About these studies...

The following Bible studies were created by Waiting for Water and a team of volunteer authors from across the country. They are designed for use by small groups meeting weekly throughout the Lenten and Easter season. Your group may choose to participate in the full ten-week journey or end your Easter Journey observation on the seventh week at Easter. Group members may find it helpful to read through each week’s Bible study beforehand and jot down their answer to the questions in the space provided.

A note on scripture...

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Note from Dan...

One of the main calls of the gospel is to un-self ourselves. The only way that happens is to let the Spirit of God open our eyes to the needs of others. Then we must make the choice to move toward those people with Christ’s empowering love. This journey from self-absorption to awareness—of God and others—to action is the crux of the Christ-following life.

The Bible studies on the following pages were written by pastors and leaders from across the country to help guide you on the Christ-ward path. This booklet brims with their wisdom, insight, stories, thought-provoking questions, and encouragement for all who are fellow travelers this Lenten and Easter season.

I invite you to join us; together, let’s take The Easter Journey, encounter Jesus, and help bring safe water to a thirsty world.

In Christ,

Dan Stevens
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During the early winter of my senior year in seminary, in the beautiful hills of Louisville, Kentucky, my professor of worship (who also happened to be my spiritual director) suggested that I might benefit from a silent retreat. Vastly more comfortable with doing than being, I was scared to death by this notion. Still, since I was very much wed to being a “good girl,” I made arrangements to spend twenty-four hours with the sisters at the convent of Loretto, about an hour’s drive from the seminary. It was a pretty brutal experience, as I recall. My discomfort rising like the steam from the old clanking radiators, I had no idea what to do or how to be in that environment. At one point, cold and confused, I took a walk on the working farm. I stopped to look at the cows with their great eyelashes coated with frost. “Hello, sister cow,” I muttered, feeling nothing, yearning for some kind of predictable spiritual sparkle. Nothing. As I turned to return to my room, my eyes landed on a small pond near the barn. In the center of the pond, on a simple mount, was a stone statue of Mary, all peace and outstretched arms. Suddenly, my breath caught in my throat and I wondered with new wonder just what it might be like
to bear Christ to the world. That wonder-full wonder still captures me whenever I read this week’s passage. It is an intensely spiritual and political text in which one woman, chosen by God for a special purpose, must wrestle both with the nature and cost of saying yes.

When God turned to Mary to bring Jesus into the world, it made no sense at all. To understand Mary’s “Yes” to God, we need to understand a bit about marriage customs in her day. The marriage process began with the selecting of a bride by the bridegroom and the negotiating of a contract between an agent of the groom and the bride’s father. The engagement was confirmed by oaths and was accompanied by presents to the bride and her family. Afterwards, the bride lived at home for one year. The woman was usually between twelve and fourteen years old.

At the end of the year, the groom came and took her to his house where the marriage was consummated and a marriage feast lasting up to a week ensued. A woman was considered married from the time of her engagement. If the groom died during that year she was a widow. If she became pregnant and the pregnancy was deemed adulterous, she faced public disgrace for a lifetime, at best, or death by stoning at worst. To say “yes” and to say “yes now” was a nearly unimaginable risk. Why would she do it? In our own smaller ways, why do we say yes when asked to step out in God’s mission?

The Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris tells a story about boarding an airplane at Dulles airport to go to a speaking engagement in Florida. As she boarded, she noticed a young father with his son, about three years old, getting settled in the seats in front of her. The little boy was very excited. It was obviously his first flight, and he was intent on scampering over his father and pulling the plastic window covering up and down. As it happened, they were well back in the line for take-off and Rev. Daley-Harris settled into her seat with a mound of work on her lap. As they crept down the taxiway waiting for each plane to take off ahead of them, she heard the little boy turn to his father and ask, “Is this as fast as it goes?”
Perhaps Mary, in one way or another, had heard her people who waited so long for liberation say, “Is this as fast as it goes?” Perhaps it was that urgency that drove her “yes now.” Perhaps the 4,100 children who die each day from water-related diseases in our world ask the same question of us, “Is this as fast as it goes?” Mary’s response asks us to consider our own urgency as we offer ourselves to God as agents of liberation, salvation, and healing today. In Christ, God speaks the great divine “Now!” Now is the time for the tables to turn. Now is the time for the suffering to end. Now is the time for the poor to be lifted up and out. Now. Now was the time for Mary’s yes. Now is the time for our yes as well.

**group question:**

Can you think of a time when you felt that you were led to do something special for God? What was the risk involved?
In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home. (NRSV)
discuss:

Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) As soon as Mary said yes to God's call on her life, she recognized the need for community in order to have the courage and support needed for the adventure before her. So she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was also pregnant. Elizabeth's child would be John the Baptist. How did Elizabeth greet Mary? What emotions might she have felt?

2) Elizabeth had keen, Holy Spirit insight as to what God was doing. As soon as she saw Mary she realized that God was doing the new thing for which they had longed and waited. What was the sign that Elizabeth experienced that helped her know what was happening? (v. 44) Are there signs that God uses with you to help you grasp what is happening?

3) Mary responded to Elizabeth's insights with one of the most stirring and powerful songs in the Bible. She said that her soul (her inward being) was so exultant that it (her soul itself) made God look magnificent. (v. 46) What are the two reasons she gave for her rejoicing? (v. 48)
4) The word in Greek that we translate “blessed” (v. 48) means to be declared indwelt by God and thoroughly satisfied. Mary said that all people will call her that forever. What two reasons did she give for this? (v. 49)

5) In verse 50, Mary gave a wonderful list of God’s characteristics. She made eight powerful claims about what God has done and is doing. Can you pick them out? (vv. 50-54) Those claims were as counter-cultural in her day as in ours. How do you think her song was received? Imagine it was a speech at a political convention today. What would the pundits say?

6) The Greek word for proud means haughty and refers to those who think they are better than others. According to verse 51, what happens to people like that? What do you think that means for us?
7) Mary said that when God is doing a mighty work, the hungry are filled with abundant good things. What does she say happens to the rich? What do you think that means for us?

8) In verse 54, Mary claimed that God, by moving through her to bring the Messiah, had helped Israel. She made two supporting claims. What are they?

9) How long did Mary stay with her cousin? Can you imagine reasons for that time period?
responding to Jesus

**personal response:**
There is a wonderful Greek word, theotokas, which means ‘the God bearer’ and it is often used of Mary in her capacity of bringing Jesus to birth for us. Of course, God does not ask us to literally give birth to a new Messiah. Jesus was and is enough. Yet we are each asked to bring Christ to awareness or reality to those around us. To do that we must bear witness to the truth that God is still doing the things that Mary discerned. How might you be a Christ-bearer this week? In what creative ways might God use you to make Jesus come alive for others?

**global response:**
There are roughly 785 million people today who do not have a clean, safe water supply, and 1.2 billion without proper sanitation. If Jesus is the Living Water and you are a Christ bearer, then how might God be calling you to take concrete action to address this crisis during this Lenten season? As a group list three first steps that you can take before you meet again. How will you take those steps? Who will do what?

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**group prayer**

Magnificent God, God of wonder and surprising callings, we praise you today for coming to be with us, right here and right now. We thank you for our ancestors, especially Mary and Elizabeth, who show us the value of community and shared joy and who saw you and your ways of justice and power so clearly. Help us this week to go forth as your ‘theotokas.’ Give us courage that we may take risks to continue your work in the world. Fill us, Lord, so that we may be poured out. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
notes:
This week we will reflect on a series of encounters with Jesus recorded by Luke in the second part of the second chapter of his Gospel. In this week’s text, Jesus is still only a tiny infant, a mere eight days old at the outset. Yet for all those involved—Mary and Joseph; the righteous man, Simeon; and the aged widow, Anna—he stands as the reason for their presence in the temple, and the agent of God’s might breaking into human history. These four people, drawn together by the weak and vulnerable Messiah before them, have by the end of these events come increasingly to recognize Jesus as far more than an ordinary babe in arms. With a growing sense of reverence and awe, they begin seeing him as a great focal point of human history, in both Jerusalem and beyond. In these and subsequent narratives, Luke demonstrates how those around him came to view Jesus as the promised Messiah, the living God in all his fullness. Luke invites us to embrace Jesus as well, with all that entails, and with reverence and awe.

My wife Kathy and I, along with our two young daughters, moved to the dusty frontier city of Quetta, Pakistan, in 1992, and lived there for more than two years on
a study grant. Quetta is a rugged, khaki-colored town ringed by stark unforgiving mountains and is known for its scarcity of water. Alexander the Great is said to have lost some 50,000 men to thirst—nearly three-quarters of his army—when he marched them across the deserts south of Quetta more than 2,300 years ago. The inhabitants of this arid land still possess a sober respect for the presence, or absence, of water in regard to every aspect of their lives.

During the two-plus years we lived in Quetta, most of our neighbors were poor refugees from Afghanistan who lived as squatters in improvised mud dwellings on the edge of town. None of these homes had indoor plumbing or their own sources of water, and every day meant for at least some members of every household an arduous quest for the water they needed for drinking and cooking and bathing and watering their livestock. This responsibility generally fell to children, who on any given afternoon could be seen fanning out across the neighborhood and beyond in search of a generous neighbor or a nearby hand pump that would provide them with a few gallons of relatively clean water. Otherwise they would have to draw from the microbe-laden canals that ran along the dusty streets.

Ours was the last house with indoor plumbing on our edge of the neighborhood where we lived, and beyond our gate lay miles and miles of rambling settlements and ad hoc hamlets that lacked indoor plumbing. Soon after we moved in, we got in the habit of giving water to anyone who asked. Someone would bang on the large steel gate and one of us would answer. I’d then run a hose out to a boy or girl from the neighborhood who had come with a wheelbarrow full of every available empty vessel they could muster. I’d turn on the pump (if there was electricity that day) and pump water from the underground tank which was filled from the city water supply when there was some, or from tanker trucks of water we would purchase for a few dollars when there was not. Soon knocks came many, and even dozens of times a day, and we got in the habit of
asking that anyone who wanted water should come all at once at three o’clock every afternoon, when we’d pump until everyone’s vessels were filled or the water ran out. There is a photo in one of our albums from that time which shows several of the neighborhood kids standing outside the gate for the daily water run. The water drew them without fail to our home every day, though it was itself a passive participant in the events to which it gave rise. In this week’s text, Jesus is in a very real sense a passive participant, as well, and yet already begins to draw people to himself, as he now actively continues to do to this day.

**group question:**

Even as a helpless babe, Jesus drew people to himself and turned their gaze to the expansive purposes God has for all people. As you reflect on this week’s passage, how is God drawing you to more fully embrace Jesus with reverence and awe, and to reorient the rhythms of your daily life around him?
encountering Jesus

read:
Luke 2:21-40 (NAS Updated Version)

21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

Jesus Presented in the Temple
22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

25 And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, 28 then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,

“Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word;
For my eyes have seen Your salvation
Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
A light of revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel.”
And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed-- and a sword will pierce even your own soul-- to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

discuss:
Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) In verses 21-24, Mary and Joseph take a number of actions in regard to Jesus. What actions do they undertake and why?

2) Based only on what you read in verses 21-24, what do you know or surmise about what kind of people Mary and Joseph are? How would you describe their attitudes toward God? How do you think God used their apparent openness and responsiveness to him to accomplish this series of events?
3) In verses 25-35, Simeon undertakes a number of actions in regard to Jesus. What actions does he undertake and why?

4) Based on verses 25-35, what do you know or surmise about what kind of man Simeon is? How would you describe his attitude toward God? How do you think God used Simeon’s apparent openness and responsiveness to him to accomplish this series of events?

5) What do you take it to mean in verse 25 that “the Holy Spirit was upon him,” and in verse 27 that “he came in the Spirit into the temple?” What does this say about Simeon’s ongoing relationship with God?

6) In verses 30-35, what do we learn about the scope of Jesus’ coming influence? For whose sake had Jesus been sent? How does this make you feel?
7) In verse 33, how do Joseph and Mary respond to Simeon’s words? How do you think they felt and responded in regard to what Simeon says in verses 33-35?

8) Is there anything joyful and exciting in Simeon’s and Anna’s words in this passage? Is there anything sobering and perhaps even frightening in Simeon’s and Anna’s words in this passage? Why do you say so?

9) Based on verses 36-38, what do you know or surmise about what kind of woman Anna is? How would you describe her attitude toward God? How do you think God used Anna’s apparent openness and responsiveness to him to accomplish this series of events?

10) In verse 38, to whom does Anna direct her response regarding Jesus? How does she respond to God? What does she say to people, and to what people does she say it?
responding to Jesus

personal response:
This passage gives us a glimpse into the responses of four people—Mary and Joseph, Simeon, and Anna—to the infant Jesus. As you consider their attitudes and reactions as outlined in this text, what is most challenging to you personally? What one way might this passage move you to change your relationship with God? What one way might this passage move you to change your relationship with other people?

Even as my neighbors in Quetta were drawn to the water we pumped out of our gate every day, so too are the people we encounter in Luke 2:21-40 drawn to the infant Jesus. As those who are similarly drawn to Jesus, what is one simple, attainable way you can contribute to even a few people obtaining clean water in their communities? What can you do or give to ensure that someone on the ground somewhere can help the people near them get clean water, even as we were able to help those who lived near us in Quetta twenty years ago?

global response:

Even as my neighbors in Quetta were drawn to the water we pumped out of our gate every day, so too are the people we encounter in Luke 2:21-40 drawn to the infant Jesus. As those who are similarly drawn to Jesus, what is one simple, attainable way you can contribute to even a few people obtaining clean water in their communities? What can you do or give to ensure that someone on the ground somewhere can help the people near them get clean water, even as we were able to help those who lived near us in Quetta twenty years ago?

Lord, like Joseph and Mary, Simeon, and Anna, we want to be people who love you and obey you, who wait for you and look for your salvation. We want to understand the breadth of your purposes in the world, and, come what may, give ourselves to partner with you in accomplishing them. We are challenged by you, Jesus, even as you lay helpless in the arms of these humble people, and we join them in yielding our very hearts and lives to you—you who have prepared your salvation for all peoples, and for each of us, as well. We join these dear ones in seeking you, in obeying you, in thanking you, and in declaring your praises to all who are willing to hear. Make us able, Lord, to do these things until the end of our days. Amen and amen.
“I don’t think our church should put so much focus on helping people who live in villages in different countries when we have people in need in our own community. God calls us to care for the people in front of us.”

“Charity begins at home. I cannot understand why we would gather money to provide safe water for the world’s poor, when people in our own community cannot afford to pay their rent. We need to take care of our own.”

Have you ever felt or said something similar? At times, people have a hard time seeing a bigger picture of God’s work of compassion in the world.

As you begin this study, consider the following story from Aaron Walling, who traveled to Mexico in 2009 as a volunteer with Healing Waters International. While there he visited a church-run water project in the neighborhood of Berriozabal which provides water to the community at a low price and generates funds for other needs too. His story shows how global acts of compassion can pave the way for local communities to care for one another in surprising ways.
“The project averages about 8000 pesos a month ($630 USD) in net income that can be spent on community service funds. We met with two of the members of the local committee that decides how to use these funds and they showed us what they have been investing in. I was impressed to hear that they spend about 80 percent of the funds on people from outside their church. They feel that this has caused many people to be drawn into attending their church and is one of the main reasons their church has grown. They typically disperse all of the funds every month.

There are several groups that get a set donation every month, including: alcohol rehab center; children’s program in poor neighborhood on Saturdays, [and] individuals with ongoing needs to buy medications. We visited these projects and saw these funds being put to very good use. In one case, the funds were designated to re-replace the wood and cardboard walls of a poor woman’s house with concrete and a tin roof.

Not only did the local committee find a good recipient for these funds, [but] they also volunteered their labor to make sure the money was only spent on buying materials. We are so fortunate to be partnered with people like these.”

**group question:**

Describe what is true and what is limited by the phrase, “Charity begins at home.”
Luke 4:14-28

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” 22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked. 23 Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’” 24 “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.
Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) Jesus begins his ministry in “the power of the Spirit” and tells the people of Nazareth that the “Spirit of the Lord” is upon him. Describe the difference between a ministry that is empowered by the Spirit and one that is not.

2) As Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-2 to the synagogue, he reveals the mission statement of the Messiah (and his personal mission statement). How does Jesus describe his call to ministry?

3) What does Jesus mean when he says, “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”?
4) Read Luke’s description of the ministry of Jesus in verses 38-44 of chapter four. What is Jesus doing? In what ways have you seen Christians do what Jesus did?

5) Read Luke 4:23-27. Jesus uses two illustrations from the Old Testament to show God’s love extends to all people (1 Kings 17:8-14 and 2 Kings 5:1-17). What do these two illustrations tell you about God’s desire to care for others outside the Jewish community?

6) Why would the people praise Jesus when he proclaimed God’s care for the Jews (v. 22) but then get furious when that love is extended beyond their community? (v. 28) Have you ever found yourself with similar feelings?

7) List possible reasons why a prophet is not accepted easily in his/her hometown.

8) Review Jesus’ mission statement (vv. 18-19) and describe ways you see the Christian church fulfilling this call. Where is the Christian church not following this mission?
responding to Jesus

personal response:

If you were following Jesus’ mission statement from Luke 4, what would be different about the way you interact with your family, neighbors, community?

global response:

Consider the testimony at the beginning of the study. In what ways can you or your church begin or continue to develop your outreach to people in need outside your local community and bring hope to those in need of safe water?

group prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for your mission statement to bring good news to people in need both at home and around the world. Empower us by your Spirit to walk as you walk as we care for those in need. Keep our eyes and hearts open to your call as we serve you throughout this next week. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.
notes:
When my son was seven years old, he was playing with a ball inside our house, even though he’d been told many times not to. The ball knocked over a beautiful vase in the living room; it went down with a great crash, breaking into too many pieces to ever put it back together again. And he was frightened by what he assumed would be my reaction. I got down on my knees, and with a little bit of coaxing, he came into my arms. He told me over and over that he was sorry, and I explained that I loved him more than I loved that vase. We cleaned it up together and he promised he would never play ball in the house again. Later that summer, he broke one of the windows in our garden shed with a baseball. At least he wasn’t playing ball inside the house!

In January 2011, I served in Haiti as part of missionary team supporting a doctor who was living there, the orphanage that he opened, a refugee camp he supported, and several medical clinics in nearby towns. We were often at the orphanage, and most of the children were very friendly and easily socialized with the many missionaries they met each year. There was
one exception, a young girl who was quiet and withdrawn; she didn’t like making eye contact and seldom smiled.

Nearly blind in one eye, she was abandoned by her parents at a young age; they had no use for a child with sub-par potential. She was taken in by several families, not out of love, but out of need—their need. They needed a “water slave,” someone to haul water for the three families all day, every day. As their children went to school each day, she fetched water. As they played, she fetched water. As their hopes and dreams grew, hers were crushed under the weight of the water that she fetched for them each day.

A villager had compassion towards this nameless, partially blind little girl and told the local eye doctor, the same one who had opened the orphanage, about her. He made the necessary arrangements for her to come and live at the orphanage with a large extended family, one that has never ever made her haul water. A family that has never judged her, but only loved her. When I returned this year, I saw a young woman who enjoys her studies, who engages in conversation, who has unlimited potential, and one who will now look you in the eye.

Because of this doctor who said “yes” to Jesus, she is experiencing the unconditional love, grace and hope of Jesus and is drinking from his living water.

She no longer lives as a nameless outcast. Her name is Wilna.

group question:

Are some sins worse than others? Are repeated sins unforgivable? Have you ever struggled to admit a transgression or accept someone’s forgiveness?
When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see
this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” 48 Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” 49 The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” 50 Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

discuss:

Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) Why do you think Jesus was invited to dine at the home of a Pharisee?

2) Upon learning that Jesus was there, a woman from the town who had lived a sinful life went to see him. What are some reasons she would want to see Jesus? What was shocking and extravagant about her actions toward Jesus?

3) Why did the Pharisee assume that Jesus was not a prophet? In his view, what was so wrong with Jesus being touched by the woman?
4) How did Jesus respond to Simon the Pharisee’s thoughts?

5) What was the central message of the story Jesus told?

6) Compare the actions of the woman and of Simon towards Jesus that night.

7) Why did Simon not see his need for forgiveness? How did that influence his approach to Jesus?

8) The woman was deeply, painfully aware of her sinfulness and her need for forgiveness. How did that influence her approach to Jesus?

9) Have you ever, like the other dinner guests that night, questioned Jesus’ ability to forgive your sins?
responding to Jesus

personal response:

Think of a time when you were overwhelmed by the depth of Christ’s forgiveness and love for you. Describe how you felt and what your response to Jesus was. Was there anything shocking or extravagant in your thoughts and actions?

global response:

The woman’s response to Jesus was one of deep devotion and intense worship. Consider as a group, how your devotion and worship of Jesus can propel you into action towards caring for others that are overlooked by man, yet deeply loved by God.

group prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for your extravagant love and forgiveness towards us. We recognize our sinfulness and our need for a Savior. Thank you for touching us with your presence. Lord, open our eyes to the people around us; allow us to see them as you see them, people of worth and significance. Guide us and empower us to serve others in your name as we continue this journey towards Easter. We pray in the powerful name of Jesus, amen.
notes:
Keeping Sabbath is a challenge for those of us living in the United States. For the most part, our lives are not structured to allow for rest, play, and worship—we value and reward work and accomplishment. “No rest for the weary,” we say to ourselves, and on we go. But many of us have returned to keeping Sabbath as a way to draw closer to God and to refresh our souls. But when does Sabbath become so individually focused that it harms community? At what point do we become so righteous in our worship and rest and play that we prevent the Spirit from working?

Last summer I traveled with a group of high school students to West Virginia to do some work in a small, down-on-its luck town. Several of our students helped a local guy out with some home repair, while two of us stayed back at the church and ran around with local kids to give their parents a break. It was hot, humid, and miserable; no air conditioning, no ice for the drinks, no shade. I wanted to sit in front of the ineffectual fan and play cards. They wanted to play basketball and foursquare. Did I mention it was hot?
On Thursday we held a community cookout and got to meet some of the neighbors. A young couple came through a few hours early with a tiny baby, maybe seven weeks old. She was hot, sweaty, and red-faced from crying. It was too early in the day, but we welcomed them anyway. They asked for ice so they could try to cool off the baby a bit. The director of the program immediately went to the kitchen and came back with a small bag of ice. We stopped playing and stared; it had been a week since we'd seen ice, but for this baby and her family they brought out the good stuff. We coveted that little bag of ice, even the best of us. That ice was meant to be part of our later celebration, a reward for a week’s worth of hot, humid work.

That night I saw the family again near a gas station. The weather had turned foul and was fixing to rain hard. They didn’t have a place to stay. Their temporary vouchers for a hotel had run out, and they hadn’t made it back to the housing office to get more help. They were planning to sleep under the bridge but were worried about flooding. The man said to me, “We were staying with friends, but, well, it’s a hard story after that. Grateful for the meal, though.”

We couldn’t do much that day except offer some water, some ice, a bit of food, and companionship. But sometimes that’s enough to keep us going in the midst of a hard story.

**group question:**

Finding time to rest and observe the Sabbath is like finding water in the desert. How do we know when to give up that water for the good of others?
Luke 13:10-17

10 On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.

14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”

15 The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.
**discuss:**

Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) What is it like to live with pain and/or illness for 18 years?

2) What do you think it might mean to be crippled by a spirit?

3) What would you give or do to be healed of such pain?

4) What do you wish to be healed of?

5) How do you observe the Sabbath?
6) What disturbs your Sabbath? How are you bothered by others’ actions while you are at rest, at worship, at play?

7) What spaces and times do you hold sacred?

8) What work do you consider essential enough to set aside the commandment to rest on the Sabbath?

9) What has God done for you that astonished others?

10) What righteousness might you be called to reexamine?
responding to Jesus

**personal response:**

Locate yourself in this story.

- Do you rarely honor the Sabbath? How might you set aside time for God this week?
- Are you the woman crippled by a spirit? Where can you find rest, healing, strength, and people to care in the next few days?
- Are you a righteous person offended by God's inconvenient grace? How might you reach out to those who work differently than you—right now, this week, this day?

**global response:**

This week, reflect on how your church is involved in the global water crisis. Discuss what kind of rest could be found on the Sabbath without clean water. Knowing that others are without, how might your church contribute toward the solutions globally?

**group prayer**

Holy God, like you touched the woman crippled by a spirit, heal us on the Sabbath. Like the church leaders, remind us that our commitment to Sabbath should not get in the way of the Spirit at work. Help us to rest uneasily when we know others are suffering. Draw us closer to you so that helping others becomes an integral part of finding rest in you.
notes:
introduction

The neighborhood of Gualey, near Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, is a community of makeshift homes crammed into a steep riverbank above the river Ozama. Home to 20,000 people, prone to frequent flooding, and without basic sanitation, Gualey is a place of outsiders, not a place most people would choose to live. But if you are looking for Jesus, it is a good place to start.

Nine years ago Pastor Ramón Rodríguez entered Gualey and began pastoring a church there. “I prayed ‘God, can you give me a tool to help people?’” he told Dean Nelson, a volunteer with Healing Waters International. Pastor Rodríguez began inviting Gualey’s outsiders—drug addicts, gang members, and prostitutes—to weekend services. Soon God provided an answer to his prayer: a water purification system at his church. With help from Healing Waters, the church opened its own safe water store, and residents began lining up around the block to purchase five-gallon bottles. They were thankful to no longer have to choose between drinking contaminated tap water and paying up to 20 percent of their daily income for commercial bottled water.
Today, crime has fallen dramatically in Gualey, and Pastor Rodríguez’s church has doubled in size. Its water ministry reaches thousands of residents each day, and the church is making plans to expand into neighboring communities. Pastor Rodríguez is grateful. “Providing water is a dream turned into a reality,” he told Dean. “But it is more than just water. It is also spiritual water because it is serving the community and making our church grow.”

In this week’s passage, ten lepers stand together and chorus, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” (Luke 17:13). Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, where he will encounter another group, this time waving branches and chorusing, “Hosanna!” The lepers were outsiders, visibly deformed and living on the boundary lines between Samaria and Galilee, town and wilderness. Whether or not they actually believed Jesus was the Messiah, we don’t know. Surely their desperation provided enough impetus to make a gamble, to throw themselves on the mercy of this strange, bearded healer. Yet rather than calculate their faith levels or recoil at their stumps and sores, Jesus stopped. He looked. And then he crossed the invisible boundary separating these outsiders from everyone else. He healed them and invited them back into society, friendship, and life.

Like the crowds of Palm Sunday, however, most of the lepers melted away, never to be seen again. But one returned, a kernel of faith bursting and growing inside him as he threw himself at Jesus’ feet and said “thank you.”

**group question:**

Gratefulness has a way of making our faith grow; where is God working in your own life this week? Share it, and give thanks.
Luke 17:11-19

11 Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

14 When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

15 One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. 16 He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

17 Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? 18 Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” 19 Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”
discuss:
Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) What happened in today’s passage?

2) In this story, we find Jesus entering a small border town; shortly afterward, he would enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:28-44). Describe the range of responses he provoked during these entries.

3) What types of people responded favorably to Jesus? Why?

4) What does the tenth leper who returned to say “thank you” receive that is different from the other nine?
5) In Luke 17:6, Jesus told his disciples, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.” What is the role of faith in today’s passage?

6) Read the following quote by Meister Eckhart: “If the only prayer you said in your whole life was ‘thank you,’ that would suffice.” What do you think this means? Do you agree or disagree?

7) Does this passage show a connection between faith and gratitude? Why or why not?

8) Sometimes (but not always) people in difficult life circumstances seem to display the most gratefulness and faith. Why do you think this is? How have you responded to difficult circumstances in your own life?
responding to Jesus

**personal response:**

Today we saw Jesus, an observant Jew, going to a border town and interacting with outcasts. The tenth man he healed was a double outcast—disfigured and homeless due to his leprosy, but also a despised Samaritan. Who are the outsiders in your community, and what kind of emotions do they provoke inside you? What are their needs, and how might God might be asking you to reach out to them?

**global response:**

Like Pastor Ramón Rodríguez in today’s introductory story, we might find that when we begin to cross borders—of country, neighborhood, class, or ethnicity—to help others, our faith and our sense of gratitude grow. How can your group or your church cross borders in the name of Christ? If you are already doing this, either by providing safe water or some other ministry, what has been the impact on your life of faith? How can you do it more?

**group prayer**

God, we thank you for crossing infinite borders in order to love and heal us. We thank you that because of Jesus, “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). This week we echo the disciples’ plea to increase our faith (Luke 17:5) as we seek to extend the borders of your kingdom to welcome every outsider. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.
In a scene from Dante’s Paradiso, a narrative poem written nearly 700 years ago, the protagonist, a Christian pilgrim, Dante, comes upon a reflection of God’s justice depicted in the heavenly sky. What he sees is a constellation of souls, illuminated like stars, which together form the image of an Eagle. For Dante, this Eagle is a symbol of God’s justice. These souls that together reflect God’s justice are singing as a chorus. What they sing about is not justice, but rather of God’s grace. The pilgrim’s stance towards this radiant and worshipful image is described as having the energy of a falcon, who, when restored to sight and released from bondage, lifts his eyes and claps his wings for flight. Simply paraphrased: In Dante’s poetic heaven, he sees God’s justice reflected in a body of believers who sing of His grace. The pilgrim, like a falcon, eagerly flies towards it. (Dante, Paradiso, 19:34-38).

In coming towards Jesus in the following Luke passage, the tax collector, Zacchaeus, comes with much the same energy as Dante’s falcon—“so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree”—and yet he encounters much more than the fictional Dante, who only sees a reflection of God’s character. Zacchaeus, rather, comes...
face-to-face with the real incarnation of God's justice and his grace; he meets Jesus Christ. Zacchaeus, like the falcon in Dante's metaphor, was once hooded—blinded and bound as we all are before we know Jesus. In the hope of seeing Jesus, though, the tax collector lets go of any earthbound ties that could have held him back and, like the bird unbound for flight, he runs to behold God.

Zacchaeus could have chosen to allow insecurity to keep him blinded. Instead, he chose to open his eyes and run toward Jesus. Or Zacchaeus could have chosen to allow others’ opinions about his sinful living, and his past, keep him bound. Rather, he chose to receive Jesus into his home and into his heart; “he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.” Zacchaeus was also prepared to have God’s grace radically enter and change his life. When addressed by Jesus, Zacchaeus quickly expressed a desire and a plan to amend his wrongs and to let God change his heart and his lifestyle. “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Through Luke’s witness, we see a man as changed by God’s grace as he was motivated to enact his justice. Similar to the figurative scene in Dante’s heavenly landscape, we see in the Luke passage that acts of Godly justice are not separate from his grace. Zacchaeus first received Jesus’ grace, and then he was moved into acts of restoration and caring for others. Zacchaeus didn’t earn his salvation by these good deeds; he was motivated to enact them by first bringing Jesus into his life.

On Easter we celebrate God’s perfect union of grace and justice in Jesus. Through his self-sacrificial death we are extended life-giving grace. Through the resurrection his love-filled justice is spoken beautifully into the world. Easter means that his grace is available to us all, should we choose to receive it.
Easter means that His justice will be done, and that even death cannot hold it back.

Easter means that God’s love can change the dynamics of the universe, and the dynamics of our lives.

Will we hold still, passively watching God as His story unfolds around us? Or will we let go of self-serving habits, senses of entitlement, desires to control things, and any of the other ropes that hold us down and choke our vision? Like Zacchaeus, will we let go and run joyfully towards the Lord, our God? Easter is grace fusing with justice, Jesus’ boundless love fusing with the perfect sovereignty of the Father.

**group question:**

When has the realization that you have received God’s grace motivated you to make things right with others? In your home? Your neighborhood? Or around the world?
Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter; “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner!”

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”
discuss:
Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) Zacchaeus was eager to see and meet Jesus. At this point in your life, how eager are you to meet him on a daily basis?

2) Have you ever been held back from a growing relationship with God due to feelings of insecurity or self-doubt?

3) How do others’ opinions shape your decisions, for good or bad?

4) Zacchaeus was ready to have Jesus change his life. What is one way Jesus has radically changed your life, or one way you would like him to do so?
5) When Zacchaeus felt convicted about the way he made money, he was willing to change his relationship with money. To lose it, even, in order to do things differently. What habit would be difficult for you to relinquish if you discovered it was hurting or hindering other people?

6) Zacchaeus expressed a desire to amend relationships with people he had cheated. He also declared a desire to help the poor. Are there relationships in your life which need mending, or specific people you feel called to help?

7) What motivates you to serve the less fortunate?

8) Discuss why it is important to understand that helping others is not the cause of salvation but a result of salvation.

9) Describe what God's justice might look like to you.
responding to Jesus

**personal response:**
What would need to be different in your life for you to be freed from whatever is holding you back so that you could run toward the Savior?

**global response:**
Zacchaeus allowed God to open his eyes to see those of whom he had taken advantage for his own gain. Led by God’s spirit, Zacchaeus chose to make reparations and give back to those he had cheated and forgotten. Whom have we as a consumer culture forgotten? With eyes opened to God’s Spirit, what would it look like for our churches and small groups to give back to those that we have overlooked? How can we repair the damage done by our neglect and collectively reflect God’s justice?

**group prayer**
Dear God, we thank you and praise you for the example of eagerness and Christ-centered focus you give us through Zacchaeus. Thank you that as we celebrate your death and resurrection this Easter, we realize that we don’t have to earn our salvation; you have given us the chance to live in a right relationship with you at no cost to us. You paid for it on the cross. Let this be the focus of our days as we strive to make right our relationships with others, remembering and pointing to your sacrificial and inimitable love, in our homes and in the world. Please allow the awareness of your grace in our lives to stir us to sing of and reflect that grace, pointing to your justice and your love in all that we do.
My son and daughter-in-law are currently trying to buy a house. Ideally, they would like a three-bedroom, two-bath home on a safe street relatively close to their church in Hollywood; they don’t mind if it’s a condo. However, their real estate agent says that they can’t afford this.

The early Christians in Acts, on the other hand, weren’t looking to buy property in order to be near their church. Rather, they were looking to sell their property in order to be the church, which provided for and cared for all the believers among them.

My son and daughter-in-law express a desire to care for other believers, but they’re not convinced that putting their 20 percent down-payment into the church offering plate is what God is calling them to do.

In the book of Acts we get a picture of God’s way for the believers of the first century. The Scriptures tell us that among them no one claimed ownership over their possessions, and that as a result, none among them was needy. The generous and selfless character of
these believers allowed them to bear each other’s burdens as they testified together with great power to the resurrection of the Lord. How do we as the modern church live with the same character—generosity, sacrificial love, deep caring for one another—and bear our own powerful testimony to Jesus, without emulating the collective-ownership real estate model in Acts?

On a short-term mission trip outside of Mexico City, I saw a picture of believers demonstrating this character of selfless generosity and of deep caring for others. It makes me think of what a Godly real estate model can look like today.

Our host informed us that we would be building a house. When we arrived at the construction sight we were early (by our estimation), and awkwardly full of self-righteousness. Already busy at work were some local people from the neighborhood. Our assumption was that this house was going to become their own, and that this expeditious pace was driven by a desire to get something for themselves.

We worked hard, but because of the intense heat we found ourselves taking lots of breaks. Our native friends, however, just kept working and working. Sometime in the early afternoon a nearby family brought us all lunch. It was only then that we discovered that the house would eventually belong to a widow in the community, and that our working companions had been sweating away to build the home for her! Furthermore, it turned out that they barely knew her.

It was humbling, to say the least, when we realized these boast-less men, who had arrived super early, and then worked circles around us, through the breaks, had been engaged in a labor of sacrificial love. All the meanwhile we had been regretfully meditating on our own righteousness and incorrectly assuming that we were serving these men!
group question:

Have you ever been surprised or overwhelmed by someone else’s generosity, either to you or someone else? Describe this experience to the group.

read:

Acts 4:32-37

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means “son of encouragement”), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.
**discuss:**
Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) What is your initial, gut and/or intellectual response to the picture in Acts of believers selling personal property in order to meet the needs of the body of Christ as a whole? How is your response similar to or different from your response to the story about the men building the widow’s house outside of Mexico City? Are you dubious? Or do such episodes occur regularly in your reality?

2) In both situations we see more than just financial choices and service projects; what we see is a spirit of deep care between believers. We see the kind of sacrificial love to which Jesus calls us: laying down our lives for one another (John 10:17) and carrying each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). How do we achieve such a character of selflessness and generosity?
3) In 1980 Henri Nouwen wrote a powerful book entitled With Open Hands. In today’s scripture and story, there were hands giving and hands receiving—open hands, in other words. When it comes to living in local and global communities of believers, what hinders our hands from opening, either to generously give to the needy, or to receive when we are the ones broken down? Which is harder for you? To give freely or to receive humbly? Have you ever been struck by the openness of someone else’s giving, or of their receiving?

4) Where does “power” come from in the Acts passage (v. 33)? What does it accomplish? How is power in the Acts passage different from power as it is defined in our culture? How does the mention of “power” fit into the rest of the passage?

5) The Scripture tells us that the apostles gave to Joseph a new name, Barnabas, which means “son of encouragement.” It also tells us that he “sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” Who in your church or community should be renamed “Barnabas”? How have they encouraged you? Or others? How have they lived like the Barnabas in Acts?
6) What does it take to have a heart like Barnabas, like the builders in Mexico, and most importantly, like Jesus? How do we live generously? Does it mean choosing to live with less square footage and less sinks in the bathroom, so that others around the world can live with safe water? How would you define your own ways of being generous?

7) If you were given the task of teaching a Sunday school class to encourage increased generosity, how would you go about it?

8) How would you define or describe God’s ways of being generous?
responding to Jesus

**personal response:**
Jesus says, “Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other” (John 13:34-35). What needy persons has God put in your life? In what ways are you caring for them?

**global response:**
When we face the reality that nearly 800 million people around the globe get all of their water from a dirty water source, and that some of them are our brothers and sisters in Christ, how are we called to respond?

**group prayer**
Lord Jesus, please grow us in our desire to be generous; cast out fears we might harbor about letting go of selfishness. We realize that you may show us places in our lives where we don’t want to change. We also trust, though, that you have called us to transform in your image. Please guide us in our pursuits to love and encourage others towards you. Please show us how to invest our hearts in your kingdom that we may care deeply for others; and show us how to find our treasures- and our real estate- in your kingdom. Amen.
Safe water not only quenches thirst; it can also quench the fires of dissension and disunity. In 2010 Lifewater International worked with the village of Abung Genga in northern Uganda to install a drilled well to provide water for all of its residents. Christian community trainers helped the villagers establish a committee to oversee the new water source and ensure equal distribution. Here is how Lifewater described the changes which took place: “As recently as last month, 510 people were collecting water from an unprotected spring, jostling and arguing to make sure that each got their share even while keeping one eye out for water snakes and slippery spots on the logs. Now these same people take pride in having a source that will help keep their children safe.”

Today’s passage in Acts 6 describes a similar situation in which members of a community were fighting because they didn’t think they were getting their fair share. R. Kent Hughes described it this way:

“Acts 6 shows us Satan trying to disrupt the inward peace of the early church. Wonderful things were happening as
the new church grew by leaps and bounds... Satan, unhappy about God’s successes, sowed a spirit of murmuring and gossip among God’s people, hoping to set believer against believer.”

The Apostles were chosen to serve and to lead the fledgling church. But when their followers began fighting and their leadership began to fracture, the door opened for Satan to step in and endanger the work of building God’s Kingdom. The way the early church’s leaders responded set the foundation for our church today.

The Apostles handled what could have been a damaging problem with great wisdom, denying Satan any foothold in the fellowship. They showed believers, new and mature, that waiting for the Living Water is not a passive, inactive function of believing. It requires action on our part. It means we will be involved more than just with our words. We will answer by meeting the responsibilities and priorities set forth by Jesus. These responsibilities include our conduct in all of our relationships. It involves a continual, relational outreach to those in need, no matter who they are, no matter where they live. It is going forth as disciples with a dynamic, living faith that works for God.

**group question:**

What are some of the problems the church faces today as it endeavors to serve the world and its surrounding communities?

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In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1-7)

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. (John 15:7-9)
discuss:
Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) We are all given spiritual gifts (Eph. 4:7-16, Rom. 12:3-8, 1 Cor. 12:1-11). Based on the Acts passage above, and the rest of chapter six, what do you think Stephen’s spiritual gifts were?

2) How does Stephen’s ministry show use of these gifts?

3) The leaders of the first century were called to serve all the people through God’s Word by work, Word and prayer. What happened when they tried to do more than this?

4) Have you ever tried to serve in ministry and encountered disunity? What was your response?
5) Looking at the Acts passage, identify and list the results of the Apostles’ decision to delegate ministry work.

6) The passage from John is among Jesus’ last words. What did Jesus mean when he asked for his disciples to remain in him and his words in them?

7) What are some ways we can remain in him on a daily basis?

8) Why do you think Jesus commanded his disciples (the future leaders of his church) to remain in him?

9) We are all called to produce spiritual fruit. What kind of fruit might you be called to produce?
responding to Jesus

**personal response:**

Jesus chose you, too, to serve in ministry to build up the body of Christ. How will you personally go forth with Jesus in you and you in him and bring the living water that Jesus has promised? How can you bring peace to a fractured world?

**global response:**

We are called to minister beyond our back doors and sanctuary walls. Globally there are millions who suffer from lack of daily necessities such as food, clothing, and water. In James we read, “Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, ‘Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well’—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?” (James 2:15-16). Too often, we ignore the sufferings of others who are far away. Out of sight, out of mind is prevalent everywhere. As you near the end of your Easter Journey, how can you ensure that your church keeps the needs of people far away—whether socially or geographically—at the top of its priority list?

**group prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank you for this opportunity to see through the examples of Jesus and his apostles how we too are chosen to lead in mending a broken world. We have the desire and now pray for the means to reach all with the living water Jesus promises. We ask you to create a clear path for our ministries to grow and spread and quench thirst. In your son Jesus Christ’s name, amen.
A Man Named Peter
written by Daniel Nathan

The book of Acts is part two of the history of Jesus and the early church, written by Luke, a Gentile physician. Jesus said to his disciples in Acts 1:8, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts is the story of the Holy Spirit moving the disciples, and later other converts, outward in ever-expanding circles beginning at Pentecost and culminating with Paul’s four missionary adventures and his second imprisonment in Rome. Acts 10, which includes part of the longest recorded story in Acts (77 verses), falls right in the middle of three key chapters, Acts 9-11, where the disciples “cross over” and bring the Gospel of Jesus to Gentiles.

There is an Afrikaans South African Vineyard Pastor named Alexander Venter. He wrote a wonderfully challenging book called Doing Reconciliation. In this book, he shared his story of how God radically spoke to him about the “other,” his Black Christian brother, and his responsibility toward him. Following is a synopsis of his story.

“I became blind to how racism was controlled by politics (apartheid) as a young Pentecostal preacher—I concentrated on the salvation of souls and did not want to get involved in politics. I preached white sermons to white people” (32).

Through a few divine encounters, Alexander began to experience growing unease with a church that only included whites. Once a black man stood up and started to criticize him when he preached about the Kingdom of God and justice. He asked, “Are you not just another white English liberal, a hypocrite trying to patronize black people by saying nice words to us in front of the whites? If you mean what you say, then come to Soweto and meet my friends and see how we live.” It was unlawful for a white person to cross over and visit black Soweto. He went regardless, and he was shocked by the poverty and hopelessness of what he saw.

“I felt God saying ‘Where is your brother?’ It struck me—my black brother! God was clearly asking me about my oppressed brother, my poor brother, my angry brother, my AOG brothers and sisters who died in the Soweto riots. Am I my brother’s keeper? I thought, ‘God, don’t get political on me now! I haven’t killed anyone, let alone a black man! Are you crazy?’ God’s response was, ‘Yes, you are your brother’s keeper. His blood cries out to me from the ground. In fact, his blood is on your hands’” (38).

Alexander had just touched the pain of black people in Soweto and he knew in his heart what God meant.

“ My resolve to live a life of repentance from my white conditioning quickly took the form of regular visits to Soweto. I went there weekly with my white friends and we met angry black comrades. We concluded that only Jesus, through the blood he shed for us, could make us one, and could heal and unite us” (39).
“There is no racism, sickness, pain or death in the Kingdom of Heaven. Nationalities or languages are not wiped away but they are one in diversity. The church should be the agent of the Kingdom in this world. The task is to expose darkness and bring light. If the church loses its salt, the nation will be overcome by darkness. The Kingdom has come and that is why we have to work so that the world would see the Kingdom in our churches” (141-142).

**group question:**

Are there individuals or groups of people with whom you associate today that might be shocking to other Christians if they learned of your involvement with these people? Do you avoid hanging out with any particular person or group?
Cornelius Calls for Peter

1 At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. 2 He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. 3 One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, “Cornelius!”

4 Cornelius stared at him in fear: “What is it, Lord?” he asked.

The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. 5 Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. 6 He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

7 When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. 8 He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

Peter’s Vision

9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as
reptiles and birds. 13 Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

14 “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

15 The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

17 While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon’s house was and stopped at the gate. 18 They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

21 Peter went down and said to the men, “I’m the one you’re looking for. Why have you come?”

22 The men replied, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.” 23 Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

Peter at Cornelius’s House
The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. 24 The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives
and close friends. 25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

27 While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. 28 He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. 29 So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

30 Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. 32 Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ 33 So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

34 Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. 36 You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. 37 You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

39 “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, 40 but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41 He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with
him after he rose from the dead. 42 He commanded us to preach to
the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed
as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about
him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins
through his name.”

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came
on all who heard the message. 45 The circumcised believers who had
come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had
been poured out even on Gentiles. 46 For they heard them speaking
in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, 47 “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being
baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we
have.” 48 So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus
Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.
discuss:
Discuss the following questions as a group.

1) How would you describe Cornelius? (vv. 1-3)

2) When have you discovered unexpected types of people on your journey to Jesus?

3) If God was willing to send an angel to communicate with Cornelius, why do you think it was necessary that Peter come as well? (vv. 4-8)

4) Describe Peter’s vision. How many times does it occur? (vv. 9-16)
5) Lev. 11:2-4, 43 would have been central to Peter’s identity as a Jew regarding clean and unclean, Jew and Gentile. What was God doing?

6) Peter didn’t immediately understand the vision in all its implications. When has God revealed part of a plan and purpose to you, not in total, but just enough to move forward in faith and trust? How did you respond to his leading?

7) What were the situations in which both Cornelius (vv.2-3) and Peter (vv.9-10) encountered God? When, if ever, have you been led by God’s Spirit (v. 19)?
8) One writer described the social distinction between Jews and Gentiles in the first century (vv. 17-23a) to be like India’s caste system of Brahmins and untouchables. What small step of obedience did Peter take (v 23)? How many different kinds of people crossed your threshold last year?

9) Peter has preached twice before this point in Acts: first at Pentecost (Acts 2) and second with the Samaritans (Acts 8). Each instance was to a specific audience with specific needs and questions. How have you relayed the gospel of Jesus differently, depending on who’s listening?

10) While Peter was still speaking, what happened (vv. 44-48)? How have you seen God move in power recently?
responding to Jesus

personal response:
Is there anyone in your life whom you’ve excluded from the reach of the gospel? Is there anywhere God is asking you to “cross over” and model the inclusive and unifying nature of the gospel?

global response:
How does the question “Who is your brother?” challenge you? Where has the Christian church abandoned or ignored the plight of its brothers and sisters? What global justice issues might God be calling you or your group to address?

group prayer
God, we thank you that your gospel is boundary-less. Your love and mercy are available to all who respond. God, we pray that we can be agents of reconciliation and bearers of your peace and justice in the lives of those around us and around the world. We pray that you open our eyes to the things that break your heart. Use us and use our church to proclaim the Kingdom, to welcome the other, and to work on behalf of the least and the lost. Amen.
Meet the Authors

A diverse group of leaders, pastors, and Christian water development practitioners contributed to The Easter Journey’s 2013 resources. In this section, you will find more information about this talented group of authors.
Week One

Rev. Eugenia Gamble is the pastor of Nipomo Community Presbyterian Church in Nipomo, California. Prior to this role, she served as Senior Pastor for two other Presbyterian churches and as Director of Spiritual Development at First Presbyterian Church in San Luis Obispo, California. She has also authored multiple books, Bible-study guides, and articles and served on the continuing education faculties at Princeton Theological Seminary, Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh Seminary, and San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Week Two

Andy Saperstein serves as Pastor of Small Groups at Vineyard Columbus (vineyardcolumbus.org) and assists in advising several international teams working in the developing world. He previously served for several years as Associate Director of a Muslim-Christian dialogue and reconciliation program at Yale University, and worked for more than twelve years in Central and South Asia in a range of church and educational development projects. Andy holds degrees in Linguistics from The University of Chicago (B.A.) and from The Ohio State University (M.A. and Ph.D.).

Week Three

Tom Stephen serves a Christian community whose emphasis is on prayer, compassion, humility, and enthusiasm for the gospel of Jesus. As pastor of Monte Vista Presbyterian church in Newbury Park, California, he works with others to give the good news to that community and through an online community called PCH Disciples. In addition to their first book, Fearless: 40 Reflections on Fear, he and his wife Ginny have worked on curriculum for Regal Books, Focus on the Family, Soul Survivor, and Gospel Light. They enjoy time together with their four children, three dogs, and two rats.
Week Four
Carol Benson serves as a Lay Pastor at Monte Vista Presbyterian Church in Newbury Park, California. She and her husband Danny are recent empty-nesters, as both of their children are now attending college and living away from home. Carol is passionate about outreach, serving others, and sharing Christ’s love with people in many parts of the world.

Week Five
Rev. Katie Mulligan is a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary and youth pastor for four churches in and around Trenton, New Jersey (Ewing, Covenant, West Trenton and Lawrence Road Presbyterian Churches). She is also a chaplain at Rider University. Katie is the parent of two boys and four cats and blogs at http://insideouted.blogspot.com.

Week Six
Carol Nowlin has been working in the water development field for the past ten years, specializing in proposal writing, program development, communications, and grants management; she also recently completed an MA in international development through Eastern University. An active member of her local Vineyard church, Carol is passionate about social justice and serving her community. She is married to Mike and has two young children.

Week Seven
Ellie Emslie Stevens is a Christian, the wife of Dustin Stevens, the mother of Ruth Stevens, a graduate of Northfield Mount Hermon School, Smith College, and UCLA, with B.A., M.A., and PhD in Italian Literature. Her specialization is the Bible as a source in Medieval Italian Literature. Her passions include studying God’s word, translation, and endurance running.
Week Eight
Dan Stevens founded Waiting for Water in 2011. Prior to this he served as Executive Director of Lifewater International for eight years and Senior Pastor at Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Ventura, California, for twenty-six years. Dan also founded IMPACT, a short-term missions training program affiliated with the Santa Barbara Presbytery. Through his involvement with IMPACT, as well as other cross-cultural ventures, he has gained a wealth of knowledge and personal experience in forming transnational partnerships and working in the developing world. Dan holds a Master of Divinity from Princeton Seminary and a Bachelor of Science degree from Pepperdine University.

Week Nine
Bonnie Boe, Dean of Santa Barbara Presbytery’s Leader Training Institute, is a member of Moorpark Presbyterian Church where she is on staff, teaches adult Sunday school, serves as a Mentor mom for her local MOPS group, and is a leader in MPC’s Children’s ministry. As part of her staff position with Santa Barbara Presbytery, she serves on several committees including Church Development. Bonnie believes that part of being a missional leader is to use the gifts we are given to go out and reach as many people for the kingdom as possible.

Week Ten
Daniel Nathan is Pastoral Coordinator for Coed Small Groups at Vineyard Columbus (vineyardcolumbus.org). Prior to this role, he served as a missionary and ran water projects in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Daniel is currently pursuing an M.P.A. from The Ohio State University in non-profit management.