



LIBERATING
FAITH STUDIES

EXAMINING OUR FAITH

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The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary
as a signal for silence
 - II. Singing
 - III. The Apostles' Creed
 - IV. Prayer, closing with the
Lord's Prayer in concert
 - V. Singing
 - VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
 - VII. Responsive reading
of the lesson text by school
 - VIII. The Decalogue
-

The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while
the classes are being arranged
 - II. Class study of the lesson
 - III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
 - IV. Closing bell — silence
-

The Closing

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application
of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

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Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Rev. Lionel Merritt

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

A.M.E. Discipline

Hello, AME Church School Member!

The Home Daily Bible Readings will continue to appear at the end of each Sunday's lesson but they will be the readings for the following week. We made this change in response to your requests. The readings for the first week are on the following page.

For over a year we have used Zoom and Facebook to facilitate our weekly Connectional Church School with teachers (lay and clergy) from around the AME Connection. They generously share their knowledge, talents, and expertise with a weekly average of 500 participants viewing via Zoom and 1500 on Facebook.

This virtual AME Connectional Church School was birthed due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The blessings from the teachings have been immeasurable. We will continue this Connectional Church School on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. EST. Join us! Zoom Meeting ID: 829 9325 1894. Visit our website- www.iamame.org- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

Like our Facebook page so you will be informed about programming and important announcements from the Publishing House and *The Christian Recorder*: www.facebook.com/amecpublishing.

Join our Facebook Group to continue conversations after Church School and share ideas, thoughts, and best practices with other AME Church School members and teachers: www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool.

Thank you for purchasing *Liberating Faith Studies*. We are working every day to fulfill our mission to provide high quality resources to empower us to spread Jesus Christ's liberating gospel, pursue justice, and enhance the social development of all people.

And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin
President/Publisher

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

February 26–March 3

Monday	1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (The Faith in Which We Stand)
Tuesday	Numbers 16:12-13, 23-34 (Turn Away from the Wicked)
Wednesday	Genesis 18:20-22; 19:1-5, 15-17, 22-25 (Flee from the Presence of Sin)
Thursday	1 Peter 2:13-25 (Always Do the Right Thing)
Friday	Genesis 5:18-24 (Walk with God)
Saturday	Jude 3-16 (Contend for the Unchanging Faith)
Sunday	Jude 17-25 (Remain in God's Love)

Sustaining Our Faith

Lesson Scripture: Jude

Focus Scripture: Jude 17-25

Key Verse: Beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. Jude 20-21

JUDE 17-25 (NRSV UE)

17 But you, beloved, must remember the words previously spoken by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ,

18 for they said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts.”

19 It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.

20 But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit;

21 keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

22 And have mercy on some who are wavering;

23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies.

24 Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing,

25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

JUDE 17-25(KJV)

17 But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ;

18 How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

22 And of some have compassion, making a difference:

23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

KEY TERMS

- **Sanctified** – Specially set apart and dedicated to the service of God.
- **Tenets** – Views, principles, beliefs.
- **Infiltration** – To gain access and push deep into the body (usually with corrupt motives).
- **Eschatological times** – The end of this world as we know it; dealing with the return of Christ.
- **Unbridled** – Without limits or restrictions.
- **Doctrine** – Core or fundamental belief or governing principle adopted to shape formal behavior or operations in a body (church).
- **Emotive** – Exciting or stirring up emotions.

As you work through these lessons, it is crucial to remember that maintaining faith in God can be a demanding task.

us to overcome frightening challenges, cannot exist in isolation. We must anchor it in a deep belief in something or someone. In these lessons, we look at the unwavering faith that stems from the character and words (scripture) of God Jehovah. We refer to people who exhibit such faith, embodying a spirit filled with deep convictions. Conversely, individuals who lack this God-centered faith we describe as faithless or lacking in faith.

The First Unit

The first group of lessons (lessons 1-5) looks at five New Testament passages that show the importance of trusting in God's goodness and power. As you work through these lessons, it is crucial to remember that maintaining faith in God can be a demanding task. Every day, we can

meet people who have vested interests in defying biblical life principles. And such people aggressively challenge the scriptures, its Christ, his teachings, and the values Christians hold dear.

INTRODUCTION

On the Series

These lessons revolve around the amazing power of faith. It is crucial to understand that faith, which empowers

This sets up serious culture or lifestyle wars between the believers in Christian communities and the wider society. And to keep our Christian faith intact, we must be prepared to give reasonable defenses of what we believe about God, Jesus Christ, and righteous living. The teachings from the selected texts help us frame our defenses.

On Lesson 1

The series starts with a fantastic call in Jude for us to fight for our faith in Christ. In the short book of Jude, we find a brilliant description of impostors who would dilute and corrupt the Christian way of life. Along with the imposter's profile, we also get a striking reminder of the foundation of the Christian faith and how

we can defend it. Maybe today more than ever before, we must respond to Jude's call to action in defense of our Christian values and how these shape our response to social concerns.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

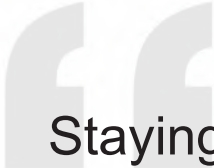
To get the full impact of Jude's

message, start by noting in verse 1 to whom the letter was addressed: people who were "sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ and called." These were persons with grounding in the Christian faith, who could appreciate the need to follow the core principles taught by Christ and the apostles. Jude is urging committed believers to stand firm on the first principles, while warning them

to stay clear of the "updated versions" of Christianity which false teachers push at them. Staying faithful to the original tenets of Christ's teaching is as much a feat of faith as killing a lion with the bare hands.

Against that background, see that Jude's warning was not original. Both

Christ and the apostles had predicted this infiltration by false teachers who dress like sheep, but under the costumes are vicious wolves. This is the focus of verses 17 to 19. This warning stands for today as well. Believers must not abandon the original principles of the Christian living for "improved versions" which cater to



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their fleshly desires. Our focus must be spiritual, not sensuous.

The term “last time(s)” in verse 18 gives the time frame for when the false teachers and deceivers would be most active among believers. The church has always had problems with deceivers who preach “strange doctrines.” But the “last time” push would be epic. This is the time theologians associate with eschatological times: the events that will mark the end of human history. Events at this time will signal the anticipated second coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, a new heaven, and a new earth.

The matters raised by Jude at places like verse 18 were major concerns of the ancient church. So, it is no surprise that verse 18 is a direct quote of 2 Peter 3:3. Apostle Peter, like Jude, was concerned about the dangers of the impact of false teachers in the church. At this point, it is useful to reflect on some

traits of the false teachers.

They show signs of galloping selfishness and greed with an unbridled hunger for honor, recognition, and attention. These urges drive them to promote themselves as expert teachers who have knowledge and insights which are superior to other leaders. False teachers often promote themselves by tearing down others.

We should challenge ourselves to see if we recognize persons with these traits. They are easy to spot as they will stop at nothing in their efforts to force people to see the world through their (false teacher’s) sunglasses.

Jude takes the traits of false teachers a step further and names two features that should keep us on our guard. False teachers are

False teachers are notorious for the way their teachings and lifestyles blend so readily with lifestyles of the prevailing culture. If we follow their teachings, the world will have great difficulty in separating believers from non-believers.

notorious for the way their teachings and lifestyles blend so readily with lifestyles of the prevailing culture. If we follow their teachings, the world will have great difficulty in separating believers from

non-believers.

Second, and perhaps more important, false teachers enjoy sowing confusion and stirring up divisions in the church. They rejoice when the church family is at war with itself. So, Jude's implied message is simple: run from members and/or teachers who are eager to instigate divisions in the church.

Contrast those tendencies with the character of true teachers in the church as given in verses 20-23. Faithful members and teachers focus on activities like praying and Bible study, which mature them and others in the things of Christ. They spread genuine love and kindness rather than hatred and

discord. These are the people we want to associate with. Such leaders show an eagerness to follow faithfully Christ's teachings which demand genuine love for God and other people. *Look closely at the two groups Jude identified. Write lasting notes of the contrast.*

Lastly, you want to consider Jude's

parting words, which entrust the believers to the care of God. This farewell greeting became famous through the ages of the church. Even today, many leaders pronounce this blessing on others with the powerful air of reverence and compassion that it evoked when Jude first gave it. To persons who receive it, the blessing still evokes a sense of peace and comfort.

SANKOFA



To persons who receive it, the blessing still evokes a sense of peace and comfort.

The matter of contending for the faith, and Christian apologetics, people sometimes see as intellectual exercises for college students. Nothing can be further from the truth, as these are issues that can touch the lives of all of us and even become life and death matters for many.

To see this, we must look at the origins of groups like the Branch Davidians of Waco Texas, Aum Shinrikyo of Japan, and the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in Uganda.

Based on published reports, these groups and movements started as splinters from larger groups and

organizations and separated because of differences in doctrines among leading figures. We do not intend to highlight the specific activities or events of these groups, but the historical reports point to a common feature. In all groups (including churches), serious divisions on doctrine or philosophy among leaders often lead to splinters and breakaway fractions. This is the bed in which cults are born, and deadly disasters raised. Clarity and unity of doctrine are that serious.

The histories of such groups compel us to do all we can to settle disputes and divisions that arise within our churches. As followers of Christ, we must know what we believe and why we believe what we believe. This is the best defense against schisms in the body of Christ.

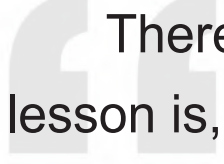
Unfortunately, in many churches, we are often too heavy on jargon, emotions, and cliches, and too short on understanding. That is a perfect platform for false teachers to walk in to sow discord and divisions. The tragedy with these

situations is that the cancer starts small and, because we left it unattended, grows to become fatal. Therefore, the lesson is, don't allow disagreements in the church to fester and go unattended. Arrest them early with a disposition of truth and love.

CASE STUDY

Perhaps for many believers, one of the best-known examples of divisions within a church community, leading to a major split in the body, occurred in the Anglican Church. This was the fracture that occurred in the Anglican communion over the definition of marriage. At its core, this matter was a clash of traditional values in the church against more progressive values in the wider society.

The question at the center of the controversy was whether the church could sanction marriages of non-traditional couples, and an extension of this was whether persons in such unions were fit candidates for ordination



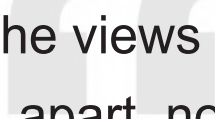
Therefore, the lesson is, don't allow disagreements in the church to fester and go unattended. Arrest them early with a disposition of truth and love.

as clergy. While any matter dealing with sexual behavior will always generate excitement, this matter was, in essence, a matter of doctrine. The key issue was, could the Anglican Church maintain its traditional definition of marriage after sectors of the wider society had moved on to more liberal definitions? Outside of all the noise and rancor, this was the heart of the matter.

Based on news media reports, certain sections of the Anglican communion stood immovable on maintaining the traditional definition of marriage. The more liberal communities could not move backward to that ancient position. In 2003 came the straw that broke the camel's

back, with the ordination of Gene Robinson, an openly gay bishop in the American district of the community. This event sparked outrage and deep divisions within the Anglican communion. Many conservative Anglican leaders and churches saw that ordination as an unwarranted and unwelcomed departure

from traditional biblical teachings. In response, several conservative Anglican provinces and dioceses, particularly in Africa and Asia, broke communion with the Episcopal Church, USA and formed alternative Anglican bodies. These bodies, such as the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), were established as conservative counterparts to the more progressive-leaning Episcopal Church.



The views were so wide apart, no arbitration could reconcile them. The result was an incurable fracture within the global Anglican community.

In all the excitement that this matter raised, we must not lose sight that at the core it was a theological debate about interpreting scripture. Different scholars of the communion interpreted Bible passages about sexuality and marriage differently. The views were so wide apart, no arbitration could

reconcile them. The result was an incurable fracture within the global Anglican community.

It is not our place here to favor one position of the issue over the other. That is not the purpose for using this case. But this case is an example of how moral

and social issues can cause major splits in a church. As the saying goes, to be forewarned is to be forearmed.


LIFE APPLICATION

The text draws a powerful contrast between two types of members we find in ALL church communities: disruptors and conciliators. The disrupters love to get their own way and give no regard to the divisions and disruption they cause in the body of believers. They are selfish and bent on making their view the prevailing or dominant view. Conciliators, on the other hand, strive to keep true to Christ's teachings as they value and promote peace and fellowship among believers.

It is useful, as we consider these profiles, to reflect on our own role in the body of Christ and how we approach contentious matters. When you look at your membership in the body of Christ, are you a disruptor or a conciliator? Ask yourself what influences your opinion on an issue: scripture, public opinion, tweets, or personalities?

Also, think about the value you put on fellowship in your church community. How you see yourself in a sober self-reflection will guide you in the areas you need to address to enhance your Christian maturity.

At times, when a contentious matter raises its head in the church, we wish we were in the super holy, all-loving early church where there were no problems.



We must confront our era's issues of abortion, marriage, sexuality, sex education, gender, racism, wealth, and politics.

By now, most of us have awakened from that dream and realized no such church ever existed. Texts like Jude tell us the church always had vexing issues to address. And history will show the issues facing the church now are minor compared to the turmoil it has faced in the past.

We must confront our era's issues of abortion, marriage, sexuality, sex education, gender, racism, wealth, and politics. We cannot run from them or kick them down the road indefinitely. If we accept that position, we must also take up our responsibility to educate ourselves on these matters. We must put ourselves in a position to understand the issues and to participate

meaningfully in discussions about the issues. The proverbial “no comment” will take us only so far.

And when we take the non-committal route, we eventually become committed to the views of those people who dared to take and push a contrary position. Therefore, we must take time to frame our personal views on the hot-button issues of our day. This gives us a starting point to evaluate the different viewpoints leaders put before us.

As we grow and mature in Christ, we find new and better ways to reject evil and accommodate and promote good. Spend some time looking at the way you handle matters that are not simple. Take for example, the matter of racism. Have your views developed over the years, and can you have a reasonable discussion about race relations without becoming hysterical, abusive, or disrespectful? Of course, matters of race and racial inequalities are emotive. Nevertheless, we must be able, as members of the body of Christ, to discuss the matter in

a manner that upholds our place in the Christian community. As you consider such matters, remember the promise in James 1:5, “God will give wisdom to believers who ask in faith.”

Last, let us be careful not to treat as enemies the people who hold differing views on a subject. Contrary views on certain subjects have always been and will continue to be part of normal church life. But, if you do stray and see another brother

or sister as an enemy, please remember Jesus’ mandate to love our enemies.

As we grow and mature in Christ, we find new and better ways to reject evil and accommodate and promote good.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you find the truth about a matter when leaders put competing positions to you?
2. How far would you go to prove your point when convinced you are right?
3. Are there matters in your heart on which you would never compromise?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Hymn: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,”
AMEC Hymnal #84

Closing Prayer: Divine maker, help me to be a peacemaker, contributing to the growth and harmony in the body of Christ. On contentious matters, keep before me that love is a distinguishing mark of genuine Christians. In Jesus' name, amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**March 4-March 10**

Monday	James 1:2-12 (The Testing of Faith Produces Endurance)
Tuesday	James 1:13-18 (The Sources of Temptation)
Wednesday	Psalm 139:1-12 (God Has Searched and Known Us)
Thursday	Psalm 139:13-18, 23-24 (God Knows All Things)
Friday	2 Corinthians 11:22-33 (God's People Boast in Weakness)
Saturday	2 Corinthians 12:1-10 (Strength Through Christ Alone)
Sunday	2 Corinthians 13:1-10 (Live by Christ's Power in You)

Testing Our Faith

Lesson Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:1-11

Focus Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:5-11

Key Verse: Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. 2 Corinthians 13:5a

2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-11 (NRSV UE)

5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test!

6 I hope you will find out that we have not failed.

7 But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed.

8 For we cannot do anything against the truth but only for the truth.

9 For we rejoice when we are weak but you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may be restored.

10 So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

11 Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Be restored; listen to my appeal; agree with one another; live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-11 (KJV)

5 Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

6 But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

7 Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

9 For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.

10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

KEY TERMS

- **Parochial** – Relating to the local (parish) church.
- **Gossiper** – A person given to spreading gossip (rumors).
- **Tenets** – Key principles and beliefs.
- **Salacious** – Exciting or arousing lust or desire.
- **Pious** – Religious and self-righteous.
- **Malignant** – Growing / expanding and deadly (disease).
- **Unwittingly** – Innocently and ignorantly.

INTRODUCTION

This is one of those lessons which spins tightly on, and swings sharply from, the **Key**

Verse. “Examine yourself” is one of the most disturbing phrases some people can hear. Those folks would rather climb to the top of Mount Everest or swim to the floor of the ocean before they can

entertain those most piercing words. Yet, in that phrase lies a most powerful tool for spiritual and emotional maturity.

Naturally, it is so easy to examine, analyze, and criticize other people. And a few smart gossipers make the examination and criticism of others a fine art. But we are reluctant to examine

ourselves, because to do so may suggest that we are not as perfect as our Facebook and Twitter profiles suggest.

Usually, to entertain examining ourselves is to suggest to ourselves we have faults and, at times, fall back into bad habits, and may even be guilty of cherished sins. That admission can be painful. Yet this was exactly what Apostle Paul was asking the church at Corinth to do. And

it is advice we should embrace every so often. Yes, there is great wisdom in examining ourselves against the tenets of our Christian faith. And where we see faults and or weaknesses, we must take

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steps to address them.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

At verse 7 of the text, Paul dances with a point that is at the heart of faith in God and his words (the scriptures). We show our faith in God and the scriptures by one sure way only: by obeying and doing what the scripture commands. Jesus took time to teach this in places like John 14:15-24. The same principle 1 John 5:3 reinforces. We can make many claims of loving Christ, but until we are walking in the prescribed lifestyles, we are just making noise.

That is the reason self-examination is such a vital exercise in the walk of faith. But also note that as Paul posed the question in the **Key Verse** (original Greek), it is a rhetorical question phrased to suggest that Paul expected a positive response. He expected the church members to know that as Christians in good standing, Christ was in them, giving them victory over the urge to sin. The only way this would not be true is if they had disqualified themselves

by not walking in the lifestyle commanded in scripture. (Those who support the once-saved-always-saved doctrine may find this approach challenging).

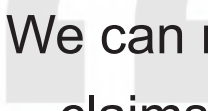
In the **Introduction**, we touched on examining ourselves versus the normal appetite to examine others. In the text, a bit of both is at play. Paul was obviously not at the Corinthian Church but was

acting on reports about sinful behaviors in the church.

However, he found himself in a situation where he had to justify his authority to enforce discipline. This he was trying to do, while making the point that his primary concern was not the authority to discipline, but the purity and maturity of

the church. The references Paul made to himself were evidence of two things. First, as an apostle of Christ, he had the authority. Second, he had examined himself and concluded he was in good standing by virtue of the life he lived.

See verses 7-9 against that background. Paul wanted the members to



We can make many claims of loving Christ, but until we are walking in the prescribed lifestyles, we are just making noise.

act righteously, but feared they would see his lack of discipline as a sign of weakness. Slowly, but deliberately, consider this situation. There was evidence of sinful behavior in the church, see 1 Corinthians 6 and 2 Corinthians 12. Rather than take steps to address the mess, members were more focused on whether Paul had the authority and inner strength to enforce discipline on them. This is a situation that is so familiar and hauntingly painful.

Now, let us put it all in a neat context. Paul wrote both Corinthian letters to address behavioral issues in the church, so he could focus on building a loving and faithful community when he was at Corinth. If you cannot appreciate this at first glance, consider some issues members try to raise at the yearly Annual Conference and/or the General Conference. Those parochial issues could have been effectively resolved at the quarterly meetings. So often, we are left to wonder if the attempts to raise local

matters at the district or Connectional levels are truly sincere efforts to find solutions. Still, as was the case with the church at Corinth, we must reject the lure to assume ulterior motives and hidden agendas.

SANKOFA

Rather than take steps to address the mess, members were more focused on whether Paul had the authority and inner strength to enforce discipline on them. This is a situation that is so familiar and hauntingly painful.

In the preceding sections, we noted that it is useful to examine ourselves periodically. One reason we should do this is because spreading false rumors or unfounded reports about individuals is unchristian and can tarnish people's reputations. We can unwittingly share unfounded allegations which can tarnish or destroy the ministries or careers of others. Therefore, even when sharing "jokes" we

must exercise a degree of caution. We can share some hard cases of the pain believers brought on others by carelessly sharing "jokes." Consider this situation about an innocent pastor, wrongly accused.

On the “Restoring Kingdom Builders” website, we find a blog about a pastor who was maliciously accused of wrongdoing. The poor brother was placed on a humiliating paid leave to allow for an external independent investigation. In two weeks, the investigators found the charges were baseless, and the pastor reinstated. According to the report, “When he re-entered the pulpit, the congregation gave him a standing ovation.” Persons interested in reading the full blog can go to: <https://blog.restoringkingdombuilders.org/tag/false-accusations-against-a-pastor-false-accusers-in-the-church/>.

When we hinted at the end of the **Telling the Bible Story** section

that we should resist the assumption of ulterior motives and hidden agendas, we meant it. Yet, truth be told, that is not always easy or wise to do. As the blog correctly noted, at times these unfortunate situations happen because nothing is done about the people making unsavory accusations. Sometimes the instigators just move from church to

church, spilling their venom. And too often we make life easy for them because we refuse to examine the salacious stories, or examine ourselves, before we share them. Kindly note that the spreading of unfounded allegations is not consistent with the Christian faith. Proverbs 6:16-19, 10:18, 19:16, and 20:19, Leviticus 19:16, Psalm 34:13, 1 Timothy 3:11 and 4:7 are useful references in this regard.

CASE STUDY

The power and usefulness of examining ourselves is not just a “Christian thing” we do to show how pious we are. Secular mental health professionals also promote self-examination. In a

Psychology Today

posting on October 26, 2018, Michael Austin, Ph.D. gave useful insights on the practice of self-examination in “The Lost Practice of Self-Examination.”

A quote that appeared within the article noted: “Nothing will make us so charitable and tender to the faults of others, as, by self-examination, thoroughly to know our

“Kindly note that the spreading of unfounded allegations is not consistent with the Christian faith.”

own – Francois Fenelon.”

And here is a passage from Dr. Austin’s posting: “Self-examination is one of many spiritual practices present across many wisdom traditions that we would do well to implement in our own lives. In a discussion of this practice, contemporary philosopher James Gould says that self-examination is the ‘regular monitoring and assessment of our own moral progress.’” Need we say more?

Perhaps all that we have left to say is the Bible makes many powerful calls to us to practice self-examination. Here are eight of them we should study within the context of the chapters in which they occur.


1. 1 Corinthians 11:28
2. Job 13:23
3. 2 Corinthians 13:5
4. Psalm 4:4
5. Psalm 77:6
6. Lamentations 3:40

7. 1 Corinthians 11:31

8. Galatians 6:4

The wisdom in those verses, if we catch it, will transform the way we see the world and others, because it will revamp the way we see ourselves.

LIFE APPLICATION



Perhaps all that we have left to say is the Bible makes many powerful calls to us to practice self-examination.

As noted at the start, self-examination is the rope on which this lesson swings. It is therefore no surprise that we open the **Life Application** section with a call for meaningful self-examination. Set a convenient time during the week and reflect on your faith walk. During this quiet time, reflect on how well you

are maturing as a Christian. Compare your views on the crucial aspect of the Christian faith. Are you convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that God exists, created all that is in the world, created humans, and is owed the worship and adoration of the people he created?

Then, in the same session or a related

session, examine yourself concerning Jesus Christ. Is Jesus the perfect expression of God, who came to this world in the flesh, died for our sins, was resurrected, and now sits on the right hand of God making intercessions for us? Did Christ send the Holy Spirit to help us live the Christian life? And here is the \$60,000

question: does the Holy Spirit, God's own spirit, live in imperfect, comparatively weak, sin-prone humans after they accept Christ as Lord and Savior? How can something so holy live in a vessel so unholy? This is not a trick-question. Ponder it and answer.

Maybe you will be tempted to think that the above personal inquiries step outside the lesson. They do not, because unless you are firmly settled on the fundamentals

of the Christian's faith, you have no proper yardstick to assess your faith walk. Assuming you are settled on the core issues, assess your relationship

with others. Can you love your enemies, forgive people who hurt you 490 times (Matthew 18:21-22), and entertain needy people as Jesus specified in Matthew 25:35-40? These assessments should not scare us. Rather, they will help us to objectively see areas in our lives we need to seek God's help to strengthen.

And here is the \$60,000 question: does the Holy Spirit, God's own spirit, live in imperfect, comparatively weak, sin-prone humans after they accept Christ as Lord and Savior? How can something so holy live in a vessel so unholy? This is not a trick-question. Ponder it and answer.

Self-reflection and the insight it brings are crucial for another reason. We must know ourselves and be honest with and about ourselves before we can be effective witnesses for Christ. People have a third eye that easily spots pretenders. You cannot effectively represent God in an area of life where you are beggarly. Consider the woman at the well in John 4. She had less than a stellar past. Yet she was able to represent Christ to

others because she accepted her sordid past and spoke of what she knew of Christ. To witness for Christ effectively, we must first understand ourselves,

and that understanding comes through honest self-examination.

Oh yes, we cannot skip around it. Self-examination can be humbling and disturbing, as it forces us to face uncomfortable situations we prefer to leave hidden in our past. Yet, it remains one of the most powerful tools for healing hurts from our past, assessing our strengths and weaknesses, and promoting growth in Christian virtues. And it gets better the more we do it honestly.

QUESTIONS

1. Why does self-examination seem so hard even when we do it within the privacy of our own homes and thoughts?
2. Can our own eagerness to examine

and criticize others be a clever device to not face our own shortcomings?

3. How does a healthy self-examination differ from a negative witch-hunt to condemn and bemoan our past mistakes?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” *AMEC Hymnal* #53

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, help me to see myself as you see me: low enough to know I need your mercy and grace to make it through this life and into eternity, yet high enough to know I can be lifted up to do anything you call me to do, despite my human weaknesses. Lord, I thank you for life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 11-March 17

Monday	2 Timothy 4:1-8 (Proclaim God’s Message at All Times)
Tuesday	Psalm 67 (Let All the People Praise God)
Wednesday	Mark 5:1-2, 6-7, 11-20 (Proclaim What Jesus Has Done)
Thursday	Acts 9:10-22 (A Powerful Defense of the Faith)
Friday	Isaiah 1:16-20 (Come, Let Us Argue It Out)
Saturday	1 Peter 2:4-12 (Live Honorably Among Unbelievers)
Sunday	1 Peter 3:8-17 (Be Ready to Speak for Christ)

Defending Our Faith

Lesson Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

Focus Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-17

Key Verse: It is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

1 Peter 3:17

1 PETER 3:8-17(NRSV UE)

8 Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

9 Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.

10 For “Those who desire to love life and to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit;

11 let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

13 Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

14 But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

15 but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you,

16 yet do it with gentleness and respect. Maintain a good conscience so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

1 PETER 3:8-17 (KJV)

8 Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous:

9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile:

11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it.

12 For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

13 And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

17 For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

KEY TERMS

- **Paradox** – An apparent contradiction; opposing idea in the same thought.
- **Proverbial** – Like what is said in a well-known saying (proverb).
- **Sanctify** – To place in a special (separated) position of worship and adoration.
- **Linchpin (Lynchpin)** – The essential factor on which something works. The heart of an argument or position.
- **Expository** – Designed to explain (or expose) the meanings of scripture.

INTRODUCTION

If for any reason you missed the devotional reading of 2 Timothy 4:1-8 or simply glossed over it, you have robbed yourself greatly. For in it are golden nuggets of truth all genuine Christian believers must subscribe to. Traditionally, we read this passage as part of the Apostle Paul's instructions to a junior minister. While that is true, the instructions and exhortations are for all believers.

Jesus' direct parallel teaching in the Gospels is John chapters 15 and 16. These passages (Timothy and John) set

out in dynamic living colors the lot of the genuine believer. It is a life of paradox. On the left hand are struggles, rejections, and sufferings, while on the right we have power, peace, and glory. This is what we sign on for.

But we all know that often this is not the representation given on popular religious shows. Sadly, we usually hear of the Christian life that is filled only with mansions, exotic cars, overflowing bank accounts, and thrilling vacations in fantasy destinations. Is some of this possible? Oh, yes indeed! Nevertheless, always remember, if we are truly standing for Christ, the world that hated Christ cannot love us. Every day we will face a choice. We can choose to be like Timothy and take the advice to endure affliction, or we can be like Demas (2 Timothy 4:10) whose love for "this present world" overrode his desire for ministry. The choice is like Sprite soda, clear. We stand, identify with Christ, and defend our faith; or we chicken out and conform to the world.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

One gripping feature of the scriptures is the powerful way in which scripture confirms and proves scripture. We see a great example of this with verses 8

and verses 10-12 of the lesson text. The virtues listed in verse 3:8 sit in sweet harmony with the *Fruit of the Spirit* of Galatians 5:22-23. In like fashion, verses 10-12 echo Psalm 34:12-16. In essence, these scriptures call us to embrace the character of God in our hearts first, so that this godly character will naturally flow out of us in our dealings with other people.

In verse 9, Peter noted that we are called to be blessings by virtue of our relationship with God through acceptance of Jesus Christ. This is interesting because we get blessings by inheritance, rather than as rewards for our works. Yet, we will only get the blessings if our faith endures to the end.

Therefore, the hope of blessings is the inspiring and motivating factor that drives us to endure.

We understand this as we see it play out every four years at the Summer Olympic Games. The hope of representing their country before the world, and earning a gold medal, motivates athletes for four

years to wake up early, train hard, eat right, and reject many of the pleasures and comforts of normal living.


The elite athletes push their bodies through multiple pain barriers, endure grueling training schedules, and even isolate themselves. They do all these things hoping to step onto the winners' podium. They know they can only get the

medal and winner's glory if they endure the training and complete the event.

The same must be the mindset of the Christian. The promise of blessings must motivate us to push through all hardships and sufferings in defense of our faith to cross the proverbial finish line. To use the football analogy, we

cannot drop the ball, neither can we let the enemy get it from us. Like Deion Sanders, we must run with our faith securely held in one hand, using the other hand to block and push away opponents.

In the text, verse 13 asks a question which, with verse 14, sets up the tension



The promise of blessings must motivate us to push through all hardships and sufferings in defense of our faith to cross the proverbial finish line.


the Christian must deal with. Why will people want to harm us if we do good to others? Normally, we would rush to say no one would, and in many cases that would be true. But recall what happened to Jesus when he healed a man on the Sabbath. The religious leaders were offended and vowed to kill him. The same thing happened to Peter and John in Acts 3 (and 4) when they healed the lame man by the temple gate. For their good deed, they were arrested, imprisoned, and threatened with punishment.

The remaining verses of the text (verses 15-17) frame the mindset we must adopt when our Christian good brings us scorn and persecution. We look and appeal to God, the *Ultimate Judge*, the *Author and Finisher* of our faith. In trying times, we remind ourselves that although we may have to suffer for a while, there awaits us crowns of glory, if we do not faint and throw in the proverbial towel.

And yes, we go beyond merely enduring sufferings. We boldly, yet respectfully, tell

others of the hope that sustains us, and the God that provides for and covers us. We stand our ground, proclaim our faith, and praise our God. That is the striking portrait of a genuine Christian.

Finally, note the call from verse 15 to sanctify the Lord in the heart. The idea of the heart in this context goes beyond the seat of the emotions definition normally


We do not fit Christ
into our desires and
decisions; rather, Christ
becomes our desire and
decisions.

given this word. See the heart as the source of will and decision-making. To sanctify Jesus in the heart, “therefore” means making the character and teachings of Christ the hub, the main determining factor, of all we desire and do. We do not fit Christ into our desires and decisions; rather, Christ becomes our

desire and decisions. Think about this deeply. It can take some time to seep into our consciousness.

SANKOFA

At times when we hear of people suffering to defend their faith, we can offer only intellectual sympathy. Fortunately,

our vision of suffering for our faith can stop people taking our parking space in the church's parking lot. Maybe we suffer when someone forgets to put our name on the church program, or when another member makes non-flattering comments about our clothes or hairstyle.

But in many quarters of the globe, persecution for faith convictions is more consequential.

Pastor Evan Mawarire of Zimbabwe is an example of someone who stood to defend his faith convictions and suffered harsh consequences. Pastor Evan Mawarire became known in Zimbabwe for his activism and criticism of the government for its unchristian policies. As a Christian pastor, he made good use

of social media platforms to mobilize citizens against corruption, economic hardships, and human rights abuses. In 2016, he was arrested and charged with inciting public violence and subverting the government.

He had to make several court

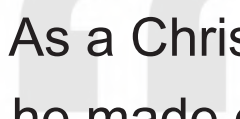
appearances to defend himself against the charges, and drew a loud chorus of support locally, regionally, and internationally. This support paid off, as he was eventually acquitted. But he was not deterred. After the acquittal, he continued the work of an advocate for positive change in Zimbabwe. His convictions about justice and fair play in society were that strong. Such is the power of the

Christian faith working in us for the good of society.

CASE STUDY

The matter of standing in defense of our faith is a complex affair. On the right hand, the Bible is packed with stories of people who stood for God, relied on their faith, and God came through for them with

amazing power. We know and love those inspiring stories about David and Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, the three Hebrews boys, Peter's jailbreak in Acts 12, and the release of Paul and Silas in Acts 16. This is the positive, uplifting side. And if these were the only stories in the Bible, more



As a Christian pastor, he made good use of social media platforms to mobilize citizens against corruption, economic hardships, and human rights abuses.

believers would stand proudly in defense of their faith.

The problem comes because, on the left hand, the Bible also has the death of Stephen and the beheading of John the Baptist. These horror stories warn us the standing in defense of our faith is risky, indeed deadly. So, many believers step back or walk lightly when opponents challenge them on matters of faith. This realization prompted us to ask what the common traits are in people who are willing to stand in defense of their faith, even in the face of credible death threats. Incidentally, we found the martyr's characteristics are the same irrespective of the cause, whether religious, social, or political.

The primary feature is a deep, enduring belief (conviction). Such people hold unshakable views, which become their subjective reality, and this perceived reality can override the usual reasoning, standard logic, and objective

reality. People of conviction see and interpret truth against the backdrop of their convictions. What aligns with their convictions is truth and what does not they reject, irrespective of its source.

People with the martyr character attach themselves to their perceived reality. They become part of their perceived reality and so their existence becomes worthwhile

only in terms of their vision of their cause. And here is the crucial linchpin. Because the person becomes part of the cause he or she represents, to attack or take away this cause (mission) is seen as a personal attack. They cannot distinguish between the mission and themselves.

We see this clearly in some of the writings of

Apostle Paul, where he identifies himself with the cause of representing Christ to the Gentiles. In 1 Corinthians 15:9-10, Paul has so closely identified himself with the working of God's spirit, he said it was not he who was doing what he did, but God's grace at work. Note likewise

People of conviction
see and interpret truth
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his declaration at Philippians 1:21-26. He was indifferent about his life, as he saw both life and death only in terms of his calling by Christ.

And in terms of his vision of the truth of the (his) Gospel, see Galatians chapter 1 notably verses 6-10. Not even an angel (who is made a little higher than humans) could bring another true version of the Gospel. That is pure conviction. That is certainty. That is his reality. That is the voice of a man who would die in defense of his (sure) faith.

LIFE APPLICATION

Most genuine believers want to defend their faith and, to varying degrees, do indeed defend it at times. Still, there are church members who know their faith is not strong and run smartly from any challenge of their faith. Silently, they admire the people who can stand publicly and defend their faith in Christ, wishing and hoping that someday they too will be able to do the same. This section is

devoted to them.

How do they get to the maturity in faith where they feel comfortable defending it? The first step is to realize that no one gets to that stage overnight. Let us read Galatians chapter 1 again. Note that Paul was sure from where his commission as

Where did your call to be a believer come from and who sustains that call? If it is a denomination, you can grow no further than the denomination allows you. But if it is from Christ, you develop as you allow Christ to grow in you.

an apostle came: from Christ and not from any earthly person or group. That is our starting point. Where did your call to be a believer come from and who sustains that call? If it is a denomination, you can grow no further than the denomination allows you. But if it is from Christ, you develop as you allow Christ to grow in you. So, ponder this and be clear about it.

Next, be real about your development. Again, look to Galatians. Paul traced his development over time. He did not get to rock-solid faith in one flash. Even the fastest sport car in the world takes time to move from zero to 60 mph. Study the Galatians'

passage from verse 12 onwards and walk with Paul as he traced his history. Underscore the time factor (three years) and the rejection and the other events he suffered along the way.

Try to feel what Paul felt along the way. Force yourself into his thoughts during the development process. And do one more thing. Stop listening to the fantasy stories

of some televangelist, especially the ones who make Christian maturity seem to happen like how we reheat chicken in a microwave oven. We have no 30-second maturity faith button to press. The TV faith giants who go from weaklings one morning to superheroes by noon only exist in TV land. For most believers, mature faith comes

out of a process that takes time. Do not take the TV fantasies seriously. If you do, they will frustrate you and make you belittle yourself when you do not see the amazing fantasy growth in yourself.

Also, saturate your mind with the things of your faith. No person develops

strong faith, or a strong defense for their faith, on a “Sunday Morning Service Only” diet. We must read good literature about our Christian faith. Attend and take part in lectures, seminars, workshops, and expository Bible studies. And whenever you get an opportunity, discuss your faith in friendly groups and listen and learn from others who are more mature.



**Ask God to help you
understand the scripture
you read.**

Support those activities with a decent prayer and meditation life. Take to heart James 1:5 that God gives wisdom to those who ask for it sincerely. Ask God to help you understand the scripture you read. And finally, tell others about Jesus Christ.

Start small! Do it one-on-one in friendly situations and don't argue, just share. When you are asked something and you are not sure, ADMIT you are not sure, research it, and give the person your best answer later. You will find as you do this, you will grow by leaps and bounds. And if you keep at it, soon you will be defending your faith in higher and

higher levels. Eventually, you will get to the point where you are not afraid to take on anyone when it comes to defending your faith. Ask me how I know.

radar?

QUESTIONS

1. What does Galatians chapter one teach us about setting a firm base for our faith?
2. What is the relationship between being sure about our faith and sharing our faith?
3. Can good Christians be secret agents for Christ, operating under the public

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” *AMEC Hymnal* #54

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, like every person you created, I wish I could always have good, happy times in my life. But I accept life is a series of struggles and at times painful. Yet I rejoice knowing that in those tough times, you are right there with me. Thanks for your presence, thanks for your power, thanks for your peace. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

March 18-March 24

Monday	Deuteronomy 28:1-14 (Blessings of Walking in God's Ways)
Tuesday	Titus 2:1-8 (Let Your Life Match Your Words)
Wednesday	Proverbs 1:1-9 (Fear God and Gain Knowledge)
Thursday	2 Corinthians 5:1-11 (Refrain From Defiling the Church)
Friday	2 Timothy 2:8-21 (Vessels Prepared for Every Good Work)
Saturday	Acts 6:1-6 (The Ministry of Caring for Others)
Sunday	Acts 6:7-15 (A Spirit-Empowered Witness)

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DECALOGUE

Superintendent—And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord hath made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

My soul be on thy guard;
Ten thousand foes arise:
And hosts of sins are pressing hard
To draw thee from the skies.

Superintendent—Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not kill.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not commit adultery.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not steal.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

Superintendent—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

School—Lord, have mercy upon us, and write these laws upon our hearts.

Nearer, my God, to thee,
Nearer to thee!
E'en though it be a cross
That raiseth me;
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee!
Nearer to thee!

Superintendent—Hear what Christ, our Savior, saith: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All—Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

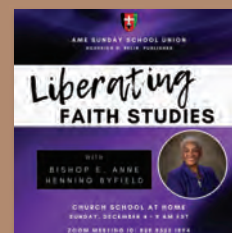
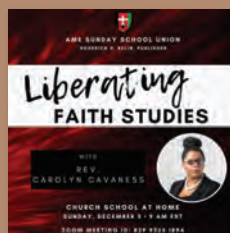
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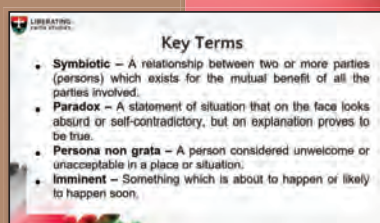
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