cheering, clapping, and celebration. I tried to be modest in acknowledging this acclamation. Uh, then I realized that this enthusiasm was not for me. Remember...we were coming down the line in alphabetical order. Right behind me (Joyner) was Sonny Jurgensen and the shouting was for him, a star football player who later made it into the NFL Hall of Fame. Oops. Misunderstanding can lead to embarrassment or error. Do you think Leah and Rachel misunderstood how God was (or was not)

at work in their situation? Were they right in giving God the credit and/or blame?

This session completes this unit about some of the women who are key players in Genesis. They are not all alike. They are not equally in touch with God. They are not always consistent. These lessons make it clear: women are both gifted and burdened with the human condition.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Joy of the Gospel* (Image), Pope Francis wrote: "But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church....and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Lord, You love us all..."

October 2025

October 5, 2025

Text: Jeremiah 1:1-19

"But I Am Only a Youth!"

This week, we begin several sessions drawing on the prophet Jeremiah. I was curious, so I dug around a bit to see what the name "Jeremiah" means. I am no Hebrew scholar, but it is obvious that Old Testament scholars do not agree on the meaning of the name.

Does it mean "appointed by God"? Does it mean "God will establish"? How about "God will raise up"? One writer says, "Jeremiah" means "Loosen the name of God." Another suggests it means "Yahweh throw." Here's another one you can look up: more than fifty years ago, there was a popular song, "Jeremiah Was a Bullfrog." It is suggested that the writer of the song was inspired to do so after reading the biblical book of Jeremiah.

The prophet remembers how he felt God's claim and call upon him. In fact, he recalls that he protested the call by asserting "I am only a boy!" (Jeremiah 1:6). That makes me wonder when I have questioned God's claim upon me. Calling me, Lord? I am not educated enough. I do not have enough experience. I don't know how to make things clear to others. I don't have a certain understanding of Your divine purposes. I don't have enough money to do what needs to be done. I am busy with other things You asked me to do. I'm not sure what it is You want me to do.

It is interesting in this first chapter of Jeremiah that the prophet records visions and images as ways God communicates with him. In Jeremiah 1:11-12, an almond tree is a symbol of how God will bloom in victory when God's purposes are fulfilled. (A similar garden image is noted in Jeremiah

24:3.) God asks Jeremiah what he sees, and it is “a pot boiling over from the north.” The prophet understands that the faithful need to prepare to push back against those who would defame God and God’s people.

What images bring God’s truth to you? How about the various colors during the seasons of the Church year? How do they speak to you? How do you think/feel when the pastor makes a sign of the cross when giving the benediction? What truth is revealed to you when you dip a bread crumb into a cup of grape juice? God is still using visions, symbols, and images to get God’s word to us.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Oxford), a book edited by John Tyson, there is a Wesley hymn quoted that is based on a text in Jeremiah: “No, they cry, it cannot be! Christians never will agree! All the world Thy word deny, Yet we on the truth rely. Sure, in that appointed day, Thou wilt give us all one way. Show us each to other join’d. One in heart, and one in mind.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Use us, even us, O Lord...”

October 12, 2025

Text: Jeremiah 12:1-13

“Jeremiah Lays Charges Against God”

Read today’s focal text and then ask yourself this question: Do I have the nerve to complain to God about God? Lord, why did You let that happen? Lord, why don’t You do something to make things better? Lord, why do evil people so often win?

The context for these verses in Jeremiah is a time of great military loss for Jeremiah’s people. (Some think that 2 Kings 23:31-37 tells what happened.) Whatever the circumstance, what impresses me is that Jeremiah does not pretend to understand; he does not pretend to think that all is okay. The prophet brings his real self to God, even wondering if God is to be blamed for these miserable days.

I don’t think God is fooled when we bring a “fake self” to God. The one who is fooled is myself, thinking I have tricked God into thinking I am a bit better than I really am. I am the one who is fooled!

Contrast that with the story of the man who brought his sick son to Jesus (Mark 9:14-29). Jesus told this father that good things can happen for those who believe. The man answers with the full truth: “I believe! I believe!” Then he added this plea of reality: “Help thou my unbelief” (King James Version).

Had you rather be a puppet who could speak only perfectly programmed lines, or had you rather be a human with free will and the ability to make mistakes? Rather than putting us on automatic pilot, God has created us so we can do wrong, even creating a culture where Sin, not Love, is sometimes

the deciding force. Our decisions, our purposes, our actions have meaning because they are the result of choice, not simply on autopilot.

The prophet Jeremiah offers us many valuable insights and helpful accounts, but perhaps none is more valuable than these verses when he is totally authentic with God. The heading of these verses in my Revised Standard Version edition is “Jeremiah Complains to God.” I am invited by these verses to bring my real self—joys, doubts, angers, peace, uncertainty, trust—when I come before the Lord...in prayer, in thought, in deed, in life.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, (John Knox Press) wrote: “God in His own freedom bestows human freedom...Human freedom is the gift of God in the free outpouring of His grace.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord, You have made me free, so I share with You my doubts, my angers, my joys, my love...”

October 19, 2025

Text: Jeremiah 13:15-27

“The Shame of Exile”

If you think these focal verses are strange, take a look at the opening verses of Jeremiah 13. Let me give you a warning: those verses are about dirty underwear. (Uh, dirty underwear clings to the body like sinful Israel clings to the Lord.)

Jeremiah records God’s challenge to Israel, a people in exile because of their choices of evil. Jeremiah 13:27 poses the hard-core question: “How long will you remain dirty?” (Common English Bible)

Jeremiah 13:15-27 is filled with violent, shameful accounts. Rape. Adultery. Prostitution. This poem challenges all that is holy and right. Verse 23 offers the depressing image that it is not likely to change any more than we can change our skin color.

Some students of the Bible think that Jeremiah’s lament in verses 18 and 19 is a poetic description of the military defeat depicted in 2 Kings 24:8-17. Indeed! What the prophet is writing about are real things happening to real people.

I like the Revised Standard Version translation of the closing sentence of Jeremiah 13:27: “How long will it be before you are made clean?” That translation ends these terribly tragic verses with a touch of hope. You don’t make yourself clean, but you can be made clean. God is still alive and well!

Have you ever felt that you were in exile? What is it like to be cut off from the people and places you know? If all of the political and social decisions seem cut off from what you value, do you feel like you are in exile? To what extent have you traded God’s spiritual gifts for things measured by the world as valuable? Exile.

The prophet Jeremiah answers those questions with

this heavy account of all that has gone wrong for Israel. Looking ahead to next week's study, Jeremiah has a word about God's promise of a renewed relationship. I don't know about you, but after reading this poem in Jeremiah 13:15-27, I'm ready to hear some good news!

What Someone Else Has Said:

David Lowes Watson (*God Does Not Foreclose*, Abingdon) put it this way: "...Should there be... even one of God's family who, after repeated entreaties and boundless pastoral care and concern, stubbornly refuses to accept his birthright of salvation...then God's cry of anguish will rend the cosmos..."

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Bring me home, Lord..."

October 26, 2025

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

"God's Promise of a Renewed Relationship"

Sometimes it is hard to have hope. Last night I was watching a baseball game on television. It was the bottom of the ninth inning with two outs with nobody on base. The team at bat was behind 4-0. Time to pack up and go home, right? The batter was walked. The next batter got a single. The next batter got on base when the shortstop fumbled the easy out. The next batter hit a home run. The score was tied, 4-4. Extra innings. And guess who won!

The prophet Jeremiah was living in such a time. It was the bottom of the ninth inning. God's people were divided into two competing nations, Israel and Judah, northern and southern kingdoms. Leader after leader and follower after follower were hauled off into Exile. At almost every turn, the people of

Yahweh were finding new ways to violate the Ten Commandments. As the saying goes, "It was all over but the shouting." Sometimes it is hard to have hope.

But the prophet Jeremiah has a different word, a new promise. The prophet announces that God is going to win the game! Sin will be forgiven (v. 34). The broken-apart kingdoms will come together as one (v. 31). Serving God in love will become part of who God's people are (v. 33).

In Luke 22:20, Jesus acknowledges that a new covenant is realized in Him. The apostle Paul understands that this victory is brought alive in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11:25, 2 Corinthians 3:6). The writer of Hebrews knows Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the promise (Hebrews 9:15). (The writer of Hebrews even quotes the Jeremiah text—Hebrews 8:8.)

Sometimes it is hard to have hope.

But God has sent Jesus Christ to restore our broken relationship with God.

But God has sent Jesus Christ to restore our broken relationships with one another.

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. We are invited to say "Yes" to this new covenant.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* (Kingswood Books), M. Douglas Meeks has written: "...Paul points to the new creation as the power of life in Jesus Christ...Thus the new creation is all-embracing in its integration of personal, historical, and cosmic dimensions of God's relation to the world and our life in God."

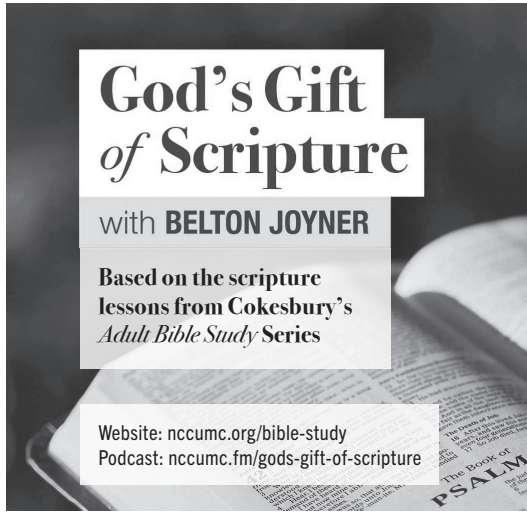
Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Yes, Lord! Yes, Lord! Bring Your promise to my loss of hope..."

Thank You for Your Continued Support

We continue praying for the people in our state and beyond who have been impacted by natural disasters. We also extend a thank you to local churches across the conference for sharing your gifts.

Visit nccumc.org/disaster for more information about ways to support disaster response ministry.



Listen to the Bible Study Online:

Belton Joyner enriches and enlivens our study of scripture with his insightful writing. You can also engage with the Bible Study through an audio version of his weekly commentary, narrated by Belton himself.

To listen online, type nccumc.org/bible-study into the search bar of your internet browser (Chrome, Firefox, Microsoft Edge, etc.). You can also subscribe to the weekly podcast on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

Media Center Serves Individuals and Congregations of our Conference

Anyone involved with a United Methodist Church in the North Carolina Conference may borrow resources through the mail, free of charge. There is no membership fee to participate. Our entire collection of over 4,000 resources is listed in an online catalog along with reader reviews, browsing by topic, and more. Most of our resources are for use with small groups, but we also offer many books, videos, and other resources for individual study and leadership training.

Website: nccumc.org/media-center

Contact: Laura Dallas, ldallas@nccumc.org or 984-257-0981.

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