

Today's Light Discussion Questions for July–September 2017

The material here is linked to the July–September issue of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about 45 minutes of study. Feel free to duplicate the questions and use them with *Today's Light* readers.

Suggestions for Using *Today's Light* Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

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July Week 1

July 1–2; Luke 1–3

1. Explain the words of Luke 1:54–55, applying them to God's people at the time of Mary and to God's people of today.
2. Consider the verbs recorded in Luke 2:16–20, describing the actions of the shepherds. How are these same actions repeated by those who have otherwise come to know the Savior through the working of the Holy Spirit?
3. Matthew and Luke have two very different presentations of Jesus' Baptism. In Matthew 3:14, John stops to discuss why Jesus should or should not be baptized. Jesus points out it is part of God's righteous salvation plan. In Luke 3:21, there is no such discussion—when John is baptizing all the people, Jesus is also baptized. What different reaction do you have to each of these approaches?

July Week 2

July 3–9; Luke 4–12

1. In Luke 4:16–30, Jesus is rejected in His hometown of Nazareth. Jesus pinpoints the problem when He says, “No prophet is acceptable in his hometown” (v. 24). Describe the challenge it would be for the Nazarene neighbors who saw Him grow up to accept He could be the Messiah. How is that challenge also there for Christians who grow up in the church?
2. At the word of Christ Jesus, the disciples caught so many fish that their boat began to sink (cf. Luke 5:1–11). And this after having fished all night and catching nothing. Jesus then commissioned His disciples with the promise that from now on they would catch men. What does the miracle of the catch of fish teach us about who really brings in the “catch of people” when God’s Word is shared?
3. Jesus gives four beatitudes in Luke 6:20–23, followed by four corresponding woes in verses 24–26. As you look at each of these four pairs of blessings and woes, how do they help you examine your spiritual attitude and lead you to repentance?
4. Explaining the parable of the sower, Jesus identifies the seed as the Word of God. Reflect for a moment on how well the seed is currently faring in your life. Is it more typical to find it trampled on and carried off by birds, springing up and withering because it finds no moisture among rocks, being choked out by thorns, or falling on good soil?
5. Relate the theme of the Old Testament to these words from Luke 9:51, “[Jesus] set His face to go to Jerusalem.”
6. Jesus teaches us to anticipate His second coming in readiness. What aspects of your life evidence readiness for the imminent return of Jesus?

July Week 3

July 10–16; Luke 13–22

1. In Luke 13:26, those thrust out of the kingdom say, “We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.” Many from Capernaum would make that claim. Jesus responds in the next verse, “I do not know where you come from. Depart from Me.” What warning should we take from this passage?
2. Explain the following statement: all of us who belong to God by faith in Christ Jesus are both the younger son and the older son in the parable of Jesus, recorded in Luke 15:11–32.
3. In Jesus’ day, people judged by appearances. People who were healthy, popular, and prosperous were thought to be in a good relationship with God. Those who were struggling, were considered as punished by God for their sin. How does Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19–31 turn that thinking upside down? How did the crucifixion affect the way He was viewed by the Jews?
4. Note Jesus’ encounter with the rich ruler in Luke 18:18–25. Jesus spoke only Law in answer to the rich ruler’s question. Why did Jesus not speak to the man about the free gift of salvation available to all who love and trust in Him?
5. Contrast the spiritual condition of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10) with that of the rich ruler (Luke 18:18–25) as evidenced by their response to Jesus and His teaching.
6. Luke 22:1–30 tells of Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper. Jesus follows the meal with a discussion of greatness. Jesus serves the meal, but He is also served at the meal. Explain. To what future meal does Jesus direct His disciples’ attention (Luke 22:30)?

July Week 4

July 17–23; Luke 23–24; John 1–8

1. Review the account of Jesus' trials before Pilate and Herod (Luke 23:1–25). In what ways can you relate to Barabbas?
2. John the evangelist is commonly symbolized as an eagle in flight because His Gospel begins with prose that lifts the reader to heaven to contemplate the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. Which portions of John 1:1–18 do you find especially uplifting today?
3. Recorded in John 2:1–11, Jesus' first miracle dealt not with threats of natural forces, demon possession, illness, or death. Rather, while a guest at a wedding, Jesus saved a family from embarrassment by providing more refreshments for the guests. What does Jesus' first miracle reveal to us about the scope of Jesus' concern for those who love and trust in Him?
4. During His dialogue with Nicodemus about the working of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?" (John 3:10). Explain. (See also Jesus' words to Peter in Matthew 16:15–17.)
5. What does it mean to you today that you have passed from death to life? What will it mean at the hour of your death (John 5:24–25)?
6. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the bread of life (John 6:35)? See also John 6:37–39.
7. Describe the kind of freedom that Jesus provides to you (John 8:34–36).

July Week 5

July 24–30; John 9–19

1. Jesus, said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).
How do we listen to the voice of Jesus?
2. Apply the following words of Jesus to your life: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:24–25).
3. Explain how John 13:3 contrasts with John 13:4–5. Tell how these contrasting truths play out in the life of one who loves and trusts in Jesus as his or her Savior.
4. Apply the words of Jesus recorded in John 14:1 to your life as a Christian. “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me.” When have these words been of special comfort to you?
5. Review John 15:1–5. Explain this metaphor as you have experienced it in your Christian life.
6. In the midst of Jesus’ trial, Pilate asked the haunting question “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Perhaps Pilate has phrased the ultimate question. What is the ultimate answer to Pilate’s question?
7. Jesus’ last words from the cross, “It is finished,” suggest both death and life (John 19:30). Explain.

July Week 6

July 31; John 20–21

1. Our resurrected Lord invited Thomas to touch what the hymnwriter describes as “rich wounds, yet visible above” (*LSB* 525:3). Someday we, too, will see where nails and spear pierced our Savior’s flesh. What do these wounds prove about God’s Son?

August Week 1

August 1–6; Acts 1–8

1. How does Acts 1:8 differ from the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:19–20?
2. Review Acts 2:36–47. How did Peter confront the hearers of his sermon with the Law? With what words did he provide them with the Gospel? What response did the Holy Spirit bring into the lives of those who heard and believed Peter's words?
3. In Acts 4:25–26, Peter and John quote the words of the psalmist David (Psalm 2:1–2). Christ's followers will always face opposition. Why is Acts 4:29 a fitting daily prayer for believers?
4. As God's people consider the work, movements, and influences that come our way, the words of unbelieving Gamaliel recorded in Acts 5:38–39 seem insightful and relevant. Explain.
5. Review Acts 6:1–7. What can God's people today, both individually and as members of Christian churches, learn from these early followers of Christ?
6. Philip's encounter with the man from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26–39) may be regarded as "easy evangelism." The man asked Philip about the meaning of Isaiah's words, and Philip told the man the Good News of Jesus. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the man came to faith, was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing. What examples of "easy evangelism" have you experienced or heard of?
7. In a day when multiculturalism promotes the respect of all cultures, practices, and religions, God's people face the temptation not to "impose our cultural norms upon others." Yet the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus is God's gift to all people. How can we appropriately bring the Good News of Jesus to those in other cultural groups?

August Week 2

August 7–13; Acts 9–16

1. In Acts 9:13, Ananias reveals his distrust in the genuineness of Saul's conversion, a suspicion many Christians shared in the early days. What place does caution have in our relationship with others who confess faith in Christ?
2. In Acts 10, the Holy Spirit leads Peter to the home of a Gentile. Why was it important that the Holy Spirit clearly intervened to reveal His will to Peter?
3. In Acts 12, the first of the Twelve is martyred, James, brother of John. What benefit did the Holy Spirit bring out of his death?
4. Both early Christians and believers today face a spiritual battle against the forces of evil that do not want the Gospel to take hold in people's hearts and lives. Describe Paul's manner in dealing with Elymas, the sorcerer (Acts 13:6–12).
5. Before James addressed the assembly regarding the issue of Gentiles coming to faith, from what source did he receive council and guidance in the judgment he formed? See Acts 15:12–19.
6. Describe Paul's vision of the man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9). How would Paul and his companions help those in Europe?

August Week 3

August 14–20; Acts 17–28; Romans 1–2

1. Review Acts 19:13–40. Compare the spiritual perspectives common in the first-century Roman world with those of today. Contrast Christianity with spirituality.
2. See Acts 22:1–4. In what ways did Paul change following his conversion? In what ways did he remain the same?
3. Paul's discourse to the governor, Felix, on righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment evoked an interesting response, "Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you" (Acts 24:25). Why might Felix have desired to hear no more at this point?
4. While sailing as a prisoner to be tried in Rome, Paul and his companions were beset by a long and terrible storm. Acts 27:20 describes, "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned." Explain this experience as a metaphor of human life.
5. In what way are followers of Jesus "mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Romans 1:12)?
6. God's Word clearly teaches salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. Explain then Paul's words recorded in Romans 2:5–11.

August Week 4

August 21–27; Romans 3–11

1. According to Romans 3:21–26, how did God demonstrate His justice?
2. What does it mean to be Abraham's child and heir (see Romans 4:18–25)?
3. Paul reminds believers that we can rejoice even in our sufferings because suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3–4). Character is defined as having distinctive qualities that set a person apart. What distinctive qualities would you expect to find in those who by God's grace endure suffering and trust in the hope Jesus provides?
4. What argument does Paul give to counter those who reason that it's okay to keep on sinning, since Jesus has earned forgiveness for all our sins (Romans 6:1–14)?
5. Review Romans 7:7–25. Explain the relationship between God's Law and human sin. How has Christ delivered us (Romans 7:25)?
6. According to Romans 8:5–17, what difference exists between those who belong to God by faith through Christ Jesus and those who do not?
7. Romans 10:14–15 clearly lays out for the reader the essential steps for evangelizing the world. In what ways do you assist in these steps?

August Week 5

August 28–31; Romans 12–16

1. Romans 12:9–21 gives specific examples of how God's love evidences itself in the lives of those in whom God's Spirit dwells. Which of these manifestations of the Spirit's working would you like to see to a greater degree in your life right now?
2. For what blessings that God provides to His people through our government are you especially grateful today?
3. Although not wrong in themselves, what kinds of behaviors and actions are best for believers to avoid (Romans 14:19–21)?
4. Describe the picture of the Church on earth Paul asks God to provide His people in Romans 15:5–13.

September Week 1

September 1–3; 1 Corinthians 1–4

1. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18. Explain the two different ways by which the Gospel is perceived by those who are exposed to it. What accounts for the difference?
2. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6–7). Explain Paul’s words. Who has “planted” and “watered” in your life?

September Week 2

September 4–10; 1 Corinthians 5–14

1. In chapter 5, Paul deals with church discipline. One of their members is openly having sexual relations with his stepmother. Paul points out the arrogance of the church, which is congratulating itself for being so loving and tolerant. He says, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Corinthians 5:6). What harm does openly unrepentant sin cause to the sinner? to the members of the congregation who are being emboldened to go and sin likewise? Why is church discipline necessary?
2. Those who belong to God by faith in Christ Jesus have the freedom of the Gospel. “All things are lawful for me,” Paul writes. But he adds, “Not all things are helpful” (1 Corinthians 6:12). Later, Paul writes, “Flee from sexual immorality.” What forms of entertainment, actions, or events might not be beneficial to those attempting to flee sexual immorality, even though they may be permissible?
3. “Bloom where you are planted” is one way to summarize Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:17–19 about what changes are appropriate to make upon becoming a believer. How might Paul’s words regarding marriage to an unbelieving spouse apply also to other relationships believers have with those outside the faith?
4. Commenting specifically about the harm that might occur from first-century Christians eating meat sacrificed to idols, Paul writes, “But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (1 Corinthians 8:9). What contemporary examples could you cite in which the exercise of Christian freedom might cause the weak to stumble?
5. What does the comforting promise of God recorded in 1 Corinthians 10:13 mean to you?
6. In 1 Corinthians 13, we see a description of the kind of love God’s Spirit works in the lives of those who belong to Him (Galatians 5:22). Here, Paul explains that of faith, hope, and love, the greatest is love. Why is love the greatest of these? (See also 1 John 4:8.)

September Week 3

September 11–17; 1 Corinthians 15–16; 2 Corinthians 1–7

1. In 1 Corinthians 15:5–8, Paul provides a lengthy list of people who witnessed Jesus' resurrection. He lays this witness as the foundation for his argument to destroy a false belief that many in this Corinthian congregation held. Read 1 Corinthians 15:12. What is this false belief? How does Paul destroy this argument?
2. Explain the connection of 1 Corinthians 15:58 with 1 Corinthians 15:56–57, the verses immediately preceding it.
3. What evidence of 2 Corinthians 1:5 do you see in your life or in the lives of those you know?
4. Those who belong to God through faith in Christ Jesus have been given a treasure—the Gospel. By its power, Christians can avoid becoming crushed, falling into despair, feeling abandoned, and being destroyed. According to 2 Corinthians 4:10, what result does God work as He enables His people to withstand persecution, disillusionment, and desperation?
5. How do Christians make others rich, even though they may be poor (2 Corinthians 6:10)?
6. What promise has the Giver of all good things given to His people in 2 Corinthians 9:10–11? What is God's inexpressible gift referred to in 2 Corinthians 9:14–15?

September Week 4

September 18–24; 2 Corinthians 8–13; Galatians 1–4

1. Review 2 Corinthians 10:1–6. What does it mean to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (v. 5)?
2. Paul concludes 2 Corinthians 13 with a trinitarian blessing (v. 14). Review the First, Second, and Third Articles of the Apostles’ Creed. For what blessings flowing from the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit are you especially thankful today?
3. Paul writes to the Galatians, “If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). Explain Paul’s words.
4. Galatians 2:21 records the following words of Paul: “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” When might those who have received God’s grace find themselves guilty of nullifying the grace of God?
5. Describe the unity enjoyed by all who have been baptized into Christ and have put on Christ (Galatians 3:26–29).
6. Review Galatians 4:4–9. God sent His only Son into the world to free us from slavery to sin. Yet even though we are free, we still sometimes find ourselves drawn to certain aspects of our slavery. Explain.

September Week 5

September 25–30; Galatians 5–6; Ephesians 1–6

1. Galatians 5:19–26 juxtaposes two worldviews. Describe the evidence of life lived according to the sinful nature and life lived according to the Spirit. What dangers does Paul warn about in verses 25 and 26?
2. Explain the positive and negative applications of reaping and sowing explained in Galatians 6:8. What positive seeds do you plan to sow today? What negative ones will you ask God's Spirit to enable you to ignore?
3. Describe what it means to you that, in spite of your sin and unworthiness, God, in Christ, has chosen, adopted, predestined, and included you in His kingdom (Ephesians 1:1–14).
4. Review Ephesians 2:8–10. What is the relationship between grace and works in the life of a believer? (Look back also to 1 Corinthians 13:1–13.)
5. Ephesians 3:11–13 reminds us that through Christ we may approach our heavenly Father with freedom and confidence. According to verses 14–19, what is Paul's prayer? For whom does he pray it? Paul adds that God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20). Why not pray for the same things as Paul did right now—for yourself and for others?
6. Ephesians 4 describes the oneness God's people have in Him. What is meant by speaking the truth in love? When is it difficult for God's people to speak the truth in love? By God's grace, what will be the outcome (vv. 15–16)?
7. Review Ephesians 5:22–33. Why is the one-flesh union of marriage an apt metaphor for the relationship between Christ and His Church? See also Ephesians 4:3–6.
8. Why is Paul's prayer request recorded in Ephesians 6:19–20 fitting for believers of all time to ask others to pray? See also Ephesians 4:15–16.

Leaders Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

July Week 1

July 1–2; Luke 1–3

1. In Jesus, God provided the long-awaited Savior of the world. Today's world is filled with many who do not know the Savior. As such, they could be said to be awaiting Him and His gift of salvation. All those who come to faith become children or offspring of Abraham. "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).
2. After the shepherds learned of the Savior's arrival, they hurried to Him. Then when they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about Jesus. Finally, they returned to their work, praising and glorifying God for all the things they had seen and heard. Somewhat similarly, those who have come to know Jesus through the working of the Holy Spirit go to meet Him in Word and Sacrament with determination. Fortified by the Spirit's power, they tell others about Him even as they go about their daily vocations, worshiping our triune God for His abundant blessing through Christ Jesus.
3. Matthew's account sets Jesus' Baptism in contrast to ours. We enter the water stained in sin, and we come out spotless. Jesus enters the water sinless, and He comes out carrying the sins of the world. The waters of Baptism become the place where our sins are exchanged for Jesus' righteousness. Luke builds a solidarity between Jesus and sinners: we are all baptized together. The distinction comes after Baptism, when the Holy Spirit descends in bodily form to anoint Jesus so He is technically the Messiah or Christ, the Anointed One. And the Father's voice speaks, "You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

July Week 2

July 3–9; Luke 4–12

1. For nearly thirty years, His neighbors had seen Jesus grow up as the son of the carpenter. They only saw him in those associations and found it difficult to open their eyes and see Him for who He truly was. When we grow up in the church, we become so familiar with the Bible stories about Jesus that we can easily let our eyes glass over and not really see Jesus for who He really is.
2. The Holy Spirit empowers God's people to perform the act of fishing for people, but it is always God who works the miracle of bringing human hearts to faith, just as He brought the fish alongside the boat so the disciples could catch them in their nets.
3. Do I feel like I am rich spiritually without realizing I am a poor, miserable sinner? Do I feel full and satisfied with God's Word and Sacraments, when my spirit is really starving? Are there times I laugh about the pleasures of this world, when I should be weeping at my spiritual poverty? Do I blunt my witness so people will speak well of me, or am I willing to speak up for Christ even if it results in rejection?
4. Although answers may vary, right now those responding to this question are studying God's Word. The Holy Spirit is working through that Word to loosen the soil, deepen the roots of our faith, and pull out the thorns that are trying to choke out the Word. By God's grace, His Word will be received in good soil by the working of the Holy Spirit.
5. All the Old Testament, in one way or another, serves to point the reader to the coming salvation through Jesus Christ, a salvation completed through His death on the cross immediately outside the city of Jerusalem.
6. Responses will vary but might include praying for Christ to come soon, zeal for evangelism, regularly reading and studying God's Word, and attending worship.

July Week 3

July 10–16; Luke 13–22

1. Our attendance at church, no matter how regular, will not gain us admittance into heaven. It takes more than warming a pew regularly. We need to know Christ through His Law and Gospel. The Law will drive us to true repentance for our sinful condition; the Gospel will drive us to rely on Jesus for complete and free forgiveness and eternal salvation.
2. All of us have failed to live as our Creator intended. But like the younger son, those of us who recognize our sinfulness and turn to our Savior are welcomed into the family of Jesus. As God's children through faith in Christ Jesus, we may be tempted to take our relationship with God for granted and to regard others as somehow less worthy than we of our Savior's redeeming love, which was the attitude of the older brother.
3. Jesus' listeners were shocked by the reversal of fortunes in the afterlife. They would have expected Lazarus to be in hell and the rich man in heaven. Passersby on Good Friday thought Jesus' crucifixion was God's declaration that Jesus was a fraud. The three hours of darkness, earthquake, and other signs challenged that false interpretation. But as Paul wrote, the cross is a stumbling block to Jews who question how it would be just for God to punish His own Son that way.
4. Jesus spoke only Law and no Gospel to the rich ruler, because the ruler was unwilling to recognize his sinfulness. The comfort of the Gospel would be ill applied to someone secure in his or her own sinfulness. Only those who first recognize their sinfulness through the Law by the Spirit's power are also able to receive the Gospel, recognizing their need for the Savior and His free gift of forgiveness.
5. Whereas the rich ruler left his meeting with Jesus unbelieving and unwilling to part with his cherished wealth, Zaccheus responded to Jesus as a changed man. Moved by Jesus, he announced his desire to give half of his possessions to the poor and to repay four times the amount to those he had cheated.
6. Jesus offers the Sacrament of the Altar for the forgiveness of sins. He also is part of the meal Himself, providing His very body and blood to recipients in a mysterious way. The Lord's Supper provides a foretaste of the banquet of which all believers will partake at last in heaven.

July Week 4

July 17–23; Luke 23–24; John 1–8

1. The assembly accused Jesus of subverting the government (Luke 23:1–2), a crime of which He was innocent. Barabbas was guilty, having been imprisoned for leading an insurrection (Luke 23:19). Barabbas was to be crucified that day, but he was released and Jesus took his place. Similarly, our innocent Savior died in our place, taking upon His innocent self the crimes of which we are guilty and paying for them in order to earn our freedom.
2. Participants will likely select varying portions of John 1:1–18. Stress the deep implications of John 1:10–13: This rejection of Jesus will play out all through John's Gospel. He created this world and deserved to be highly exalted by His creatures, but the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.
3. Though this miracle was not dramatic in a worldly sense, Jesus was upholding marriage as a cornerstone of human society. Our Lord cares about every aspect of our life. We need not be concerned about any issue or concern being outside the scope of our Savior's interest or desire to intervene. In His Word, He invites us to "Cast [our] burden on the LORD, and He will sustain [us]; He will never permit the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22).
4. Those who read and study God's Word can only understand its intent and purpose by Holy Spirit-given faith. All others will see it as a book of rules and morality. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to bring readers and teachers to understand that the Scriptures reveal our sin and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus' words to Peter contain this implication.
5. John 5:24 explains that those who trust in Jesus for salvation have already received eternal life. Verse 25 directs us to the time when Jesus will raise from the dead to life eternal those who have received Him by faith.
6. Answers will vary but will likely focus on Jesus' promises to quench our spiritual hunger and thirst as the bread of life and to accept as His own all whom the Father gives to Him. Stress that Jesus came from heaven to do the will of the heavenly Father, and that will is that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).
7. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has earned our freedom from sin, guilt, fear, and its eternal consequences.

July Week 5

July 24–30; John 9–19

1. Jesus has given us the gift of His Holy Spirit, who has called us by the Gospel. Through His Word, Jesus continually speaks to us, convicting us of our sin, comforting us with His message of forgiveness and salvation, and empowering and directing us for a new life lived according to His purpose and will.
2. When the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives through the Means of Grace, we die to our sinful selves. God raises us from our lifeless condition to a new life lived in and empowered by Jesus. Such a life bears the fruit of the Christian life as the Holy Spirit sanctifies us.
3. Jesus knew that He had come from and was returning to God and therefore possessed God's almighty power. Yet He chose to demonstrate that power by taking on the role of a servant, washing and drying the feet of His disciples. Jesus' actions remind us that as the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus we are free people, the slaves of none. Yet as the Spirit of God works through the life of believers, we serve all others, caring for them selflessly and unconditionally as God in Christ cares for us.
4. Responses will vary. Emphasize the significant application of this invitation in our lives. Jesus tells us not to worry but rather to trust in God and in Himself, God's Son, our Creator, Redeemer, and Friend.
5. Responses will vary. Participants may give life examples of various aspects of these verses. Jesus is the life-giving vine and believers are His branches. The Father (gardener) cuts away dead branches and prunes healthy ones so that they might be even more productive. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing.
6. This question is especially appropriate in our current culture, which denies absolute truth. Jesus is the unchanging truth that sets us free (John 8:32). Faith is the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Redeemer of all.
7. "It is finished" was a Greek accounting term stamped on a contract when the last penny was paid in full. Jesus uses this word to make it clear that He has completely paid the penalty for every single sin of each man, woman, and child, of all time. His death means life for all who love and trust in Him.

July Week 6

July 31; John 20–21

1. Jesus' wounds prove that Jesus is a human. He is the incarnate Son of God; He became human so He could endure human pain, suffering, and death for us and for our salvation.

August Week 1

August 1–6; Acts 1–8

1. In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), Jesus gives His followers an imperative—to teach and baptize all nations. Jesus' words recorded in Acts 1:8 tell the result of the Spirit's work: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
2. Peter told the people that they had crucified Jesus, who is both Lord and Christ. Then when they were cut to the heart by the Law and asked what they could do, Peter replied with the Gospel, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).
3. Various forms of persecution directed against those who share the Good News of Jesus and His love are common among those zealous for the Gospel. At times, opposition to the message of the Gospel comes from national leaders and others in authority. The words of Acts 4:29 are a prayer that God would enable His followers to speak God's Word with great boldness in the face of opposition.
4. These words, spoken by an unbeliever, are helpful for us to remember as we ponder the teachers, movements, and forces that at times gain momentum among the people of God. Gamaliel said, "So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" (Acts 5:38–39).
5. Answers are likely to focus on the importance of not neglecting the ministry of the Word and on the efficacy of dividing up responsibilities for the sake of the overall ministry of the Church.
6. Responses will vary. Point out that at times God's people are asked for "a reason for the hope that is in [us]" (1 Peter 3:15). God's Word encourages us to do so "with gentleness and respect."
7. We can bring those of other cultures the Good News of Jesus, teaching God's Word without imposing our cultural standards except, of course, where these standards coincide with clear biblical directives. Also, we do not need to turn them from their religious convictions or philosophies before telling them of Jesus Christ and His salvation. The Holy Spirit will work to shatter their false belief and convince them Jesus is their Lord and Savior.

August Week 2

August 7–13; Acts 9–16

1. Some might think that caution has no place, but Jesus Himself knew not to trust the things people said and did (see John 2:25). The key is to be loving and charitable as we build relationships with others.
2. All through the Old Testament, God has placed a separation between Israelites and Gentiles to keep the faith intact until Christ came. Peter was still observing this separation until God made it clear he no longer should.
3. James's death made it clear to the Twelve that none of them was exempt from suffering and death—so they would strive to make the most of the time God gave them. It taught the other Christians to deeply appreciate the apostles remaining among them—as we see in their fervent prayers for Peter. After the death of the last apostle, John, the reverence in which they held the apostles' writings in the New Testament showed that appreciation lived on.
4. No doubt existed that Elymas was an evil person. Paul took on evil directly. He called Elymas “you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness” (Acts 13:10). He identified him as full of all kinds of deceit and trickery and directed the hand of the Lord against him, striking him with blindness and therefore impeding his ungodly ministrations.
5. James sought the counsel and direction of God's Word before he spoke the thoughts he formulated on the issue of what to require of Gentiles who came to faith. (By the way, this James was Jesus' half-brother, not the martyred brother of John. See Matthew 13:55.)
6. While Paul was in the westernmost part of the Asian continent, he had a vision of a man from Macedonia (present-day Greece) standing and begging him to come to Macedonia and help them. God's people are able to offer the best of all help when they bring the Good News of Jesus' forgiving love and salvation.

August Week 3

August 14–20; Acts 17–28; Romans 1–2

1. The spiritual perspectives of those in the Roman world of the first century might be described as an eclectic mixture of religions including witchcraft. Meeting the spiritual needs of people provided a means of economic gain to many. Fear of financial loss caused many to oppose the Gospel. Participants will be able to draw ready parallels with the interest in spirituality popular in our society (horoscopes, television and movies promoting witchcraft, and the popularity of spiritual themes in books and interviews). Paul writes, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). Jesus Christ is the only true source of forgiveness, peace, and eternal salvation. Through the Means of Grace, His Spirit also provides the strength necessary for resisting and overcoming the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:13–18).
2. Paul’s zeal for God remained after his conversion. However, God channeled Paul’s zeal away from his being a persecutor of the followers of Christ to his being a missionary who labored diligently to bring the Good News to all others.
3. Perhaps Paul’s discourse on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come began to have an unsettling effect on Felix. Such is the result of the hearing the Law. Mention that although Paul visited with Felix frequently after this time, God’s Word makes no mention of whether Felix received the Gospel and came to faith.
4. Sometimes life can seem like sailing a ship in the storm. We are worried, troubled, and helpless, unable even to see clearly so that we may navigate our lives reasonably and responsibly. At these times, as at *all* times, our loving and gracious God invites us to come to Him so that He may give us rest (Matthew 11:28–29).
5. God’s people mutually encourage one another’s faith by speaking God’s Word to one another, encouraging and supporting one another as brothers and sisters in Christ in anticipation of Christ’s return (see also 1 Peter 4:7–11). Seeing the faith, peace, and confidence the Spirit works in us as we pass through times of trial and suffering gives great encouragement to our Christian brothers and sisters.
6. Paul is speaking here of the final judgment, when all people will be judged according to the actions that flow naturally out of their faith in Jesus, or the evil deeds that witness the lack of faith (see also Matthew 25:31–46).

August Week 4

August 21–27; Romans 3–11

1. God demonstrates His justice by placing our sins upon Jesus rather than casting them aside unpunished. Since Jesus has taken our sins upon Himself to pay their penalties, God places Jesus' righteousness upon us through faith.
2. All who believe in Jesus are the children of Abraham. Like us, Abraham believed and it was "counted to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:22).
3. Answers will vary somewhat. We might expect those who by grace endure suffering and trust in the hope Jesus provides to evidence spiritual maturity, a perspective characterized by adeptness in spiritual discernment, and a firm, steady, unshakeable sense of their identity in Christ.
4. Paul stresses that those who possess the new life in Christ live under grace. Now dead to sin, those who belong to God through faith in Christ Jesus live with Him (Romans 6:8). Those who return to sin risk becoming enslaved in it again.
5. God's Law is not sin (Romans 7:7). Instead, it demonstrates the way we would live our lives without sin. It also exposes our sinful condition by revealing the requirements we are unable to fulfill. Jesus rescued us from sin's condemnation by keeping the Law in our place and through His innocent death paying the penalty we deserved because of our sins.
6. Paul delineates two perspectives. Those who belong to God through faith in Christ Jesus have the Spirit of God living in them and, as the children of God, desire to live according to God's will. Those without faith live according to the sinful nature, which maintains control over them.
7. Answers will include ways God's people assist in sending messengers of the Gospel or otherwise enabling the effort of bringing the Gospel to the ears of those who do not yet believe.

August Week 5

August 28–31; Romans 12–16

1. Answers will vary. Possibilities include showing genuine love, holding fast to what is good, displaying brotherly affection, honoring one another, having zeal and spiritual fervor, serving the Lord, being joyful in hope, showing patience in tribulation, being constant in prayer, sharing with God's people in need, showing hospitality, blessing those who persecute us, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep, living in harmony with one another, demonstrating a willingness to associate with the lowly, not repaying anyone evil for evil, being careful to do what is honorable, living peaceably with everyone, not seeking revenge, showing kindness to enemies, and overcoming evil with good.
2. Example of blessings God provides through the government will vary but may include security, order, and efforts for the common good.
3. It is best for Christians conscientiously to avoid those things that might in any way hamper or harm the spiritual health of another.
4. Paul asks God to grant all who love and trust in Him through Christ a spirit of unity. He asks for the Holy Spirit to fill the believers—Jews and Gentiles alike—with joy and peace.

September Week 1

September 1–3; 1 Corinthians 1–4

1. To some, the message of the Gospel is foolishness. To others, it is the power of God. The difference in perspective depends on each individual's spiritual condition. To the unsaved, the Gospel is foolishness. To those with faith, the Gospel is the power of God at work forgiving, saving, and regenerating the believer.
2. The Holy Spirit works through Word and Sacraments to bring a person to repentance and faith. When it comes to conversion—the act of bringing a person from unbelief to belief—the ways of the Holy Spirit are mysteries to the human mind. At times, the people we least expect to respond to the Gospel are brought to faith and their lives are completely transformed. Others whom we might expect to respond harden their hearts and absolutely refuse to budge. The thing to remember is that the Holy Spirit works with all His might when He is given the Means of Grace to work with (Word and Sacrament), but He still gives the human the right to harden his or her heart and refuse to believe.

Jesus says, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Some come to faith after an initial exposure to the Gospel. For others, years of witnessing, prayer, and many Gospel messages by a number of believers precede conversion. Those who “planted and watered” will vary by the individual.

September Week 2

September 4–10; 1 Corinthians 5–14

1. This man was an openly unrepentant sinner. That means the congregation was fully aware of the sinful lifestyle in which the man was involved, and he felt no guilt or remorse for doing so. The church thought it was being loving by being accepting, perhaps even permitting him to share Communion with them. They were killing him with kindness, giving him the impression that he was still in God's graces though he was involved in a sin that destroys faith and drives out the Holy Spirit. The only loving thing for the congregation to do was to exercise church discipline, even excommunication—so the man would see he was excluding himself from heaven by clinging to this sin. Church discipline also keeps the temptation of this sin from spreading to other members who think God approves of this lifestyle choice because the church does nothing about it. Today, we have a similar problem with denominations that endorse homosexuality and ordain gay pastors.
2. By divine inspiration, Paul tells us to flee sexual immorality. In our sex-saturated society, matters of appropriateness and propriety involve continual choices. Specific examples will vary, but may include movies, TV shows, song lyrics, and the Internet.
3. If, upon coming to faith, God's people continue relationships with those who are still unbelievers, they have the chance of witnessing to them, thereby providing the opportunity for the Holy Spirit also to work faith in their lives. Care must be taken, however, that believers remain a positive influence to their unbelieving friends. If the Christian is being drawn to turn away from God, it may be time to sever the friendship.
4. Possibilities might include alcohol consumption, dancing, gambling, and movies we see.
5. God permits temptation because it helps us more clearly see we are poor, miserable sinners, and it drives us to Jesus, our Savior. God promises to limit the pull of the temptations that can come upon us from Satan, the world, and our own sinful nature. When we are sorely tempted, He promises also to provide a way out so that we can stand up under it. Specific reflections on the personal application of the verse will vary.
6. When it comes to salvation—our relationship to God—faith is the greatest. But that relationship is only possible because of God's love for us in sending His Son as our Savior. Paul is speaking of sanctification—how we live out our Christian lives in this world. Love is directed to our neighbor; therefore, it has the greatest impact on our neighbor and provides an opportunity for us to talk about the reason for our love—the love of Jesus, our Savior.

September Week 3

September 11–17; 1 Corinthians 15–16; 2 Corinthians 1–7

1. The great resurrection chapter in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 15. The false belief Paul addresses here is the opinion that there is no resurrection of the dead. To destroy this notion, Paul reveals their conflicted thinking. On one hand, they believe Jesus rose from the dead, but on the other, they don't believe we will rise from the dead. Paul argues to the logical conclusion that Christ could not have risen if there is no resurrection of the dead. But the fact that there are so many witnesses—most of whom are still alive—who could tell you what they saw, heard, felt, and experienced shows that there must be a resurrection for us as well.
2. Paul encourages us to stand firm, let nothing move us, and always give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord because we know that our labor in Him is not in vain. Paul's words flow out of the resurrection of our Lord. Paul writes, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:56–57). Empowered by Christ's resurrection, we live the new life. The Holy Spirit enables us, working through God's Word.
3. Participants will provide examples of those who, in the face of hardship and suffering, reflect the comfort Christ provides through God's Word.
4. Just as the body of Christ died, our bodies will decline and die—unless the Lord comes first. Yet all believers also carry the life of Jesus—the eternal hope Jesus provides to all who love and trust in Him. Unbelievers see that hope and joy that sustain us through those difficult moments of life, and we have the opportunity to share our faith.
5. Christians enrich others by living in response to—and proclaiming—the Good News of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for us and for our salvation. In our lives, they see God at work, and the Holy Spirit works through our witness to create saving faith in them.
6. God promises to bless His people so that they in turn can use His gifts to be a blessing to others. God's indescribable gift is Jesus Christ, His only Son and our Savior.

September Week 4

September 18–24; 2 Corinthians 8–13; Galatians 1–4

1. Our sinful nature and the sinful world around us fills us with all kinds of thoughts that are ungodly and self-directed. As God's Spirit works in the lives of His people through the Word, He exposes the evil of those thoughts and moves Christians to adopt a new set of standards, goals, and priorities, serving God in every aspect of their lives.
2. The first phrase, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," puts in mind the Second Article, which speaks of justification—how Jesus made us right with God by taking our sin upon Himself and suffering the punishment we deserve. The second phrase, "the love of God," reminds us of the First Article—God's creation and preservation and sustaining of us His creatures. His love also reminds us of John 3:16, God's love that moved Him to send His Son to save us. The third phrase, "the fellowship of the Holy Spirit," speaks of the Third Article. The phrase means the fellowship within the Christian brothers and sisters in Corinth that is of or from the work of the Holy Spirit. Luther described it in these words in his explanation of the Third Article: "[the Holy Spirit] calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."
3. The Galatians were becoming legalistic—teaching that human works like circumcision are necessary for salvation. This whole area of legalism pleases man because it gives us a part in our own salvation, a space for pride. Cephas (Peter) gave way to those legalistic pressures when he withdrew from the uncircumcised Gentiles. This was pleasing to the circumcision party, but Paul knew such works are empty and meaningless to God—even an insult to Christ. So as a servant of Jesus Christ, Paul confronted him publicly—certainly not pleasing to Peter at the time!
4. Whenever we trust on our own goodness and worthiness—even our church attendance, our offerings, the office(s) we hold in church, and the good deeds we do for others—we "nullify the grace of God."
5. Faith in Christ unites baptized believers, breaking down a multitude of barriers, including those of ethnic and racial background and gender.
6. Before coming to Christ, we were comfortable in our natural state. The pull of our sinful human nature never leaves us. The new person God has made us continues to battle the old nature until Jesus takes us to live with Him in heaven. God strengthens and equips us for this battle through Word and Sacrament.

September Week 5

September 25–30; Galatians 5–6; Ephesians 1–6

1. Paul encourages us to keep in step with the Spirit and not to become conceited, provoking and envying one another. These attitudes and behaviors can grow out of a self-righteous trust in our own acquired sense of goodness.
2. Both good and bad attitudes and behaviors generate consequences, either positive or negative ones. Examples will vary.
3. Answers will reflect an appreciation for the awesome love, grace, and mercy of God who reached down from His heavenly throne to forgive, uplift, and sustain lowly, undeserving sinners.
4. Our salvation comes solely by God's grace through faith in Jesus. In response to God's love for us and by His power, we act lovingly toward God and others. Our Christlike actions flow naturally from the new heart given to us by the Holy Spirit.
5. Paul prays for other believers. He asks (1) that God would strengthen them with His Spirit's power so that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith; (2) so that being rooted in Christ they would come to grasp the extent of His great love; and (3) that God's people would be filled with His knowledge and love.
6. Speaking the truth in love means to speak God's Word—Law and Gospel—to one another. At times, when the one we are talking to has been caught in sin, that person may not want to hear the truth; but if the person does not hear it and repent, he or she cannot be saved. When we speak this correcting word, we do it out of genuine concern and love, never out of arrogance, pride, or hatred. By God's grace and power, working through that Word, we will grow closer to one another as the Body of Christ and close to Christ Himself—the Head of the Body.
7. The relationship of Christ and His Church is intimately close. Christ loves the Church and creates a one-flesh union with her through Word and Sacrament.
8. All believers are Christ's ambassadors. In every age, Christians support one another by asking God in prayer to equip them to make a clear and powerful proclamation of the Good News of Jesus.