

LENT LESSONS 2026

WEEK 6

MARCH 22, 2026

Lesson 33: Faithful in Work — Righteousness in Calling

Main Text: Colossians 3:23–24

“Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for people...”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

Paul instructs believers to approach their daily work with a transformed perspective. Within the Roman world many Christians occupied difficult social positions, including servitude. Yet Paul reframes their labor in theological terms.

“Whatever you do,” he writes, “do your work heartily, as for the Lord.” The phrase translated “**heartily**” literally means *from the soul*. Work performed with this attitude becomes an act of devotion rather than mere obligation.

By directing attention toward the Lord rather than human supervisors, Paul elevates ordinary labor into sacred vocation. Every task, however small, becomes an opportunity to honor Christ.

Christian traditions have long emphasized this theology of vocation. Reformers such as Martin Luther taught that everyday work can glorify God when performed with faithfulness and integrity. Wesley likewise encouraged believers to practice diligence and stewardship in all forms of labor.

Pentecostal spirituality affirms that the Spirit’s empowerment extends beyond church gatherings into everyday life. The Spirit equips believers to demonstrate excellence, honesty, and perseverance in their professions. Through such faithfulness the gospel becomes visible in ordinary settings.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Bezalel Filled with the Spirit (Exodus 31:1–5)

One of the earliest references in Scripture to a person being filled with the Spirit of God appears not in connection with preaching or prophecy, but with skilled craftsmanship. As Israel prepared to construct the tabernacle in the wilderness—the sacred dwelling place where God’s presence would be manifest among His people—the Lord appointed a man named Bezalel for this task. The Lord declared to Moses, “See, I have called by name Bezalel... and I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship” (Exodus 31:2–3, NASB).

Bezalel was entrusted with designing and constructing many of the most sacred objects used in Israel’s worship. Under the Spirit’s direction, he worked with gold, silver, and bronze, fashioned intricate carvings, and crafted the furnishings that would be used in the

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service of God. The text emphasizes that his artistic ability was not merely natural talent but a gift strengthened and directed by the Spirit of God.

This passage expands our understanding of how the Spirit works among God's people. The Spirit does not empower only prophets, priests, or kings; He also equips those who serve through skillful labor. In Bezalel's case, artistic craftsmanship became an act of worship. Every detail of the tabernacle—its furnishings, garments, and sacred instruments—was shaped through work performed under divine guidance.

The story therefore reveals an important principle about the nature of holiness. Holiness does not exist only in moments of prayer, prophecy, or preaching. It also extends to the faithful use of human skill and labor. When work is performed with devotion to God and guided by His wisdom, ordinary craftsmanship becomes sacred service.

Through Bezalel, Scripture shows that the Spirit sanctifies not only the heart but also the work of the hands. Labor offered to God with excellence and reverence becomes part of the worship through which His glory is revealed among His people.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian history contains many examples of believers who honored God through ordinary work. The Protestant reformer **William Tyndale (1494–1536)** devoted his life to translating the Bible into English so that ordinary people could read Scripture. His labor eventually cost him his life, but his work profoundly shaped the English-speaking church.

The Puritan theologian **William Perkins (1558–1602)** emphasized the dignity of everyday labor. Perkins taught that all legitimate work—whether farming, teaching, or governing—can be performed as service to God.

In the nineteenth century, the missionary **William Carey (1761–1834)** combined theological study with practical labor as a printer and educator in India. Carey's work led to Bible translations in numerous languages and helped launch the modern missionary movement.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Evaluate your work habits.
2. Offer your vocation to God in prayer.
3. Fast from complaint about labor.
4. Practice excellence even when unseen.
5. Ask the Spirit to sanctify your calling.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Lord of All Callings, Forgive my laziness, complaint, or divided motives in work. Consecrate my labor. I depend upon Your Spirit to make even ordinary tasks holy

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offerings. Let righteousness mark my diligence. May my work reflect Your character. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Proverbs 22:29 — Skilled before kings.
- Ecclesiastes 9:10 — Do with all your might.
- Ephesians 6:5–8 — Work as unto the Lord.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 — Work quietly and properly.
- Matthew 25:21 — Faithful in little.

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MARCH 23, 2026

Lesson 34: Steadfast Under Fire — Righteousness That Endures Pressure

Main Text: 1 Peter 2:11–12, 21–23

“Beloved, I urge you as foreigners and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles...”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

Peter wrote his first epistle to communities of believers scattered throughout Asia Minor who were learning to follow Christ while living as minorities within a society shaped by pagan religious practices and imperial loyalty. Their faith placed them in a difficult position. They were citizens of earthly cities and provinces, yet their ultimate allegiance belonged to the kingdom of God. For this reason, Peter addresses them as “foreigners and strangers,” reminding them that their identity is defined not by cultural belonging but by covenant relationship with Christ.

This language does not suggest withdrawal from society. Peter does not call believers to retreat into isolation or abandon engagement with the world around them. Instead, he urges them to live within their communities in such a way that their conduct reflects the character of God. The phrase “keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles” emphasizes visible moral beauty. Christian life becomes a form of witness when it reflects integrity, humility, and compassion in everyday relationships.

Peter also reminds his readers that the greatest threat to this witness often arises from within. He warns that sinful desires “wage war against the soul.” Temptations are not harmless impulses but forces that actively seek to undermine spiritual life. The believer therefore must cultivate vigilance and discipline, guarding the heart so that inward desires do not erode outward faithfulness.

The ultimate model for this kind of endurance is Jesus Himself. Christ endured hostility, misunderstanding, and suffering without abandoning obedience to the Father. Rather than retaliating against His opponents, He entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously. Peter presents this example to encourage believers who face opposition. Faithfulness to God does not depend upon favorable circumstances but upon steadfast obedience.

Practices such as fasting and prayer help sustain this endurance. By directing the heart toward God’s presence, these disciplines strengthen the believer’s ability to resist internal temptation and external pressure. When the focus of life remains centered upon the Lord, the Christian becomes capable of living honorably even in environments that misunderstand or oppose the faith.

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BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3)

The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego provides one of Scripture's clearest demonstrations of steadfast faith under cultural pressure. During the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, a massive golden statue was erected on the plain of Dura. Representatives from across the empire were commanded to gather for its dedication. At the sound of musical instruments, every official was required to bow in worship before the image (Daniel 3:4–6).

For the three young Hebrews serving in Babylon's administration, the command created a direct conflict between imperial authority and loyalty to the God of Israel. When they refused to bow, their defiance was quickly reported to the king. Nebuchadnezzar summoned them and gave them another opportunity to comply, warning that refusal would result in immediate execution in a blazing furnace.

Their reply reveals remarkable composure and theological clarity. They answered the king respectfully but firmly: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire... but even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3:17–18, NASB). Their obedience was not dependent upon the promise of rescue. Faithfulness to God was reason enough to stand firm.

Enraged, the king ordered the furnace heated to extraordinary intensity. Yet when the men were thrown into the fire, Nebuchadnezzar saw something astonishing. Instead of three victims, he observed four figures walking unharmed within the flames, the fourth appearing "like a son of the gods" (Daniel 3:25). The fire that was meant to destroy them became the setting in which God's presence was most clearly revealed.

When the three Hebrews emerged without injury, even the king acknowledged the power of their God. Their refusal to compromise transformed a moment of persecution into a public testimony. The narrative demonstrates that holiness maintained under threat often becomes a powerful witness. Faithfulness to God, even in the midst of pressure, reveals His presence and ultimately brings glory to His name.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian endurance under persecution has appeared throughout history. The early martyr **Perpetua (d. 203)** courageously faced death rather than renounce Christ. Her prison diary, preserved in early Christian literature, reveals profound faith and calm confidence in God.

During the seventeenth century, the Scottish preacher **Samuel Rutherford** endured imprisonment for refusing to compromise his faith. His letters written from prison encouraged believers across Scotland and continue to inspire readers today.

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In the twentieth century, **Richard Wurmbrand**, a Romanian pastor, suffered years of imprisonment under communist persecution. Despite brutal treatment, he continued to proclaim Christ after his release, reminding the global church that faithfulness sometimes requires costly endurance.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Identify current relational or cultural pressures.
2. Fast while praying for perseverance.
3. Respond to hostility with measured speech.
4. Entrust justice to God.
5. Ask the Spirit to produce patient endurance.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Faithful Lord, I confess that under pressure I have reacted in flesh rather than righteousness. Strengthen my endurance. Guard my response. I depend upon Your Spirit to empower patience and holy restraint. When reviled, let me reflect Christ. When pressured, let me remain steadfast. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Matthew 5:10–12 — Blessed when persecuted.
- Romans 5:3–5 — Perseverance produces character.
- Hebrews 12:1–3 — Consider Him who endured.
- James 1:2–4 — Trials producing maturity.
- Revelation 2:10 — Be faithful unto death.

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MARCH 24, 2026

Lesson 35: Above Reproach — Righteous Witness Before the Watching World

Main Text: Titus 2:11–14

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires...”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul emphasizes that the moral life of the Christian begins not with human effort but with the grace of God revealed through Jesus Christ. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Titus 2:11, NASB). Paul does not describe grace merely as pardon for past sin. Instead, he portrays grace as an active force that shapes the life of the believer. The language he uses suggests training or formation, similar to the disciplined instruction given to a child. Grace therefore not only forgives; it educates the heart and reforms the character.

Because grace transforms the believer, it teaches a new way of living. Paul explains that grace instructs believers “to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:12). Salvation is not merely a change in status before God; it initiates a new pattern of life. The believer learns to reject habits and desires that once governed the heart, replacing them with self-control, upright conduct, and reverent devotion to God.

Paul further grounds this moral transformation in the future hope of Christ’s return. Christians live, he says, “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Titus 2:13). The expectation of Christ’s return does not lead to withdrawal from responsibility but to renewed faithfulness in the present. Knowing that Christ will appear encourages believers to live in a manner worthy of the coming kingdom.

The apostle then reminds Titus that Christ “gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14). Redemption therefore includes purification. Christ’s saving work not only rescues believers from sin’s penalty but also restores them to lives marked by righteous action.

Within the Wesleyan and Pentecostal-Holiness traditions, this passage has long been understood as a powerful affirmation that grace and sanctification belong together. The same grace that pardons the sinner also empowers holy living through the work of the Holy Spirit. Practices such as fasting and prayer assist believers in aligning present desires with the future hope of Christ’s kingdom. By denying immediate appetite and

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turning the heart toward God, believers train themselves to live in anticipation of the coming glory of Christ.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Daniel's Reputation (Daniel 6:4)

The life of Daniel provides a vivid illustration of the kind of integrity Paul describes. By the time of Daniel chapter six, Daniel had served for decades within the administrations of several Babylonian and Persian rulers. Under King Darius, he was appointed as one of the highest officials in the kingdom because of his exceptional wisdom and reliability.

Yet Daniel's success provoked jealousy among other leaders in the royal court. These officials began searching for grounds upon which they might accuse him before the king. The text records their frustrating discovery: "They could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him" (Daniel 6:4, NASB). After examining his conduct carefully, they could not identify dishonesty, incompetence, or moral compromise.

Recognizing that Daniel's life was above reproach, his enemies concluded that the only way to trap him would be through his devotion to God. They therefore persuaded the king to issue a decree forbidding prayer to anyone except the king for thirty days. Daniel's integrity left them with no other strategy. His faithfulness in both public service and personal devotion had eliminated every ordinary avenue of accusation.

Daniel's life demonstrates a powerful principle: righteous character often becomes the strongest defense against false charges. When believers consistently live with integrity, even their opponents must acknowledge the difference. The witness of a life shaped by devotion to God speaks more loudly than words alone.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Throughout Christian history, believers have recognized that the credibility of the gospel depends in part upon the visible integrity of those who proclaim it. In the second century, the Christian apologist **Athenagoras of Athens** wrote a defense of the faith addressed to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. Christians had been accused of atheism, immorality, and social disorder. Athenagoras responded not merely with philosophical argument but by pointing to the moral character of Christian communities. He argued that believers were known for purity of life, care for the poor, and fidelity in marriage. Their conduct, he insisted, demonstrated the transforming power of the gospel they proclaimed.

During the eighteenth century, the American theologian **Jonathan Edwards** addressed similar concerns during the Great Awakening. Edwards warned that genuine revival must be measured not by emotional enthusiasm but by moral transformation. In his influential work *Religious Affections*, he argued that authentic spiritual experience produces

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humility, holiness, and love for neighbor. A life shaped by grace, Edwards insisted, becomes the strongest evidence that the gospel is true.

Mission history provides equally powerful examples. The Irish missionary **Amy Carmichael (1867–1951)** spent more than fifty years serving in India, where she rescued vulnerable children from exploitation and established communities devoted to Christian discipleship. Her quiet perseverance and sacrificial love earned the respect of both Christians and non-Christians alike. Carmichael’s life demonstrated that consistent holiness often becomes the most persuasive witness to the watching world.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Evaluate areas where conduct may compromise witness.
2. Fast while asking for moral clarity.
3. Invite trusted accountability.
4. Align daily conduct with gospel confession.
5. Remember Christ’s appearing.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Gracious Redeemer, Thank You for grace that saves and sanctifies. Forgive inconsistency in my witness. I depend upon Your Spirit to empower denial of ungodliness and pursuit of righteousness. Let my life reflect the gospel I proclaim. Make me a people purified for Your possession. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Philippians 2:14–16 — Shine as lights.
- 1 Timothy 3:1–7 — Above reproach.
- Matthew 5:16 — Let your light shine.
- 1 Peter 3:15–16 — Good conscience.
- 2 Corinthians 8:21 — Honorably in the sight of all.

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MARCH 25, 2026

Lesson 36: “I Am Among You as the One Who Serves” — The Lordship of Servanthood

Main Text: Luke 22:24–27

“But I am among you as the One who serves.”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

The Gospel accounts reveal that even in the final hours before His crucifixion, Jesus’ disciples were still wrestling with their understanding of greatness. Luke records that during the meal a dispute arose among them as to which of them should be regarded as the greatest (Luke 22:24). Their thinking reflected the assumptions of the political world surrounding them. In the kingdoms of the ancient world, authority was measured by power, recognition, and the ability to command others. Leaders exercised influence through dominance, and honor was often pursued through visible status.

Jesus responded by confronting this cultural understanding of leadership and replacing it with a radically different model. He explained that among the nations, rulers “lord it over” their subjects, but the pattern of God’s kingdom would not follow the same path (Luke 22:25–26). In Christ’s kingdom, greatness is not measured by how many people serve a leader, but by how willingly the leader serves others. The one who occupies a position of authority must become like the youngest in the household, and the one who governs must adopt the posture of a servant.

Jesus did not present this principle as a mere ethical ideal. He grounded it in His own life and mission. Although He possessed divine authority and eternal glory with the Father, He willingly entered the human condition, taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2:6–7). From His incarnation in Bethlehem to His suffering on the cross, the life of Jesus consistently demonstrated the humility of God’s love. The Son of God exercised authority not by domination but by self-giving service.

Christian history has repeatedly affirmed this pattern. Leaders who have exerted the greatest spiritual influence have often done so through humility and sacrificial care for others. **Francis of Assisi**, for example, renounced wealth and privilege in order to serve the poor and proclaim the gospel through a life of simplicity. Centuries later, **John Wesley** traveled thousands of miles on horseback preaching the gospel and organizing communities of believers, not as a ruler seeking prestige but as a shepherd devoted to the spiritual care of ordinary people.

Spiritual disciplines such as fasting and prayer help cultivate this same humility within the life of the believer. By setting aside personal comfort and focusing attention upon God, these practices weaken pride and self-importance. The heart becomes more attentive

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to the needs of others and more receptive to the servant-like character that Christ Himself displayed.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Jesus Washing the Disciples' Feet (John 13:3–17)

John's Gospel provides a vivid illustration of the servant leadership Jesus taught. During the final meal with His disciples, John carefully notes that Jesus acted with full awareness of His identity and authority: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God..." (John 13:3, NASB). In other words, Jesus did not serve out of insecurity or weakness. His humility flowed from the certainty of who He was and from His complete trust in the Father.

In the middle of the meal, Jesus rose from the table, laid aside His outer garments, and wrapped a towel around His waist. He then poured water into a basin and began washing the feet of His disciples—an act normally reserved for the lowest servant in a household. The scene must have been startling. The one they called "Teacher" and "Lord" assumed the posture of a servant before them.

When Jesus came to Peter, the apostle resisted. The reversal of roles seemed inappropriate and uncomfortable. Peter protested, saying, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" (John 13:6). Yet Jesus insisted that this act was necessary, explaining, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8). The washing symbolized more than hospitality; it pointed to the deeper cleansing that Christ would accomplish through His sacrificial death.

After completing the task, Jesus explained the meaning of what He had done. "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am," He said. "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:13–14). The act of service was not merely a demonstration of humility; it established a pattern for life within the community of believers.

In this moment, the humility of Christ became visible in action. The One through whom all things were made knelt before His followers and performed the work of a servant. By doing so, He revealed that true greatness in the kingdom of God is expressed not through status or recognition but through sacrificial service. Those who follow Christ are therefore called to imitate His example, allowing humility and love to shape the way they lead and care for others.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian leadership has often been most powerful when expressed through humble service. In the fourth century, the Cappadocian bishop **Basil the Great** became widely known for his compassion toward the poor. In the city of Caesarea, he established what historians sometimes call the first large-scale Christian hospital complex. This

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community of care included shelters for travelers, medical treatment for the sick, and provisions for the hungry. Basil believed that genuine Christian leadership must reflect the servant heart of Christ.

A similar spirit appeared centuries later in the ministry of **George Müller (1805–1898)** in Bristol, England. Müller became known for establishing orphanages that eventually cared for more than ten thousand children. Remarkably, he refused to solicit financial support publicly. Instead, he relied entirely upon prayer and the voluntary generosity of believers. His life illustrated a profound trust in God and a commitment to serve the most vulnerable members of society.

Missionary history also offers compelling examples. **Lottie Moon (1840–1912)** devoted nearly forty years to missionary work in China. She lived simply among the people she served, learning their language and culture while tirelessly sharing the gospel. Her sacrificial life and deep compassion helped inspire a massive missionary awakening in American churches. Through such servants, the church has repeatedly seen that Christlike leadership is revealed not in prominence but in humble service.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Identify unnoticed needs around you.
2. Serve without announcement.
3. Fast from recognition-seeking.
4. Pray for humility.
5. Embrace lowly tasks joyfully.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Servant Lord, Forgive my desire for position over service. I have measured greatness by visibility rather than humility. Form Christ’s mind within me. I depend upon Your Spirit to crush pride and cultivate joyful service. Let fasting weaken ambition and strengthen compassion. Make me great by making me low. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Philippians 2:1–11 — Christ’s humility.
- Mark 10:42–45 — The Son of Man came to serve.
- Galatians 5:13 — Serve one another through love.
- John 13 — Foot washing.
- Matthew 23:11–12 — The greatest shall be servant.

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MARCH 26, 2026

Lesson 37: “You Shall Be My Witnesses” — The Normalcy of Gospel Proclamation

Main Text: Acts 1:6–8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses...”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

The opening chapter of Acts records the final instructions Jesus gave to His disciples before His ascension. After His resurrection, He spent forty days appearing to them and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). During this time the disciples were still attempting to understand the nature of the kingdom that Jesus had inaugurated. Their question reveals lingering expectations shaped by Jewish hopes for national restoration: “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). They anticipated a political transformation in which the Messiah would reestablish Israel’s prominence among the nations.

Jesus redirected their attention away from political speculation and toward their true mission. The timing of God’s redemptive purposes remained within the authority of the Father. What the disciples needed to understand was not the schedule of the kingdom but their role within it. Jesus therefore declared that the defining feature of their calling would be witness.

He promised that they would “receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). The word translated “**power**” (*dynamis*) refers to *divine enablement* rather than human ability. The disciples were not being commissioned to rely upon their own persuasive skill or personal courage. Instead, the Holy Spirit would empower them to bear testimony concerning the risen Christ. Their witness would not originate merely from memory or conviction but from the active presence of the Spirit working through them.

The term “**witness**” also carries significant meaning. In the ancient world a witness was someone who testified to events they had personally observed. The apostles had seen Jesus’ ministry, His death, and His resurrection. Their proclamation therefore consisted of bearing truthful testimony about what God had accomplished through Christ. The same Greek word, *martys*, later came to describe those who sealed their testimony with their lives. From the earliest days of the church, witness and suffering were often inseparable.

Jesus also outlined the geographic expansion of this witness: “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” The gospel would begin in Jerusalem, the city where Jesus had been crucified and raised. From there it would spread outward to Judea and Samaria and ultimately to the nations. The pattern

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reflects the global scope of God's redemptive plan. The kingdom of God would not be confined to one people or nation; it would reach every corner of the world through the testimony of Christ's followers.

This passage therefore establishes a foundational principle for the church. Gospel proclamation is not an extraordinary activity reserved for a small group of specialists. It is the normal and expected expression of life empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit does not merely comfort believers internally; He sends them outward as witnesses to the saving work of Christ. The mission of the church grows wherever believers speak truthfully about the Lord they have come to know.

Spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting help sustain this witness. Through these practices believers become more attentive to the Spirit's guidance and more courageous in speaking about Christ. As the heart grows increasingly aligned with God's purposes, the proclamation of the gospel becomes not a burdensome obligation but a natural overflow of devotion to the Savior.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: Stephen Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7)

Stephen provides one of the earliest and most powerful examples of Spirit-empowered witness in the life of the early church. Chosen initially to serve the needs of the Christian community, Stephen soon became known for his wisdom and spiritual authority. Luke records that he was "full of grace and power" and that he performed signs and wonders among the people (Acts 6:8). His testimony about Christ, however, provoked opposition from certain members of the synagogue who were unable to refute the wisdom with which he spoke.

Stephen was eventually brought before the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish council, and accused of speaking against the temple and the law. As he stood before these hostile authorities, Luke notes something remarkable: "all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). Even in the presence of those who sought his condemnation, the grace of God was visibly evident in his demeanor.

When given the opportunity to speak, Stephen did not defend himself with personal arguments. Instead, he recounted the story of Israel's history, moving from Abraham to Moses and the prophets. His speech is saturated with Scripture and reveals how God's redemptive purposes had consistently been resisted by those who opposed His messengers. Stephen ultimately testified that the same pattern had culminated in the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus, the Righteous One whom God had raised from the dead.

The response of the council was violent rage. Stephen was dragged outside the city and stoned. Yet even in the moment of martyrdom, his witness reflected the character of

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Christ. Looking toward heaven, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” and then, echoing the words of Jesus on the cross, he cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:59–60).

Stephen’s life demonstrates that true witness combines bold proclamation with visible grace. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he spoke truth without fear and responded to violence with forgiveness. His testimony did not end with his death; it helped ignite the missionary expansion of the early church. Through Stephen we see that Spirit-empowered witness continues even in the face of opposition, because the message being proclaimed is greater than the life of the one who speaks it.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The expansion of the gospel across the world has often been carried forward by believers who embraced the call to witness beyond familiar boundaries. One of the most remarkable examples emerged from the **Moravian community at Herrnhut** in the eighteenth century. Following a spiritual renewal in 1727, this small group of believers developed a deep passion for global evangelism. Within a few decades they had sent missionaries to the Caribbean, Greenland, Africa, and North America. Some even volunteered to live among enslaved populations in order to share the gospel with those who had never heard it. Their missionary zeal profoundly influenced later evangelical movements.

In the nineteenth century, the Scottish missionary **David Livingstone (1813–1873)** became one of the most widely known Christian witnesses in Africa. Livingstone combined exploration, humanitarian concern, and evangelism as he traveled through vast regions of the African continent. His reports exposed the horrors of the slave trade and inspired a generation of missionaries and reformers to bring both the gospel and social transformation to Africa.

More recently, the story of **Elisabeth Elliot** illustrates the enduring power of Christian witness. After her husband Jim Elliot was killed while attempting to reach an isolated Ecuadorian tribe in 1956, Elisabeth eventually returned to live among the same people responsible for his death. Through patient love and perseverance, she shared the message of Christ with them. Her story remains one of the most striking examples of forgiveness and missionary courage in modern Christian history.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Pray daily for one person who does not know Christ.
2. Fast for boldness.
3. Share your testimony concisely.
4. Live consistently before unbelievers.
5. Trust the Spirit for words and courage.

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PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Empowering Spirit, Forgive my silence. I have received power yet withheld proclamation. Fill me afresh. I depend upon You for courage, clarity, and compassion. Let fasting increase urgency and prayer produce boldness. Make me a faithful witness — in word and in life. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY:

- Matthew 28:18–20 — The Great Commission.
- Romans 10:14–17 — Faith comes by hearing.
- 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 — Ambassadors for Christ.
- 1 Peter 3:15 — Ready to give an answer.
- 2 Timothy 4:2 — Preach the word.

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Lesson 38: Moved with Compassion — The Heartbeat of Witness

Main Text: Matthew 9:35–38

“Seeing the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

Matthew summarizes Jesus’ ministry in a striking threefold pattern: “Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness” (Matthew 9:35). These activities—teaching, proclaiming, and healing—reveal the comprehensive nature of Christ’s mission. His ministry addressed both the spiritual and physical needs of the people. Truth was proclaimed, but it was accompanied by acts of restoration that demonstrated the compassionate character of God’s kingdom.

As Jesus traveled throughout the region, He encountered large crowds who gathered around Him. Matthew tells us that “seeing the crowds, He felt compassion for them” (Matthew 9:36). The word translated “**compassion**” is the Greek term *esplagchnisthē*, which describes a *deep, visceral response of mercy*. In the ancient world this word referred to the inward parts of a person—the seat of strong emotional concern. Matthew uses the term to convey that Jesus’ response to human suffering was not distant or indifferent. His heart was deeply moved by the condition of those who came to Him.

The reason for this compassion is also significant. The people were “distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd.” The imagery recalls Old Testament passages in which Israel is described as a flock lacking proper guidance and protection (Numbers 27:17; Ezekiel 34:5). Without faithful shepherds, sheep become scattered, vulnerable to predators, and unable to find nourishment. In the same way, the crowds Jesus encountered were spiritually exhausted. Many had been burdened by oppressive interpretations of the law, neglected by leaders who sought power rather than care, and left without the guidance necessary to find life in God.

Jesus therefore interprets the situation through the language of harvest rather than despair. He tells His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:37). Instead of viewing the crowds merely as a problem to manage, Jesus sees them as a field ready to receive the message of the kingdom. Human need becomes an opportunity for redemptive mission.

Yet the shortage of laborers reveals another reality. The work of compassionate witness cannot be accomplished by Christ alone during His earthly ministry. The disciples must participate in the mission. Jesus instructs them to pray “to the Lord of the harvest to send

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out workers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38). Prayer therefore becomes the starting point of mission. Those who ask God to send laborers soon discover that they themselves are being sent.

This passage reveals that authentic Christian witness grows out of compassion. The proclamation of the gospel does not arise from cold obligation but from a heart moved by the suffering and spiritual need of others. When believers see people through the lens of Christ’s mercy, their response naturally combines proclamation with care. Fasting and prayer deepen this awareness by quieting self-centered concerns and allowing the believer to perceive the needs of others more clearly. In this way the compassion of Christ becomes the driving force behind the church’s mission in the world.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–37)

Jesus illustrates the nature of compassion through the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan. A traveler on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is attacked by robbers, stripped of his possessions, and left half dead along the roadside. His survival now depends entirely upon whether someone will stop to help him.

Two religious figures pass by the wounded man. First a priest and then a Levite see him, yet both continue on their way. Their positions within Israel’s religious life make their indifference especially striking. Though they recognize the need, they allow the suffering man to remain where he lies.

The unexpected hero of the story is a Samaritan, a member of a people often despised by the Jews. When he sees the injured traveler, Jesus says that “he felt compassion” (Luke 10:33). Moved by mercy, he binds the man’s wounds, places him on his own animal, and brings him to an inn where he ensures that continued care will be provided.

Jesus concludes the parable with a simple command: “Go and do the same” (Luke 10:37). The story reveals that compassion is not merely an emotion but a response that interrupts routine, accepts inconvenience, and acts for the good of another. In this way mercy becomes a living witness to the character of God’s kingdom.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Throughout the centuries, Christian compassion has often been expressed through practical care for those who suffer. In the seventeenth century, the French priest **Vincent de Paul (1581–1660)** became widely known for organizing ministries to the poor and abandoned. Distressed by the suffering he saw around him, Vincent established charitable societies that cared for orphans, the sick, and those imprisoned by poverty. His work laid foundations for many later Christian relief efforts.

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During the nineteenth century, **Catherine Booth**, co-founder of the Salvation Army, demonstrated similar compassion in the crowded slums of London. While preaching the gospel alongside her husband William Booth, she also worked tirelessly among the poor, advocating for the dignity of women and the protection of vulnerable children. For Booth, evangelism and compassion were inseparable expressions of Christian love.

The life of **Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922)** offers another remarkable example. Born into a Hindu family in India, Ramabai eventually became a Christian and devoted her life to rescuing widows and educating young girls who had been marginalized by society. Through schools and care homes, she offered both practical help and spiritual hope to thousands of women. Her ministry demonstrated that Christian compassion often becomes a powerful form of witness.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Ask God to reveal overlooked needs.
2. Fast from indifference.
3. Pray specifically for the lost and suffering.
4. Act compassionately in practical ways.
5. Share the gospel in relational context.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Compassionate Shepherd, Forgive my apathy. I have seen crowds without feeling burden. Enlarge my heart. Break hardness. I depend upon Your Spirit to pour divine love within me. Let fasting soften me and prayer send me. May compassion compel me to be a faithful witness. Amen.”

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL STUDY

- Ezekiel 34 — Promise of the true Shepherd.
- Luke 15 — Shepherd seeking the lost sheep.
- Romans 10:1 — Paul’s burden for Israel.
- Jude 22–23 — Mercy toward doubters.
- 1 John 3:16–18 — Love in action.

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Lesson 39: Together in the Work — Corporate Servanthood and Witness

Main Text: Acts 2:42–47

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

The book of Acts describes the birth and early life of the Christian church in the days following Pentecost. After the Holy Spirit was poured out and thousands responded to Peter’s proclamation of the gospel, a new community began to form in Jerusalem. Luke summarizes the character of this community by describing several practices to which the believers were “continually devoting themselves.” These practices reveal that the life of the church was not merely a gathering of individuals who shared private faith. It was a corporate body shaped by shared devotion and mutual responsibility.

First among these practices was devotion to “the apostles’ teaching.” The early believers understood that the message of Christ required careful instruction. The apostles, as eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, served as authoritative teachers who explained the meaning of the gospel in light of the Scriptures. Through their teaching the church was grounded in the truth of God’s redemptive work in Christ. Corporate witness therefore began with shared understanding of the gospel.

Alongside teaching, the believers devoted themselves to “**fellowship.**” The term used here, *koinōnia*, describes more than casual social interaction. It refers to a *deep sharing of life among those who belong to Christ*. This fellowship included practical care for one another’s needs, mutual encouragement, and participation in the common life of the community. Luke later explains that believers shared resources so that no member of the community would be left in need. Their unity became a visible expression of the transforming power of the gospel.

The community also gathered for “the breaking of bread,” which likely included both shared meals and the remembrance of Christ’s death through the Lord’s Supper. These gatherings reminded believers that their fellowship was rooted in the sacrificial work of Jesus. Every meal became an occasion to recall the grace through which the church had been formed.

Finally, the believers devoted themselves to prayer. Through prayer they sought God’s guidance, strength, and presence. The mission of the church was not sustained by human organization alone but by dependence upon the Lord who had called them.

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Luke concludes by describing the impact of this shared life. The community experienced unity, generosity, and joy. Their conduct earned the favor of many in the surrounding population, and “the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). The growth of the church was therefore not merely the result of individual evangelistic efforts but of a community whose life together displayed the reality of the gospel.

This passage reveals an important principle about Christian witness. The proclamation of the gospel is strengthened when it emerges from a community shaped by truth, fellowship, worship, and prayer. Corporate faithfulness creates an environment in which the message of Christ becomes visible through the shared life of His people.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: The Church at Antioch (Acts 11:19–26)

The church at Antioch provides a powerful example of how corporate witness leads to expanding mission. Following the persecution that arose after Stephen’s martyrdom, many believers were scattered beyond Jerusalem. Some traveled as far as Antioch, a large and diverse city where Jews and Gentiles lived side by side. At first these believers spoke only to fellow Jews, but soon some from Cyprus and Cyrene began proclaiming the Lord Jesus to Greek-speaking Gentiles as well.

Luke records that “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). When news of this growing community reached the church in Jerusalem, Barnabas was sent to investigate. Rather than exercising control, Barnabas recognized the evidence of God’s grace among the believers and encouraged them to remain faithful to the Lord.

Seeing the need for further teaching, Barnabas traveled to Tarsus to find Saul and brought him to Antioch. Together they spent an entire year instructing the growing congregation. It was in this diverse and vibrant community that the disciples were first called “Christians,” a name that reflected their visible identification with Christ.

The church at Antioch demonstrates how corporate formation prepares the church for broader mission. Through teaching, encouragement, and shared devotion, this community became a center from which the gospel would later spread throughout the Gentile world.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christian mission has often flourished where believers cultivate strong spiritual community. During the sixteenth century, the **Anabaptist movement** emphasized shared discipleship and mutual accountability among believers. Though frequently persecuted, these communities developed close fellowship, disciplined spiritual practices, and a deep commitment to following the teachings of Christ. Their communal life strengthened their ability to endure hardship and continue proclaiming the gospel.

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In the eighteenth century, the **Methodist class meeting system** created a similar environment for spiritual growth. Small groups of believers gathered weekly to pray, confess struggles, and encourage one another in holy living. These gatherings provided the structure that sustained the Methodist revival and allowed the movement to spread rapidly across Britain and North America.

The twentieth-century **East African Revival** demonstrated the same principle on a large scale. Beginning in the 1930s, believers in Rwanda, Uganda, and Kenya experienced a renewal marked by public confession of sin, restored relationships, and deep fellowship among Christians. These communities became centers of evangelism that spread throughout East Africa, illustrating the power of shared spiritual life.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Commit to consistent fellowship.
2. Fast corporately when possible.
3. Participate actively in church life.
4. Serve within community.
5. Pray for unity in witness.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“Lord of the Church, Forgive my isolated spirituality. I have sought private growth without communal responsibility. Unite us in teaching, fellowship, prayer, and generosity. I depend upon Your Spirit to sustain unity and multiply witness. Let fasting deepen our bond and strengthen our mission. Add to Your Church through our obedience. Amen.”

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MARCH 29, 2026

Lesson 40: Remain in Me — Sustaining Strength After the Fast

Main Text: John 15:1–8

“Abide in Me, and I in you.”

EXPOUNDING THE TEXT

In John 15, Jesus speaks to His disciples during the final evening before His crucifixion, preparing them for life and ministry after His departure. Knowing that they would soon face the uncertainty of a world without His physical presence, Jesus gives them one of the most important instructions for sustaining spiritual life: “Abide in Me, and I in you” (John 15:4). The image He uses is drawn from the familiar world of agriculture. Jesus describes Himself as the true vine, His Father as the vinedresser, and His followers as the branches.

The metaphor communicates the absolute dependence of the branch upon the vine. A branch cannot generate life within itself. Its vitality flows from its connection to the vine that supplies nourishment and strength. In the same way, the life of the believer is sustained through continual union with Christ. Spiritual vitality does not arise from personal effort alone but from remaining connected to the source of life.

Jesus emphasizes this dependence repeatedly throughout the passage. “Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me” (John 15:4). Fruitfulness—whether expressed through righteous character, faithful witness, or acts of love—results from abiding in Christ. When believers remain connected to Him through trust, obedience, and devotion, the life of Christ becomes visible through them.

At the same time, Jesus warns that spiritual vitality requires ongoing attention. The Father, described as the vinedresser, tends the vine so that it may produce greater fruit. Branches that bear fruit are pruned so that they may become even more fruitful, while those that remain disconnected eventually wither. The image reminds believers that spiritual growth often involves refinement. God’s work in shaping the believer’s life may include discipline, correction, and the removal of distractions that hinder fruitfulness.

The call to abide therefore speaks to the ongoing nature of the Christian life. Seasons of intense spiritual focus, such as fasting and prayer, can awaken the heart to God’s presence, but the life that follows must continue in the same dependence upon Christ. Abiding involves remaining attentive to His words, cultivating communion through prayer, and allowing His commands to shape daily life.

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Jesus concludes by explaining that this abiding relationship brings glory to the Father: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8). The goal of abiding is not merely personal spiritual experience but a life that visibly reflects the character and mission of Christ. When believers remain connected to Him, their lives become fruitful branches through which the life of the vine flows into the world.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE: The Early Church’s Continued Prayer (Acts 4:23–31)

The early church provides a clear example of what it means to continue abiding in Christ after a powerful spiritual beginning. Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles began proclaiming the gospel openly in Jerusalem. Their bold witness soon provoked opposition from religious authorities, and Peter and John were arrested and warned not to speak in the name of Jesus.

After their release, the believers gathered and turned immediately to prayer. Rather than responding with fear, they sought God’s strength to remain faithful to their calling. In their prayer they acknowledged God’s sovereignty over the nations and asked for courage to continue proclaiming His word despite the threats they faced.

Luke records that when they had finished praying, “the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). This moment reveals that the work of the Spirit did not end with Pentecost. The believers who had already received the Spirit were again strengthened and empowered as they sought God together.

Their experience illustrates an important principle for the life of the church. Spiritual empowerment is not a single event but an ongoing reality sustained through abiding in Christ. As believers continue in prayer, dependence, and obedience, the Spirit renews their courage and enables them to carry forward the mission of the gospel.

EXAMPLES FROM THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The call to abide continually in Christ has shaped the spiritual lives of many influential Christians. In the fifteenth century, the devotional writer **Thomas à Kempis** composed *The Imitation of Christ*, a book that has guided believers for centuries in cultivating daily communion with God. Kempis emphasized humility, quiet devotion, and constant dependence upon Christ as the source of spiritual strength.

In the nineteenth century, the South African pastor and writer **Andrew Murray (1828–1917)** explored this same theme in his teaching on abiding in Christ. Murray believed that the Christian life is sustained not by occasional spiritual experiences but by ongoing dependence upon the presence of the Holy Spirit. His writings helped many believers understand that spiritual fruitfulness grows out of continual fellowship with Christ.

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The American pastor **A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)** echoed this concern in the twentieth century. Tozer warned that the church could become busy with religious activity while neglecting deep communion with God. Through his preaching and writing, he called Christians back to a life centered on worship, prayer, and constant awareness of God's presence. His message reminds believers that the strength gained during seasons of fasting must be sustained through lifelong abiding in Christ.

LESSON IMPLEMENTATION

1. Establish daily rhythm of prayer and Scripture.
2. Continue occasional fasting beyond Lent.
3. Remain accountable in community.
4. Guard against spiritual complacency.
5. Seek fresh filling regularly.

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE AND DEPENDENCE

“True Vine, Thank You for sustaining grace through this fast. Keep me abiding beyond this season. I depend entirely upon Your Spirit to maintain fruitfulness. Without You I can do nothing. Let what was cultivated in fasting continue in faithful obedience. Remain in me as I remain in You. Amen.”