



COPTIC ORTHODOX DIOCESE OF THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES  
SUNDAY SCHOOL CURRICULUM  
8th Grade





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# Introduction

September 11, 2020

*"Let everything take second place to our care of our children, our bringing them up to the discipline and instruction of the Lord. If from the beginning we teach them to love true wisdom, they will have greater wealth and glory than riches can provide."*

St John Chrysostom

The book of Proverbs tells us to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov 22:6) Although our Orthodox faith never changes, the society and challenges our children face are always evolving. In light of this constant change, and in honor of the 100 year anniversary of establishment of Sunday school in 2018, the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States began working on a new curriculum named "Children of Light" to equip and educate our children in order to live a life pleasing to God in the midst of the world we live in. St Habib Girgis rightly reminds us that "education is the first need for the community after bread." Seeing the importance of educating our children, great effort was put over the past few years into ensuring a curriculum is developed that would feed our children with the proper foundations and tools appropriate to their age. Every grade will equip the child with strong biblical, liturgical, spiritual and morally appropriate lessons allowing them to grow in faith while providing them with tools to navigate the day to day issues they face in society so that they may be the true light of the world they are each called to be.

May this new curriculum be a tool that allows our children to grow in wisdom and in love of God, living up to their calling of being light of the world and true children of Light.

Bishop Youssef

Bishop Basil

Bishop Gregory

Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# Overview and Milestones



## Theme of the Year

### Choosing Orthodoxy

**Rationale:** Throughout this year youth will be seeking a level of independence and self-reliance while being completely confused on who they actually are. Having been baptized in the church, youth in this age group often wonder who is God to them and whether they would have picked to be Christian themselves by this point. This year focuses on providing them the tool on making them choose to be where they are as they struggle to be pressured into different kinds of behaviors with their friends.

## Psych Analysis



Physical

Skin problems, Worries about normal physicality, Short term minded



Intellect

Distracted from homework for social life, One word answers to adults, Question parents and value



Social

Struggles with identity, Seeks independence, Honesty conflict with peer pressure, Into music,


[Detailed Characteristics](#)

## Building Blocks

### BB1: Choosing my Faith

*Have you chosen to be a Christian?*

### BB4: Scripture's Faith and Truth

*Accepting the Truth of the Biblical Texts, The Development of Biblical Canons, The Role of individuals in Scripture, Scripture in Church Services, The Sacraments in Scripture*

### BB7: Traditions, a Foundation of Orthodoxy

*'Scripture Alone'?, Holy Tradition, The Apostolic & Patristic Tradition, Our Identity*

### BB2: Doubts in Faith

*Who Is Jesus?, Did Jesus Really Rise?, Can We Trust the Bible?, Can One Live a Good Moral Life Without God?, Does God exist?, Is the Bible Full of Contradictions?, The Secular influence, Q&A: Revisiting your doubts*

### BB5: OT Timeline 2

*The United Kingdom: Saul, The United Kingdom: David, The United Kingdom: Solomon to Jeroboam, The United Kingdom: Rehoboam, Review the United Kingdom*

### BB8: Your Church

*Establishment of the Church, The Creed, The School of Alexandria, The Councils, Monasticism, Shapes & Iconography, The Feasts of the Church, Fasting, BB Review*

### BB3: Choosing a God Centered Life

*Who Are You to God?, Praying and Reading Scripture, Being an Active Member of the Body, Present Your Body a Living Sacrifice, The Work of the Holy Spirit in You*

### BB6: Lifestyle Choices & Orthodoxy

*Christian Dating, Tattoos & piercings, How to Confess, Scribes and Pharisees, Unity*

### BB9: True Christian in a Non Christian World

*Why Live as a True Christian?, Why on earth am I here?, Hearing the Voice of God, How to Handle Temptation, God is the Source of Pleasure, Relationships with Non Christians, Witnessing Christ in a Non Christian World, BB Review*

## End of Year Milestones & Objectives



Scripture

- + Understand/know the events of the unified Kingdom
- + Knows the structure and content of the Bible
- + Aware of the Deuterocanonical Books
- + Understands the necessity of Sacraments based on Scripture (the difference maker of orthodoxy)



Spiritual

- + Spiritual practice without rewards (eg. Read bible/Pray without doing it for points/tokens/prizes)
- + Has an accountability partner
- + Desire to volunteer (without being pushed)
- + Begun a true & honest relationship with their Father of Confession.



Social

- + Can have a personal answer to: "Why am I Orthodox?"
- + Understands what is Christian Dating and its appropriate timing
- + Learning to establish boundaries
- + Attempts to hear God (through Prayer, Scripture, Church Fathers and Spiritual Guide)



Rituals

- + Understands the schisms of the church (councils)
- + Values Holy tradition and Iconography
- + Knows the seasons of the Church
- + Attends Vespers & Praises twice+/month



## Acknowledgements

The Diocese would like to thank all those who helped in this curriculum. There were collaborators and volunteers from across the globe throughout the US, Canada, and Qatar. We would also like to thank St. Mary and St. Mark of Edmonton for their significant collaboration in this service. May God bless and reward all to those who have labored and prayed for this curriculum.

## Providing Feedback

Feedback, suggestions and material may be submitted at any time in the following [form](#).

## Disclaimer

Only the content presented on this curriculum has been reviewed and verified. The provided links have also been reviewed. However, the remainder of the content of these websites were out of the scope of the review.



# Building Block I: Choosing my Faith

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Building Block 1: Choosing my Faith



## Lesson 1.1: Have You Chosen To Be A Christian?

### Objective

To understand that being Christian is a choice we make and that it is ok to be at different stages of our faith.

### Application

It is a good idea to reflect on where we are in our faith, we should be encouraged to ask questions and seek truth.

If we find ourselves in doubt, talk to our spiritual father, servant or loved one that can guide us before we come to any harsh conclusions about Christianity.

### References



**Scripture:** [Leviticus 1:3](#), [Leviticus 19:5](#), [Leviticus 22:29](#), [Matthew 23:3-4](#), [Luke 15:11-32](#), [2 Corinthians 9:7](#)



**Liturgy:** [Psalm 50](#)



**Patristic:** St. Basil the Great



**Story:** [St. Simon the Shoemaker](#)



**Other:** [Why Am I Christian? Talk by Fr. Daoud Lamej](#), [Timeless Truths in Truthless Times \(Chapters 1, 4, 7, 16, 23\)](#)

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Willingly or Unwillingly?

- In the Old Testament, God instructed Moses to establish various offerings for the Lord (peace offerings, burnt offerings, etc.). Now, pay close attention to the manner in which the Lord requested these offerings:
- “If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the Lord.” - Leviticus 1:3
- “And if you offer a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord, you shall offer it of your own free will.” - Leviticus 19:5
- “And when you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, offer it of your own free will.” - Leviticus 22:29
- The Lord is love, all He has to offer us is His love, and all He requests from us is to present our offerings in love (free will).
- Do we offer to the Lord of our own free will, as He has requested us to do? Or do we offer out of a feeling of duty?
- Simon the shoemaker and the moving of the Mokattam Mountain with the sheer reciting of “kyrie eleison”. Essentially, it isn’t about WHAT (kyrie eleison) you offer the Lord, but HOW (faith and love) you offer it to the Lord. The people called with St. Simon with immense faith, love, and trust. Their offering of prayer and reciting “kyrie eleison”, although simple, was done out of their own will, desire, and love.
- The Lord accepts those who are simple in their offerings, but be willing and loving.
- “For if You desired sacrifice, I would have given it: You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit: a broken and humbled heart God shall not despise. Do good, O Lord, in Your good pleasure to Zion; and let the walls of Jerusalem be built. Then You shall be pleased with sacrifices of righteousness, offering, and burnt sacrifices: then they shall offer calves upon Your altar.” - Psalm 50
- First, the Lord requests us to have a broken and humbled heart that is willing to know Him, then we may present Him with our offerings (service, attending liturgy etc.) and He will be pleased to receive them.

#### + Blind Followers or Active Doers?

- Regarding the scribes and pharisees: “Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.” - Matthew 23:3-4
- The scribes and Pharisees are typically introduced with “woe to you, scribes and Pharisees” in scripture. The scribes and Pharisees were individuals who obtained vast knowledge about traditions and the faith, yet they were always called hypocrites. This is due to the fact that they were blind knowers and not active doers, as revealed in the above verse.



- It is important for us to evaluate whether we are blind partakers of our faith. Do we go to church because that is Sunday morning tradition or because we want to? Do we fast because we think it is a rule in the church or because we want to? Do we know why we go to church every Sunday? Do we know why we fast?
- These traditions and actions which we are consistent partakers of, we should partake of with understanding the beauty behind them.

#### + Joyfully or Grudgingly?

*Consider discussing with the students the characteristics that make someone a joyful partaker of the faith*

- “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” - 2 Corinthians 9:7
- “People who give reluctantly or under compulsion present a blemished sacrifice which should not be accepted.” - St. Basil the Great
- The Lord will readily accept our efforts and offerings to Him, as long as the source of our offering is love and joy.
- Be joyful that you have the opportunity to come to the liturgy and partake of His eucharist, not annoyed that your parents woke you up early on Sunday. Be joyful as you give someone your only water bottle because you see them thirsty, not upset because now you won’t have water. Be joyful in all that you give to the Lord, and the blessings you receive from Him will be ten times more than what you’ve offered to Him.

#### + Who Reaps the Rewards?

*Consider discussing with the students what the rewards of someone who partakes of faith.*

- The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) - at the end of the story, who was the one profiting from the son returning to his loving father? The father or the son? - The son! By the end of the prodigal son’s journey, he felt as though he was not worthy to be his father’s son and should be a servant.
- Thus, when we approach the Lord, we shouldn’t feel as though He is in need or expecting our love. We are the ones who are in need of His love and He is the father whose arms are always ready to embrace us, how lucky are we?
- What is stopping us from yearning to partake in this life with Christ? (Intro to the following building block) - Give the students an opportunity to ask any questions/doubts they have about the faith.



# Building Block 2: Doubts in Faith



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Building Block 2: Doubts in Faith



### Lesson 2.1: Who Is Jesus?

#### Objective

To fully understand who Jesus is in a historical and spiritual aspect.

#### Application

Anytime you are stuck in a situation ask WWJD (what would Jesus do?). Answer that question, and it will guide you to do the right thing.

#### References



Scripture: [Exodus 28:1, John 5:22](#)



Liturgy: [The Confession](#)



Patristics: [On the Unity of Christ, St. Cyril of Alexandria](#)



Story: [Case for Christ, Lee Strobel \(Atheism to Faith\)](#)



Other: [Timeless Truths in truthless Times 18 & 19](#), [The genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ](#), [How do we know Jesus Christ really existed](#), [What is the Coptic Orthodox Church's Christological belief?](#)



#### Body Overview Bullet Points

##### + Who is Jesus?

*Consider asking the students their favorite flavor of ice cream is. How do you know it's your favorite flavor? To be able to know which flavor is your favorite, you must first taste it, experience it, and know exactly what it is. You wouldn't claim an ice cream flavor to be your favorite without trying it first. Now as Christians, we follow Jesus, but how many of us actually know who Jesus is. How can we claim to follow Christ if we don't know who He is?*

- Genealogy: Society in Biblical times was organized along family and tribal lines. Genealogy was of importance in establishing a person's lineage. Religious importance was determined by whom your forefathers were. For example, only the descendants of Aaron could become priests (Exodus 28:1). The Holy Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke trace the ancestry of the Lord Jesus Christ back to Abraham and Adam, respectively. Though both genealogies are not exactly alike, the ancestries were included in the Holy Gospels to emphasize that the Lord Jesus was a son of King David, which was the necessary lineage for the Messiah.
- Background: The Holy Gospels are full of information and insight into the Lord's Holy life. The Lord Jesus Christ can be seen growing and abiding in the Spirit. From walking in the wilderness, telling of parables, of challenges with the devil, performing miracles, and facing His opponents, we can view the Lord Jesus Christ's life from His Holy birth. The Holy Gospels do not describe His appearance; tell of His education, nor of His psychological development. The Gospels are meant to portray Him as an icon does a saint. We identify with the Lord Jesus Christ through His sayings and teachings.

##### + The Historical Jesus

- There is no reputable scholar who will deny the historical existence of Jesus. Historians at times will bring into question certain accounts, but if one were to look at another example, Socrates, from a historical perspective, he presents similar issues. Socrates left no writings. All we know about Socrates are mainly the things that either Plato, his disciple, said about him or Xenophon, another of his disciples said about him and a few other things. Surprisingly, Plato and Xenophon don't give the same picture of Socrates. So the given of historians prevent them from the ability of portraying perfect pictures of historical figures.
- As far as we know, the first author outside the church to mention Jesus is the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who wrote a history of Judaism around AD93. He has two references to Jesus. About 20 years after Josephus we have the Roman politicians Pliny and Tacitus, who held some of

the highest offices of state at the beginning of the second century AD. From Tacitus we learn that Jesus was executed while Pontius Pilate was the Roman prefect in charge of Judaea (AD26-36) and Tiberius was emperor (AD14-37). Pliny contributes the information that, where he was governor in northern Turkey, Christians worshipped Christ as a god. Neither of them liked Christians.

- Virtually everything that is known about the life of the Lord Jesus Christ comes from only four documents, the Holy Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. The Case For Christ by Lee Strobel successfully aims to challenge and prove the reliability of the gospels, evidence of Jesus & the resurrection. This novel is linked in the resources and can be helpful in providing supplemental evidence for the existence of Jesus.
- According to John McRay, PhD, places, people, and events which were mentioned by the authors of the gospels have been traced and confirmed through archaeological excavations. Thus, a plethora of scientific evidence works to enhance the credibility of the New Testament.
- As much as it is important to acquire knowledge of outside evidence which supports the existence of Jesus, we should not neglect the source of all our answers... the scripture.
- "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." - St. Jerome
- It is crucial to take the scripture under our belts and to employ scripture when building confidence in the existence of Jesus and in our faith.

#### + Jesus My God

- Our Lord asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am". Peter answered and said: "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" - Matt 16:15-16
- Jesus existed eternally. "Before Abraham was, I am" - John 8:58
- We believe in the Holy Trinity (3 hypostases/persons, 1 essence). God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of the three has their unique role, yet all three have the same essence.
- "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" - John 5:22
- "Amen, Amen. Amen. I believe, I believe, I believe and confess to the last breath... that this is the lifegiving flesh that Your Only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ took from our Lady, the Lady of us all..."
- "Then he does not have two natures? That of God, and that of man? Well, Godhead is one thing, and manhood is another thing, considered in the perspective of their respective and intrinsic beings, but in the case of Christ they came together in a mysterious and incomprehensible union without confusion or change. The manner of this union is entirely beyond conception." - On the Unity of Christ, SVS Press, pg. 77
- Example of Jesus walking on water. Humans can't walk on water, but divine nature alone does not have legs. Thus, He is both human and divine, but his divinity did not consume his humanity. An example of this mystery is coal and fire. Jesus' humanity is like the coal and the fire can be compared to his divinity.
- He emptied himself, that I may be filled. He was wounded so we can be healed. He was arrested so we could be free. Really, "He took what is ours and gave us what is his" - Friday Theotokia
- He is my God who I worship and fulfills the prophecies and forgives my sins (Matt 1:23, Matt 14:33, Luke 7:48, Matt 2:23)

#### + Jesus My Light

- "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine", lyrics from a christian song we teach the little children.
- Jesus is our light. As cliché as it may sound, do we truly take our light (Jesus) with us everywhere we go. Our lives are meant to be a radiance of Him to all others. Use your life to be an image of Christ.
- In order to truly be guided by the light of Jesus, we should do our best to resemble His perfection in all that we do. Anytime we are stuck or unsure what to do, consider asking... What Would Jesus Do (WWJD).
- "The question is not whether you should believe in Jesus or what you can make of him. The real question is, once you genuinely seek Him and are found by Him, what does He intend to make of you?" - George Bassilios, Timeless truths.



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 2:  
Doubts in Faith



## Lesson 2.2: Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?

### Objective

To know some basic truths about the resurrection

### Application

The resurrection is so much more than an event in history and it requires us—to answer the very question Jesus first asked his disciples: Who do you say that I am?

### References



Scripture: [Luke 24](#)



Liturgy: [The first hour \(Prime\) prayer](#)



Patristics: [St. Ephraim the Syrian; Contemplations on the Resurrection by HH Pope Shenouda III, Ch. 5;](#)



Story: The atheist who asked God to appear to him; [The thief on the cross](#)



Other: “Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?” Bassilios, George. Timeless Truths in Truthless Times. 2018, [“Is Christ’s Resurrection a REAL fact? Part-2” OrthodoxAnswers;](#) [St. Ephraim: Evidence of Resurrection Fr. Matthias](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Resurrection: How important?

*Before presenting the lesson title, consider asking: what particular Christian belief made the Jews hate them so much back then? The Jews would have permitted the 12 disciples to preach all they want about their god, for there was a myriad gods back then. The one thing they resented is preaching that the ONE, TRUE God had come and defeated Hades already - for “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11).*

- God has promised us, from the early ages, that He will grant us a chance to be freed from the corrupt body we inherited from Adam. A true creator would fulfill his promises, would he not? The New Testament writers testify to the happening of the resurrection endlessly, and each apostle emphasized the resurrection as the foremost belief to preach about.
- St. Paul testified, “And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power” (1 Corinthians 6:14).
- The 12 apostles, 11 of whom were martyred, all lay down their lives because of their belief in the resurrection. The Jews were furious against them because, though they shared many common beliefs, the Jews insisted that their Messiah did not come, incarnate, or defeat Hades that soon. St. Peter died crucified upside down; why else would he do that had he not believed that the one crucified and resurrected was the Son of God?
- Liturgy Connection: Praying the first hour (Prime) every morning to commemorate the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### + Resurrection: Logical or Mythological?

*Resurrection opened the gates of heaven to mankind; the life-to-come that we all dreamed of after death has finally become true. Is that just a Greek myth?*

- Jews believe that it is really hard to find a God who has conquered Hades by sending His only begotten son; it is just too self-sacrificial of a move to them. They felt threatened at the hearing of the prophecies of the resurrection, and hence bribed the guards to say, “His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept” (Matthew 28:13). Catch any of the illogical premises of this statement?
- Could the guards even SEE who stole the body if they were asleep? Magic spells that make them see through their sleep were not possible at the time.
- Would the disciples denude the body and steal it so disgracefully? Leaving behind the linen and the shrouds well-folded? The body of the God

whom they worship would lose all dignity if it was carried away naked!

- Would the fear-stricken disciples who could not even approach the cross suddenly become bold enough to do that? Where would such boldness come from? Only John the beloved was by the side of Jesus on the cross, and he alone is too weak to slide the rock away on his own. (HH Pope Shenouda)
- Now that we have established the legitimacy of His resurrection, can we say that He indeed opened the gates of Heaven? Conquered death? Did what no other Jewish leader or Greek god could ever do in the past million years? Yes. As Pope Shenouda confirms, if you have faith in God that He is the creator, you EXPECT Him to resurrect and rise up again.

*Consider reading St. Ephraim the Syrian saying, If he was not flesh . . . And if he was not God . . .*

- “The facts themselves bear witness and his divine acts of power teach those who doubt that he is true God, and his sufferings show that he is true man. And if those who are feeble in understanding are not fully assured, they will pay the penalty on his dread day. If he was not flesh, why was Mary introduced at all? And if he was not God, whom was Gabriel calling Lord?” St. Ephraim the Syrian.

#### + Resurrection: Fulfillment of the Prophecies or Misinterpretation of the Bible?

*Resurrection is written all over the Bible; the body had no breath in it, then disappeared and arose from the dead, leaving the linen folds behind. Are we overthinking the Bible? Was Jesus not fully dead, just half fainted?*

- Not only were the Jews back then resistant to the concept of the resurrection, but so are atheists today. Many have stretched forth the myth so far that they believe Christ was not fully dead when crucified, but that He just fainted. This myth is known as Swoon Theory, and is easily refutable by the fact that neither Nikodimos nor Joseph felt pulse or breath in the body that they were carrying around (Fr. Matthias Shehad). We can infer all that just from reading John 19: 39-40 (embalming the body of Christ).
- While there is a generally agreed-upon theology of resurrection in the Old Testament (Job 19:25-27; Ps 49:15; 73:23-28; Isa 25:8; 26:19; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Hos 13:14; Dan 12:1-4 etc.), connections between Psalm 16:10 and Psalm 22, and Isaiah 53:10-11 and Daniel 12:2-3 reveal that the Messiah, in particular, would be raised from the dead.
- How many people mentioned in the Bible said they expect a coming redeemer to save them? Even from the most unlikely individuals, Job - in the depths of despair - admitted, “For I know that my redeemer lives, and HE shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that IN MY FLESH I SHALL SEE GOD” (Job 19:25-27). Job was that specific even before the prophecies were fulfilled!

#### + Resurrection: Evidence or Proofs?

*Can you back up the occurrence of the resurrection with any kind of proof? Scientific experiments, per se? Or do you just follow the direction in which existing evidence points with as much faith as you have?*

- If you follow the direction in which evidence goes, then you are incurring an element of faith in the process. Many religions used that age-old belief of a life-to-come, then using faith, they said heaven must be that place where we live after death. Using heaven as a basis, those religions started rewinding the narrative in their own ways thereafter. No matter how many religions arise, though, they all share that common belief that there IS a life-to-come, backing up this faith of ours.
- One atheist once said that if God revealed Himself to him, he will believe. He prayed for that, but God never revealed Himself. Why so?!
- Science can be predictable, but the God who created it has a mind of His own. It stands to reason that the God who created it would not be predictable according to human standards, then! You cannot command God to appear to you (Fr. Matthias Shehad). Faith is that crucial to having a true, genuine relationship with the creator. Science and experiments cannot compensate for faith in any way!
- How did the thief on the cross believe that Jesus is the Son of God? “Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said]to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:39-43)

- + Live in the shadow of the resurrection and be confident in your Risen Lord. The Resurrection of Jesus from death is foundational to our faith and hope. If Christ’s Resurrection is the foundation of our hope, how should our lives change? And how should we live in light of the Resurrection?

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 2:  
Doubts in Faith



## Lesson 2.3: Can We Trust the Bible?

### Objective

To be able to have supportive arguments on the authenticity of the Bible among peers.

### Application

This upcoming week try to explain the defense of our bible to a family member. They will likely learn something new from you!

### References



Scripture: [Titus 1:9](#)



Liturgy: [Apinav Shopi](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Genesis 35.4](#)



Story: [The Ethiopian Eunuch and St. Philip](#)



Other: [The Authenticity of the Bible, Fr. Abraham Wassef: Authenticity and Reliability of Bible, SUS Lecture](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Age of the Bible

- The Masoretic Text: The authoritative Hebrew and Aramaic text of the 24 of Tannakh. It was primarily copied, edited, & distributed by a group of Jews known as the Masoretes between the 7th and 10th centuries of the common era. While it was written sometime between the seventh and tenth centuries AD, it was based on the meticulously preserved oral tradition and the best available manuscripts of the original Hebrew text. The Masoretic Text was an answer to a problem that had been building in the Jewish community for centuries: biblical Hebrew was ambiguous, and most Jews didn't know how to read it anymore. With no vowels, punctuation, or stress marks, the original Hebrew left a lot of room for interpretive errors. And as biblical Hebrew fell out of usage, the Scriptures became virtually inaccessible to the public. Rabbis were still confident in the combination of written and oral tradition and took steps to make them more accessible without corrupting the original Hebrew texts.
- Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, is traditionally dated to the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285-246 BC). It is commonly called the 'Septuagint' version because according to the traditional account of its origin, it had seventy-two translators. This letter tells how King Ptolemy II commissioned the royal librarian, Demetrius of Phaleron, to collect by purchase or by copying all the books in the world. He wrote a letter to Eleazar, the high priest at Jerusalem, requesting six elders of each tribe, in total seventy-two men, of exemplary life and learned in the Torah, to translate it into Greek. The Septuagint translation made the Hebrew scriptures available both to the Jews who no longer spoke their ancestral language and to the entire Greek-speaking world. The Septuagint was later to become the Bible of the Greek-speaking early Church, and is frequently quoted in the New Testament. The Greek Old Testament, or Septuagint is the earliest extant Koine Greek translation of books from the Hebrew Bible, various biblical apocrypha, and deuterocanonical books.
- Dead Sea Scrolls: Over 900 texts in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek were found, including every book of the Hebrew Bible, except Esther and Nehemiah. The largest biblical scroll was an almost complete text of the book of Isaiah! The Dead Sea Scrolls were 1,000 years older than what had previously been considered the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. Many closely resemble the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible preserved by Jewish scribes over the centuries.
- The oldest existing manuscripts date back to the fourth century A.D. Both the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal an amazing consistency with the Masoretic Text.

#### + Consistency of the Bible

- This book is really a library of books written over 1500-2000 years by 40 authors. They were written by 40 different men from 13 different countries, from 3 separate continents, and yet it all comes together as a literary masterpiece, with one central theme. That's a



miracle...with a divine Author overseeing the whole thing!

- These 40 men have such diverse backgrounds: Doctors, fishermen, shepherds, soldiers, kings, princes some were rich, some were poor, educated uneducated... If we were to take 40 men from this room today, and let's say they were all equal in social standing-education, and background: if we put them all in a room together, the 40 of them probably couldn't ALL agree on any one thing, much less everything! And yet, God's Word stands without contradiction! And they all write about the same hero, Jesus Christ.
- The Bible covers a variety of subjects: Origin of universe, creation of man, beginning of sin, divine principles of government, rise and history of Israel, incarnation of Christ, institution of the church, evangelization of the world. Yet, with all of this variety, there is one theme from beginning to end: Jesus Christ, and the redemption of mankind. Genesis: seed of woman Gen. 3:15. Exodus: passover lamb. Leviticus: high priest. Numbers: pillar of cloud by day, fire by night. And we could go on and on...

#### + Translations of the Bible

- The Bible is the most translated book in history. The entire Bible has been translated into 670 languages.
- The New Testament alone is available in approximately 1,500 languages, and at least one portion of the whole Scripture (that is, one book, one psalm, or a fragment from either the Old or the New Testaments) has been translated into more than 3,000 languages. There is less than 1% variation between them all.

#### + Be Ready to Learn, Be Ready to Defend

- In the book of Acts, we see the Ethiopian Eunuch who was reading the Scriptures while traveling on the road. The passage he was reading was difficult to understand, so he simply asked someone to help him digest the words. His zeal and curiosity for understanding the Bible led him to being baptized into the faith.
- St. John Chrysostom says we should have the same desire to read the Scriptures as the Eunuch did. "Consider, I ask you, what a great effort it was not to neglect reading even while on a journey, and especially while seated in a chariot. Let this be heeded by those people who do not even deign to do it at home but rather think reading the Scriptures is a waste of time, claiming as an excuse their living with a wife, conscription in military service, caring for children, attending to domestics and looking after other concerns, they do not think it necessary for them to show any interest in reading the holy Scriptures." - Homilies on Genesis 35.3
- "The time came to send the multitude away. Let the scribes write, let the wise men assemble, and reveal what is in the holy Scriptures." - Apinav Shopi
- "The Holy Scriptures were not given to us that we should enclose them in books, but that we should engrave them upon our hearts." - St. John Chrysostom
- "Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." - Titus 1:9
- We are called to defend our faith and to convict those who contradict the word of God. Thus, we should solidify the evidence in our minds and engrave it in our hearts in order for us to live up to our calling.



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 2:  
Doubts in Faith

## Lesson 2.4: Can One Live a Good Moral Life Without God?

### Objective

To understand that the Lord is the source of our moral instincts.

### Application

The next time you have an inclination to do something good, evaluate your intentions. Are you doing something good for the sake of the Lord?

### References



Scripture: [John 15:5, James 1:17, John 14:6](#)



Liturgy: [Gregorian Liturgy \(p.86\)](#)



Patristics: [On the Incarnation, St. Athanasius](#)



Story: [St. Augustine](#)



Theology Academy: [Moral Theology](#)



Other: [Why do you want to be good? HG Bishop Basil](#)

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Why Do You Want to Be Good?

*Consider giving the students a couple minutes to evaluate their motive for being a good person.*

- Are we obeying the commandments of the Lord because we want to be good people? Because we don't want to be bad people? Because we want to make the world a better place? Or as said in the Christmas season, "to be good for goodness sake"? This is not our goal as Christians.
- Why do we attempt to separate the good from God? He should be the primary reason we are good. The primary motive for our morality. The primary reference for distinguishing good from bad.
- The Lord is the good one. Consider the word "goodbye". The origin of this word was "God be with you". "Ye" used to mean you. So good (God) be with you is a constant reminder in our everyday lives. Thus we can conclude,, our goodness is God.
- Story of St. Augustine (give background of his life before reading the following passage) : "As he spoke these words he heard a child's voice singing "Tolle lege! Tolle lege!" (Take up and read! Take up and read!). He could not remember any childhood game he played with any such words. He remembered that Saint Anthony was converted from the world by hearing a single verse. He took up Saint Paul's epistles and read the first chapter that met his eyes: "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, fulfil the lusts thereof." (Romans 13:13-14)" - copticchurch.net
- Do as St. Augustine and "take up and read" in order to find the Truth, to find the Lord, to find all good things through Him and by abiding in Him.

#### + Oh My God, Oh My Goodness

*Consider discussing with the students why people sometimes replace the phrase "oh my God" with "oh my goodness".*

- Oh My Goodness is a substitute phrase for Oh my God, implying that God and goodness are inseparable entities.
- "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." - John 15:5
- The Lord is the source of all the fruit, blessings, and goodness in our life. He provided us with a guide for what is right and what is wrong. He provided us with a rulebook to refer to. The Holy Spirit provides our souls with a zeal and conscience that guides us. Thus, how can one claim that they can lead a morally good life without the presence of the source of goodness, the Lord Himself?
- The Lord is the overarching power who gives His children the authority to conduct good. However, in the absence of His dwelling in us, in the absence of His mercy, in the absence of His grace... we are capable of nothing.





- “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” - James 1:17
- Consider the verse above. It is not written that “some” good gifts are some above, rather EVERY good gift and EVERY perfect gift. Where else are we to search except for above?
- "The Savior works mightily every day, drawing men to religion, persuading them to virtue, teaching them about immortality, quickening their thirst for heavenly things, revealing the knowledge of the Father, inspiring strength in face of death, manifesting Himself to each, and displacing the irreligion of idols." - St. Athanasius
- The Lord establishes the instinct of good virtue within us and gives us the ability to decipher right from wrong, moral from immoral, heavenly from earthly, and more.
- All throughout the Liturgy we say God is the “Good One and Lover of mankind”. We should persistently thirst and battle to attain goodness from the Good one, the source of all things good.

+ “I am the way, the truth, & the life” John 14:6

*Consider discussing with the students the meaning of this verse. Is it possible for the Lord to be any more clear? What does it mean when He says “I am the way”?*

- “I am the way, the truth, & the life” John 14:6 - the Lord did not say “I am ONE of the ways” or “I am A way” ... He clearly declared that He is “THE way”. The meaning one and no other.
- How can we attempt to do anything else but find our direction, our truth, our life in Him? Our answer is provided in a stark and glaringly clear manner.
- We often admire and strive to imitate the luxury and social media perfection presented by celebrities. They are loved by millions of fans, at times applauded for acts of kindness or generous donations they make. However, their fame is an external and elusive goal, and thus comes under the bracket of an extrinsic goal (the desire to achieve the goal results in external rewards, such as a desired opinion of another, acquiring physical objects such as wealth or medals etc.). The science shows that these types of goals can be harmful to our mental and physical well-being. Are they living a good moral life? Better yet, are they truly happy?
- In essence, we need to set our goal on the answer which the Lord has gifted us with. Follow his way and we will find all the love, peace, and joy which we need and desire.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 2.5: How Do You Respond to a Question About the Existence of God?

### Building Block 2: Doubts in Faith



### Objective

To understand that though all evidence will eventually point to the existence of God, as they do now, faith is the driving factor of our evidence.

### Application

To base our beliefs on our faith rather than the amount of evidence

### References



**Scripture:** Jeremiah 9:23-24; Job 11:7, 38:4; Isaiah 40:18, 26; John 17:3; Romans 1:20; Hebrews 11:6; Psalm 19:1; Psalm 14:1-4



**Liturgy:** [Offering of Incense \(pg.18\)](#); [Prayer of Reconciliation of the Son \(pg. 183\)](#); [Prayer of the Pauline Incense \(O God the great and the eternal, pg.92\)](#)



**Patristics:** [Abba Epiphanius](#)



**Story:** [Fr. Lazarus St. Anthony](#)



**Other:** Timeless Truths in Truthless Times by George Bassilios; [“Is God Dead?” Cover of TIME magazine in 1966](#); [There must be more than this! Fr. Lazarus St. Anthony](#); [God’s Not Dead by Harold Cronk](#); [Stephen Hawking answers the qt, “Is there a God”](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + We find God by tracing His grace and His works around us

*Is faith truly nothing but an “irrational leap in the dark, a gift of God,” as posted on TIME magazine back then? If so, then faith will only be found “smothered in emotionalism” with desperate people who are tired of this world (Wash Spokane, TIME 1966).*

- A common scene in church is that of people coming in when the church is empty, crying like all hell broke loose. We tend to take God for a final resort, a resort for the utterly desperate and needy cases only. Prescribing God to the utterly helpless is not how faith works. A prescription error is what it is.
- Why is it that we only seek to find God when the waves hit hard? Well, that in itself testifies to our tendency to be egotistical, self-led, free-minded as many atheists like to call it, and hence on our own accords in life. Believing in God and seeking Him in no way limits our freedom. It is rather a sign of wisdom and brain-headedness, particularly when St. Augustine tells you that “To fall in love with God is the greatest romance, to seek Him the greatest adventure, and **to find Him the greatest human achievement.**”
- Fr. Lazarus St. Anthony tells his story of how he believed in God and Jesus Christ after a long time of being an atheist. *Consider sharing his video.*

#### + We find God by the mighty, supernatural, far-reaching theories of science

*Or do we?*

- Starting off with the foundational beliefs we have so far, we believe in a “great and eternal God” (Prayer of the Pauline Incense) who “is existing before the ages and reigning forever” (Prayer of Reconciliation of the Son), “that which exists from one end of the world to the other” (Offering of Incense).
- But we also believe that all things are made of cells, that cells are the smallest living creatures, and that all cells come from pre-existing cells in the current world (Cell Theory)! In the earlier times, of course, we Christians believe that cells ultimately came from a Creator, that their inception required the power of God to grant life. So you see, science is not necessarily a sword that fights religion, just a utensil that we can

use, at our own cost, to further investigate the works of God using our own means and languages.

- One aspect of science, though, is the formation of theories. Theories are trains of thought that cannot be proven true, but that have not been proven false at all either - using scientific means only. Theories use experiments to back them up, and many theories today use the Miller-Urey experiment to state that cells, indeed, can come to exist on their own due to the conditions of the ancient world - the volcanic gases and the high temperature can initiate the chemical process. Does that mean that God is useless now?
- Stephen Hawking riled up the whole country when he proved that black holes are not sheer vacuums, but rather do emit particles that contribute to the greater universe. Scientists who help resolve a vast, beyond-thought dilemma make it seem more plausible that God does not exist, that science alone is powerful enough, and that is why he was venerated as a global icon for having enough faith to pursue such a vast, profound topic. He seemed to embrace the idea that we do not need God and science, but just science alone, as he rose to fame. When he finally stepped away from the spotlight and refreshed his mind, though, he went from
  - “God may exist, but science can explain the universe without the need for a creator”
  - to
  - “The discovery of the laws of nature will tell us whether we need a god to explain the universe at all... Unlike laws made by humans, the laws of nature cannot be broken - that’s why they are so powerful.” With that in mind, Hawking started to rephrase the antagonism that scientists have for God into a much more sound and reasonable fashion. No human mind could have designed the world that way, with those unbreakable laws of nature. Thereby, a God must exist, no matter how obscure it was in the way Hawking worded it. He concluded by saying, “My prediction is we will know the mind of God by the end of this century,” so alas, the great Stephen Hawking admits it.

#### + The wisdom of God does not come on its own. We must seek it. Read, therefore.

*There is a reason as to why God spoke in parables. There is a reason as to why God wants us to find Him, instead of just revealing Himself to us. It stands to reason that a true and loving God would allow you the freedom and privilege to choose, out of your own will, to go find Him and embrace His words.*

- “It is because of our unbelief, because of our divided mind, because we do not love Him with all the heart, nor really believe Him, that we have not yet found the spiritual cure and salvation” (St. Macarius the Great).
- Irenaeus wrote, “If anyone reads the Scripture carefully, they will find some word, some hidden treasure in the field, which is Christ.”
- St. Ambrose says, “Just as in Paradise, God walks in the Holy Scripture seeking men.”
- ‘Reading the Scriptures is a great safeguard against sin.’ Abba Epiphanius
- “Ask, and it shall be given to you. Seek, and you shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7-8)
- "An old man was asked, 'How can I find God?' He said, 'In fasting, in watching, in labors, in devotion, and, above all, in discernment. I tell you, many have injured their bodies without discernment and have gone away from us having achieved nothing. Our mouths smell bad through fasting, we know the Scriptures by heart, we recite all the Psalms of David, but we have not that which God seeks: charity and humility'" (Stories of the Desert Fathers).

#### + Spare material

- The belief of the Steady-State Universe and the discovery of Hubble's Law. Stephen Hawking finally concluded that the universe must have had a beginning.
- Present the Big Bang Theory, the basics of the 2nd law of thermodynamics and the Law of Biogenesis; all of which prove everything has a beginning. Thus the Big bang, should it be fact, must have had a Beginning [Gen 1:3]
- But in the end, no evidence will be sufficient to provide faith, for Faith itself is the evidence of things hoped for (Hebrews 11:1)

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Building Block 2: Doubts in Faith



## Lesson 2.6: Is the Bible Full of Contradictions?

### Objective

The goal of this lesson is to instill confidence on the consistency of Holy Scripture

### Application

Leave the youth with 2 contradictions and have them research the answer to the validity and consistency of the passages.

### References



Scripture: [Romans 3:4](#), [2 Timothy 3:16](#), [John 17:17](#)



Liturgy: [Liturgy of St. Gregory \(p.41\)](#)



Patristics: [St. Augustine](#)



Story: [Simeon the Elder](#)



Other: SUS Lectures on Scripture [Lecture II](#), [Lecture I](#), & [Lecture IV](#), [The Holy Bible: Inspiration and Inerrancy](#), HG Bishop Youssef



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Divine Inspiration

- “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” - 2 Timothy 3:16
- In coptic, inspiration (nifi ente efnoti) means “the breath”, rendering the divine inspiration to be the breath of God.
- Inspiration (the breath of God) is ‘the supernatural action of the Holy Spirit on the mind of the sacred writers whereby the Scriptures were not merely their own but the word of God’. The Holy Spirit so guided and superintended the sacred writers making use of their unique personalities that they wrote all that He wanted them to write without excess, omission, or error. Therefore, the inspired writings are at the same time perfectly Divine and perfectly human; infallibly authoritative because they are all God-breathed; intelligible because written in the language of men.
- Story of Simeon the Elder (linked in References) - is a profound demonstration of the Lord’s inspiration of the holy scripture.
- As we pray “You have given to me the Law as an aid” St. Gregory Liturgy. We don’t say the authors gave us the law as an aid, rather the Lord Himself. The authors were simply the Lord’s tools for delivering His message to us.

#### + Void of Error

- Not only is Holy Scripture inspired and authoritative, it is also inerrant and infallible. By this we mean that it is without error in the original manuscripts. It is inerrant in all that it affirms, whether in historical, scientific, moral, or doctrinal matters. Inerrancy extends to all of Holy Scripture and is not limited to certain teachings of Holy Scripture.
- Essentially, God supervised the human authors without cancelling their personalities or writing style in order to provide the recorded scripture without error or flaw. Thus, what the authors wrote is precisely what God wanted them to write. God did not dictate to them the material, rather inspired them. Because scripture is inspired, there is no room for error in it (inerrant). Due to its inspiration and inerrancy, the scripture is rendered authoritative.
- “Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar” - Romans 3:4
- Reason for inerrancy: God is the truth. If God is true, and God breathed out the scripture, then the scripture is true.
- “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” - John 17:17
- “The Scriptures are holy, they are truthful, they are blameless.... So we have no grounds at all for blaming Scripture if we happen to deviate in any way, because we haven’t understood it. When we do understand it, we are right. But when we are wrong because we haven’t understood it, we leave it in the right. When we have gone wrong, we don’t make out Scripture to be wrong, but it continues to stand up straight and right, so that we may return to it for correction.” - St. Augustine



- Irenaeus, Against Heresies, book 2, chapter 28, “God Who created us, being most properly assured that the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit.”
- “Let us then in everything believe God, and contradict Him in nothing, though what is said seem to be contrary to our thoughts and senses, but let His word be of higher authority than both our reasoning and sight. Thus let us do in the mysteries also, not looking at the thing set before us, but keeping in mind His sayings. For His word cannot deceive, but our senses are easily beguiled. His word has never failed, but our senses in most things go wrong.” St. John Chrysostom

#### + Flaws in Common Contradictions

- A popular mistake is to take things out of context. It is easy to make contradictions when there are none by violating the context of the passage(s) in question. When the critic proposes a contradiction, he ought to do so from within the context of this background belief. By failing to do this, he/she merely imposes alien concepts as if they belong.
- Say that Joe is recorded as saying that Sam is not his son. But elsewhere, he is recorded as saying that Sam is his son. An obvious contradiction, right? But what if one’s background belief about Joe and Sam includes the belief that Sam is Joe’s adopted son? By ignoring the context this belief provides, one perceives contradictions where there are none.
- The critics assume that the Biblical accounts are exhaustive in all details and intended to be precise. This is rarely the case. As such, the critics build on a faulty assumption and perceive contradictions where there are none.
- The critics seem to assume that the Bible is written in one genre (a literal and descriptive account). While the Bible does indeed contain literal and descriptive accounts (which, of course, are not exhaustive in detail), it also contains many other styles of composition: the psalms communicate through poetry, many teachings/prophecies are in the form of hyperbole and metaphor, parables contain deeper messages, etc.
- The critics assume that the believer in Biblical Inerrancy also believes that copyists could make no mistake. It is our belief that the original documents were without error, and were copied as faithfully as humanly possible. Thus, copyist errors are of little concern and are unlikely to result in significant changes. (Recall the translations activity from lesson 2.3)



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 2:  
Doubts in Faith

## Lesson 2.7: Atheism & Agnosticism: The Secular influence

### Objective

To understand how the world and how its desire for freedom influences its beliefs

### Application

Be aware of secular influence. What steps are you taking this week to avoid these influences?

Read meticulously; be credible

Be firmly rooted in Biblical truth

Understand the atheist arguments and where the atheist stands

### References



**Scripture:** Colossians 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1; Romans 1:28-30; Ephesians 4:18; Jeremiah 17:13-15



**Liturgy:** [The Second Cantic \(Psalm 135\)](#)



**Patristics:** St. Isaac the Syrian; St. Gregory of Nyssa



**Story:** St. Augustine Upbringing and conversion; [St. Paul and the altar of the unknown god](#)



**Other:** [Unit 14 of the St. Mary and St. Mina Coptic Orthodox Church Curriculum](#); [God's Not Dead](#) by Harold Cronk; [SUS Article on atheism](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Is 'god' the key ingredient of any religion?

*Do you need to believe in some god in order to have a religion? Do you need morals, principles, and tablets of law to make a religion? What is religion, then?*

- You do not need to believe in a supernatural entity in order to constitute a religion. You do not need a set of principles and virtues in order to make a religion; Satanism itself is a religion! Religion can then be narrowed down to this: ""
- Deism: The founders of the United States - Ben Franklin, George Washington, etc. - were not Christians by word. They were deists - they agreed that "a God is out there, removed from man" - but they held no faith nor care for it.
- Theism: Theo means God, and Theism is the BELIEF - from within your heart - that God exists. You BELIEVE in it and you CARE about it well enough to PRACTICE this faith in deed and in word. You do not just say that God is out there, independent of man. God is out there, and we are here to seek Him, find Him, and embrace Him. Christianity is a theistic religion that can be summed up as "The Lord Jesus Christ is my God and my Savior."
- Gnosticism: Gnost means knowledge. A gnostic individual would say that he can know, for certain, whether or not God exists. An agnostic person - with the added 'a' prefix for negation, claims that there is no possible way to say for certain that God exists. An agnostic theist, then, says that he believes in God, will worship him, but has no way of KNOWING if God exists after all.
- [Religion on a spectrum](#): using this spectrum, we can identify ourselves - Orthodox Christians - as gnostic theists, or people who believe in God but also KNOW for certain that God exists. Science will dare us badly at this point, but we know God exists because we sought Him out through faith, He answered, and He showed us His works. Seek, and you will find (Matthew 7:7). If God is the creator of all, then He has a mind of His own, meaning that you will only find Him if you seek first wholeheartedly and have faith.
- As the times have progressed, belief systems grew all the more vast and illegitimate that they excluded god out of the whole equation. According to SUSCOPTS, if man denies faith in God, he "inevitably constructs his own mental/physical gods," as depicted perfectly in [this diagram](#). As the times have changed, the prophecies in the book of Judges started to make sense; "In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:4). We went from worshipping man as the highest being, equal to God, in humanism, to worshipping the world as self-limiting, as if the world is god with nothing beyond, in secularism, and then we went even further into naturalism, hedonism, and even **pluralism**, the current state of the world (pluralism = tolerate everything = Extreme liberalism = Diversity is God).



#### + Are 'faith' and 'knowledge' key ingredients of any religion?

*Now that you have seen religion on a spectrum, where would you place an atheist? Where would you place an agnostic?*

- An atheist not only denounces the existence of God, but also states that you CANNOT know in any possible way if God exists. God is not meant to be known or found in an atheist perspective. So atheists then have neither faith nor knowledge of God.
- Here's the catch: If God is not meant to be known or found, why do atheists act so thankful or so enraged at random times? English poet Dante Garbiel Rossetti sums it up nicely: "The worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful, and has nobody to thank." C. S. Lewis reaffirms his viewpoint even better: "Atheists express their rage against God although in their view He does not exist." God is not the reason why your loved one died of cancer, as can be seen in the movie God's not Dead. He knew about it, of course, He is the creator after all and knows us better than anyone, but He is not to blame for those events. You never had faith, so do not expect to understand those seemingly unnatural incidents.
- Agnostics and atheists both start with an 'a,' so denying either the belief in a god or the ability to know His existence for certain. Atheists denounce the existence of God, whereas agnostics denounce the ABILITY TO KNOW if God exists. The agnostic version of things is that God may exist out there, but we will never be able to know that. So atheists chant we have no faith, and agnostics chant we have no knowledge.
- But doesn't the claim "we have no knowledge" also imply ignorance? Are we created as robots? Of course not. God intended for us to be able to find Him. He gave us the ability to seek Him wholeheartedly and find Him. He also gave us the liberty to do so, and agnostics, in brief, chose the liberty not to find Him. When St. Paul passed by a few Greek worshippers bowing down to the "altar to the UNKNOWN GOD," he told them, "The ONE whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth... [He designed everything] so that the nations should seek the Lord... though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17: 23-28).

#### + What, then, are the key ingredients of religion?

*"I am the way, the truth, and the life." Sounds familiar? Religion is the belief in God, the exercise of practical faith by constantly searching for Him, constantly remaining in touch with Him, and firmly asserting His existence till martyrdom.*

- Faith without evidence is incomplete, for God has explicitly stated that "Eternal life is KNOWING the Father and Jesus Christ whom He sent" (John 17:3).
- Reasons why people doubt God and lose faith include emotional hurt, lack of knowledge, and sheer ignorance/belief in oneself as equal to God. People who feel partial treatment in church sometimes take it out on God and start doubting their faith too. But again, giving into the secular influence is not rational, if not ten times less rational than ignorance. As futile as telling an atheist "have faith and you will know Him" sounds, it stands to reason that if God is the true creator, then he ought to have a mind of His own, and you ought to acknowledge that and use FAITH as the pathway to finding Him. Reading the Bible with a mentality that has no faith nor intention of learning will, of course, lead to no success. It IS hard, no one denies that, but as St. Augustine reminds us, "To find God is the greatest human achievement."
- We read in St. Augustine's book of Confession, "(From ages 17-19) "To Carthage I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves bubbled up all around me. I loved not as yet, yet I loved to love....I searched about for something to love, in love with loving.....For within me I had a dearth of that inward food, Yourself, my God, though that dearth caused me no hunger....For this reason my soul was far from well, and, full of ulcers, it miserably cast itself forth, craving to be excited by contact with objects of sense. Yet, had these no soul, they would not surely inspire love. To love and to be loved was sweet to me, and all the more when I succeeded in enjoying the person I loved. I befouled, therefore, the spring of friendship with the filth of concupiscence, and I dimmed its lustre with the hell of lustfulness.... I fell precipitately, then, into the love in which I longed to be ensnared....and secretly arrived at the bond of enjoying; and was joyfully bound with troublesome ties, that I might be scourged with the burning iron rods of jealousy, suspicion, fear, anger, and strife." Augustine, Confessions 3.1
- Over time, as science advanced and as Stephen Hawking proved to us that we can discover things beyond the limits of the Earth we live in, the abundance of knowledge made us seem like we do not need God anymore. But St. Isaac the Syrian warns us from just that thing, reminding us that "Blessed is the man who knows his own weakness, because this knowledge becomes to him the foundation, root, and beginning of all goodness." In other words, if you take the abundance of knowledge with precautions, not with pride, not with self-infatuation, then you will be able to use it wisely and grow in wisdom, as opposed to "knowledge puffs up" (1 Corinthians 8:1).
- As we sing the second canticle of the midnight praises, "To Him who alone great wonders: Alleluia, His mercy endures forever ...."
- "The soul leaves all surface appearances, not only those that can be grasped by the senses but also those which the mind itself seems to see, and it keeps going deeper until by the operation of the spirit it penetrates the invisible and incomprehensible, and it is there that it sees God. The true vision and the true knowledge of what we seek consists precisely in not seeing, in an awareness that our goal transcends all





knowledge... “ - St. Gregory of Nyssa

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 2:  
Doubts in Faith



## Lesson 2.8: Q&A: Revisiting Your Doubts

### Objective

Review

### Application

Review

### References

Review

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Jesus the Son

- We believe in the Holy Trinity (3 hypostases/persons, 1 essence). God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each of the three has their unique role, yet all three have the same essence.
- "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" – John 5:22
- "Then he does not have two natures? That of God, and that of man? Well, Godhead is one thing, and manhood is another thing, considered in the perspective of their respective and intrinsic beings, but in the case of Christ they came together in a mysterious and incomprehensible union without confusion or change. The manner of this union is entirely beyond conception." - On the Unity of Christ, SVS Press, pg. 77
- Example of Jesus walking on water. Humans can't walk on water, but divine nature alone does not have legs. Thus, He is both human and divine, but his divinity did not consume his humanity. An example of this mystery is coal and fire. Jesus' humanity is like the coal and the fire can be compared to his divinity

#### + Resurrection: Fulfillment of the Prophecies or Misinterpretation of the Bible?

*Resurrection is written all over the Bible; the body had no breath in it, then disappeared and arose from the dead, leaving the linen folds behind. Are we overthinking the Bible? Was Jesus not fully dead, just half-fainted?*

- Not only were the Jews back then resistant to the concept of the resurrection, but so are atheists today. Many have stretched forth the myth so far that they believe Christ was not fully dead when crucified, but that He just fainted. This myth is known as Swoon Theory, and is easily refutable by the fact that neither Nikodimos nor Joseph felt pulse or breath in the body that they were carrying around (Fr. Matthias Shehad). We can infer all that just from reading John 19: 39-40 (embalming the body of Christ).
- We know that Elijah and other saints did, indeed, go to Hades, body and spirit, which means that we DO need someone to renew our corrupt bodies in order to allow those saints back into Paradise. The resurrection, therefore, makes sense as the ultimate resolution to that dilemma.

#### + Consistency of the Bible

- This book is really a library of books written over 1500-2000 years by 40 authors. They were written by 40 different men from 13 different countries, from 3 separate continents, and yet it all comes together as a literary masterpiece, with one central theme. That's a miracle...with a divine Author overseeing the whole thing!
- These 40 men have such diverse backgrounds: Doctors, fishermen, shepherds, soldiers, kings, princes some were rich, some were poor educated uneducated... if we were to take 40 men from this room today, and let's say they were all equal in social standing education, and background: if we put them all in a room together, the 40 of them probably couldn't ALL agree on any one thing, much less everything! And yet, God's Word stands without contradiction! And they all write about the same hero, Jesus Christ.

#### + We find God by the mighty, supernatural, far-reaching theories of science

*Or do we?*

- Starting off with the foundational beliefs we have so far, we believe in a “great and eternal God” (Prayer of the Pauline Incense) who “is existing before the ages and reigning forever” (Prayer of Reconciliation of the Son), “that which exists from one end of the world to the other” (Offering of Incense).
- But we also believe that all things are made of cells, that cells are the smallest living creatures, and that all cells come from pre-existing cells in the current world (Cell Theory)! In the earlier times, of course, we Christians believe that cells ultimately came from a Creator, that their inception required the power of God to grant life. So you see, science is not necessarily a sword that fights religion, just a utensil that we can use, at our own cost, to further investigate the works of God using our own means and languages.

#### + God is the source of all goodness

*Consider discussing with the students why people sometimes replace the phrase “oh my God” with “oh my goodness”.*

- Oh My Goodness is a substitute phrase for Oh my God, implying that God and goodness are inseparable entities.
- “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” - John 15:5
- The Lord is the source of all the fruit, blessings, and goodness in our life. He provided us with a guide for what is right and what is wrong. He provided us with a rulebook to refer to. The Holy Spirit provides our souls with a zeal and conscience that guides us. Thus, how can one claim that they can lead a morally good life without the presence of the source of goodness, the Lord Himself?
- “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” - James 1:17

#### + Flaws in Common Contradictions

- A popular mistake is to take things out of context. It is easy to make contradictions when there are none by violating the context of the passage(s) in question. When the critic proposes a contradiction, he ought to do so from within the context of this background belief. By failing to do this, he/she merely imposes alien concepts as if they belong.
- The critics assume that the Biblical accounts are exhaustive in all details and intended to be precise. This is rarely the case. As such, the critics build on a faulty assumption and perceive contradictions where there are none.
- The critics assume that the believer in Biblical Inerrancy also believes that copyists could make no mistake. It is our belief that the original documents were without error, and were copied as faithfully as humanly possible. Thus, copyist errors are of little concern and are unlikely to result in significant changes. (Recall the translations activity from lesson 2.3)

#### + Is ‘god’ the key ingredient of any religion?

*Do you need to believe in some god in order to have a religion? Do you need morals, principles, and tablets of law to make a religion? What is religion, then?*

- Religion on a spectrum: using this spectrum, we can identify ourselves - Orthodox Christians - as gnostic theists, or people who believe in God but also KNOW for certain that God exists. Science will dare us badly at this point, but we know God exists because we sought Him out through faith, He answered, and He showed us His works. Seek, and you will find (Matthew 7:7). If God is the creator of all, then He has a mind of His own, meaning that you will only find Him if you seek first wholeheartedly and have faith.
- As the times have progressed, belief systems grew all the more vast and illegitimate that they excluded god out of the whole equation. According to SUSCOPTS, if man denies faith in God, he “inevitably constructs his own mental/physical gods,” as depicted perfectly in [this diagram](#). As the times have changed, the prophecies in the book of Judges started to make sense; “In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:4). We went from worshipping man as the highest being, equal to God, in humanism, to worshipping the world as self-limiting, as if the world is god with nothing beyond, in secularism, and then we went even further into naturalism, hedonism, and even *pluralism*, the current state of the world (pluralism = tolerate everything = Extreme liberalism = Diversity is God).



# Building Block 3: Choosing a God Centered Life

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 3.1: Source of Instigation: He Wants ME

Building Block 3:  
Choosing a God  
Centered Life



### Objective

To understand the depth of God's love and acceptance.

### Application

When you think of God's blessings, replace "us" by "me". For example, "Jesus died for ME", "Jesus loves ME", "Jesus wants ME". His love is personal and tailored to each one of us, and by remembering that everything is for YOU, this will bring Him closer to your heart.

### References



**Scripture:** [1 Corinthians 3:16](#), [Exodus 20:5](#), [Matthew 6:24](#), [Zephaniah 3:17](#), [John 15:14-15](#), [James 2:17](#), [Jeremiah 31:3](#), [James 4:8](#)



**Liturgy:** [Liturgy of St. Gregory \(p.37\)](#)



**Patristics:** [St. John Chrysostom](#)



**Story:** [St. Mary of Egypt](#)



**Other:** [Beginning A Relationship With God, Mighty Arrow Magazine](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + There Lies A Treasure in Our Core

*Consider giving the students to reflect on who/what is at the core of their life. Is it school? Is it friends? Is it luxury? Is it family? ... Is it God???*

- "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." - Genesis 1:27
- Our bodies do not belong to us. Did we create ourselves? Did our parents create us? No. It is stark and clear from the verse above that God created us.
- When you create something, do you own it? Yes. Thus, the Lord is the owner of our souls, of our bodies, of our lives.
- However, it is understandable that we sometimes get distracted by the hustle and bustle of life which makes it difficult to remember that God owns us. It is easy to get caught up in school, grades, friendships, siblings, and forget to even lift up our heart to God for one moment.
- However, "do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" - 1 Corinthians 3:16
- We are sacred because of His presence in us. He is the treasure that lies in our core: the core of our souls, the core of our bodies, the core of our lives.

#### + He is A Jealous God

*Consider asking the students if they think God is a jealous God or not. If yes, have them discuss what it means for Him to be called a jealous God.*

- "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" - Exodus 20:5
- The Lord spoke His commandments and warned us that He is a jealous God. The Lord wants us to love Him, be loyal to Him, and place Him at the forefront of all what we do. Essentially, He WANTS our lives to revolve around Him. He WANTS our love to go to Him. He WANTS our hearts to belong to Him.
- Story of St. Mary of Egypt: Prior to St. Mary's repentance, she was living a shameful life full of sin and wrongdoing, while still attending church. This duality is unacceptable to God. For it is said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." - Matthew 6:24. Thus, as she was entering the church, she felt a strong force which repelled her and prevented her from entering. She tried 3 or 4 times and was still unable to enter. She was then struck with remorse for her sinful life. She burst into bitter tears and repented, then was able to enter the church easily. (there are more details to the story which can be found in the link in resources).
- This story reveals the extent of the jealousy of God. He does not approve of us being loyal to anything else (sin, earthly things etc.) except Him!



- “He will rejoice over you with singing” - Zephaniah 3:17
- Once we are committed to the Lord, He will rejoice over us.

#### + God Leaves the 99 to Find YOU

- “So He spoke this parable to them, saying: ‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?’” - Luke 15:3-5
- The Lord spoke this parable as a symbol of His love for His children. Never think that because you sin, God doesn’t love you... FALSE!! He will search for you and leave 99 of His children to find you. His love is unconditional and neverending in abundance.
- “God loves us more than a father, mother, friend, or any else could love, and even more than we are able to love ourselves.” - St. John Chrysostom
- Although we sometimes feel like no one can love us more than our family members, their love for us is a mere fraction compared to the immense love which the Lord has for each one of us.
- In fact, “ No manner of speech is able to define the deep expanse of Your love for mankind” (Liturgy of St. Gregory). No words are able to define how much God loves us. Truly, allow us to meditate on that.

#### + Draw Near to Him and He Will Draw Near to You

*Consider discussing what it means to draw near to the Lord. Have them discuss how we can begin drawing near to the Lord.*

- God granted us free will. Although He owns us and cares about us and searches intently for us, He will never force us to have a relationship with Him.
- It should be out of our own will that we reach out to Him, that we lift up our feeble arms with a burning desire for His love.
- “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” - James 4:8
- Explain that the rest of the building block will involve us exploring what we can do to engage in a God centered life.
- “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” - James 2:17
- Just loving the Lord with words is not sufficient, we must begin actively seeking Him in our actions, in our day to day lives.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 3.2: Initiate the Spark: Our Prayer Corner

Building Block 3:  
Choosing a God  
Centered Life



### Objective

To understand the importance of having a designated place of prayer.

### Application

This week, start setting up your prayer corner.

### References



Scripture: [Matthew 6:6](#), [Luke 5:16](#), [1 Kings 19:11-13](#),  
[Revelations 3:20](#), [Psalm 39:3](#)



Liturgy: [The Anaphora, Liturgy of St. Gregory](#)



Patristics: [Abba Isaiah](#)



Story: [St. Bishop](#)



Other: [Orthodox Prayer Life, Fr. Matthew the Poor](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Gather the Logs (Foundation)

- Gathering the logs and building your foundation requires beginning the beautiful journey of creating your prayer corner.
- One may wonder, why do I need a prayer corner? Present the following verse: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” - Matthew 6:6
- Where is our secret place? Where do we go to meet God? Liturgy is only once a week, so we cannot solely rely on meeting Him at church. Do we meet God in our homes? Is there a spot in our homes where we can kneel down after a long day as the liturgy says and “lift your hearts” to the Lord... asking, seeking, knocking.
- Take the initiative and begin building your very own prayer corner. Fill it with icons of saints you love, an icon of our savior, one of our mother St. Mary... whatever your heart desires. Bring a candle to your prayer corner and your Agpeya. This will now be your dedicated spot for prayer, each morning and each night.
- Be careful, however, for this is now a holy and revered place meant only for approaching the Lord. When you approach your prayer corner, remove your shoes and begin entering a steady and calm spirit in order to make it a fruitful time with the Lord.

#### + Sharpen the Stick (Preparation)

- After creating your prayer corner, don't neglect it by forgetting to use it each day! Are we prepared to meet God? Or is time with Him a “maybe” on our to-do list? Or is He not on our to-do list at all? Essentially, where does God stand in terms of our daily, weekly, yearly, and lifetime priorities?
- In order to be ready to begin a life of prayer, we must sharpen our priorities. We must sharpen our days in order to have a dedicated time for meeting God each and every day.
- “So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” - Luke 5:16
- Jesus Christ Himself was accustomed to going off into a desolate place in order to pray to the Father.
- “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” - Revelations 3:20
- The Lord is always knocking at our door, waiting for us to open our hearts to Him. Thus, when we offer Him a time where we aim to listen to Him speaking to us, He will. He will guide our minds and hearts, in order that we perform His will.
- “But the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a **still small voice**.” - 1 Kings 19:11-12





- The Lord speaks to us in the silence, it is hard to find Him in the loud hustle and bustle of our everyday lives. Thus, run to Him. Run to your prayer corner at the end of the day with hopes of finding His comforting love and peace. Search for Him in the silence. Search for Him in the still small voice.

#### + Ignite the Spark (Initiation)

- “While I was musing, the fire burned [within me]” - Psalm 39:3
- Merely meditating on the word of God several times will surely end up inflaming one’s heart (igniting the spark). Thus, meditation is the first, formal link that connects sincere effort in prayer with God’s gifts and grace.
- “Hush your tongue so that your heart may speak [which is meditation], and hush your heart that the Spirit may speak [which is contemplation]”. - St. John Saba, Homily on the Gifts of the Spirit.
- As you read through scripture, do not rush through the chapters without tasting and understanding the Lord’s word. Rather, be quiet (“hush your tongue”) and allow your heart to speak (this is the act of meditation). Then once you’ve given a chance for your heart to speak, silence your heart so that the Holy Spirit is able to speak (this is the act of contemplation).
- A great way to pray is to pray through the words of the Bible
- Prayer is not limited to just words, but instead singing, writing, drawing, painting (iconography), or just sitting in silence can all be forms of prayer if they are done with God, for God, and through God.

#### + Sustain the Fire (Dedication)

- Sustaining the fire requires a dedicated effort to fuel the fire. How can we fuel our life of prayer? By praying and lifting our hearts throughout every step of our day. Even just a bit of fuel, given consistently, will sustain the fire: meaning, simple prayers throughout the day like “Jesus Christ, son of the Lord have mercy upon me a sinner” (Jesus Prayer), “Lord help me”, “thank you Lord”, “Lord bless” etc.. Whatever speaks from your heart to the Lord.
- Fr. Matthew the poor, in his book *Orthodox Prayer Life* defines prayer as a call and response. A divine call and human response. God is calling, he’s always calling. When we pray, we are answering his call.
- Christ Himself said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20). When we answer the call, that’s when the dialogue starts.
- The saintly Abba Isaiah, the Egyptian hermit, says of the Jesus Prayer that it “is a mirror for the mind and a lantern for the conscience.”
- Unceasing prayer consists in an unceasing invocation of the name of God. Whether talking, sitting, walking, making something, eating, or occupied in some other way, one should all times and then every place call upon the name of God, according to the command of scripture: pray without ceasing. In this way the enemies’ attempts upon our life are stopped.
- “For the strength of Saint Bishoy’s love of our Good Savior, he wanted to continue his conversation with God throughout prayer as long as possible so he used to tie his hair with a rope attached to the ceiling of his cave to wake him up if he fell asleep so that he continues his prayer to his beloved.” - (linked above)
- Prayer is the breath of a Christian. Without prayer, we are not living. Thus, pray unceasingly, unconditionally, & uninterruptedly.
- Never stop giving fuel to the fire.
- Whoever has tasted the sweetness of Christ will be diligently occupied in prayer, which, more than any labour, brings one near to God; for in prayer the mind is commingled with God and becomes the image of its Maker and the recipient of his gifts and a fount of His mysteries.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 3.3: Initiate the Habit: Routine

Building Block 3:  
Choosing a God  
Centered Life



### Objective

To understand that developing routine in prayer and reading the scripture will be attained through reliance on God.

### Application

Read one chapter, or even begin with one verse, of the bible each day this week. Say the thanksgiving prayer each morning and each night in front of your prayer corner.

### References



Scripture: [Deuteronomy 4:29, Matthew 11:28-30](#)



Liturgy: [Liturgy of St. Gregory \(p.43\), Second Sunday Psali](#)



Patristics: [Homily 38 on Matthew, St. John Chrysostom](#)



Story: [St. Bishop Carrying Jesus](#)



Other: [When You Pray, suscopts](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Two Oxen Come Together (Compliance)

Consider displaying an [image](#) of the yoked oxen in order for the students to visualize this concept.

- First explain the concept of yoke on the oxen so they are able to comprehend the sequence of events in this lesson: A yoke is a wooden collar that is placed on an animal so that the owner can control it. Very similar to a bridle on a horse, a yoke is a means to allow the driver to direct the animal. Often the yoke is wide enough for two collars for two animals. A farmer would say that two animals that are in wooden collars together are “yoked.”
- “But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” - Deuteronomy 4:29
- Two oxen coming together entails us finding the Lord (our partner). We need to seek Him in order for us to feel His presence in this journey.

#### + The Yoke is Placed on the Oxen (Alliance)

- What is our yoke? We often look to prayer and reading the bible as a heavy burden. Spiritual routine, in a way, can be considered our yoke. After a long/stressful day, spending time reading a chapter of the bible or praying seems like another task which we just “don’t have time for”. Don’t feel ashamed for feeling this way! We are human and weak, and the Lord is fully aware of that.
- However, don’t become submissive to these feelings, rather remember that this yoke is not placed on one ox, but TWO oxen! Who is this second ox that holds the yoke with us? - Our loving Father. Meaning, you are not taking the burden of this load alone. It takes discipline to be consistent with reading the bible and praying each morning and night. Ask Him for strength to be consistent, ask Him for patience to be persistent.
- “But You emptied Yourself and took the form of a slave.” - Liturgy of St. Gregory
- Is the Lord willing to take the form of a slave just for me? - Yes. He is willing to carry my burdens with me? - Yes. Is he willing to walk with me in order for me to succeed? - Yes.
- Thus, let us ask the Lord for help before embarking on the journey of our spiritual routine in order for Him to strengthen us.

#### + The More Experienced Ox Carries the Load (Reliance)

- We are young in our spiritual lives, still children (despite age) in front of the Lord. However, fear not, for the more experienced ox (God) is the one who will carry the heavy burden of the load as He walks with us.
- We are entirely dependent on Him for success in our routine. We are weak, but He is strong. We alone cannot reach any success, but with Him we



will attain grace, mercy, love, and reap the fruits.

- St. Bishoy: “On the appointed day, everybody was in a great hurry rushing to see Jesus. On their way, they passed by man who was trying to join them but had great difficulty because of his age; so he stretched out his hand asking for help, but nobody stopped or even paid him any attention. When Anba Bishoy passed by him, he stopped and carried him on his shoulders, gradually he started to **feel that his load was becoming lighter and lighter**, then he realized that the old man was Jesus the Lord, the one that everybody ignored” - linked above
- The weight of the Lord is a light and sweet load, carry it willingly and happily.

#### + “Your Yoke is Sweet and Your Burden is Light” - Second Sunday Psali

*Consider discussing with the students how we can begin feeling like a burden is light and the yoke is sweet.*

- Reach this level of thanksgiving in which we feel that this yoke (burden) is sweet to our souls. Once we stop feeling like praying every night is a task or reading the bible is an assignment, we will realize how light His burden is, yet how sweet His yoke is.
- “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” - Matthew 11:28-30
- “And if you are still afraid and tremblest at hearing of the yoke and the burden, the fear comes not of the nature of the thing, but of your remissness (carelessness); since if you are prepared, and in earnest, all will be easy to you and light. Since for this cause Christ also, to signify that we too must needs labor ourselves, did not mention the gracious things only, and then hold His peace, nor the painful things only, but set down both. Thus He both spoke of a yoke, and called it easy; both named a burden, and added that it was light; that you should neither flee from them as toilsome, nor despise them as over easy. But if even after all this, virtue seem to you an irksome thing, consider that vice is more irksome. And this very thing He was intimating, in that He said not first, Take my yoke upon you, but before that, Come, you that labor and are heavy laden; implying that sin too has labor, and a burden that is heavy and hard to bear. For He said not only, You that labor, but also, that are heavy laden.” - St. John Chrysostom

#### + Remember:

- Reading is only the beginning, but it is not enough. We should not just read the Bible, but **Live** the Bible!
- Christ Himself said, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments*” (John 14:15) But how can we know His commandments, unless we read them in the Bible?
- Christ also said, “*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me*” (John 5:39)
- Hosea also tells us, “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” (Hosea 4:6)
- It starts with reading, searching, and gaining knowledge from the Bible. But soon, it needs to go beyond that.
- **It needs to become an experience:** I sit with my Heavenly Father and listen to Him and share a word with Him.
- When it becomes an experience, the Bible stops being just a book and starts becoming something so much more, something that is beautiful and enjoyable.
- “*I have not departed from Your judgments, For You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way.* (Psalm 119: 102-104)

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 3.4: Initiate the Change: Practice

Building Block 3:  
Choosing a God  
Centered Life



### Objective

To understand the importance of putting the virtues they pray for into practice.

### Application

Have the students make a list of virtues they wish to attain. Instruct them to pray for these virtues everyday during the upcoming week and see what opportunities God gave them to practice the virtues they asked for.

### References



Scripture: [Galatians 5:22](#), [Genesis 1:27](#); [Philippians 4:8](#)



Liturgy: [Prayer of Reconciliation, Liturgy of St. Cyril \(p.239-240\)](#)



Patristics: [Homily 5 on Galatians, St. John Chrysostom](#)



Story: [Impatient Monk](#)



Other: [How to Develop Virtues, Fr. Daniel Ebrahim](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Discover

- What is a virtue? So, I want you to take a minute and personally reflect and ask yourself, “How do I understand virtue? What words come to mind when I think of virtue? What definitions or historical figures come to mind?”
- Basic definitions: Doing that which is right. Doing what God wants you to do. Right action.
- It is a characteristic of God.
- “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Galatians 5:22
- Above is a list of a handful of virtues which we should be aiming to attain. Discover which virtues you are failing to practice in your life and pray for them. During our routine prayer, we can include routine requests for virtues we wish to attain (patience, humility, obedience etc.)
- “The soul is situated in the middle of the struggle between virtue and vice. If the soul uses the body as it should, it makes itself more spiritual. But if it departs from the Spirit and yields itself to evil desires, it renders it more earthy. Do you see how everywhere he is not speaking of the essence of the flesh but of moral choice that is inclined toward virtue or vice? So why does he refer to “the fruits of the Spirit”? Because evil works come from us alone, and hence he calls them works, **while the good works require not only the resolution of our will but the kindness of God.**” - St. John Chrysostom
- Highlight the bold portion of the verse above. Good works require the kindness of God, they cannot be attained by our will alone. Thus, we must request and ask the Lord to help our souls to carry an abundance of these fruits.

#### + Investigate

- Investigate and search for opportunities to use the virtues you prayed for, surely God will send you opportunities which require you to use the virtues you’ve been praying for. We must be on the lookout for these opportunities and respond to them in the correct way.
- We cannot convince ourselves that we are fulfilling our calling of perfection if we avoid practicing the virtues we ask for. Do not escape interacting with people you don’t get along with, or situations that instigate anger, rather approach them with the Lord in your hand.
- There was a monk who was very impatient. You may wonder, why would a monk be impatient? Don’t they become monks so that they don’t have to deal with the world? Yes, that’s true. So imagine how impatient this monk was...The more he tried, the more impatient he became. So he decided that he must get away to learn to be patient. So he built himself a little home deep in the woods, far away from civilization. Years later, a man was traveling in those woods and met him. The man was amazed to find anyone living so far away from the rest of the world, so he asked the monk why he was there all by himself. The monk said that he was there to learn to be patient. The traveler asked how long he had been there, and the monk replied: seven years. Stunned, the traveler asked, “If there is no one around to bother you, how will you know when you are



patient?” Annoyed, the monk replied, “Get away from me. I have no time for you.”

- Contemplate how this applies to your life. Do you avoid your parents or ignore their requests? Do you give your siblings the “silent treatment” once you get into a disagreement? Do you stay away from people that make you angry?
- If the answer to any of these questions is “yes”, then we aren’t putting forth our best effort to practice the virtues which God has called us to live by. Instead you should be investigating and searching for every opportunity possible in which you can practice patience, forgiveness, humility.... Etc.
- “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

#### + Share

- Share the virtues you’ve learned and practice them with all those around you.
- “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” - Genesis 1:27
- The Lord initially created us in His own image... we were perfect! However, corruption and sin has distorted the perfect image He initially created us in. We must continuously strive to be restored to perfection.
- How can we become perfect again, you may ask? At the beginning of the lesson, we discussed that virtues are characteristics of God. Thus, the more virtues we have, the more we will resemble the image of Christ.
- “ O God of love and Giver of oneness of heart, who grants the true oneness of mind towards virtue. Who has also granted unto us the new commandment, through Thine Only Begotten Son. That we love one another as Thou hast loved us we the unworthy and astray.” - Liturgy of St. Cyril
- “The soul that really loves God and Christ, though it may do ten thousand righteousness, esteems itself as having wrought nothing, by reason of its insatiable aspiration after God. Though it should exhaust the body with fasting, with watching, its attitude towards the virtues is as if it had not yet even begun to labor for them.” St. Makarios the Great
- Finally, recognize that we are unworthy of His love and care for us, yet He grants us “oneness of mind toward virtue”.
- This prayer of St. Ephrem will be a great aid to everyone in this struggle: “O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, meekness of mind, patience and love to Thy servant. Yea O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother, for blessed art thou unto ages of ages. Amen.”

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 3:  
Choosing a God  
Centered Life



## Lesson 3.5: Initiate the Love: Our Ultimate Goal

### Objective

To understand that our ultimate goal is becoming a beacon of light.

### Application

Seek/search for small ways to spread the Lord's light to others this upcoming week.

### References



Scripture: [Matthew 5:15](#), [Romans 12:1](#), [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)



Liturgy: [Liturgy of St. Basil](#)



Patristics: [Homily 15 on Matthew](#), [St. John Chrysostom](#)



Story: [Anba Abraam](#)



Other: [No Greater Love](#), [Mother Teresa](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Building Block Review

- God granted us free will. Although He owns us and cares about us and searches intently for us, He will never force us to have a relationship with Him.
- It should be out of our own will that we reach out to Him, that we lift up our feeble arms with a burning desire for His love.
- "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." - James 4:8
- Take the initiative and begin building your very own prayer corner. Fill it with icons of saints you love, an icon of our savior Jesus Christ or our Mother the Virgin St. Mary... whatever your heart desires. Bring a candle to your prayer corner and your Agpeya. This will now be your dedicated spot for prayer, each morning and each night.
- We are young in our spiritual lives, still children (despite age) in front of the Lord. However, fear not, for the more experienced one (God) is the one who will carry the heavy burden of the load as He walks with us.
- We are entirely dependent on Him for success in our routine. We are weak, but He is strong. We alone cannot reach any success, but with Him we will attain grace, mercy, love, and reap the fruits.
- "The soul is situated in the middle of the struggle between virtue and vice. If the soul uses the body as it should, it makes itself more spiritual. But if it departs from the Spirit and yields itself to evil desires, it renders it more earthy. Do you see how everywhere he is not speaking of the essence of the flesh but of moral choice that is inclined toward virtue or vice? So why does he refer to "the fruits of the Spirit"? Because evil works come from us alone, and hence he calls them works, **while the good works require not only the resolution of our will but the kindness of God.**" - St. John Chrysostom

#### + Light Your Candle (Service)

- "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house." - Matthew 5:15
- A candle alone does not provide light. Therefore, all this knowledge alone, will not allow you to light your candle, rather taking every opportunity to put all what you've learned into practice in order to be a living example of love and christianity.
- "Each one of us is merely a small instrument. When you look at the inner workings of electrical things, often you see small and big wires, new and old, cheap and expensive lined up. Until the current passes through them, there will be no light. That wire is you and me. The current is God. We have the power to let the current pass through us, produce the light of the world. Or we can refuse to be used and allow the darkness to spread." - No Greater Love, Mother Teresa
- We are mere instruments, but the Lord is the powerful current which can shine through us. You should not embark on service alone, rather by

working with the Spirit and requesting the Lord to aid you in all that you do.

- Don't think, however, that this service is limited to being a Sunday school servant or a deacon who knows every hymn. As much as those are beautiful and important services, there are hundreds of small ways we can serve others in our everyday lives, we just have to search to find them. Mother Teresa goes on to explain that it is "possible that in the apartment across from yours there is a blind man who would be thrilled if you would go over and read the newspaper to him. It's possible that there is a family that needs something that seems insignificant to you, something as simple as having someone baby-sit their child for half an hour. There are so many little things that are so small many people almost forget about them." - No Greater Love, Mother Teresa

#### + Let the Candle Burn (Living Sacrifice)

- "Neither do men light a candle and put it under the bushel, but on the candlestick, and it gives light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven. For I, says He, it is true, have kindled the light, but its continuing to burn, let that come of your diligence: not for your own sakes alone, but also for their sake, who are to profit by these rays, and to be guided unto the truth." - St. John Chrysostom
- No one lights a candle then blows it out right away, rather lights it and lets it burn. We too are the same. Burn continuously and sacrifice yourself for the Lord and for all those around you.
- "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." - Romans 12:1
- Introduce the concept of sacrifice with the ideology that Christ sacrificed Himself for us out of love. Similarly, we learn to offer ourselves as a sacrifice to Him through our growth of love of Him.
- Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- The Lord is owner of our souls, bodies, and spirits, "Make us all worthy, O our Master, to partake, of your holies unto the purification of our souls, our bodies and our spirits." - Liturgy of St. Basil
- Through Him we can be made pure, through Him we can become living sacrifices.

#### + Become a Beacon of Light & Love (Radiate Him)

- Our ultimate goal is to radiate the Lord in each step we take in life.
- "The chance to share our love with others is a gift from God. May it be for us just as it was for Jesus. Let's love one another with undivided love. Let's experience the joy of loving God and loving one another." - No Greater Love, Mother Teresa
- Do not feel burdened with sharing your light with others, rather recognize that this is a gift the Lord has blessed us with. Spread the Lord's love and light with a joyful, humble, and righteous spirit. You are his tool, He is your strength.
- "Another day, a poor woman went to him when the Bishop had no money. But someone had given him a shawl, which he never used. He apologized to the woman that he had no money, gave her the shawl saying that she may sell it and use the money. The woman took it and went to the market to sell it. There the owner of the shawl saw her, bought it from her and returned it to the Bishop. Before giving the shawl to the Bishop, he asked, "Father why did you not use the shawl as it is cold these days?" The Bishop replied, "The shawl is Upstairs my son" meaning that it is with the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the man presented the shawl to him. The Bishop said, "I hope you gave the poor woman the right price." The man replied, "Yes father, I gave her the right price."... These are but a few of the examples of Anba Abraam's generous giving. This saint always gave with the Spirit of Love. Love in every matter, in every virtue, and in every practice is like the soul to the body. If the soul left the body it would immediately die and not exist." - suscopts on Anba Abraam
- An example of the extent to which we can share love and light fervently and joyously.



# Building Block 4: Scripture's Faith and Truth





# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 4.1: The Role of Faith in Biblical Understanding

Building Block 4:  
Scripture's Faith  
and Truth



### Objective

Understand that believing things in the Holy Bible based on faith is not blind following, but divine inspiration.

### Application

The better we know God, the more we trust Him and the less we doubt. What is one thing you will do this week to strengthen your faith?

### References



Scripture: [John 1:1-3](#), [1 Thessalonians 2:13](#), [Acts 16:31](#), [Hebrews 11:1-6](#), [John 3:18](#), [John 20:27](#), [Matthew 28](#)



Liturgy: ["And we too who are sojourners ..."](#)



Patristics: [Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel according to S. John, vol. I, 176.](#); [St. Augustine](#)



Story: [The 12 disciples failing to heal the epileptic child](#)



Other: [Life of Faith by HH Pope Shenouda III](#); [SUSCOPTS Lecture V: How to Read the Holy Bible](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Your actions are related to your faith

Share with the student the story of [Charles Blondin](#).

- Charles Blondin was a famous French tightrope walker. His story is a wonderful illustration of what true faith is. Blondin's greatest fame came on September 14, 1860, when he became the first person to cross a tightrope stretched 11,000 feet (over a quarter of a mile) across the mighty Niagara Falls. People from both Canada and America came from miles away to see this great feat.
- He walked across, 160 feet above the falls, several times... each time with a different daring feat – once in a sack, on stilts, on a bicycle, in the dark, and blindfolded. One time he even carried a stove and cooked an omelet in the middle of the rope! One time Blondin stopped and addressed his audience: "Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?"
- The crowd enthusiastically yelled, "Yes! You are the greatest tightrope walker in the world. We believe!" "Okay," said Blondin, "Who wants to get into the wheelbarrow?" As far as the Blondin story goes, no one did at the time!
- This unique story illustrates a real life picture of what faith actually is. The crowd said they believed. But... their actions proved they truly did not believe. Similarly, it is one thing for us to say we believe in God. However, it's true faith when we believe God and put our faith and trust in His Son, Jesus Christ.

#### + Your faith is the lens of knowing the truth.

*Do you have faith that Walt Disney corporation will never collapse given its abundant wealth? That robots will never beat human power? That scientists will never find God hidden under an artifact?*

- Faith is not a case of schizophrenia, nor mental illusion. Faith is choosing to trust in someone so strongly that you would sustain that faith all your life. Pursuing God using a personal philosophy would set a weak basis for faith. Holy Tradition, which consists of Scripture, Patristics, Liturgics and Rituals, is an enlightenment and pathway to proper faith.
- We have many different ways of garnering knowledge - better known as "Ways of Knowing" - such as emotions, sense perception, intuition, and so forth. Faith is a way of knowing too! There is a section of knowledge that you can learn only through faith. Faith means you do not ask to see or touch the wounds of Jesus Christ, unlike doubting Thomas. Faith means you carry on inner hope and reach out to touch His garment, believing that "If only [you] may touch His clothes, [you] shall be made well" (Mark 5: 28).
- The bleeding woman did more than just look for a magical cure, if you think about it. If her faith was not there, she would not have been healed by touching His garment. *"Your faith has made you well," He said* (Mark 5:34).

- St. Augustine comments, “Few are they who by faith touch him; multitudes are they who throng about him.”
- Now that you know that faith allows miracles to happen, that faith is a strong and deeply rooted conviction, and that faith needs to be acted and lived out in deed, not just in word, you would realize that the Bible is your ultimate guide to living out that faith. Jesus Christ once said, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord!,’ shall enter the kingdom of Heaven*” (Matthew 7:21). You can do miracles, you can convert multitudes, you can believe that Jesus Christ was truly the incarnate God, but you would still be missing something: pursuing the truth in all things. The Bible is your manual to pursuing the truth in your life, in all that you do. The truth about the Trinity and the origins of the universe, the truth surrounding righteousness and wisdom, all emphasize the fact that faith is not a statement, not performing miracles, but a deep-rooted desire to live out a truthful life with the Bible as your fact-checking database. The idea of “my truth” and “your truth” is an obsolete, futile way of approaching the truth, so saying “we agree to disagree” here is not in any way rational.
- The Bible is our manual of truth. We read it in light of the sayings of the Church fathers, in accordance with their interpretations of it. We need faith to accept the truths in the Bible. Faith, then, is our “lens” of reading the Bible and knowing the truth.

#### + Your faith is the doctrine that you practice.

*Now that you know that the Bible is your truth manual, and that faith is your lens of reading that manual, what is missing? You read the truth, you accepted it by faith, but did you apply it? Faith without deeds is a bad case of dead faith.*

- Pope Shenouda reminds us that faith is not only a belief, but also a life!
- Did the 12 disciples have faith at the beginning of their journey with Christ? You would think so, but why then would He tell His disciples, “O faithless and perverse generation” (Matthew 17:17)? His disciples were trying to heal an epileptic child, but they failed. Faith enables one to do miracles, but only if one lives out that faith. They admitted He was the incarnate God, they expressed their desire to learn the truth, and yet there appears to be hesitancy about living that out, professing it, and living out His doctrines. Jesus Christ, indeed, came to a generation of unbelievers, though you’d be shocked to hear that about the disciples.
  - Can you redefine faith, now? “*I say to you, if you have faith as little as mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘move from here to there,’ and it will move*” (Matthew 17:20). Faith is living out the doctrine you practice, pragmatically, realistically.
- In light of that, we can now see why a heretic, though he may still have faith, does not have “SOUND” faith, is not really practicing the proper doctrine. A wise man would first seek out to find the right religion, with the right approach to the words of Jesus Christ, then he would abide by the interpretations of that church and loyally, faithfully, embrace them in all his behavior, knowing that they are apostolic, originating from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles without alteration (our church is apostolic!).
- If the Bible is our primary doctrine, and we want to practice it properly, we need to abide by the contemplations of our church fathers. The church has constructed an early community around the 12 apostles, the 70 disciples, and the very first patriarchs (St. Mark!). We cannot legitimately apply the Bible without following the contemplations and explanations set forth by those fathers. They did not amend the Bible; they just explained it.

#### + Your faith is in need of constant fueling.

*Faith enables us to read the Bible as our truth manual, to trust every word in it, and to practice it. What strengthens this faith throughout this whole journey?*

- If we were to make a caliber against which to measure the strength of our faith, what are a few things you would list on the caliber? (1) Confidence in God’s qualities, (2) confidence in God’s ability to do anything, (3) confidence in God’s timing, (4) humility of heart and mind, (5) experience with God, (6) see God in every matter that happens to you, and (7) take Him as your friend, so much so that you do not worship Him out of fear but approach Him constantly in genuine pursuit of a relationship. That is not a euphemism, nor a futile and childish way of portraying God, it is a wise way of depicting how this particular relationship should look like.
- The eucharist is a continual feast we partake in that testifies to our relationship with God.
- Sunday school service and liturgical sermons feed our inexperienced minds with pearls of wisdom and guidance.
- Meditations and contemplations iron our rusty, shaky faith into place and train us to see God and understand His words in the right way, but above all to see His motives and His intentions in everything we do before we go on and blame Him for awful incidents.

#### + Your faith is your shield. You have no other.

*St. Paul emphasized the shield of faith as the feature “above all” features that adorns you in the armor of God.*

- Faith ties the knot in your relationship with Christ. A man with faith reads the Bible because he loves Jesus Christ wholeheartedly, because he wants to know more about Him and follow Him thoroughly, and because he wants to sustain that relationship for life. Faith becomes your



shield once you use it to safeguard that connection you have with God. Faith preserves that connection and hence, gives you that power and protection against all kinds of evil that may strike you. The bold sections in the following verses redirect your attention to the target person of it all: Jesus Christ. After all, we are BELIEVERS. We build faith OUT OF OUR OWN DESIRE, not under obligation. It is a RELATIONSHIP that you are privileged enough to engage in, not a cult of forced service.

- “The Lord is my light and my salvation... Though an army may encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; Though war may rise against me, in this I will be confident” (Psalm 27: 1/3).
- “Now the just shall live by faith” (Hebrews 10:38).
- “The Holy Bible is not merely a work of literature or a collection of historical documents, although certainly it can be approached on that level. It is, much more fundamentally, a sacred book, addressed to believers, to be read with faith and love” (SUSCOPTS Lecture 5: How to Read the Holy Bible?).
- “For without faith, it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6).
- “Having been proven by facts, that He is both Son of God and the Father, and introduced into the world grace which is more excellent than the ministry of Moses, He devised, as God, another way to bring unto the faith, from all quarters driving together to salvation them that were lost” - Commentary of St. Cyril of Alexandria on the Gospel of St. John.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 4.2: The Development of the Biblical Canons

Building Block 4:  
Scripture's Faith  
and Truth



### Objective

To understand through the use of the Old and New Testaments how the Holy Canons of the church evolve before and after Christ.

### Application

The next time you're reading the Holy Bible, take a second and think about what canonical category the passage you are reading fits into, and think about how you can benefit from knowing the category.

### References



Scripture: [Luke 24:44](#); [Luke 11:51](#); [Matthew 23:35](#)



Liturgy: [Midnight Praises](#)



Patristics: ; [St. Irenaeus](#)



Story: Jesus Christ embracing the canonized Bible;; Protestant Churches breaking apart the canons



Theology Academy:

- ▶ [Origin of the Hebrew Bible \(Biblical Studies\)](#)
- ▶ [The Old Testament Canon \(Biblical Studies\)](#)
- ▶ [The Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Old Testamen...](#)



Other: [The Deuterocanonical Books, Article by LAcopts](#)  
[Article on the Canonization of Scripture](#); [The Story of the Bible](#);  
[PBS Emergence of the Four Gospel Canon](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Treat the Bible in canons

*Context of canonizing the bible: Why develop new canons? Why canons at all?*

- The canons of the OT are developed throughout time before Christ and compiled as history evolves. The OT can be divided in two sets of books: the First Canonical Books (Protocanonical) and the Second Canonical Book (Deuterocanonical).
- First canon Books were compiled by Ezra the priest & divided in 3 sections:
  - Torah: 5 books of Law
  - Nebeim:
    - Early Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings),
    - Latter Prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the twelve junior prophets)
  - Ketebeim:
    - Poetic Books (Psalms, Job, Proverbs)
    - Megillot/Scrolls (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther)
    - Followed by the books of Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles
- The Deuterocanonical books appeared after Ezra's death (Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Joshua Son of Sirach, Baruch, I & 2 Maccabees)
- Martin Luther wrote extensively about getting rid of the deuterocanonical books, because they were not in the then-current Hebrew Old Testament. However, the Hebrew Bible was not formalized until 90 AD, after the Church began using the Septuagint (Greek version, which Christ quoted from), and the Hebrew-language Jewish version was chosen, by the Rabbis at Jamnia, specifically to stop the spread of Christianity.

#### + Spread the Bible in canons

*What canons then? What are the benefits of canonizing?*

- A canon is defined as a standard, corpus, or code with one standard interpretation. It sets a standard to which nothing shall be added nor removed, preserving its meaning. The first five books of the bible are written by Moses and share a style of interpretation/context. Thereby, we put them together into one canon called the Torah, and we treat all five books like parts of a pentalogy... like chapters of a greater book, like the three movies of the Jurassic Park trilogy.
- The Holy Bible is unique in its continuity across 1500 years and a myriad generations, written by writers from royal ranks to peasant classes, circulated across continents and vast deserts from the wilderness of Mt. Sinai to the prison walls of St. Paul. All that, and yet it remains intact with one definitive focus carried on across all of those scenarios. We call that continuity, and canons help sustain that continuity safely.
- As the bible was circulated more widely amongst Jews and even newly converted gentiles, canons were the best possible way of preserving the meaning, integrity, and interpretations of each section of the Bible. New gospels arose at the time, most debated of which is the Gospel of Thomas. You have the early church fathers to thank for the four gospels we hold so highly today. Back then, it was a mayhem of despair trying to tell apart which gospel was authentically passed down from the 12 apostles and which one was not. St. Irenaeus, exhausted with this mayhem, asserted most strongly: "The heretics boast that they have many more gospels than there really are. But really they don't have any gospels that aren't full of blasphemy. There actually are only four authentic gospels."

*Did God endorse the idea of canonizing the Bible?*

- Yes, as ironic as it sounds! Even before the canons of the OT were seen in one, printed book, even before the written bible was ever compiled together, you can see traces of a canonized bible in the sayings of Jesus Christ: "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44).
- And now that we have defined canon, it becomes clear that calling the deuterocanonical books 'apocryphal' is a misnomer. Apocrypha means concealed. We hold those books of "Tobit, Judith, Maccabees" and so forth as canons, standards of our Bible, so they are not concealed.
- Fathers of the second and third generations like Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius of Alexandria and Cyprian, also fathers of the fourth generation as Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom; all of them made equal references in the books they wrote to the protocanonical and the deuterocanonical books.
- In John's Gospel (Ch. 10:22) Christ the Lord mentioned the Feast of Dedication- this Feast was not mentioned in the Bible in the Protocanonical while it was proved in the Book of Maccabees that Judas Maccabeus was the first to initiate this feast when he purified the temple of the profanities of the gentiles and renewed the altar. This is a clear evidence that the Jews received the commemoration of this feast from this Book.
- NT evolved in time, more specifically in a local council of Carthage in 397 Canon 24, to become canonized into the four gospels, the book of Acts (History of the Church category), the Pauline epistles, the general/Catholic epistles, and Revelations.

## + Endorsing the canonized Bible

*How do we embrace the canonized bible, then?*

- We already do, the way the church fathers have paired a chapter from the Gospels with each liturgy, the way the Gospels are embedded in the liturgy as the foremost, most important records to be read after the Pauline and Catholic epistles, and the way each Gospel chapter has a specific meaning for each season and each Sunday compared to the general themes of the Psalms read before the Gospel. (Key point: The Gospel did not begin with the evangelists. The Gospel was already alive in the churches back then!)
- We also do embrace the canonized Bible in taking down the Agpeya the way our church fathers designed it, with the Gospel being a key, highly essential part of each prayer, that culminates in a long set of psalms for each hour.
- Alas, we embrace the canonized Bible most profoundly when we chant the 15th Theotokia of the midnight praises and say, "When the chosen scholars/of the Holy Books/saw it/They were greatly amazed;" "They thought with/their enlightened minds/and explained it/Through the Holy Books."

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 4.3: Scriptural Divine Inspiration

Building Block 4:  
Scripture's Faith  
and Truth



### Objective

To understand the role of the human beings in recording, interpreting, and receiving scripture

### Application

Change the way you envision the Holy Bible. To avoid using the Bible texts wrongly, it is good to read whole biblical books and try to understand the text considering both its immediate context and the entire biblical book. Always ask what the text says about the character and nature of God.

### References



Scripture: [John 1, Acts 1, Acts 2, 2 Tim 3:16-17, Romans 15:4, Psalm 45:1, Deuteronomy 28:12](#)



Liturgy: [The Litany of the Gospel](#)



Patristics: [St. Augustine of Hippo, Contra Faustum book 2](#)



Story: Simeon the Elder



Other: [Inspiration and Interpretation of the Holy Bible; Lecture II of Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures by Fr. Shenouda Maher](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + The Chosen Vessels

- What is a vessel? If you had a vessel right now, what kind of things would you put in it?
- God wants to use people for His Holy purposes. He wants to fill them up with the Holy Spirit and use us in His plans. A vessel is something that holds things, like a jar or a cup. When we love God and are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are filled with His goodness and God can then use us for whatever purposes He wants.
- "The Holy Spirit elevated and directed the faculties of the sacred writers, thus supervising the selection of the materials to be used and the words employed during writing."
- God chooses specific individuals on whom to pass down inspiration, but how exactly does the Holy Spirit communicate through them? The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is essentially "guidance" and is plenary and verbal. There are sections in the scripture of St. Paul where he expounds on topics saying - "I, not the Lord, say this..." (1 Cor 7:12-15). This is ok, to write by permission instead of by commandment of the Holy Spirit.
- God chose those evangelists while also embracing their personalities and allowing them liberty to write as they wish in the sphere of God's inspiration. They were chosen not as dead tools, but as living vessels, their personalities taken into consideration in the choosing.

*Does the Holy Spirit talking through the human writer diminish his personality and personal values, by any chance?*

- By no means! Although we usually call the writer the "instrumental cause" of the scripture compared to the Holy Spirit being the "primary cause," God allowed them to maintain their personality and personal values as they wrote. Their personality did not hinder or blur the meaning of God's word. If anything, it facilitated the wording and explanations of it. "The inspired writings are perfectly divine and perfectly human; infallibly authoritative because they are all God-breathed; intelligible because they are written in the language of men" (Fr. Shenouda Maher).
- In the story of Simeon the Elder, one sees how the Holy Spirit protects nonetheless the accuracy of that which is written. In commemoration of this, prior to the reading of the gospel and in anticipation of hearing the Word of God, the priest prays the prayer of Simeon silently: "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have declared to all people"

#### + Uniqueness of each Vessel

- Do you notice the obvious difference in style between Moses narrating the turmoil facing the Israelites, David indulging us in His love of Christ, Isaiah prophesying in the most noble manner, and the other styles of James, John, and Peter? Those different styles are attributed back to the writers themselves and their unique personalities, NOT to the Holy Spirit. God chose those vessels knowing the unique

personality that they had. He did not override it, but embraced it! Those evangelists were not dictated.

- The Holy Scripture is “perfectly divine and perfectly human... God did not divest the writers of their several individualities of style; His Spirit acted on their spirit so that their individuality had free play in the sphere of His inspiration” (Fr. Shenouda Maher).
- Just as they have had unique personalities so closely touched by their savior, so could we. (saints, relatable snippets)

#### + Becoming intentional about service in every way

*The Holy Spirit alone will not move one’s heart to write about God. Humans are not inspired mechanically by the Holy Spirit to write books. Their personality is not compromised in the process, either. They remain opinionated, of a unique perspective, and of a self-led desire through it all.*

- It takes something equally important, and that is a true intention to serve God and to dedicate oneself to preaching His word. Deacons chose to be of good reputation, deacons also chose to follow those requirements listed in the Bible to remain deacons. A writer of scripture self-willingly follows those requirements and a lot more!
- Now as mentioned in earlier lessons, those books remain inerrant. The evangelists remained faithful and discerned the voice of the Holy Spirit well throughout their writings. As St. Augustine proclaims, “If we are perplexed by an apparent contradiction in scripture, it is not allowable to say, ‘The author of this book is mistaken;’ but either the manuscript is faulty, or the translation is wrong, or you have not understood it.”

*If so, would you say that the four Bibles are identical, bearing the exact same truths? Would you say the four evangelists were just writing the same thing to enhance its credibility?*

- God would not use human beings in such a way. He was NOT USING them, as we have proven earlier. The four evangelists do address the same EVENTS, they witnessed some common incidents, but their personality, their unique experiences, the different places and communities they have met, altogether make for a quintessential element in their writings, and God honors that. He does not gloss over it.
- Syrian Christian theologian Tatian once tried to harmonize all four gospels into one, and called it the “Diatessaron,” meaning “through the four.” Now we know from last lesson that St. Irenaeus refuted him properly, but the main point is: You, a believer in the present age, would not acknowledge that the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the New Testament had you not read the Gospel of St. Matthew. Sure, the other three gospels wrote about the same events, but only St. Matthew was blunt enough to QUOTE the Old Testament since he was addressing the rebellious Jews in the years right after the crucifixion. St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John all addressed different audiences and thereby, would have never quoted the Old Testament. Each audience back then had particular concerns, particular needs.
- St. Mark was addressing Egyptian gentiles like us, St. Luke was addressing ‘Christians’ who have already converted and built churches, and St. John was focused more on the virtue of loving God and seeing Him through each parable (i.e. his non-synoptic gospel explained Christ’s teachings while the other gospels did not). The Holy Spirit could not have done that. The Holy Spirit only passed down the truths, but God chose those particular evangelists for that additional style of writing that they had.
- The process of divine inspiration does not happen mechanically. It happens cooperatively. The Holy Spirit cooperates with that submissive, spiritual soul and enlightens it. The individual takes that enlightenment in light of his experiences and writes it in his own fashion, in a way that is tailored to the language and style of the audience at the time. So God moved His Holy Spirit to enlighten the rebellious Jews through St. Matthew, but those Jews owe St. Matthew just as much appreciation as they do to God. St. Matthew knew just well enough how to word it and how to entwine his knowledge of the Old Testament into it.

#### + Becoming a Vessel

- Become a Vessel: God could have delivered His words to us in any different way. He was under no obligation to use human means. However, it is because those individuals pursued that relationship that He allowed them to speak ON HIS BEHALF. A chosen evangelist is not just a vessel impersonated by the Holy Spirit, but a highly esteemed individual whose life and personality is like no other.
- Empty the vessel of all unnecessary content.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit: As St. Paul admonishes the turbulent church of Corinth to heed his word, he reminds them of the context of the Biblical words and commandments: “[C]learly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3).
- Of course, the Holy Spirit - a hypostasis of God, not a magical potion or an external force or anything - did influence the apostles, but it did not override or overrule their personality. We all have the Holy Spirit within us since baptism (and seen even better in Pentecost. They are the first priests, so they received the Holy Spirit directly from above then passed it down by administering baptism to other converts).

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 4.4: Scripture in Church Services

Building Block 4:  
Scripture's Faith  
and Truth



### Objective

To understand the reason why Scripture is used during services, and see how the church rites are rooted from Scripture.

### Application

Throughout the liturgy and other church services, notice and study how the rites of the church are derived from Scripture.

### References



**Scripture:** [Genesis 8:21](#), [2 Chronicles 26:18](#), [John 1:29](#), [1 Peter 1:19](#), [Psalm 25:6](#), [John 19:40](#), [1 Corinthians 16:20](#), [2 Corinthians 13:12](#), [1 Thessalonians 5:26](#), [1 Peter 5:14](#), [Ephesians 2:4-5](#)



**Liturgy:** [The Offertory](#), [The Prayer of Reconciliation](#), [The Liturgy of the Faithful](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Athanasius of Alexandria, Letter XXIX](#); [St. Cyril of Jerusalem](#)



**Story:** [King Uzziah Entering the Temple and Burning Incense](#)



**Other:** [Understanding the Liturgy by Father Athanasius Iskander](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Rites: Learning the Scripture & Maintaining Stability

- Consider when the printing press was invented (1440) and even then, it was very slow to get books printed. For people to learn about the Holy Scripture, the only source they had was to come to church and listen to the scripture through the liturgy. It is also important to note that the entire Holy Bible was not compiled until 400 A.D.
- The church is structured around teaching the people about the life of Christ and the old testament through the course of a year.
- The word “rites” in Arabic is pronounced “tuks” which is derived from the Greek word “taxis” meaning “a system.” In the coptic church, this refers to the system of the liturgy which is the recitation of verbal prayers and the performance of holy symbolic movements. If the order of worship was shaped according to society and culture of the congregation, the church will inevitably lose its stability. The apostolic system of our church is permanent and unchangeable, fulfilling the needs of all people at all times without losing system and stability.
- Saint Athanasius of Alexandria states, “But you are blessed, who by faith are in the Church, dwell upon the foundations of the faith, and have full satisfaction, even the highest degree of faith which remains among you unshaken. For it has come down to you from apostolic tradition, and frequently accursed envy has wished to unsettle it, but has not been able.”
- The small details of the Divine Liturgy are taken for granted. It is important to study and learn all of the different rites and hymns that are done and said out of habit and to contemplate on the Scripture that is used throughout the various church services.
- When the church has a service, liturgy, fast, feast, or tradition, it is all founded in Biblical Text. We'll list some examples

#### + Examples of Rites in the Old Testament

- Noah, after the flood, built an altar for God and took every clean animal and every clean bird and offered burnt sacrifices on the altar. “*And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma*” (Genesis 8:21).
- Abraham built an altar for the Lord wherever he went, always calling on the name of the Lord and presenting Him burnt offerings.
- King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26 took it upon himself to enter the temple and burn incense on the altar. Azariah the priest and eighty other priests followed Uzziah into the temple and confronted him saying “*It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed!*” (2 Chronicles 26:18). When





Uzziah became extremely angry, leprosy broke out on his forehead. He was a leper until the day he died.

- System, order, roles were all of great importance.

#### + Examples of Rites in the Liturgy Rooted from Scripture

- St. John the Baptist called Jesus *"The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* (John 1:29). Therefore the priest examines the loaves of bread to choose a "lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19) as he stands at the foot of the altar facing the west.
- Afterward, the priest washes his hands three times symbolizing the action and obligation to be clean from all sins and transgressions. David in Psalms 25:6 states *"I will wash my hands among the innocent and will circle your altar, O Lord."* The priest recites all of Psalm 25 as he is washing his hands.
- The priest rubs the lamb with slightly wet hands on the top and bottom to allude to the high priests in the old testament who would lay both hands upon the head of the scapegoat and confess all the sins of Israel over it symbolizing the transfer of the people's transgressions to the animal.
- The priest recites *"grant, O Lord, that our sacrifice may be accepted before You for my sins, and for the ignorances of Your people."* The action of rubbing the Lamb above and below with the slightly wet right hand of the priest also signifies the anointing of the body of Christ before being wrapped up in linen as stated in John 19:40 *"Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury."*
- The Holy Apostolic Greeting is the oldest of all Eucharistic rituals and was called "Apostolic" because it was instructed to us by the apostles. St Paul mentioned it multiple times; Romans 16:16 *"Greet one another with a holy kiss."* 1 Corinthians 16:20 *"Greet one another with a holy kiss."* 2 Corinthians 13:12 *"Greet one another with a holy kiss."* 1 Thessalonians 5:26 *"Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss."* St. Peter also mentioned it in 1 Peter 5:14 *"Greet one another with a kiss of love."*
- When the priest says *"Lift up your hearts."* and the congregation replies *"We have them with the Lord."*, is rooted from Ephesians 2:4-5 *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."*
- Saint Cyril of Jerusalem tells us that, "The priest cries, "Lift up your hearts!", for truly it is necessary at that most awesome hour to have one's heart on high towards God, and not below, occupied with earth and things of earth. In effect, then, the priest commands everyone at that very hour to banish worldly thoughts and to have their hearts in heaven. Then, assenting to this by your confession, you answer, "We have lifted them up to the Lord." Let no one present be so disposed that while his lips say "We have lifted them up to the Lord," in his mind, his attention is engaged with worldly thoughts. At all times we should be mindful of God, but at least, if this is not possible due to human frailty, we must strive for it at that hour."
- In the Commemoration of the Saints in the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, it states that "...this is the command of Your Only-Begotten Son, that we share in the commemoration of Your saints..." Where in the Holy Bible does our Lord Jesus Christ command us to commemorate our saints? Hebrews 13:7, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith."

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 4.5: The Sacraments in Scripture

Building Block 4:  
Scripture's Faith  
and Truth



### Objective

Identity the 7 Sacraments in Scripture

### Application

Live a sacramental life to boost our Spiritual health

### References



**Scripture:** [John 3:5](#), [Mark 16:16](#), [1 Corinthians 3:16-17](#), [Matthew 18:18](#), [John 20:22-23](#), [Acts 19:18](#), [Matthew 26:26-28](#), [John 5:54-57](#), [Luke 10:8-9](#), [James 5:14-15](#), [Matthew 19:5-6](#), [Mark 3:14-15](#), [Luke 6:13](#)



**Liturgy:** [The Confession](#), [The Liturgy of St. Basil](#)



**Patristics:** [Tertullian](#); [Justin Martyr](#)



**Story:** [St. Peter and St. John laying their hands on those who have been baptized.](#); [Nathan and David](#)



**Other:** [Holy Sacraments](#)

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + What is a Sacrament?

*Consider distributing verses and have them identify which verse corresponds to which sacrament*

- The sacraments are as His Grace Bishop Mettaous of El-Syrian Monastery states “the channels by which we receive the graces and blessings of the Holy Spirit”.
- It is practicing a visible rite to receive an invisible grace.

#### + Sacrament of Baptism

- The first sacrament through which we are born again by being immersed in water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity. It is the door through which a believer enters the church and is able to partake in the other sacraments.
- It was instituted by Jesus Christ himself with his own baptism in the River Jordan by John the Baptist.
- In John 3:5, “*Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*”
- Mark 16:16 also states, “*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.*”
- “As many as are persuaded and believe that what we [Christians] teach and say is true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly . . . are brought by us where there is water, and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, ‘Except you be born again, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven’ [John 3:3]” (*First Apology* 61 [A.D. 151]). Justin Martyr

#### + Sacrament of Confirmation/Chrismation

- Also known as the “Myron,” it is the anointing of a newly baptized believer with the consecrated oil called the myron. “Myron” is a Greek word meaning “ointment” or “fragrant perfume.”
- Through this sacrament, the believer receives the seal of the Holy Spirit by being anointed with 36 crosses on his joints and senses.
- Our body becomes a temple for the Holy Spirit that dwells in us.
- 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*”



- It is performed directly after baptism.
- Initially, St. Peter and St. John would lay their hands on the people who have been baptized so they would receive the Holy Spirit. However, when christianity began to spread further out, they were not able to do that on everyone so they established the anointment by Myron as an alternative.

#### + Sacrament of Repentance and Confession

- This sacrament is the remorse of our sins and the confession before a priest to ask for forgiveness of our sins. After confessing, the sinner is absolved by the priest where he is granted forgiveness.
- Confession means admitting and declaring a certain matter. Repentance is the intention of turning away from your sin and working on improving yourself and improving your relationship with God.
- Jesus instituted this sacrament when He said to his disciples in Matthew 18:18, *“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”* and in John 20:22-23, *“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”*
- Jesus is giving authority to His disciples to bind or loosen sins by hearing confession. Note that Priesthood is received through the Holy Spirit. In the latter passage, the Lord told them to “receive the Holy Spirit”, this was done only to the disciples, and prior to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon all people, clearly differentiating the gift.
- In Acts 19:18, *“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.”*
- Consider reading 2 Samuel 12 and discussing David confessing to Nathan. *“So David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.’”*
- [Some] people flee from [confession] as being an exposure of themselves, or they put it off from day to day. I presume they are more mindful of modesty than of salvation, like those who contract a disease in the more shameful parts of the body and shun making themselves known to the physicians; and thus they perish along with their own bashfulness....The Church has the power of forgiving sins. This I acknowledge and adjudge.” Tertullian

#### + Sacrament of the Eucharist

- This sacrament was instituted by Jesus Christ in the upper room on Covenant Thursday when He *“took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body. Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’”* (Matthew 26:26-28)
- The Eucharist is carried out during the Holy Liturgy and we enter communion with God as we partake of His Holy body and precious blood.
- The Sacrament of the Holy Communion has many benefits as stated in Scripture. The first being whoever participates in this sacrament abides in Christ and Christ abides in him according to John 6:56 which says, *“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”*
- The second benefit is the promise of eternal life. John 6:54 states, *“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*
- The third benefit is it provides spiritual growth and healthiness. Also in John chapter 6 verses 55 and 57 say, *“For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed...As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.”*
- In the liturgy during the Confession, the priest states, *“Given for us for salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of Him.”*
- *“‘Eat my flesh,’ Jesus says, ‘and drink my blood.’ The Lord supplies us with these intimate nutrients, he delivers over his flesh and pours out his blood, and nothing is lacking for the growth of his children.”* St. Clement of Alexandria
- *“What you see is the bread and the chalice; that is what your own eyes report to you. But what your faith obliges you to accept is that the bread is the body of Christ and the chalice is the blood of Christ. This has been said very briefly, which may perhaps be sufficient for faith; yet faith does not desire instruction.”* St. Augustine

#### + Sacrament of Unction of the Sick

- This sacrament was instituted by Jesus Christ when He said to his His disciples *“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers”* (Matthew 10:8) and *“whatever city you enter...heal the sick there”* (Luke 10:8-9).
- St. James states in James 5:14-15, *“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of the faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.”*



- The priest anoints the sick with oil and prays with them and their family to obtain the grace of remedy from God.
- It is also called the Sacrament of the Lamps because the early Christians used to place oil in a lamp, from which hung seven other lamps. Each lamp was lit at the beginning of every prayer. Now, the seven lamps are replaced by seven wicks, made from cotton wool, which sit in a plate of oil in the shape of a cross.
- The Spirit of God dwells and sanctifies the oil in order to heal those anointed by it.

#### + Sacrament of Matrimony

- This sacrament is the descension of the Holy Spirit on a bride and groom uniting them as one body.
- Matthew 19:5-6 says, *“and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”*
- Jesus blessed the wedding in Cana of Galilee where He performed His first miracle, [Wedding in Cana of Galilee](#)

#### + Sacrament of Priesthood

- This sacrament is an act of service and is a divine calling in which the sacred duty of the priest is to guide the congregation towards salvation.
- The Bishop lays his hands on the head of the elected candidate, so that the Holy Spirit will descend on him and grant him a priestly rank.
- Mark 3:14-15, *“Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons:”*
- Therefore, Jesus instituted this sacrament when he chose twelve of His followers and consecrated them for ministry.
- Luke 6:13 says, *“And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:”*
- The Disciples and Apostles ordained bishops, priests, and deacons. One example as we read in 1 Timothy 3 where St. Paul giving instruction on ordination criteria, [1 Timothy 3](#)



# Building Block 5: Examples of Steadfastness in the Scripture: OT Timeline 2

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 5.1: The United Kingdom: Saul goes from Hero to Zero

Building Block 5:  
Examples of  
Steadfastness in the  
Scripture: OT  
Timeline 2



### Objective

To Understand that the Thirst for Power Destroys but Humility Builds

### Application

Self-reflect to find the blind-spots where pride may be getting the best of us, to find our character flaws, and to acknowledge our mistakes.

### References



Scripture: [1 Samuel 14:47-48](#); [1 Samuel 15:26](#); [James 4:6](#); [1 Samuel 18:7](#)



Liturgy: [Prayer of Submission to the Father, The Liturgy of St. Cyril](#)



Patristics: [Saint Barsanuphius, Guidance Toward Spiritual Life: Answers to the Questions of Disciples](#)



Story: [Satan Cast Out of Heaven](#)



Other: [The most devastating sin to the soul is PRIDE.](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Normalized Life: Sinful Demand of a King

- Israel at this time was only ruled by judges who were chosen by God. Samuel was the current judge of Israel until some time passed and he became too elderly to rule. He decided to appoint his sons, Joel and Abijah, to be judges over Israel and help regulate the people of Israel. However, they were wicked in their ways, taking bribes from the people and abusing their roles as judges. This caused the elders of Israel to reevaluate the rulers of their nation.
- As the elders began to gather together, they started to depreciate the role of a judge which was given by God and began to demand a king to rule over them like the other nations. By demanding a new ruler, they were rejecting God as their king. The Israelites were more concerned about their cultural and social reputability than the blessing of reigning under Yahweh.
- Pride is the original sin as stated in the Prayer of Submission to the Father in The Liturgy of St. Cyril, “[Let] boasting and the original sin which is pride: [flee from us], for the sake of He who alone humbled Himself for our sakes.”
- Samuel was displeased after hearing this, so he prayed to God and the Lord instructed him to listen to what the people were requesting although they were not appreciating the blessings God had continuously given them. However, God told Samuel to warn the Israelites of the actions of the new king that will reign over them. He will take away their sons, their daughters, their produce, and their flock. After hearing this, the Israelites were not concerned and continued to demand a king.

#### + First King: Chosen by the Heart of Men

- Saul was from the family of Benjamin. He was tall and exceedingly good-looking. God had told Samuel to keep an eye out for a man from the land of Benjamin who he shall anoint king over Israel and that he would be the one to save the Israelites from the Philistines.
- When Saul later on approached Samuel, Samuel took Saul, anointed him, gave him instructions, then afterward proclaimed him king of Israel. As the king, Saul was continuously victorious with his battles and helped deliver the people of Israel from the other nations.
- 1 Samuel 14:47-48 “So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed them. And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them.”



#### + Rejected by God: God's success mistaken for personal success

- Now that Saul was gaining confidence in himself, his ego began to take over. He began to make decisions by himself, and became blind to the arrogance he was acquiring.
- While facing the Philistines, Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days for him to come so they could offer a sacrifice together. Saul became impatient and decided to take matters in his own hands, disregarding Samuel's words. He took the initiative of offering a sacrifice by himself.
- Samuel continuously instructed Saul to listen to the voice of the Lord and follow His directions. The Lord had said to attack the nation of Amalek and destroy everything; man, woman, child, ox, sheep, camel, donkey, etc. King Saul, however, disobeyed God, ignored His instructions, and decided to spare the life of the king of the Amalekites, King Agag, as well as keep the best sheep, oxen, fatlings, lambs, and everything else that remained in good shape.
- The actions of King Saul greatly upset the Lord causing Him to regret that He appointed Saul as king of Israel. When Samuel went to confront Saul, Saul was not able to see what he did wrong. He was not able to admit that he disobeyed God and rejected Him. Instead, Saul attempted to manipulate his response by saying he saved the best sheep and oxen to sacrifice to the Lord, even though that is not what God ordered him to do. Samuel then states to Saul that to obey the Lord is much greater than sacrifice and that because he rejected God, God has rejected him as king.
- I Samuel 15:26 *"But Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.'"*
- Samuel left Saul that day and never saw him again until the day of his death.
- As we read in James 4:6, *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*

#### + Distressed Saul: Life without God

- Because God rejected Saul, the spirit of the Lord departed from him and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him. He started to become extremely distressed.
- One of the servants said to King Saul that he had seen a son of Jesse that was very talented in playing the harp, was handsome, and had the Lord with him.
- So Saul sent messengers to bring David to him. After meeting, Saul found favor in David and made him his armorbearer.
- David would play the harp for King Saul whenever the distressing spirit from God was upon him.

#### + Destroyed by His Own Jealousy

- After David killed Goliath and the Philistines fled, the women of Israel were singing *"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands"* I Samuel 18:7. Saul, after hearing this, became jealous and very angry. He wanted to be the only one that people praised. He wanted all the recognition and power. Because of this, Saul began to despise David and became driven towards extreme hatred for him, to the point that he sought to kill David.
- There came a day where the distressing spirit from the Lord came upon Saul again and David was there playing the harp. Saul had a spear in his hand and attempted to kill David with it, but David was able to escape two different times. Now Saul began to be afraid of David because he knew the spirit of God was with him. Saul therefore completely removed David from his presence but continued to be afraid of him.
- David knew that Saul wanted to kill him so he fled. Saul continued to seek David and find wherever he may be. He was determined to kill him. Saul became extremely angry with anyone that helped David escape. There was a priest named Ahimelech who had spoken with David, but when the priest refused to tell Saul anything, Saul ordered for Ahimelech to be killed. Ahimelech and eighty-five other priests were killed that day.

#### + David Spares Saul's Life, Twice

- A little while later, there came a day when David was given the opportunity to kill the person that was trying to kill him. King Saul was on the hunt for David and while he was in the wilderness, he went into a cave to rest. David went into the cave, only cut off a corner of Saul's robe, and spared his life. When Saul walked out of the cave, David followed and called out to Saul and told him to see how he could have killed him but decided to only cut off the corner of his robe. David was able to control his emotions, unlike Saul.
- There came another opportunity for David to kill Saul while he was sleeping in the camp, but instead he just took the king's spear and his jug of water that were by Saul's head.
- Saint Barsanuphius said *"The humble man does not get angry, does not remain in dispute with anyone, and does not condemn anyone. Rather,*



he considers all men more worthy than himself.”

#### + Tragic End of Saul

- Samuel became very distraught because he had no one to consult. Samuel was dead and God was not answering him. He decided to meet with a woman who is a medium and ask her if she could bring up Samuel so that he may speak to him. Saul told Samuel that he is distressed and does not know what to do. Then Samuel proceeds to tell him that he will be delivered to the hands of the Philistines and he and his sons will die.
- Saul fell to the ground at the words of Samuel. He had no strength because he had not eaten any food all day and all night.
- As the Philistines continued fighting against Israel, they were on the search for Saul and his sons. They found his sons and killed them. Saul told his armorbearer to draw his sword and kill him but the armorbearer refused. So Saul took the sword and fell on it and killed himself. When the armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he took the sword and fell on it as well.
- When the philistines found the body of Saul, they cut off his head and stripped off his armor.
- As stated earlier, pride is the original sin, the most devastating sin. Satan pursued his own will due to his pride which caused him to fall out of heaven.
- Likewise, the disobedience, the thirst for power, the jealous hatred, all led Saul to his own demise.

#### + The problem with pride

- At first, Saul looked to be the ideal king: He came from a wealthy family (1 Samuel 9:1); handsome, “There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel.” (1 Samuel 9:2); He was a successful military leader, giving Israel victories over Moab, Ammon, Edom, the Philistines and others (1 Samuel 14:47-48); and initially, he was a loyal worshiper of God. He rebuked the people when they violated God’s will (1 Samuel 14:32-34), built altars to worship the Lord (1 Samuel 14:35) and “Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land.” (1 Samuel 28:3).
- Saul’s downfall, his pride: He took it upon himself to act as priest (1 Samuel 13:8-14); He blatantly disobeyed a command from the Lord (1 Samuel 15); He was consumed with jealousy (1 Samuel 18:6-9); and Rather than repent of his many wrongs and seek the help of the Lord, Saul sought guidance elsewhere (1 Samuel 28).
- Saul’s pride had tragic results for himself; his kingdom would not continue to endure (1 Samuel 13:14). But his pride also resulted in disaster for the people. By the end of his reign Saul had lost considerable territory to the Philistines and other nations.
- There is a reason that God hates pride (Proverbs 6:16-17). A proud man will reject God’s will every time it conflicts with his own desire. A proud man cannot love others more than himself.
- Thus, the first step to being a person after God’s own heart is to “deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24).



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 5.2: The United Kingdom: David

Building Block 5:  
Examples of  
Steadfastness in the  
Scripture: OT  
Timeline 2



### Objective

Exemplary leadership going from his youth against Goliath, to his leadership in the kingdom, to his leadership in repentance

### Application

Have a self-reflection of yourself in a journal or a note, and reflect: What are my spiritual objectives and vision? When would I stand for my brothers and sisters in church? OR would I not? Would I desire to make the church better? How? Why not? Are sins stopping me? How can I present a proper repentance?

### References



Scripture: [1 Samuel 16:1-13](#); [1 Samuel 17:31](#); [2 Samuel 2:4](#); [2 Samuel 5:3](#)



Liturgy: [Psalm 51](#)



Patristics: [Tertullian](#)



Story: David



Other: [Pope Shenouda the III](#); [Bishop Youssef](#)

### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Which King occupied a great amount of space in the Bible?

*Consider the following activity as an opening: Ask: If you were going to choose a new king or leader for the country, what would be the qualities you'd be looking for in the person? Invite responses and create a list on a whiteboard/flipchart. You may also consider reading 1 Samuel 16:1-13.*

- King David has been characterized by continuous growth: faithfulness in his youth, in Saul's palace, and in his own kingdom; and when he happened to fall into sin, he managed to rise by repentance.
- "For I have provided Myself a king among his sons." (1 Samuel 16: 1)
- When Samuel was mourning Saul, because he didn't repent, the Lord told him to stop, because we as humans can't see what God could see, in this case God saw the youngest son of Jesse as the next king.
- David was a young shepherd with a small frame, reddish/auburn hair, and light eyes.
- Samuel expected the eldest son of Jesse, Elihu, to be the chosen king by God, but the Lord said, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16: 7)

#### + What was special about him - Why did God select him?

- God saw in David a faithful heart that was worthy of leading His people. For example, he learned from tending the sheep, to love every single one of his father's flock; and to boldly defend them against the wild beasts (the lion and the bear) (1 Samuel 17: 34).
- During his keeping the sheep he learned to play the harp, a talent used by God to introduce him to king Saul. He enjoyed nature, to praise God with spiritual psalms.
- He also learned to strike with the sling, to help him kill the mighty 'Goliath'.
- David's life is a leading example of humility, courage, patience and repentance.

#### + To be God's leader requires humility

- How David and Saul meet and how Saul forgets him: David was seen by Saul and members of the household several times. David was called as a musician boy to play his harp to refresh Saul's soul; and once Saul got better, the boy returned to his father's house, to resume his duties keeping sheep for several years, until he became a young man. Considering Saul's mental health condition, he forgot about David and even how

he looked. Even Abner, the commander of Saul's army, didn't recognize David, since he was only the music boy.

- David was humble. He knew that, even as king, he was still just a servant of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. "Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" (2 Samuel 7:18). He was a lowly shepherd boy and was chosen as king. But after his anointment, he returned to take care of the sheep. When he does get called up to the palace, instead of demanding the throne, he works as a servant. He performs music for the king whenever Saul demands it. When his dad asks the anointed king to serve snacks to his older brothers, he serves snacks to his older brothers.

#### + To be God's leader requires courage

*What is the secret of David's triumph in his fight against Goliath?*

- David had great characteristics that we should live by. We see how he is obedient when Jesse asked David to go check on his brothers and the bible states that David woke up early and did as his father requested. (1 Samuel 17: 18)
- So we see that David was obedient.
- When David's older brother was angry with him he stayed calm and didn't become hostile.
- When David heard About Goliath, he thought "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine," he added saying: "and takes away the reproach from Israel; For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17: 26)
- David's thinking was every conquest is for God and the church and any defeat would be a loss. David felt the zeal of the Lord of hosts; and realized that God Himself grants the conquest to be glorified among His people. By this thought David entered the battle, hidden in God.

#### + To be God's leader requires patience

- David was anointed as Israel's king when he was about 17 years old. But he was 30 before becoming king of Judah (which was just part of Israel) and 37 before he was named king of all Israel, as promised.
- How many times does David get anointed King? David had been anointed a king, three times:
  - a- Secretly in his father's house (1 Samuel 16: 13)
  - b- His anointment as a king over the house of Judah (2 Samuel 2: 4)
  - c- His anointment as a king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5: 3)
- David did some great things as a king
- He conquered Jerusalem and moved the Ark of Covenant and bringing it to Jerusalem
- Defeated the Philistines and became a King that influenced small kingdoms such as Edom, Moab and Ammon
- David establishes the kingdom for Solomon, but does not build a temple because when Nathan asks the Lord, the Lord says leave it for his son.

#### + To be God's leader requires faithful repentance

*The fall and Repentance of David; Leaders who fall can repent and be restored.*

- David committed adultery with Bethsheba and had her husband killed.
- David's falls filled him with a lot of sorrow, but through repentance, they were transformed into glories; his psalms of repentance became the secret of correction of the paths of many, who were devastated by sin, and broken down by despair.
- Psalm 51 is a psalm of confession in which David prays that God will create in him a clean heart, and renew in him a right spirit.
- This Psalm has always been held, and always will be held, in the Church, as the most magnificent expression of repentance.
- Tertullian says, "[Regarding confession, some] flee from this work as being an exposure of themselves, or they put it off from day to day. I presume they are more mindful of modesty than of salvation, like those who contract a disease in the more shameful parts of the body and shun making themselves known to the physicians; and thus they perish along with their own bashfulness"
- According to the Coptic Orthodox rite, most prayers begin with the recitation of this Psalm right after the Lord's prayer and the prayer of thanksgiving.
- Another serious fault, committed by David, was, ordering a census of the people, to know the number of men who "drew the sword;" without seeking the counsel of God. As a result of his action, a severe chastisement came upon the people. But through this David was able to regain God's mercy.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 5.3: The United Kingdom: Solomon's Wisdom

Building Block 5:  
Examples of  
Steadfastness in the  
Scripture: OT  
Timeline 2



### Objective

To understand that God's wisdom is available to all who ask and by living a life using Godly wisdom one would experience great blessing

### Application

Proverbs is filled with wisdom, read a chapter of proverbs each day as a means to gain some of the wisdom of King Solomon.

### References



Scripture: [1 Kings 1-13](#); [1 Kings 2:10-12](#); [1 Kings 3:5-15](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:4-10](#)



Liturgy: [Litany of Peace](#)



Patristics: [Abba Daniel/Desert Fathers](#); [St. Jerome](#)



Story: [Humility of St. Anthony](#)



Other: [Wisdom](#)

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Who is King Solomon:

Consider asking the students: "If you could have any wish come true, what would you ask for? (Let each have a chance to tell you what they would ask for.) What are some strengths that could become our downfall? You may explain that this lesson is about King Solomon, a man who received great gifts from God but eventually used those gifts unrighteously. Suggest that students look for incidents that show the gradual decline of Solomon. Emphasize that we should look for his flaws not to judge him, but to learn from his mistakes.

- Solomon was the third and final king of the *unified* nation of Israel, succeeding King Saul and King David. The Kingdom becomes divided (2 kings) during the reign of his son.
- Solomon was the son of King David and Bathsheba. Solomon was not the oldest son of David, but David promised Bathsheba that Solomon would be the next king. When David's elder son Adonijah declared himself king, David ordered his servants to bring Solomon to the Gihon spring where the priest anointed him while David was still alive. Solomon inherited a considerable empire from his father.
- Many kings ascended the throne of Israel from the time of Saul to the dissolution of both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. None of these kings, however, obtained the power and prestige that Solomon did.
- During the forty years that Solomon ruled as king of Israel, there was peace and unity throughout his vast domain.
- Under Solomon's reign Israel reached her greatest point as a nation—honor, wealth, power, and respect were hers because of the administration of her greatest king.
- Solomon built the first Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, a seven-year task that became one of the wonders of the ancient world. He also built a majestic palace, gardens, roads, and government buildings. He accumulated thousands of horses and chariots. After securing peace with his neighbors, he built up trade and became the wealthiest king of his time.
- He composed 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. He wrote the Song of Songs, the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon in the Deutro-canonical books

#### + Solomon asks for wisdom from God, which he receives.

- Once Solomon's kingship was firmly established, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and promised him anything he asked. Solomon chose understanding and discernment, asking God to help him govern his people well and wisely. God was so pleased with the request that He granted it, along with great riches, honor, and longevity (1 Kings 3:11-15).
- A well-known example of Solomon's wisdom is his judgment in a dispute over the identity of the actual mother of an infant child (1 Kings 3:16-28). Solomon offered to split the living child in half, understanding that the true mother would prefer to lose her son to another woman



than to have him killed. Solomon was not only wise in his rule as King but had excellent general wisdom as well.

- His wisdom is sought and heard of. Queen of Sheeba (who Christ praises in Matthew 12:42 which indicates the importance of seeking and desire Wisdom, traveled 1,200 miles to confirm the stories of his wisdom and dignity (1 Kings 10)).

#### + God's Wisdom vs. Man's Wisdom: True Meaning of Wisdom

- What is wisdom? There are two kinds of wisdom, man's wisdom and God's wisdom. Men would think that wisdom is being smart and getting a good education and using this education to lead a successful life. God's wisdom is knowing God and what His Word tells us how to live a life that pleases Him. Having God's wisdom brings true peace and satisfaction.
- Humility, once firmly established, makes the foundation for wisdom strong. King Solomon famed for his wisdom said, "When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2). David the Prophet and King said, "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making the wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7), "the simple" referred to here being the humble. In the Holy Book of Sirach we read, "A poor man with wisdom can hold his head high and take his seat among the great" (Sirach 11:1). Again, the poor man in this verse refers to the humble. Why humble? The poor man knows he is poor, is patient when misfortunes strike him, blames himself in everything and does not care about the opinion of others because his aim is simply to please God. St. Athanasius the Great wrote much concerning the humility and wisdom of St. Anthony.
- Someone asked Abby Anthony, "What must one do in order to please God?" The old man replied, "... whoever you may be, always have God before your eyes..."

#### + Solomon's Failures sets up a coming destruction

- To satisfy his curious mind, Solomon turned to worldly pleasures instead of the pursuit of God. He collected all sorts of treasures and surrounded himself with luxury. Abba Daniel said, 'The body prospers in the measure in which the soul is weakened, and the soul prospers in the measure in which the body is weakened.'
- Solomon allowed lust to rule his heart instead of obedience to God. Apparently, he let his foreign wives worship their native gods and even had altars to those gods built in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7-8).
- Solomon taxed his subjects heavily, conscripted them into his army and into slave-like labor for his building projects.
- A prophecy is made that Jeroboam will become King, due to the fierceness of King Solomon, and that he would be great. Out of fear of being replaced, Solomon threatens him and so Jeroboam flees to Egypt. Jeroboam eventually comes back and becomes king over 10 tribes.
- Solomon's kingdom was marked by unprecedented peace, wealth, and splendor. He was the wisest man who ever lived, yet he did not handle his prosperity well. His resources, in fact, eventually went into the construction of pagan temples. Israel itself would soon follow in his footsteps of forgetting God. The greater our prosperity or success, the more likely we are to forget our need for God (This is why we pray for the king, (leader), the armies, the rulers, etc., in the liturgy, maybe we couldn't handle being in authority or rich, that's why God does allow it for us). Let us never forget this inherent danger that comes with material and other blessings. Don't just pray for success—pray for the character to handle success as well.
- We have to guard our hearts, watch our life and doctrine closely. And not assume because we've been put in a position of authority or being given great gifts, that necessarily authority and status and gifts equate to the fruit of the Spirit.
- Although Solomon had several significant failures, years later, he shared, through wisdom, the value of such pursuits in life.
- "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done. And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 2:11)
- "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity." But if all created things are good, as being the handiwork of a good Creator, how comes it that all things are vanity? If the earth is vanity, are the heavens vanity too?—and the angels, the thrones, the dominations, the powers, and the rest of the virtues? No; if things which are good in themselves as being the handiwork of a good Creator are called vanity, it is because they are compared with things which are better still. For example, compared with a lamp, a lantern is good for nothing; compared with a star, a lamp does not shine at all; the brightest star pales before the moon; put the moon beside the sun, and it no longer looks bright; compare the sun with Christ, and it is darkness. (St. Jerome Letter XLVIII. To Pammachius.)
- "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

#### + What do we do to acquire wisdom?



- Ask God to grant you wisdom (Philippians 4:6)
- Study the words of God (2 Timothy 2:6)
- Maintain intimate contact with God (Colossians 4:1)
- Listen to a truly wise man for instruction (1 Timothy 4:13)
- Search out the best way to live correctly (Colossians 4:6)
- Do not waste your precious gifts (1 Timothy 4:14)
- Open yourselves to others and you will receive more in return (Titus 3:15)
- Be alert and careful not to act foolishly (Titus 3:3)
- Risk everything to acquire the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44)
- "I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in the right paths" (Proverbs 4:11).

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 5.4: The United Kingdom: Jeroboam & Rehoboam

Building Block 5:  
Examples of  
Steadfastness in the  
Scripture: OT  
Timeline 2



### Objective

To understand the importance of proper guidance.

### Application

Attempt to get comfortable with someone mature and open up for guidance. This can be about a, or any mature servant.

### References



Scripture: [1 Kings 11:26-40](#), [1 Kings 12](#), [Divided kingdom map](#)



Liturgy: [St. Basil Liturgy page 71](#)



Patristics: [St. Silouan the Athonite](#)



Story: [St. Christopher](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Background Leading to the Division (1 Kings 11:26-40)

#### + Who was Jeroboam and why did he flee to Egypt?

*Consider opening by asking these questions: Where do you go for advice, and how do you make good use of advice? Do you have access to people who are spiritually mature, who can listen with an open mind, who are not afraid to tell you something you'd rather not hear?*

- Jeroboam was one of King Solomon's servants.
- Review of the prophecy by Ahijah that Jeroboam will be king over 10 of the 12 tribes. (1 Kings 11:26-40)
- God promised to divide the kingdom because He was angry with Solomon for worshiping other gods.
- God did not take the whole kingdom out of the hand of Solomon for the sake of David.
- God warned Jeroboam to walk in God's way and do everything in the sight of God and to keep His statutes and commandments.
- When Solomon found out he sought to kill Jeroboam. So he fled to Egypt.

#### + Like or unlike his father? Who is Rehoboam?

*Consider comparing the decision making process of Rehoboam with our decision making process, sometimes based on friends yet ideally should be based on parental guidance and spiritual guidance through a priest or reliable experienced servant.*

- Rehoboam was the son of King Solomon. (1 Kings 12)
- He became king after King Solomon's death.
- Jeroboam came back from Egypt after King Solomon's death.
- Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came to ask Rehoboam to ease the taxes on them which his father King Solomon put on them.
- Rehoboam refused the advice of the elders and sought the advice of his childhood friends, which was to treat them harsher than his father.
- Rehoboam's action caused the divide of his kingdom as prophesied by Ahijah.
- Israel made Jeroboam King over 10 tribes and Rehoboam became king to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Refer to the map of the divided kingdom of Israel.

#### + Rehoboam's counsel

- Rehoboam should have spent time fasting and praying asking God for guidance and wisdom.
- He should have evaluated both the advice of the elders and his childhood friends.
- He should have considered the experience of the elders versus the limited experience of his friends.



- He should have come up with his own questions for Israel to help him determine what advice to pursue.
- He should not have relied on his own mind since he did not have any experience himself.
- St. Silouan the Athonite wrote “If the Lord has left us ignorant of the ordering of many things in this world, then it means it is not necessary for us to know: we cannot compass all creation with our minds. But the Creator Himself of heaven and earth and every created thing gives us to know Him in the Holy Spirit.”
- Tell the story of St. Christopher how he was not persuaded to commit sin with two women and he was able to convert them.
- During the litany of the assemblies in the St. Basil Liturgy, the priest prays “Satan and all his evil powers, trample and humiliate under our feet speedily.”

#### + Predestination vs. Predetermination

- Note that in I Kings 11:38, Jeroboam was promised great blessings and to know just like King David, if He obeyed God’s commandments.
- Not many today know who King Jeroboam is, unlike King David. It is to be noted that Jeroboam does not appear to even seek to be a king. All the opposite, he seems to be willing to submit to Rehoboam.
- However, this humility does not last long, as once he becomes the first leader of Israel (also known as the North or Ephraim), his kingdom quickly turns to pagan worship.
- This shows that though King Jeroboam was predestined by God for greatness, the king’s choices reflected a different path, thus not predetermined.
- Being predestined by God does not nullify human free will for in everything God is the originator and initiator; He wants us to be His children but it is up to us, to our choice by our own free will, to accept this invitation. Before the earth was formed, God the Sovereign determined that every sinner, by trusting in Christ would be made righteous. It will please Him greatly that we accept this invitation and this adoption through accepting His only Begotten Son.

Note: the last lesson of the building block, you will give the kids a workshop in which they will put in order different events chronologically and geographically.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 5.5: BB Review: The United Kingdom

Building Block 5:  
Examples of  
Steadfastness in the  
Scripture: OT  
Timeline 2



### Objective

Review the events of the Old Testament in chronological periods.

### Application

Not being discouraged to read the Old Testament.

### References

N/A

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

- + Present this lesson more as a workshop Review where they attempt to take different characters and some elements of their stories from the beginning of the Old testament and attempt to sort them in chronological order.

*Consider using a carton board with names/ summarized stories on velcro and attempt to have them build a timeline of all the events on the board.*

- You may use the Grade 7 Curriculum BB2 to review the Chronology of the Pre-Kingdom era.
- You may alternatively/simultaneously use the review question below.

#### + Saul goes from hero to zero (First king)

- Why did the people ask to be ruled by a king instead of having judges?
- What does it mean to reject the judges and ask for a king?
- Who was the first king of Israel and who anointed him?
- What did King Saul do to be rejected by God?
- How was David, son of Jesse, introduced to King Saul?
- Why did King Saul want to Kill David?
- How did David spare King Saul's life and how many times?
- How did King Saul die?
- What were the main root causes of King Saul failure?
- Was King Saul always prideful?

#### + David (Second King)

- When was David chosen to be King?
- How was David chosen King?
- What skills did David have?
- How did David spend his time while tending to his father's sheep?
- What are David's qualities and virtues he lived by?
- What was the difference between King Saul and King David actions after they sinned?
- Why did God accept King David's repentance?
- What are some of King David's accomplishments?
- Why wasn't King David allowed to build the Temple?
- What book in the Bible did David write?

#### + Solomon's temple and Jeroboam (Third King)





- Who was Solomon's mother?
  - Was Solomon King David's first born?
  - Why did King David choose Solomon as his successor?
  - When Solomon became king what did he ask God for?
  - How was King Solomon able to build such an elaborate Temple?
  - Tell a story from the Bible to demonstrate King Solomon's wisdom.
  - Who was the queen from the south that came to visit King Solomon to see for herself his wisdom?
  - What was King Solomon's downfall?
  - What caused King Solomon to choose to worship idols and reject God?
  - What books in the Bible did King Solomon?
- + Result of Rehoboam's rejection of guidance (Fourth and last king before the kingdom's division)
- Who was Jeroboam and why did King Solomon want to kill him?
  - What country did Jeroboam flee to?
  - Did Jeroboam ever return to Jerusalem?
  - Who became king after King Solomon's death?
  - What was the purpose of the meeting that Jeroboam and Israel had with King Rehoboam?
  - What was the time period Rehoboam asked for to make his decision?
  - Who did Rehoboam ask for advice from?
  - What was the advice of the elders and the advice of his childhood friends?
  - Whose advice did he take?
  - What was Israel's reaction after they heard Rehoboam's decision?
  - What caused the divide of the Kingdom?
- + What do these stories from the Old Testament teach us?
- Reliance on God's wisdom
  - Trust God
  - To have patience
  - Not to be prideful
  - To confess and repent
  - Pray and ask God for guidance



# Building Block 6: Lifestyle Choices & Orthodoxy

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 6.1: Lifestyle Choices: Christian Dating

Building Block 6:  
Lifestyle Choices &  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

To understand the differences between dating from Christian view and the dating of modern society today.

### Application

Before making any decision, ask yourself “would I be okay with this getting published in the newspaper for everyone to see?”. If the answer to this question is “no”, then this action is likely from the devil and not from God... don’t do it!

### References



Scripture: [2 Timothy 2:22](#), [Genesis 2:18-24](#)



Liturgy: [Holy Matrimony Gospel Response](#)



Patristics: [Homily 6 on Second Timothy, St. John Chrysostom](#)



Story: [Jacob is directed by his father to choose a wife](#)



Other: [Grade 7 Legacy Curriculum Nov Week 4, Marriage and Divorces, Our world in Data](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Dating: In the Eyes of the World

*Consider beginning class by discussing the following questions with the students: When I say, “dating” what other words come to mind? (Boyfriends, girlfriends, love, broken hearts, etc.) How many of you know someone who has been hurt by a dating relationship? (Allow for discussion.) Do you think it is okay to date? What are some reasons not to date? (Yes, no. People’s hearts get broken, etc.) As a Christian teenager, why might it not be okay to date? (We are not ready; most dating relationships are not God honoring.)*

- “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” - 2 Timothy 2:22. In the world that surrounds us, dating has become a societal norm. However, we as Christians consider dating without the end goal of marriage as an “evil desire”.
- Students may wonder... why is it an evil desire? To respond, have the students consider anything we do in our lives (ex: going to school, reading a book, playing in a sports game). In all these situations, do you do the task aimlessly/without purpose? Don’t you go to school with an end goal of doing well so you can make it to college? Don’t you read a book so you can find out how it ends and what the meaning behind it was? Don’t you play in a sports game with the intention and goal of winning? This is human nature. We do all things with purpose and an end goal. Thus, dating “just for fun” or “because everyone else does it” does not give it purpose.
- When we look at the dating world in modern society, there are a lot of misconceptions and misunderstandings about why our faith directly contradicts the standard practices. In modern dating, outside the faith, there is a lack of God centered thinking. Most relationships stem from either carnal lusts or emotional reasons.
- Contrastly, when we think of dating with regards to the faith, we need to approach it with the idea that dating has a singular purpose: to find a partner to spend the rest of your life with while keeping God at the center of every relationship.

#### + Dating: In the Eyes of a Christian

*Around the world, the divorce rate is roughly 50% (<https://ourworldindata.org/marriages-and-divorces>). Consider debating the reason behind such a high rate of divorce. You may also look at the rate at which the number of marriages are decreasing all together in society and discuss the reasons and implications. It may be that modern dating instills a habit of pursuing desires, that when unfulfilled trains us to disassociate from the one they’ve attached themselves to. The constant recurrence teaches and trains the heart to escape when trials arise in relationships rather than grow through differences. Dating may in fact be a reason for divorce rates and the lack of true healthy relationships.*

- Driving license analogy: Although you may have extensive knowledge about directions, the roads, and cars, you have to reach a certain age



before you can start driving. In the same fashion, christian dating is designed to only begin when you are mature enough. Students may challenge themselves by saying “what if I’m mature now?” --- Response: How often do you change friends or make a new best friend and distance yourself from an old friend? This is due to the fact that we still have years ahead of us for developing knowledge about people. Thus, it is not wise to commit yourself to a relationship while you are prone to changing your mind.

- When we think of dating with regards to the faith, we need to approach it with the idea that dating has a singular purpose: to find a partner to spend the rest of your life with. A partner who will help you reach the ultimate goal of salvation.
- “Those that have been united together in harmony by the Holy Spirit, are like a harp, praising God continuously” - Holy Matrimony
- In Christianity, we need to approach relationships with the idea that it is not a 2 party union, but a 3 party union. The two individuals with God at the center of the relationship. Making God the center of our relationships will not just happen haphazardly, it starts with our personal relationship with God. If we don't have a strong foundation, how can we start looking to bring someone else into the fold?
- Once you are of an appropriate dating age, if your parents are made aware, the other person's parents are made aware, and you have the guidance of a spiritual father, then you are allowing God to speak through the beacons He set in your life. If, however, for any reason, you need to hide your relationships from any of the aforementioned parties, this gives room for the devil to take us down a slippery slope. For anything that is not brought to light will be consumed by darkness. If your parents do not know about a relationship, it is residing in darkness.
- Jacob, one of our blessed fathers, obeys the advice of his father to choose a wife from the house of Laban. Us too, should heed the advice of our parents with regards to selecting our life long partner.
- Our goal right now should be to prepare and build our relationship with God before seeking to build a relationship with someone else. It is important, however, to pray about all the traits you wish to have in your future partner. Pray that God sends him/her to you at the time which He wishes, for all that comes from God is perfect in all ways.
- “Flee also youthful lusts. Not only the lust of fornication, but every inordinate desire is a youthful lust. Let the aged learn that they ought not to do the deeds of the youthful. If one be given to insolence, or a lover of power, of riches, of bodily pleasures, it is a youthful lust, and foolish. These things must proceed from a heart not yet established, from a mind not deeply grounded, but in a wavering state. What then does he advise in order that none may be captivated by these things? ...Rejoice not in those who only call upon the Lord; but those who call upon Him sincerely and unfeignedly, who have nothing of deceit about them, who approach Him in peace, who are not contentious. With these, associate yourself. But with others it is not easy, but only as far as lies in you, be peaceable.” -St. John Chrysostom
- To oppose youthful lust, as expressed by St. Paul to St. Timothy, “*follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*”
- In order to do this, surround yourself with an appropriate group of friends (righteousness), discover charitable services (charity), do not count on your own strength but trust in the will of God (faith), & resist and expose sexual thoughts in confession (peace).

#### + Dating: In the Eyes of Our Creator

*Consider reading Genesis 2:18-24 with the students then ask the following questions: What was not good, according to God, in Genesis 2:18? (That man was alone.) What did God do about it? (He created a woman.) What was the point of all this, according to verse 24? (For man and woman to leave their parents and be united together as one.) What does this passage say about what God wants for you? (He wants us to have a loving marriage that lasts.)*

- Childhood Analogy (Parents): Let us begin by considering your childhood timeline. You are born, you learn to walk, you learn to talk, you go to school, you learn to read, you learn to write, etc... During each of these childhood stages who does the child love the most? Who does the child run to when they scrape their knee? Who does the child cling onto when they're scared? (Their Parents). Through this, the children are given an extended length of time during which they grow attached to their parents and build their relationship with them.
- Childhood Analogy (God): Now, let us consider the same scenario in the eyes of Our Creator. Ask yourself and respond in a genuine manner: Have you gone through this extended length of time with God... getting attached to Him and building your relationship with Him? (likely, the youth will be thinking “no”). The reason most of us haven't gone through this extended length of time of getting close to God is because we are still young. Only recently you became mature enough to understand what it means to have a relationship with God. Thus, you haven't yet gone through your “childhood” years with God. We are still young in our spiritual lives. Spend your time getting close to God, the person who will eventually be the one to send you your lifelong partner.
- At this moment in time, focus your goal on becoming the right person for someone else. This will be attained through your relationship with God. Through Him we find all ideal and perfect traits. Think about what you want in a future partner and gear your efforts towards achieving those virtues.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 6.2: Lifestyle Choices: Temple of God

Building Block 6:  
Lifestyle Choices &  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

To learn and recognize that the bodies are a sacred temple of God.

### Application

Instead of watching a TV show or movie, read the bible. Instead of playing an inappropriate game, make a prayer rope. There are so many options that can replace bad habits for holy ones, slowly but surely.

### References



Scripture: [1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#), [1 Peter 1:15](#), [Romans 12:1-2](#)



Liturgy: [Fraction to the Son: O Lamb of God \(p.28\)](#)



Patristics: [Cyprian of Carthage](#)



Story: [Sufferings of St. Paul](#)



Other: [No Greater Love](#), [Mother Teresa](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Our Bodies: Our Property

- The world which surrounds us continually places emphasis on empowering individuals to take charge of their bodies and lives. Thus, the media is filled with inappropriate clothing, inappropriate piercings, inappropriate scenes in movies etc.. These actions make it seem as though our bodies are our property.
- However, let us trace back to the birth of any person on this earth. Did they create themselves? Did their parents create them? No. There is only one creator of all things... God. Although, all of us may understand this concept, it is easy to forget this when faced with modern day practices.
- Analogy for further enhancement of the idea of God being owner of our bodies: Imagine that you've been creating a drawing for 15 years, constantly working on it and perfecting it. Then one day, someone comes and rips a hole in your drawing. Then another person comes and spray paints black all over your drawing, then another one rips your drawing. How would this make you feel? Take your feeling and multiply it by 100 in order to understand how God feels when we destroy our body, which He owns.

#### + Our Bodies: A Temple of God

- If God is the owner of our bodies, then we are considered sacred and holy. Our body is established as a temple for God to dwell in.
- *"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."* - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- The verse above reminds us to "glorify God in your body and in your spirit". Essentially, if our body is a place where the Lord is dwelling it must be a place worthy for Him to dwell in. We cannot fill our bodies (eyes, minds, nor souls) with bad thoughts, bad images, bad clothing, bad cuts (tattoos/piercings). Rather, anything we do to our body should be for the further glorification of God who abides in us.
- "Of this same thing in the first to the Corinthians: 'Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body.'" - Cyprian of Carthage
- When we make the decisions with the intent to glorify God with everything that we do, not only will He further glorify Himself through our lives, but our relationship with Him will strengthen. Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord teaches us to seek all things through the Lord in this way.
- One should keep our bodies clean as a suitable residence for the Holy Spirit. We should keep our bodies from ungodly practices and from the lust of the world.
- In the Fraction to the Son: O Lamb of God, the priest prays "Make us a holy temple for your dwelling and purified vessels for receiving you."



## + Our Bodies: Holy Bodies

- A very powerful passage by Mother Teresa on being holy: “We should not be concerned with the instrument God uses to speak to us, but with what God is saying to us. I’m just a little pencil in His hand. Tomorrow, if He finds somebody more helpless, more hopeless, I think He will do still greater things with her and through her. We all know there is a God who loves us. We can turn and ask Him, ‘My Father, help me now. I want to be holy, I want to be good, I want to love.’ Holiness is not a luxury for the few; it is not just for some people. It is meant for you and for me and for all of us. It is a simple duty, because if we learn to love, we learn to be holy. The first step to becoming holy is to will it. Jesus wants us to be holy as His Father is. Holiness consists of carrying out God’s will with joy. The words ‘I want to be holy’ mean: I will divest myself of everything that is not of God; I will divest myself and empty my heart of material things. I will renounce my own will, my inclinations, my whims, my fickleness; and I will become a generous slave to God’s will. With a will that is whole I will love God, I will opt for Him, I will run toward Him, I will reach Him, I will possess Him. But it all depends on these words: ‘I want’ or ‘I do not want.’ I have to pour out all my energy into the words ‘I want’.” - *No Greater Love*, Mother Teresa
- “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.” - 1 Peter 1:15
- God has called us to a much higher fashion: to be “ambassadors for Christ” and to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...and do not be conformed to this world” (Romans 12:1-2). Just like St. Paul who says “For I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus.” (Galatians 6:17). This not being a tattoo, but rather he embodied sufferings and struggles through his service that have come to glorify God as an ambassador. He frequently was in prison, was beaten three times with rods, was once stoned and suffered all the other things. Similarly, you can mention a few of the passions of Christ that will be read in Holy Week.
- Not only should we prevent ourselves from witnessing any form of evil (bad movies, wearing inappropriate clothing, hearing bad words), but we are called to attain a higher level of holiness through offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Pray that the Lord uses your body as a tool for delivering His message, as a tool for bringing others closer to Him, as a living image of Him!

## + Anticipation of Rebuttal Regarding Tattoos

*This portion is only needed if a student asks “why do so many coptic people have tattoos if we aren’t supposed to?”*

- Historically, tattoos were rites and ceremonies with which people expressed their sorrow at their funeral. The heathen did so to pacify the infernal deities they dreamt about, and to render them favorable to their deceased friend. God commanded that this must not be imitated by His people. His people, whom the God of Israel had set apart for Himself must not receive the image and superscription of these worthless deities, and therefore must not make cuts or prints in their flesh. Such practices were signs of rebellion against God Himself.
- Cross tattoos which Christians have on their hand: During the era of persecution, the Coptic Christians were prevented from wearing crosses or declaring themselves Christians. As the persecution increased, Christians started to tattoo the cross on their skin as a sign that they will never denounce their Christianity till they are skinned. Henceforth the cross tattoo became a sign of holding on to the Christian faith. In modern society this persecution no longer threatens us. Thus, it is more important to let the cross and the Lord radiate in our hearts than through a tattoo on our skin. Also, we are allowed to wear a cross necklace which serves the same function.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 6.3: How to Confess

Building Block 6:  
Lifestyle Choices &  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

To realize the importance of repentance and confession in our journey toward salvation, why confession, and how to confess

### Application

Schedule regular confessions, you may not only schedule your next one but establish a sequence and predetermined confession schedule with your father of confession. Schedule a confession and attempt one of these methods. Let us know, were they practical or difficult to apply?

### References



Scripture: [Judges 13-16, Luke 15:21, Acts 19:18](#)



Liturgy: [Psalm 50](#)



Patristics: [Ladder of Divine Descent, St. John Climacus](#)



Story: [St. Moses the Strong](#)



Other: [Copticchurch.net on Confession](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + What comes first: Confession or Repentance?

- A common doubt one may feel towards confession is... "If God knows all my sins, why can't I just confess in prayer and change on my own?" However, it is human nature that we see ourselves in an egocentric way, constantly trying to give ourselves excuses for bad actions and rationalizing the behavior or sin to make ourselves feel better rather than remorseful. Thus, it is necessary for someone to hold us accountable for our actions and canons. That which begins in our rooms with God is our repentance, and the repentance is completed in confession and washing of sins through the sacrament.
- God is our refuge, not one who we hide from as if he would condemn us to jail as a prosecutor or judge. He, on the opposite, directs and protects us in an ultimate form of love.
- When the prodigal son was aware of his sins, he returned to his father saying, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight" - Luke 15:21. Just as the prodigal son returned in a remorseful way, we must also run to our father for confession and reveal our sins, so that we may be freed from the sin and cleanse ourselves. The prodigal son's father immediately embraced him and forgave him. The Lord loves us in the same way. Once we confess our sins, they are in our past and the Lord embraces us and leads us.
- The Church helps us with this process of repentance by offering the Sacrament of Confession. Confession provides us with the opportunity to affirm to God that we realize we have lost our way, and we want to return to the path leading toward God.
- Use Samson's story to reflect how sin removes the grace given to us from God but repentance and confession may renew it. - Judges 13-16
- The book of Acts tells us that the Sacrament of Repentance and Confession was practiced during the days of the Apostles: "*And many who had believed came, confessing and telling their deeds*" - Acts 19:18.
- Thus, the Lord has entrusted and authorized certain individuals to accept our confessions, just as the apostles were entrusted to do so in the bible.

#### + Overcoming the Barriers

- We often get embarrassed to confess the same sins to our priest over and over again, thinking that our priest will look at us differently or think that we are not serious about our repentance.
- "Do not be surprised that you fall every day, do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly, the angel who guards you will honor your patience." - St. John Climacus
- Through this quote by St. John Climacus, we can be encouraged in knowing that we are bound to fall into the same sins over and over again. He explains that the angel who guards you will HONOR your patience. Do not be discouraged when confessing the same sins. The priest will do the same as the angel mentioned in the quote by St. John... despite the fact that you repeat the same sins, your priest will be proud of you for



getting up and will encourage you.

- St. Moses the Strong went to his father of confession (Abba Isidore) 11 times in the middle of one night because he was struggling with sin. Each time that St. Moses would go to Abba Isidore, he would tell him to go back to his cell and continue praying. The last time that St. Moses went to Abba Isidore he was unwilling to return to his cell, so Abba Isidore accompanied Abba Moses to his cell. Abba Isidore said to him “look to the west and see” and he saw a multitude of demons that were in a state of violent, furious disorder. Then Abba Isidore told him “look to the east and see” and he saw countless multitudes of angels who shone. Abba Isidore told him “behold those who you saw in the west are the very ones who attack even the holy ones of God. Those whom you gaze in the east are the very ones whom God sends to help his saints.” Upon hearing these words St. Moses the strong was strengthened and returned to his cell. He overcame his sin by going to his father for confession repeatedly. It was through the guidance and support of his father of confession that he was able to find comfort in the Lord. Thus, just as St. Moses went to his father of confession 11 times in one night confessing the same sin, we also should confess our sins to our father of confession without fear of judgment or shame.

#### + Necessity of Priesthood

- Confession was instituted by God Himself. In the story of the paralytic we see Christ forgiving his sins and the scribes astonished at the saying. For God only can forgive sins. And truly this remains the case, but he extended his authority through the Holy Spirit to his disciples after the resurrection when he said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”
- King David in Psalm 32 says: “I will confess my transgression to the Lord”, and though he mentions to the Lord, the practicality of this was done in front of the representative of the Lord (See 1 Sam 12:13)
- We may ponder on the reason he instituted it this way. Blind guides will constantly fall in the same pit. You will constantly try and rationalize your behavior or sin to make yourself feel better rather than remorseful. This is simply human nature.
- The father of confession is there to hold us accountable. A guide to give advice on how to stop committing the same sins over and over and offer guidance on how to grow our relationship with God. The father of confession’s role is to guide in a loving manner, symbolic of our Lord’s love.

#### + Methods of Self-Examination

*Consider asking the students what structure they use when they approach confession. It may be that some youth might not know the general content to be delivered in confession*

- Preparing for Confession is key to feeling the true blessing of this sacrament. Repentance and self examination should be practiced in the weeks leading up to confession. Evaluate yourself:
- Evaluating our behavior against the ten commandments and the beatitudes. The commandments are a mirror by which we see how God meant us to be, and how we’ve fallen short of His plan for us.
- Evaluating our behaviors at home, at school, at church
- Evaluating ourselves with respect to Passions such as: Pride, Lust, Anger, Gluttony, Greed, Envy, Sloth, Despair
- Evaluating the sins of commission (as previously listed), or sins of omissions (James 4:17)
- Evaluate the practicing of your canons: reading the bible, praying the Agpeya etc.
- It is important to keep track of/take note of the sins you’ve been committing so that when it is time for confession all your thoughts are already prepared.
- After examining actions, repentance should take place. Copticchurch.net provides a guideline for repentance: “Conditions of Repentance- True repentance has four conditions: Contrite heart and remorse for previous sins, Steadfast intention to improve, Strong faith in Christ and hope in His love to forgive, Verbal confession of sins before the priest.”
- “The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit: a broken and humbled heart God shall not despise.” - Psalm 50
- True repentance is rooted in a broken spirit which is offered to the Lord humbly.
- Verbal Confession of our sins before the priest is the last step of repentance. However, before approaching confession, remember to pray for the Lord to be present and speak through your father of confession. Thus, it will no longer be the priest guiding you, rather God speaking through the priest.
- After confession, offer the prayer of thanksgiving to God and thank Him for the gift of loving forgiveness.



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 6.4: Hypocritical Religion? Scribes and Pharisees

Building Block 6:  
Lifestyle Choices &  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

Understanding hypocritical behaviors, remembering not to judge “hypocrites”, and not allowing anything to keep us from the Lord.

### Application

Take time this week to self reflect on your behaviors. Do the actions you do during the week (words you say, activities you do, people you hang out with) align with our faith or not? If not, seek guidance from your Father of Confession.

### References



Scripture: [Matthew 23](#), [Matthew 5:37](#), [Matthew 12:33](#)



Liturgy: [Liturgy of St. Cyril](#)



Patristics: [St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Luke](#)



Story: [St. Moses the Strong](#)



Other: [Bishop Youssef Sermon on Hypocrisy](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Hypocrisy, as Defined in the Bible

*Look at the Biblical examples of the religious hypocrites, and then discuss how we can apply the lessons learned from their actions to our modern lives. Read Matthew 23 as a class, maybe a few verses per student then discuss the implications of these hypocritical actions in today's terms (Bishop Youssef's sermon -linked above- is a helpful guide).*

- Christ in this passage is making evident the hypocrisy of Clergy charged with leading their people. He says that those in positions of leadership will be held to a higher standard than the people they are shepherding. Christ is using very powerful language to condemn the hypocrisy of those who seem religiously devout on the surface, but instead are concerned with the glory that comes from being someone with influence and power.
- A couple points of potential discussion:
- “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.” - Matthew 23:25-26. In order to understand this verse, consider how we fill a dirty cup with water. What is the first action one would take? - clean the cup. None of us would be willing to drink a cup of water if the cup were filled with dirt. Thus, we are called to do the same. Each one of us must cleanse our souls and minds before we can be filled with God's Light.
- “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.” - Matthew 23:16-22. In addition to what the Lord says to them, one should also remember what the Lord instructed us on swearing in general, “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.” Be wary of swearing, for it displeases the Lord. Thus, be simple and truthful in our responses. We cannot curse or swear from the same mouth which partakes of the Lord's precious body and blood.

#### + We All Need Healing

- Often people claim that they stopped going to church because they are tired of the "hypocrites" in the church. Hypocrites in the church are usually people who are seen to be very devout in church, but during the week are often seen doing things that they tell others not to do.
- There is a lot to consider when thinking of this response. How can hypocrites influence other people, how can hypocrites dissuade people from coming to church. Is this a valid concern? This is a very tough situation to deal with, however, we need to be more concerned with our own actions than the actions of others. One must try his/her best to not be distraught by the seemingly hypocritical behavior of some members. It

is a church filled with sick members. No matter how many years they've been coming for healing.

- Although it is difficult to observe that the way someone presents themselves in church completely contradicts the way they behave outside of the church, there is one thing that must be remembered... no one is called to judge except Jesus. Thus, it is important for one to try their best to not let the actions of others change their opinion of the person, or of the church, or of the faith.
- Hypocrites should not dissuade a person from living their christian life. At the same time, one should constantly evaluate themselves to ensure that they are not sliding into hypocrisy.
- Refer to the story of St.Moses the Strong for further explanation of the idea of not judging any "hypocrites": "Once the Fathers of the Scetis were holding a council to reprimand a monk who had committed a fault. St. Moses was invited, but he refused to attend. The priest went to him, and said, Come, for the people are expecting you. St. Moses arose, took a basket filled with sand that had a hole in the bottom of it, carried it on his shoulder and started walking towards the council. When the monks saw him coming with the bag of sand, with sand pouring out of the hole, they asked him the reason of his behavior. He said to them, The sand you see running from the bag represents my sins which are always following me, and yet, today I am coming to judge the errors of my brother. When they heard this, they left the council and every monk went to his own cell, as none could judge that monk." - St. Mary & St.Moses Abbey
- Through St. Moses' story everyone should remember that we are all sinners. It is also important to consider that the church is a hospital of the sick. No exceptions. Thus, if you are to witness someone who's actions in the church do not align with their behavior outside of the church, pray for their healing, but never judge.

#### + Actions Aligned with Faith

- When we talk about living a Christian life, we need to aspire to be the light to the world especially when we are not in church. We can be disciples of Christ by simply living the life we are called to live. When someone displays hypocritical behavior, they are diluting and devaluing the word of the Christian faith."Either make a tree good, and its fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit." - Matthew 12:33.
- "But though hypocrites may be able possibly to remain undetected, and seize the honors which men bestow, "yet God, He says, knows your hearts." The Judge cannot be deceived; He sees the depth of our mind; He knows who is the true combatant, and who steals by fraud the honor which another truly deserves:" - St. Cyril of Alexandria
- As St.Cyril of Alexandria explains, although one may be able to deceive those around him/her, no one is able to deceive the Lord for He sees our hearts.
- "We ask You, O our Lord, grant us Your servants, throughout our lifetime on earth, and more especially at present, thoughts that do not recall to memory former evil deeds and a conscience without hypocrisy-, but grant us faithful thoughts and a heart full of brotherly love. So we may flee from any likeness to Judas the traitor as we give one another a spiritual kiss. And as we agree together in purity like Your holy disciples and apostles we become cleansed and sanctified through Your Holy Spirit." - Liturgy of St.Cyril
- As prayed by the priest in the Liturgy of St.Cyril, one should continually strive to flee from the likeness of Judas the traitor, who appeared to other disciples to be righteous, but actually betrayed Christ. Do not be betrayers of Christ by appearing righteous but doing unrighteous things in the dark. Expose sin so that one can be made pure and a bearer of the precious light of our Lord and Savior.
- Let nothing keep you from the Lord. No matter what you see, or hear, or feel about the actions of others, always remember that our life in the church is meant for the Lord. Let nothing, let nobody, let nothing keep you away from His love and tender grace and mercy.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 6.5: Unity

Building Block 6:  
Lifestyle Choices &  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

Understanding the importance and objective of unity amongst and within ourselves.

### Application

In your next conflict or talk that leads to gossip, attempt to direct the conversation towards resolution and unity.

### References



Scripture: [John 17](#), [1 Peter 3:8](#), [Philippians 2:2](#), [Psalm 133:1](#), [Mark 3:24](#), [Psalm 2:2-3](#), [Matthew 26:39](#), [1 Corinthians 1:10](#), [John 6:38](#), [Romans 15:3](#)



Liturgy: [Liturgy of St. Gregory](#)



Patristics: [St. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on John](#)



Story: [Schism of the Church, Suscpts](#)



Other: [Bishop Basil Sermon on Unity](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Resembling One, As the Trinity

- In John 17, Jesus prays to the father saying, “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as *We are*.” - John 17:11. In this verse, the Lord is speaking about the unity of the Trinity and repeats multiple times in His prayer “that the world may believe that You have sent Me”. Thus, the reason the Lord is praying for our unity is so that people may know that the One that we worship is the True God.
- Verses expressing the Lord’s desire of our unity:
- 1 Peter 3:8 “Finally, be all of one mind, having compassion one with another, love as brethren, be tender hearted, be courteous:”
- Philippians 2:2 “Fulfill you my joy, that you be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”
- Psalm 133:1 “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”
- Similarly in the Gregorian liturgy, the priest prays: “Grant your people oneness of heart.” St. Cyril emphasizes this notion in his commentary on John, saying, “He wishes indeed the disciples to be kept in unity of mind and purpose, being blended, as it were, with one another in soul and spirit and the bond of brotherly love; and to be linked together in an unbroken chain of affection, so that their unity may be so far perfected as that their elective affinity may resemble the natural unity which exists between the Father and the Son” - St. Cyril of Alexandria
- Not only does unity mean for us to be united together, but one first must be united within his/herself. One thought tells you, “stand and pray” the other thought tells you “go to sleep you are tired”. We have a thought that says “be faithful in your work” and another thought that says “cut some corners for efficiency”. We have to choose between these thoughts, we have to have a united way of thinking otherwise we will struggle to stay steadfast in the path we are walking on.

#### + Power of Unity

- When Christ says: “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand” - Mark 3:24, it illustrates how even the devil would dare not be disunited. In fact, one of the main aspects the devil attempts to attack is our unity among each other. Among churches, among friends, among spouses. This is precisely what King David says in Psalm 2: “Kings of the earth set themselves together, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and His anointed. ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.’” - Psalm 2:2-3
- An Ethiopian saying goes that “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion” - not religious, simply a phrase that nicely illustrates the power of uniting.
- A similar concept can be illustrated in the ‘tug of war’ rope pulling game. Exerting force at the same time (you can tie in some mathematical

concept of the sum of forces) is stronger than forces at different times.

- "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." - I Corinthians 1:10
- In the Christian faith, the idea of unity is what binds our faith. Without unity our faith ceases to exist because a house divided cannot stand.
- Sadly, The lack of unity is the reason why the Original Church of Christ is no longer one church. Every schism of the church has resulted from a lack of unity. These happened hundreds of years ago, but their effects can still be felt today. Each time began in what was seemingly a 'small little fox.' It is in the small things that we must ensure unity of mind, for in them can create a multitude of divisions that can be difficult to recover from.
- "Historically, the Church of Rome enjoyed communion with the Orthodox Church. In 1054 a schism between Rome and the other patriarchal sees resulted from widening differences between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. The cause of the schism was initially a dispute over papal authority and the soundness of theology surrounding the term filioque, a word which was added by the Western churches to the Creed without the consent of the Orthodox bishops." - Suscpts

#### + Humbly Unified

- Christ, being united to the Father, demonstrated many aspects and the character of a united individual:
- Obedience and Submission: "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." - Matthew 26:39. We each must aim for our will to be united with His will, just as Jesus did with the Father before his crucifixion. Similarly, Jesus again says, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. - John 6:38. If the Lord was able to submit and humble Himself in front of the Father's will, then so must we.
- Do not give in to any small causes of division. In I Corinthians 10:10, St. Paul says "Neither murmur you, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer." Gossip is a form of division. We are actively pinning individuals against one another when we gossip, it is directly against the spirit of unity. In order to rid ourselves of these divisions, we must be humbly unified. For gossip stems from a root of pride. It is important to remember that no one is perfect, rather everyone is working on the road of perfection, as Christ called us to do.
- Accepting Reproach of Those I unite myself with: "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." - Romans 15:3. In a similar fashion, we must be ready to take on the burdens of unity. Uniting with other means accepting the bad and the good, then working together, encouraging each other to persist through the path towards salvation. Thus, be ready to readily endure with one another; guiding, supporting, persevering.



# Building Block 7: Traditions, a Foundation of Orthodoxy

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 7.1: 'Scripture Alone'?

Building Block 7:  
Traditions, a  
Foundation of  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

Understand the concept of "Scripture Alone" and the Orthodox view on it.

### Application

Take the time when reading Scripture, or attending church services, to find the connection between the common things we pray every liturgy and what is written in scripture.

### References



**Scripture:** [2 Tim 3:16](#), [1 Cor 4:6](#), [Gal 1:8](#), [2 Tim 3:8](#), [Jude 9](#), [1 kings 17](#), [James 5:17](#) [2 Timothy 3:15-17](#) [2 Thess 2:15](#) [2 Thess 3:15](#) [John 21:25](#)



**Liturgy:** [First Hoos of midnight praises is in fact Exodus 15](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Athanasius](#) [St. Basil the Great](#) [Martin Luther](#)



**Story:** [What is the doctrine of Scripture Alone?](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Introduction to the Protestant Reformation

- Martin Luther, originally a Catholic monk in an Augustine Monastic Order, begins to correct the church in certain of their practices (for instance, the use of indulgences).
- The corruption was rampant, even doing things such as promising the people guaranteed absolution for any sin if the parishioner donated enough money to the church.
- After the church begins to ignore him, he writes 95 theses and posts them on the doors of the church. This is the start of the Protestant Reformation. Though many of Martin Luther's disagreements were valid, a new dogma of Sola Scriptura was formed and eventually became a formal principle of many Protestant Christian denominations.
- Martin Luther once expressed: "a simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it"
- Digging deeper into this concept, let's start with asking the question: "If I only read the Holy Bible, but never take the Holy Communion, can I expect salvation?"
- Discuss the sacraments being required for salvation, and ask if they read the Holy Bible only instead of practicing these sacraments, will they be saved? It is for this reason why we believe that Sola Scriptura is dangerous and misleading

#### + What is scriptures alone or sola scriptura?

- It is a doctrine believed in by the Protestant Denominations that means that the Bible is the Christian's only source of faith. It is often combined, if not always, with a belief that the scriptures will declare personally to the reader everything regarding the truth of the Gospel.
- Unfortunately, the main consequence of sola scriptura is division in the Church. This doctrine is the reason for the thousands of denominations that we see today within Protestant Christianity
- This stems from the fact that each of our Protestant brothers and sisters is permitted to say, "God told me so and so from the Bible."
- Surprisingly, the scriptures do not support a sola scriptura model. The verse used to support this belief is found in the 2nd epistle to St. Timothy, as St. Paul says: "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2Tim 3:15-17)
- This verse is saying we need the scriptures to be complete. But it doesn't say only the scriptures. What this verse is saying is that we cannot be complete without the scriptures.

### + Impact of Sola Scriptura

- The Impact of Sola Scriptura is that each person began to have their own interpretation of what the bible means, resulting in multiple different beliefs
- Over 30,000 denominations formed today, compared to the 2, Orthodox and Catholic
- Examples of the beliefs vary for different evangelical groups
  - Prosperity Gospel
  - Calvinist - Predetermination
  - Episcopal Church – Social beliefs
  - Imagine the Christian Protestant world constituted of many denominations. There are 4 different denominations that believe in sola scriptura. But each denomination holds a different faith from the others.
  - However, within each denomination the people hold the same faith. This is not because all those people read the Bible the same way, since most people that join the churches for the first time do not know their Bible.
  - The Christians within each denomination hold the same faith because they are taught the faith; each as per their respective traditions. In other words, the pastor when he is at the pulpit, he is teaching his Protestant tradition whether Evangelical or Pentecostal.
  - Different interpretations will cause confusion within the church.

### + Orthodox View on Scripture

- Inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16), interpreted by the Church (1 Cor 4:6) but not the sole teaching (as detailed in the Traditions lesson) though they has to be line with the totality of Scripture (Gal 1:8)
- The Bible is authoritative and given by the Holy Spirit: "As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses" (2 Timothy 3:8). Jude 9, a dispute is mentioned between the Archangel Michael and Satan over Moses' body - Neither of these references are found in the OT. Similarly in James 5:17 which recounts I Kings 17 but adds information not found (lack of rain for 3 years)
  - Augustine of Hippo: "The Scriptures are holy, they are truthful, they are blameless.... So we have no grounds at all for blaming Scripture if we happen to deviate in any way, because we haven't understood it. When we do understand it, we are right. But when we are wrong because we haven't understood it, we leave it in the right. When we have gone wrong, we don't make out Scripture to be wrong, but it continues to stand up straight and right, so that we may return to it for correction."
- Our church believes the Scripture must be interpreted by the Church in light of Holy Tradition (Councils, writing of the Fathers)
  - St. Athanasius of Alexandria, "Let us look at the very tradition, teaching, and faith of the catholic church from the very beginning, which the Logos gave (edoken), the Apostles preached (ekeryxan), and the Fathers preserved (ephyllaxan). Upon this the Church is founded (tethemeliotai)" (St. Athanasius, "First Letter to Serapion", 28)
  - "Of the dogmas and messages preserved in the Church, some we possess from written teaching and others we receive from the tradition of the apostles, handed on to us in mystery. St Basil
- The Holy Bible is part of Holy Tradition, but not outside of it. Supposing that Scripture and Tradition are two separate and distinct sources of Christian Faith, as some do, would be a mistake since there is, in reality, only one source; and the Holy Bible exists and found its formulation within Tradition.
- The Tradition of God, which the church embraces, accepts and depends upon these tradition which St, Paul refers to in 2 Thess, 2:15; "Therefore brethren, stand fast to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by epistle." and also "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us." (2 Thess. 3:15)
- It is the Tradition revealed by our Lord to the disciples during the fifty days after His Resurrection, which St. John refers to "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they should be written every one, is suppose even the world could not contain the books that should be written." (John 21:20)
- The church without Tradition is a church without roots, a church doomed to face relentless confusion and inevitable division.
  - The Scriptures are true, holy, just and good. But they were not meant to stand alone, their interpreter, and their writers of the Church through the Apostolic tradition, handed down from generation to generation.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 7.2: Holy Tradition, Evidence, and Its Benefits

Building Block 7:  
Traditions, a  
Foundation of  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

To emphasize the importance of tradition in our Orthodox faith.

### Application

The next time you come across a tradition in our church which you don't know the meaning of, seek answers from your Father of Confession.

### References



**Scripture:** [Luke 24:27](#), [Acts 1:3](#), [Matthew 15:2-3](#), [Mark 7:8,13](#), [Col 2:8](#), [2 Thess 2:25](#), [2 Thess 3:6](#), [John 21:25](#), [1 Cor 11:23](#), [Eph 2:20](#), [John 21:25](#), [2 John 12](#), [2 Thessalonians 2:15](#), [2 Thessalonians 3:6](#), [Gen 4:4](#), [8:20](#), [12:7](#), [Gen 14:20](#), [John 21:25](#), [1 Corinthians 11:1-2](#)



**Liturgy:** [Liturgy of St. Gregory, As it Was Response](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Basil, Concerning Baptism](#)



**Story:** [Comparative Theology, Pope Shenouda III](#)



**Other:** [The Holy Tradition, Fr. Barnabas](#), [Holy Tradition, SUS Article](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Necessity of Tradition in Orthodoxy

- Orthodox means conforming to what is generally or traditionally accepted as right or true; established and approved (Dictionary definition)
- But how does this apply to our church? In the interest of remaining as close as we can to Christ, we try and keep every aspect of our church the same generationally.
- Practicing the same services, prayers, traditions does not mean that the church is unwilling to adapt to certain circumstances, or problems. It just means that we try to stay true to the original church.
- The response signifies to us that we, the Orthodox people, are seeking Christ. Previously, Currently, and Into the next generation. As we say in the liturgy, "As it was and is, it will be - to generations of generations and to all the ages of ages. Amen."
- Tradition preserved for us the sound doctrines that were handed from one generation to the next. Tradition is every teaching, other than the Holy Bible, that reached us through the entrustment of the Apostles and the Fathers. St. Mark brought this tradition to Egypt and taught us about the Liturgy, worship, and other unwritten things... If the interpretation of the Bible was left to the comprehension of each individual, we would have various denominations not sharing the same faith.
- After the Resurrection, the Lord met the two disciples of Emmaus, and "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" - Luke 24:27
- The Lord spent forty days with His disciples after His Resurrection, speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God "...being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." - Acts 1:3
- We cannot believe that His teachings were lost since they are so important. The only way for these teachings to have reached us was through Tradition. Thus, it is through means of Tradition that the Church heritage, rituals, and disciplines have reached us. Tradition includes the Church canons and regulations, the writings of the Church Fathers, the decisions of the holy councils, beside the rituals and oral tradition.

#### + Tradition of Men (Not Christ's Desire)

- "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? - Matthew 15:2-3
- It is important to remember that it is our responsibility to follow the traditions which the Lord sets for us, but not to confuse them with traditions of men. Similar to the lesson about the scribes and pharisees, our actions must be aligned with our faith. Thus, the





commandment of God remains as the guide for our traditions and should be our priority.

- • “For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men– the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” - Mark 7:8,13
- This verse reiterates the message delivered in the first verse.
- “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” - Col 2:8
- The traditions which we are to follow are not meant to be traditions of the world, they are meant to be traditions which Christ has set in place. Thus, be careful not to think that all traditions should be followed, rather the traditions according to Christ’s word and traditions that are aligned with the scripture.
- Ecclesiastical Traditions: 2 Thess 2:25, 2 Thess 3:6, John 21:25, 1 Cor 11:23, Eph 2:20, John 21:25, 2 John 12

#### + Holy Tradition (Guided by Christ)

- “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” - 2 Thessalonians 2:15
- “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.” - 2 Thessalonians 3:6
- St Basil the great says concerning 2 Thessalonians 3:6: “[Paul] says, “Knowing this, that our old nature is crucified with him, that the body of sin may be destroyed to the end that we may serve sin no longer.” By these words we are taught that he who is baptized in Christ is baptized in his death, and is not only buried with Christ and planted together with him but is first of all crucified with him. Thus we are instructed that as he who is crucified is separated from the living, so also he who has been crucified with Christ in the likeness of his death is completely set apart from those who live according to the old nature. Hence the Lord commanded us to beware of false prophets, and the apostle says, “And we command you, brothers, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother walking disorderly and not according to the tradition which they have received of us.” The “old nature” mentioned by the apostle signifies all sin and defilement, taken individually and together, as if they represented his own members.”
- In the old testament, laws on sacrifices were only written after the exodus from Egypt, but it is important to note that the idea of sacrifices, the tradition thereof, began very early without any mention of where they were taught such things (Gen 4:4, 8:20, 12:7) or even on the priesthood (Gen 14:20)
- Even St. Paul knows the names of Jannes and Jambres, two sorcerers who resisted Moses in Exodus, but their names were not mentioned. This must have been known through tradition.
- The church is structured in a way that the people are exposed to both the new and old testaments, and we closely follow the life of Christ throughout the year specifically for this reason.

#### + Importance of Tradition

- There are, even in Scripture, many references to things that were passed on verbally by Christ but not written down (which can also be referenced in Pope Shenouda’s book “Comparative Theology, linked above) : “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” - John 21:25
- With this verse in mind, it is apparent that the Bible only gives us a small fraction of all the teachings which the Lord passed down to us. Thus, through tradition we can begin to discover and
- “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.” - 1 Corinthians 11:1-2
- Through this, we can recognize that it is our responsibility to hold reverence towards the traditions of our church, because that is what the Lord instructs us to do in the scripture.
- Now evaluate the reason we do everything in our spiritual lives. Why do we pray? Why do we read the bible? Why do we attend liturgy? Why do we go to Sunday School? The list goes on. One of the activities which should be included in this list is seeking to study, learn, and understand traditions, because this is part of the message which Christ has left for us on this earth and will, just like all the other activities, bring us closer to God.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 7.3: The Apostolic Tradition & The Patristic Tradition

Building Block 7:  
Traditions, a  
Foundation of  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

To understand the importance of knowing who our early church fathers are and why it is important to study their teachings.

### Application

When looking for insight to the Word of God, try using a resource such as the Catena Bible to read about the verse in question from the point of view of an early church father.

### References



Scripture: [John 21:25](#), [2 Timothy 2:2](#), [2 John 12](#), [3 John 13-14](#), [Titus 1:5](#), [Col 2:8](#)



Liturgy: [Commemoration of the Saints](#)



Patristics: [Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, III.4](#)



Story: [Life of St. Basil the Great](#)



Other: [The Apostolic Tradition - Coptic Orthodox Church \(suscopts.org\)](#)

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + What is Patristics and Who are the Fathers?

*Consider asking the students if they know names of any of the early church fathers.*

- Patristic Traditions come from Early Fathers and Desert Fathers who have expressed their teachings through many writings, through Ecumenical Councils and even liturgies.
- There are several teachings stemming out of Patristic Traditions: Homilies & Canons.
- Names of some of our early church fathers: St. Clement of Rome, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Polycarp of Smyrna, St. John the Philosopher, St. Irenaeus of Lyon, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. John Climacus, St. John Chrysostom (only some of the many)
- The fathers are commemorated in our liturgy, and some of their specific names are mentioned in the commemoration of the saints: "Our holy fathers the patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the preachers, the evangelists, the martyrs, the confessors and all the spirits of the righteous who were consummated in the faith." - Gregorian Liturgy
- Differentiate between Apostolic Traditions (traditions handed down by the Apostles themselves) and Patristics Traditions (Traditions handed down by the disciples of the Apostles and their subsequent disciples -Early Church Fathers)
- Apostolic traditions are directly handed from Christ to the disciples, and Patristic traditions are passed from Apostles to their disciples.

#### + Scripture and Tradition

- "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21)
- St. Paul says: "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2Tim 3:15-17)
- Source of Christian teaching: The Scripture - external writings (Didache) and others not written but orally (John 21:25) which are delivered through the Early Church Fathers.
- The Church considers the tradition as the second source of Christian teaching after the Holy Bible. It is historically accepted that Christian teachings in the early Church were through tradition before writing of any Book of The Holy Gospel or Epistles.
- This concept is key to understanding why the early church fathers matter. If we read something from the Holy Bible with our current

understanding taking into account societal factors and how we grew up, it can be mistaken for an alternative untrue meaning. We, therefore, can look to the teaching, writing, and explanations of the early church fathers who can clarify and explain the original scripture in a way that we may have not seen or understood before.

#### + The Value of Oral Tradition (of the Apostles and the Church Fathers) and Their Contributions to the Faith

- Many teachings are known to be oral and this is scripturally supported (2 Timothy 2:2, 2 John 12, 3 John 13-14, Titus 1:5 - here teaching on rites in a prior face to face meeting)
- Again we need to take a look at simple historical factors that play into this. The invention of the printing press didn't become common until the mid 1500s. The apostles started their ministries in the mid first century. There are 1400 years roughly between the start of the church and the ability to easily print books in moderate quantities.
- It would then stand to reason that the teaching of the church, the practices of the church such as Liturgical practices were all communicated to the disciples of the church orally. The passing down of this information was written over a long period of time by many people.
- Reading these insights from the early church fathers allow us to keep church tradition by staying true to the original church as much as we can.
- Colossians 2:8: Concerning this verse St. Cyril of Jerusalem says "True religion consists of these two elements: pious doctrines and virtuous actions. Neither does God accept doctrines apart from works, nor are works, when divorced from godly doctrine, accepted by God.... The knowledge of doctrines is a precious possession. There is a need of a vigilant soul, since there are many who would deceive you by philosophy and vain deceit."
- Examples of influence of the fathers:
  - St. Basil the Great wrote our most used Divine Liturgy.
  - They made major contributions to the definition of the Trinity finalized at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 and the final version of the Nicene Creed, finalized there.
  - They pass down truthful interpretations of the Word of God. The fathers outstandingly meditated on the Holy Bible, and through them we can gain a deeper understanding of the Lord's message to us.

#### + Why Study the Fathers' Teachings?

- "One should not seek among others the truth that can be easily gotten from the Church. For in her, as in a rich treasury, the apostles have placed all that pertains to truth, so that everyone can drink this beverage of life. She is the door of life." (Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, III.4)
- Irenaeus also wrote: "Those who explain scripture without the help of the Church traditions cut asunder the significant of the truth"
- St. Irenaeus emphasizes the importance of referring to the apostles in order to fully understand the truth. The Lord has gifted us with the fathers as pillars of our faith in order to open to us the doors of truthfully understanding His teachings.
- Doctrinal Reasons: their theological and scriptural insights are very valuable. The Patristics lived much closer to the days of the apostles, and they were forced to develop the apostolic teaching in response to the influx of various heresies and errors. Their formulation of trinitarian and christological doctrine was eminently biblical and foundational for true Christianity, and their homilies, apologetical and homiletical writings, and so on, contain innumerable valuable insights. For the Orthodox Church, the Fathers are a major source and authority alongside Holy Scripture and are venerated as such.
- Historical reasons: studying the Patristics gives us a much clearer understanding of the history of the Church
- Liturgical Reasons: The Patristic literature is the primary source material for reconstructing the early history of the liturgy. In addition to the texts of the liturgies, Patristic literature gives us such things as the descriptions of practices, quotations of early prayers, hymns, rituals, etc
- The Fathers of the Church are saints not only because of their vast knowledge, but also because of their deep spirituality. According to the teachings of the Church, there can be no real separation between theology and spirituality. The Fathers are examples to us by their conduct, way of life, and holiness
- Thus, it is through the Church traditions and the teachings of the early church fathers that we can grow closer to the Lord and nearer to the interpretation/meaning of His message for us.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 7.4: Being Coptic Orthodox: An Orthodox Identity

Building Block 7:  
Traditions, a  
Foundation of  
Orthodoxy



### Objective

This is intended as a discussion. The goal is to see that being Coptic Orthodox transcends being just Egyptian even though it is rooted in Egyptian heritage.

### Application

Go out there and make disciples, the Coptic Orthodox way

### References



Scripture: [Matthew 22:37-40](#); [Psalm 83](#); [Psalm 41:5](#); [Psalm 121:1](#); [Exodus 20:8-11](#); [John 3:16](#)



Liturgy: [Anaphora of St. Cyril Liturgy](#)



Patristics: [St. Augustine](#) and [St. Cyril of Jerusalem](#)



Story: [St. Paul](#)



Other: [Early Church Tradition](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Culture Defined

*Consider discussing what differentiates cultures: American Culture Vs. Egyptian Culture Vs. Orthodox Culture (Discuss what may be a norm in one but be an offense to the other; the difference in approaches towards dating for instance or morality - are they just different or there is a Right/Wrong?) (Potential similarities/differences: Music, Art, Customs, Language)*

- What is Culture? Culture is the learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors of a group of interacting people.
- Culture can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs, and institutions of a population that are passed down from generation to generation.
- Culture has been called "the way of life for an entire society." As such, it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, games, norms of behavior such as law and morality, and systems of belief as well as the art (Wikipedia, 2009).

#### + "Big C" culture & "Small c" culture

- "Big C" culture refers to that culture which is most visible. Some visible forms of culture include: Arts, music, literature, food, architecture, dance, history, etc.,
- When learning about a new culture, The "big C" cultural elements would be discovered first.
- "Little c" culture, in contrast, is the more invisible type of culture associated with a region, group of people, etc. Some examples of "little c" culture include communication styles, verbal and non-verbal language symbols, how to behave, myths and legends, cultural norms and social matters (what is proper and improper in social interactions), individualism vs collectivism, power distance etc.

#### + Mislabelling Holy Tradition for culture.

- Why do men and women sit on different sides of the church? The practice of separate seating has nothing to do with culture and has everything to do with maintaining a practice that has been around since even before the early Church.
  - The historical practice established by the apostles is for the men and women to be seated separately in the service. Separate seating has been the main practice in the church throughout the ages.
  - The apostles assigned by Jesus the task to help Him to "build my church." We are told to "stand fast and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." (II Thessalonians 2:15), therefore this apostolic established practice should be retained. Early Church Fathers wrote about that and supported it.
  - St. Augustine says, "[See] the masses flock to the churches and their chaste acts of worship, where a seemly separation of the

sexes is observed; where they learn how they may so spend this earthly life, as to merit a blessed eternity hereafter; where Holy Scripture and instruction in righteousness are proclaimed from a raised platform in presence of all, that both they who do the word may hear to their salvation, and they who do it not may hear to judgment. "

- St. Cyril of Jerusalem says, "Let men be with men, and women with women. For now I need the example of Noah's ark, in which were Noah and his sons, and his wife and his sons' wives. For though the ark was one, and the door was shut, yet things had been suitably arranged. If the Church is shut, and you are all inside, yet let there be a separation, men with men, and women with women, lest the pretext of salvation become an occasion of destruction. Even if there be a fair pretext for sitting near each other, let passions be put away." (Protocatechesis, 14, NPNF 2:7)

- Why don't we use the common musical themes that we see in protestant churches?

- The early Church Fathers almost all of them objected the use of musical instruments in churches
- The most important instrument is the heart. St. Augustine says, "praise the Lord, presenting unto Him your bodies a living sacrifice. Let your members be servants to the love of God, and of your neighbor, in which are kept both the three and the seven commandments."
- According to St. Didymus the blind, in the harp, the tunes come from its lower extremity, referring to the body which was created from the earth; Whereas, in the instrument with ten strings, the tunes come from its higher extremity, referring to the soul, soaring high up in the heavenlies with the spirit of thanksgiving.
- Justin Martyr says, "The use of singing with instrumental music was not received in the Christian churches, as it was among the Jews in their infant state, but only the use of plain song." (Justin Martyr, quoted in Bingham, Antiquities of the Christian Church, vol. I, p. 189).
- St. Clement of Alexandria says, "The Spirit, distinguishing from such revelry the divine service, sings, Praise Him with the sound of trumpet; for with sound of trumpet He shall raise the dead. Praise Him on the psaltery; for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord. And praise Him on the lyre. By the lyre is meant the mouth struck by the Spirit, as if it were by a plectrum. Praise with the timbrel and the dance, refers to the Church meditating on the resurrection of the dead in the resounding skin. Praise Him on the chords and organ. Our body He calls an organ, and its nerves are the strings, by which it has received harmonious tension, and when struck by the Spirit, it gives forth human voices. Praise Him on the clashing cymbals. He calls the tongue the cymbal of the mouth, which resounds with the pulsation of the lips. Therefore He cried to humanity, Let every breath praise the Lord, because He cares for every breathing thing which He has made. For man is truly a pacific instrument; while other instruments, if you investigate, you will find to be warlike, inflaming to lusts, or kindling up amours, or rousing wrath... The one instrument of peace, the Word alone by which we honor God, is what we employ. We no longer employ the ancient psaltery, and trumpet, and timbrel, and flute..." (Clement of Alexandria, Paedagogus 2.4).

- Does the liturgy have to be this long?

- The Liturgy is the central and most important act in the Orthodox Church because we all stand before the throne of God participating together in prayer, teaching, worship, and finally receiving the Holy Communion, the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Divine Liturgy is normally three hours long on a typical Sunday and is meant to prepare us to receive the Body and Blood of our Savior.
- Christ told us 'about the need to pray continually and never lose heart' (Luke 18:1). The Church has faithfully observed this exhortation by never ceasing in her prayer and by urging us to pray: 'Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.' (Hebrews 13:15). The Church not only satisfies this precept by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other different ways, especially the prayers of the hours, midnight praises etc.,

+ The Day of the Lord: Culture of Tradition?

- Why is coming to Orthodox church on Sunday seen as vital, where other denominations get to stay at home and watch church online or on TV Every week?
- Sometimes people ask this question to justify their laziness. As we look at our fellow Christians and our society, we observe that everyone is short of time and stressed. One reason is that many of us have forgotten the meaning of Sunday.
- For Christians, Sunday, the Lord's Day, is a special day consecrated to the service and worship of God. It is "the day the Lord has made" (Ps. 117 (118):24). Its nature is holy and joyful. Sunday is the day on which we believe God acted decisively to liberate the world from the tyranny of sin, death, and corruption through the Holy Resurrection of Jesus.
- Sunday is more than just the first day of the week. In our faith we see how it is the ultimate day of new beginnings: "It is Easter which

returns week by week, celebrating Christ's victory over sin and death, the fulfillment in Him of the first creation and the dawn of "the new creation" (2 Cor 5:17).

- The Lord's Day is the day after the last day of the week and so it symbolizes eternity as well: what St. Augustine calls "a peace with no evening (Confessions 13:50)." St. Basil the Great in his Treatise on the Holy Spirit writes, "Sunday seems to be an image of the age to come... This day foreshadows the state which is to follow the present age: a day without sunset, nightfall or successor, an age which does not grow old or come to an end (On the Holy Spirit 26:77)."
- The requirement of frequent church attendance is not man-made, but it was one of the Ten Commandments, (Exodus 20:8-11)
- As affirmed by the word of the Lord, "Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40). Can we truly fulfill these commandments without going to church? If we love someone, do not we try to see this person as often as possible?
- David, the Prophet and King is a great example for us, Psalm 83, Psalm 41:5, Psalm 121:1
- In the church, He Himself is present in His Body and Blood. In the church, He revives us in Baptism. In the church, God forgives us our sins in the Mystery of Confession, He gives us His own self in the most holy Communion.
- The primacy of Sunday is affirmed by the liturgical practice of the early church. St. Justin the Martyr writing around 150 AD notes that "it is on Sunday that we assemble because Sunday is the first day, the day on which God transformed darkness and matter and created the world and the day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead (First Apology, 67)." Sunday has always had a privileged position in the life of the church as a day of worship and celebration. It is the perpetual first day of the new creation, a day of rejoicing.
- Ignatius says, "Try to gather together more frequently to celebrate God's Eucharist and to praise him. For when you meet with frequency, Satan's powers are overthrown and his destructiveness is undone by the unanimity of your faith. There is nothing better than peace, by which all strife in heavenly and earthly spirits is cast out"

#### + Relating our Orthodox Identity with our Culture

*Consider this discussion: What makes us Coptic Orthodox? [Faith, Church, Tradition, Education, Culture?] Where are the Balances and/or challenges between Culture, Tradition and Faith? How does all this impact our interaction with Society?*

- Cultural differences may impact the way of communication and misunderstanding among people from different cultures (American vs Egyptian). However, we may all have the same values, founded on our Biblical values and God's commandments and teachings, when it comes to our Orthodox Culture
- We ought to value our identity in Christ more than our cultural identity.
- There is Diversity in Scripture: Ephesians 2:14-19; Acts 2:5; 8:27; 10:28; 1 Corinthians 12:24 – yet Christ's body is one.
- Salvation was offered to everyone, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)
- As we pray the Anaphora of St. Cyril Liturgy and say, "You are He who created man according to Your own image and likeness; and created everything in Your wisdom-Your true light Your Only-Begotten Son, our Lord, God and Savior, and King of us all, Jesus Christ, through Whom we give thanks, and offer unto You with Him and the Holy Spirit the Holy consubstantial and indivisible Trinity this logical sacrifice and this bloodless service. ***This which all the nations offer unto You from where the sun rises to where it sets***, and from the north to the south For great is Your name O Lord, among all the nations, and in all places sweet incense and pure sacrifices are offered to Your Holy Name
- Revelation 7:9-10 paints a beautiful picture of the very diverse children of God, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"
- Cultures are relative and no culture is any better than or superior to another. Therefore, we should not allow our cultural differences to become points of conflicts or controversies. Rather, we ought to learn about others' backgrounds to reach them where they are.
- The great example of St. Paul who had great understanding of people's culture, as we read in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, "and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*."
- And as we read in Acts 17 and how he met the philosophers where they are, "Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.



# Building Block 8: Know Your Church

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 8.1: Brief History of the Establishment of the Church by St. Mark

Building Block 8:  
Your Church



### Objective

Understanding the sacrifice of St. Mark the Apostle to start the church in Alexandria.

### Application

Realize that we can follow the examples of the martyrs and keep the faith no matter the obstacles we face in daily life.

### References



Scripture: [2 Timothy 3:12](#), [1 Peter 4:14-16](#), [Matthew 5:10](#)



Liturgy: [The commemoration of the saints in the midnight praises](#), [The Hymn of the Intercessions](#)



Patristics: [The Tertullian Project](#), [The Tertullian Project II](#)



Story: [St. Mark the Apostle](#)



Other: [In Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers "Martyrdom of Mark."](#) [In The Mythological Acts of the Apostles](#) [History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church of Alexandria.](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

*Review Chapter 1 and 2 of The Tertullian Project Reference*

#### + What happened after the Lord Jesus's Ascension?

- In the time of the dispensation of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, after his Ascension into heaven, all the countries were allotted among the apostles, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that they might preach in them the words of the good tidings of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- After some time a lot fell on St. Mark the evangelist to go to the province of Egypt, and the great city of Alexandria, by the command of the Holy Spirit.
- He was called to go there, so the people can hear the words of the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and confirm them therein; for they were doing wrong in the sight of the Lord. They were worshiping idols instead of the Lord Jesus.
- Tradition teaches us that It was in his house in the upper room that our Lord Jesus Christ had the Last Supper. After Jesus ascension St. Mark started preaching the Gospel with St. Peter in Jerusalem and Judea, and with St. Paul in Antioch, Cyprus and Asia Minor, Colossi and Rome.
- St. Mark performed many miracles; he healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, and cast out demons by the grace of God which descended upon him.
- Many believed in the Lord Christ through him, and broke their idols which they used to worship, and all the trees which the devils used to haunt, and from which they addressed the people.
- He baptized them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the One God.
- The Holy Spirit then said he needs to leave and go to Alexandria.
- St. Mark was an Evangelist—one of the four men who wrote the Gospels in the New Testament and was not one of the twelve Apostles.

#### + Starting with One Simple Encounter: St. Mark transforms Egypt

- St. Mark is the founder of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He is the first of the unbroken chain of 117 patriarchs. St. Mark was of Jewish parents. He was born in a city called Pentapolis on the Northern African coast, west of Egypt. His family moved to Jerusalem where he met our Lord Jesus Christ.
- After St. Mark left Rome he went to Egypt in 61A.D. St. Mark entered the city of Alexandria, from the east from the five-western cities. St. Mark



began wandering in the streets and roads of Alexandria; he kept walking all day until the straps of his sandals were torn. He went to a cobbler (shoemaker) called Ananias to mend them for him. After greeting him, he gave him his sandals and the shoemaker worked on them while St. Mark waited. Suddenly the awl pricked the shoemaker's hand and he screamed in pain saying "O One God". At this moment, inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Mark felt that the divine providence had caused this incident to happen, in order to pave his way in the land of the Pharaohs. He spat on the ground and made a piece of mud and rubbed Ananias' hand with it saying, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ this hand would return whole". At once the wound healed as if nothing happened.

- Ananias was surprised at what happened and St. Mark interrupted his surprise and asked him: "What do you know about the One God Whom you mentioned?" Ananias replied, "I only hear about Him, but I don't know Him." St. Mark began to talk to him about the Lord Jesus, His birth of Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, His life, service, teachings, and miracles. As Ananias finished mending the sandals and St. Mark was ready to go Ananias invited him to visit his house so that he might give his family his blessings.
- St. Mark accepted the invitation, and on entering the house he talked to them all about the Lord Jesus Christ and their need to believe in Him for the sake of their own salvation. He also cured their sick by the power of Jesus Christ. Ananias and all his family believed in Christ, and St. Mark baptized them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus the family of the simple shoemaker was the first in Egypt to join the Christian faith.
- St. Mark made Ananias' house a center for preaching the word of salvation. Many people gathered to hear his teachings, and many people -Egyptians and Greek- believed in Jesus Christ
- When the number of people that believed in the Lord multiplied, and the people of the city heard that a man who was a Jew and a Galilean had entered their city, wishing to overthrow the worship of the idols, their gods, and had persuaded many to abstain from serving them, they sought him everywhere; and they appointed men to watch for him.
- So when St. Mark knew that they were conspiring together, he ordained Anianus bishop of Alexandria, and also ordained three priests and seven deacons, and appointed these eleven to serve and to comfort the faithful brethren so he could leave.
- St. Mark then departed from among them, and went to Pentapolis, and remained there two years, preaching and appointing bishops and priests and deacons in all their districts.
- St. Mark returned to Alexandria, and found that the brethren had been strengthened in the faith, and had multiplied by the grace of God.
- The brethren had found means to build a church in a place called the Cattle-pasture, near the sea, beside a rock from which stone is hewn. So St. Mark greatly rejoiced at this; and he fell upon his knees, and blessed God for confirming the servants of the faith, whom he had himself instructed in the doctrines of the Lord Jesus and because they had turned away from the service of idols.

#### + Evangelism: St. Mark's lifestyle

- The symbol for Mark is a lion with wings. That is because his Gospel begins with the story of John the Baptist, a "voice crying in the wilderness" (Mark 1:3), like the roaring of a lion.
- His famous story with lion, as related to us by Severus Ebn-El-Mokafa, St. Mark
- St. Mark left Alexandria for Pentapolis about AD 65 in North Africa (now Libya and Tunisia) to visit the churches there. On his way to Pentapolis he visited Ancient Cairo (Babylon) and some towns in Upper Egypt. He received a letter from St. Paul calling him to go to Rome to help him in his preaching especially after he had known of his sincere service in Egypt and Africa.
- It is well known that St. Mark was one of those who laid the foundations of the Church of Rome, and his name is mentioned in the epistle to the Colossians and the epistle to the Philippians, which were written by St. Paul.
- There is evidence that St. Mark not only went to Rome but he also went to Venice where he established its church. After his death, his head was buried in a big Cathedral bearing his name. It was St. Mark who preached them, saved them from darkness and brought them to light as the tradition states.
- Paul the apostle himself bore witness to St. Mark, in his epistle to Timothy when he was the apostle of the nations. He said: "He (Mark) is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). He also sent the Colossians letters of recommendations so that they might receive him and welcome him when he came to them. We see now that St. Mark evangelized in Asia (Colossi), Europe (Rome and Venice), Africa (Egypt and Libya), Cyprus, Lebanon and Syria.

#### + Why was St. Mark Martyred?

- The unbelievers found out that St. Mark had returned to Alexandria, they were filled with fury on account of the works which the believers in Christ did such as healing the sick, and driving out devils, and loosing the tongues of the dumb, and opening the ears of the deaf, and cleansing the lepers; and they became more angry and agreed to find St. Mark quickly.
- In the year 68 AD, Easter fell on the same day as the Serapis feast. The furious mob gathered in the Serapis temple at Alexandria and then

descended on the Christians who were celebrating the Glorious Resurrection at Baucalis. St. Mark was seized and dragged with a rope through the main streets of the city. Crowds were shouting "The ox must be led to Baucalis," a precipitous place full of rock where they fed the oxen that were used in the sacrifice to idols.

- At nightfall the saint was thrown into prison, where he was cheered by the vision of an angel, strengthening him saying, "Now your hour has come O Mark, the good minister, to receive your recompense. Be encouraged, for your name has been written in the book of life." When the angel disappeared, St. Mark thanked God for sending His angel to him. Suddenly, the Savior Himself appeared and said to him, "Peace be to you Mark, my disciple and evangelist!" St. Mark started to shout, "O My Lord Jesus" but the vision disappeared.
- On the following morning probably during the triumphal procession of Serapis he was again dragged around the city till death. His bloody flesh was torn, and it was their intention to cremate his remains, but the wind blew and the rain fell in torrents and the populaces dispersed. Christians stole his body and secretly buried him in a grave that they had engraved on a rock under the altar of the church.
- St. Ambrose discusses Matt 5:10 when he says "Otherwise; the first kingdom of heaven was promised to the Saints, in deliverance from the body; the second, that after the resurrection they should be with Christ. For after your resurrection you shall begin to possess the earth delivered from death, and in that possession shall find comfort."
- This is how St. Mark lived his life, to win the kingdom of heaven and to be with Christ Jesus.
- We commemorate St. Mark in every liturgy in the commemoration of the saints and likewise in the midnight praises.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 8: Your Church



## Lesson 8.2: Statement of Faith: The Nicene Creed

### Objective

Learning the roots and reasonings of the Orthodox Creed.

### Application

The next time the creed is prayed in a church service/agpeya, contemplate in the words you are praying and not just recite it with emotionless memorization.

### References



Scripture: [John 3:31](#)



Liturgy: [Orthodox Creed](#)



Patristics: [St. Athanasius of Alexandria](#); [St. Athanasius](#)



Theology Academy:

[Was Jesus fully God? - 4th Century \(Church History\)](#)



Other: [St. Athanasius the Apostolic](#) [The Orthodox Creed](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + The Arian Heresy:

- The soldier who marches at the head of an army of fighters carries the flag and raises it to fix it at the highest spot. He may be wounded; he may die and become a martyr. In case this happens, another soldier succeeds in raising the flag and declaring victory. Similarly, our faith came to us through the saints' struggle and the martyrs' blood.
- The main part of the Orthodox Creed was set by the Council of Nicene in AD 325. There were 318 Bishops who attended that Council and Pope Alexanderos, together with St. Athanasius the Apostolic (who was a deacon at the time), represented the Coptic Church. The Council was held to discuss the Arian heresy.
- Arius, a Christian presbyter in Alexandria, Egypt. Arian theology holds that the Son of God is not co-eternal with God the Father and is distinct from the Father (therefore subordinate to him). In other words, that Christ was not the Everlasting Son of God, but that He was created as any other man. However, as in mainstream Trinitarianism, Arianism holds that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who was begotten by God the Father.
- The Arian heresy spread throughout all of Egypt, Libya, Palestine and Asia Minor, and reached the ears of Constantine. The argument between the old patriarch and Arius was spreading like wildfire quickly.
- The Emperor summoned all of the bishops (about 1800) to meet in Nicea, Asia Minor to discuss the dispute and settle it once- and-for-all. It was the first Ecumenical Council with imperial authority and sanction. Because the heresy had not yet reached Europe, only six bishops represented the Western Church. The rest of the 318 bishops came from the East including the Metropolitan of India, which was outside the Empire. It was difficult to overlook the signs of disfigurement and mutilation. The bishops of the Council represented all the varying traditions of Christianity.
- St. Athanasius defended the Godhead of Christ and succeeded in having the Council's agreement to issue a creed to excommunicate Arius and dismiss him. Then he put the Orthodox Creed till the beginning of "Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit".
- This Creed was completed in the second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (381 AD) convened by 150 Bishops against Macedonious' heresy against the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus (431 AD), convened by 200 Bishops against Nestor's heresy, added the introduction to the Creed. This Creed is shared by all the churches the world over.
- Many of these bishops had been victims of the persecution of Diocletian, the predecessor of Constantine.
- "One who denies that Christ is God cannot become his temple [of the Holy Spirit]" (*Letters 73:12 [A.D. 253]*). St. Cyprian of Carthage

#### + St. Athanasius, young and knowledgeable

- The first Ecumenical Council took place at Nicea in 325 AD to discuss the Arian Heresy. At the Council the bishops pronounced Arianism to be a heresy and they reaffirmed the true faith of the Apostles.
- Pope Alexander, noticed a young teenager named St. Athanasius. Pope Alexander loved him and guided his formal education and also served as his mentor in the things of the Church. St. Athanasius grew in wisdom and knowledge.
- Though St. Athanasius was only a deacon at this time St. Athanasius played an important role in the proceedings at the Council where the bishops pronounced Arianism to be a heresy and they reaffirmed the true faith of the Apostles.
- There was a need for a short summary of the faith to which those who were baptized could subscribe. Some of the earliest Christian creeds were written for this reason. The great heresies in early church history prompted the writing of the Creed. The “Nicene Creed” is the one formulated by St. Athanasius (the 20th Pope of Alexandria), the Hero of the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in the 4th century (324 AD).
- St. Athanasius's commentary regarding the Nicene Creed “While [the Arians], like men sprung from a dunghill, truly "spoke from the earth" [John 3:31], the bishops [of Nicea], not having invented their phrases for themselves, but having testimony from their fathers, wrote as they did. For ancient bishops, of the great Rome and our city [i.e., Alexandria, Egypt, where Athanasius was bishop], some 130 years ago, wrote and censured those who said that the Son was a creature and not consubstantial with the Father.”
- When Pope Alexander died St. Athanasius was chosen as his successor. As the new Patriarch of Alexandria and Egypt, he worked zealously for the good of the Church and was known as the defender of our faith.

#### + The Nicene Creed Clarifies

- There is a difference between sonship among people and the Sonship of Christ to God. The human father is older than his son and each one of them is separated from the other but Christ is Consubstantial with the Father everlasting and of the Same Essence. He said about himself, “I and the Father are One.”
- The human language does not contain any words that can indicate the conformity and unity except “the Father and the Son”, that is why Christ is the “Son” but there is a big difference: “He is the only Begotten Son of the Father before all ages”.
- There is another simile that can be used, i.e. the coming forth of the light out of a lamplight is generated but not through flesh
  - Light of Light: He is of the same nature and essence of the Father. God is Love and we knew love through His Son. There is no difference in Essence
  - Begotten not created: As water flows out of a spring and runs through a canal but the water is one, the same is true of the Son begotten of the Father before all ages.
  - In one essence with the Father: The Scripture says: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1-3)

#### + The Creed Establishes:

- The Nicene Creed (“Orthodox Creed”) is the statement of faith of the Coptic Orthodox Church, written in the early fourth century by one of the Coptic Church’s most important figures St. Athanasius.
- The main facts of faith, as stated in the Creed, have existed since before the official form of this Creed. Some of these facts were included in the laws of the Apostles, the laws of Apollides, and in some sayings of the early church fathers.
- The Creed includes the following main facts of the Christian faith:
  - The oneness of God
  - The Holy Trinity, the Godhead, and the role of the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit
  - The Incarnation, Redemption, and Salvation
  - Baptism for the remission of sins
  - The resurrection of the dead and the life to come in eternity
  - The second coming of Christ for judgment
  - The One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Building Block 8: Your Church



### Lesson 8.3: The School of Alexandria

#### Objective

Highlight the importance of learning to the early Christians by focusing on the school of Alexandria.

Spark an eager interest in learning, reading, and exploring our beautiful faith.

#### Application

Seek to learn spiritual matters educationally. You may tell them about the theological program such as the SUS TSP program.

#### References



**Scripture:** [2 Timothy 2:15](#); [Proverbs 12:1](#); [18:15](#); [16:16](#); [Matthew 28:19-20](#); [Titus 2:1](#); [Acts 5:42](#); [Psalm 119:15-16](#); [1 Peter 3:15](#);



**Liturgy:** [The Liturgy of the Word](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Jerome](#); [St. Clement of Alexandria](#)



**Story:** [Didymus the Blind](#)



**Theology Academy:**

[The Largest Early Christian School - 3rd Century \(Church ...](#)



**Other:** [Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. The School of Alexandria: Book 1 Before Origen](#), [Malaty, Fr. Tadros Y. The School of Alexandria: The School of Alexandria: Book 2 Origen, Evangelism and the School of Alexandria, An Introduction to the School of Alexandria, 3rd Century | School of Alexandria](#)



#### Body Overview Bullet Points

##### + Importance of theological schools

- We were commanded by Christ to make disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” [Matthew 28:19-20](#)
- We have to be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;” [1 Peter 3:15](#)
- The Bible teaches us to seek learning, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” [2 Timothy 2:15](#)
- “Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates correction is stupid.” [Proverbs 12:1](#)
- “The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.” [Proverbs 18:15](#)
- “How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.” [Proverbs 16:16](#)
- “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine:” [Titus 2:1](#)
- “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” [Acts 5:42](#)
- “I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.” [Psalm 119:15-16](#)
- God's word is a living word, so the church has prepared five readings for each Liturgy; the Pauline Epistle, the Catholic Epistle, the Acts (Praxis), the Synaxarium, and the Gospel. These readings provide an opportunity for Biblical contemplation and teaching.

##### + A Pride of Egypt: The School of Alexandria

- Earliest Christian School in the World & traditionally known that it was instituted by St. Mark and assigned St. Justus as the Dean
- Long before the establishment of Christianity in Alexandria, the city was famous for its many schools. The two principal libraries of

Alexandria were in the Bruchium, the distinguished palace area where the Museum stood, and the Serapeum, the magnificent temple of Serapis, built by Ptolemy III. The number of rolls or "books" is estimated to have numbered between 400,000 and 700,000.

- In the School of Alexandria, Egyptian Priests, Jewish Rabbis, Magi from Persia, brahmins and Buddhist monks from India, Gnostic Christians, Druids and Shamans, met in an atmosphere of inclusiveness and mutual respect. And thus, Alexandria became the birthplace of the Hermetic and Alchemical Arts and was a unique flowering of the cultural and esoteric learning in the ancient world.
- Because of these institutions, Alexandria soon became famous as a rich center of knowledge. Therefore, it is not astonishing that Alexandria early became a Christian intellectual center.
- St. Jerome records that the Christian School of Alexandria was founded by St. Mark himself. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to establish it to teach Christianity, as this was the only way to give the new religion a solid foundation in the city.
- The Bruchium was accidentally set on fire when Caesar burned the fleet in the harbor, but many rolls were rescued. The Bruchium quarter was destroyed by Aurelian in 273; About 390 AD Emperor Theodosius ordered the destruction of the Serapeum Temple. The Muslim Caliph `Omar of Demascus finally destroyed the remainder of the library, because, as he said of the books: "They will either contradict the Quran, in which case they are heresy, or they will agree with it, so they are superfluous." So enormous was the volume of literature that it took six months for it all to be burnt to ashes.

#### + Center of Learning, yet the school did not have a building for the longest time and often met underground

- This Christian School started as a Catechetical School, where candidates were admitted to learn the Christian faith and some Biblical studies to qualify for baptism. The deans were in fact catechists.
- Origen describes the catechist's functions in more than one of his books. He had both to teach doctrine and to give instructions on the Christian life. "If you want to receive Baptism," Origen says, "you must first learn about God's Word, cut away the roots of your vices, correct your barbarous wild lives and practice meekness and humility. Then you will be fit to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit."
- Marked by Diversity, Economic Poverty, and Radical Generosity – Students came from all over the world, from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. Teachers sacrificed to make this possible. One head of school, Origen, lived in total poverty and once sold his own small library to make ends meet (Eusebius' Hist. Eccl. 6.3.9). He never received a paycheck.
- Even blind students were able to attend and learn, thanks to a raised-alphabet system using carved wood, fifteen centuries before the Braille system, introduced by the blind Didymus, Head, during the time of St. Athanasius.
- Students were Broadly Educated – Students and teachers were encouraged to engage deeply with the various philosophies of the day. Heads of school were well-versed in the thought of Aristotelian and Middle Platonic philosophy, and Jewish philosophical exegesis.
- Christ was at the Center – The school took a whole-life approach to Christian virtue, with Jesus Christ at the center. Students were taught a regular practice of study, prayer and the disciplines of the Christian life, including fasting, purity, integrity, and a life of celibacy until marriage. To just give a flavor of the Christ-centered focus, read this brief passage from Clement of Alexandria, the school's head from AD 192-203: "It is time for us in due course to say who our Instructor is. He is called Jesus. Sometimes he calls himself a shepherd, and says, "I am the good shepherd." According to a metaphor drawn from shepherds, who lead the sheep, is hereby understood the Instructor, who leads the children—the Shepherd who tends the babes. For babes are simple, being figuratively described as sheep. "And they shall all," it is said, "be one flock, and one shepherd." The Word, then, who leads the children to salvation, is appropriately called The Instructor (Paedagogue)."

#### + Great Teachers emerged from this school:

- The school was able to satisfy the thirst of the Alexandrian Christians for religious knowledge, encourage higher studies and create research work in a variety of fields
- The first certain head of the school was Pantaenus c.180. Besides being a great teacher, he was credited as one of those who adopted the Greek alphabet in the Coptic script
- His successor was Clement of Alexandria (c.150 A.D.- c.215 A.D.), his most illustrious pupil, and the first systematic teacher of Christian doctrine. As such he was and is revered as one of the old Fathers. Amongst his disciples were the great Origen and Alexander who would become archbishop of this city and a supporter of Athanasius' fight for orthodoxy.
- Origen was the dean of the school at the age of 17 and wrote commentary on the entire Bible. He undertook this great work to vindicate the Septuagint version of the Bible. It was Origen that gave the School of Alexandria the high character it enjoyed for biblical studies.
- St. Athanasius, saint and doctor of the Church, stands out on the pages of Church history as the greatest champion of the mystery of the Incarnation
- St. Didymus the Blind was revered as the foremost Christian scholar of the fourth century and an influential spiritual leader. He became entirely blind at age four. From his youth, he prayed earnestly not for his physical eyesight, but for the illumination of the heart. In a short

time he became one of the most educated men of his day, with a great knowledge of grammar, rhetoric, logic, music, arithmetic, and geometry, and a perfect familiarity with Holy Scripture, knowing much of it by heart. He was placed at the head of the famous catechetical school of Alexandria. Under his leadership, the school was open for blind students to study through a system in which reading letters were engraved into the surface of wood. This learning process of Didymus was the precursor of Louis Braille who invented the educational system of reading embossed dots by touch.

- St. Jerome often spoke of Didymus not as the blind but as “the Seer.” He also said about him, “He surpassed all of his day in knowledge of the Scriptures.”
- After Didymus, an obscure period in the history of the School followed. Its greatest days were over. After the first split of the Church which happened as a result of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the emperor of Constantinople closed the School as an avenue of persecution against the Copts.

#### + Who was Archdeacon Habib Guirguis and how was he involved with the School of Alexandria?

- Under the leadership of Pope Kyrillos the V, the School reopened in 1893 AD which was eventually led by Archdeacon Habib Guirguis
- Pope Kyrillos V appointed the late Deacon Habib Girgis, who was the first graduate of the seminary, as the dean of the theological seminary.
- He dedicated his life to the seminary and its improvement. Deacon Habib Girgis assisted the Pope in expanding its buildings in Mahmasha.
- Pope Kyrillos often visited the seminary and blessed its students.
- This deacon was a skillful speaker. He accompanied the Pope in his pastoral visits to Upper Egypt and Sudan.
- He translated many religious books from foreign languages to Arabic and published El- Karma periodical, to spread the facts of the faith in a positive way.
- The School of Alexandria was one of the most important sources of theological knowledge of Christianity. It became a center for evangelism and theological research. Although it does not exist today in its original form, the teachings and practices of the School are very much alive in the modern mind of the Coptic Church and its leaders.
- This school endured under intense persecution for 350 years. Of the nearly 20 heads of school, at least three died as martyrs. Many others were affected personally by persecution: for example, while Clement of Alexandria was a young head of school, his father was beheaded during the persecution of Septimius Severus of 202.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 8.4: The Three Ecumenical Councils

Building Block  
8: Your Church



### Objective

Knowing our Faith has been scrutinized through history and answers to all questions can be found.

### Application

If someone asked you to define your faith as a Christian, what would you answer? The Nicene Creed gives a full and adequate answer. Try to take it apart, line by line, and examine its magnificence.

Dionysius; Irenaeus

### References



**Scripture:** [Matthew 18:17](#); [Acts 15](#); [John 1:14](#); [John 10:30](#); [John 8:58](#); [Isaiah 8:6](#); [Hebrews 1:8](#); [Revelation 1:8](#)



**Liturgy:** [The Confession](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Ignatius](#); [Justin Martyr](#); [Dionysius](#); [St. Irenaeus](#)



**Story:** [Life of Athanasius the Great](#)



**Other:** [Servants Preparation Program, The Ecumenical Councils, A Brief History of the Christian Church, Fourth October the Ecumenical Councils](#)

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

- + Introduction: The idea of an ecumenical council is that it is a gathering of leaders of the whole church (oikoumene - inhabited world or household in Greek) to determine doctrine and/or practical matters.
  - The Council of Jerusalem: In the early Church a question arose concerning Gentile converts to the Faith. Some within the Church believed these new converts should follow Jewish dietary restrictions and the law of circumcision.
  - The issue threatened to divide the Church as strongly opinionated groups formed around Saint James the Less, bishop of Jerusalem, who believed in Circumcision as a necessity, and St. Paul, who argued that Christ fulfilled the Law and therefore circumcision was no longer required.
  - In order to resolve the conflict, the apostles gathered in Jerusalem, where after some debate, Peter spoke on the issue in favor of not requiring circumcision and dietary restrictions of the Gentiles. James agreed but proposed Gentile converts follow the law of “strangers among the Jews”.
  - James’ amendment was accepted, and the apostles decided to announce their decision by sending Paul, Barnabas, and a few other men with letters to Antioch to inform the Christian community in the city.
  - The council of Jerusalem was an important event in the life of the Church since it set the procedures for how disagreements and questions of importance were decided by the Church’s leadership.
  - This “council” is not listed among the ecumenical councils in Church history because it was an apostolic gathering and significantly pre-dates the ecumenical meetings. Who presided over each? Who was present? What was decided? Do Christians always agree about everything? Even as early as the first century there was disagreement – but one Church.
- + The First: The Council of Nicaea – 325 AD
  - This first gathering of the bishops of the Church met in the imperial city to discuss the teaching of the Egyptian priest, Arius.
  - In essence, Arius taught that Jesus was a creature of God and therefore He was not God Himself. Unfortunately, Arius’ teachings gained acceptance and spread, threatening the unity of the Church. Desiring an end to the debate, the Roman Emperor Constantine invited the world’s bishops to Nicaea to discuss the matter.
  - 318 bishops responded to his call. The Council condemned Arius’ heresy, proclaiming the apostolic faith that Jesus is “true God and true man, consubstantial (homooousios) with the Father.”



- A Creed was developed to express this apostolic faith.
- At this Council, it was resolved to celebrate Pascha on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox, after the Jewish Passover. It also determined that priests should be married, and it established many other rules or canons.
- "There is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord." St. Ignatius
- "Permit me first to recount the prophecies, which I wish to do in order to prove that Christ is called both God and Lord of hosts." Justin Martyr

#### + The Second Ecumenical Council - Constantinople

- The Second Ecumenical Council was convened in the year 381, in the city of Constantinople, under the Emperor Theodosius I.
- This Council was convoked against the false teaching of the Arian bishop of Constantinople, Macedonius, who rejected the deity of the third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit. He taught that the Holy Spirit is not God, and called Him a creature, or a created power, and therefore subservient to God the Father and God the Son, like an angel.
- There were 150 bishops present at the Council, among whom were Gregory the Theologian, who presided over the Council and Gregory of Nyssa
- At the Council, the Macedonian heresy was condemned and repudiated. The Council affirmed as a dogma the equality and the single essence of God the Holy Spirit with God the Father and God the Son.
- The Council also supplemented the Nicene Creed with five Articles in which it set forth its teaching about the Holy Spirit, about the Church, about the Mysteries, about the resurrection of the dead, and the life in the world to come. Thus they composed the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which serves as a guide to the Church for all time.
- "For it is essential that the Divine Word should be united to the God of all, and that the Holy Spirit should abide and dwell in God; and thus that the Divine Trinity should be reduced and gathered into one, as if into a certain head—that is, into the omnipotent God of all." Dionysius

#### + The Third Ecumenical Council - Ephesus

- The Third Ecumenical Council was convened in the year 431 A.D., in the city of Ephesus, under Emperor Theodosius II.
- The Council was called because of the false doctrine of Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, who profanely taught that the Theotokos St. Mary simply gave birth to the man Christ, with whom then God united morally and dwelled in Him, as in a temple, as previously He had dwelled in Moses and other prophets. Therefore, Nestorius called the Lord Jesus Christ, God-bearing, and not God incarnate; and the Holy Virgin was called the Christ-bearer (Christotokos) and not the God-bearer (Theotokos).
- The 200 bishops present at the Council condemned and repudiated the heresy of Nestorius and decreed that one should recognize that "Jesus' divinity did not part from His humanity for a single moment, nor twinkling of an eye." As we pray in the liturgy
- The Council also affirmed the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and strictly prohibited making any changes or additions to it.
- "The Virgin Mary, being obedient to his word, received from an angel the glad tidings that she would bear God" St. Irenaeus

#### + St. Athanasius is called "The Great" by the Church. Why?

- He defended Jesus against Arianism for many years. His was the major role in that conflict; he suffered exile over and over for his faith. The entire Christian faith could have been destroyed if Arius had won.
- Athanasius would argue that only Jesus the God-man could have died for our sins; only if He were truly God and truly man would the crucifixion have meant anything at all. If Jesus, as the Arians taught, were only a creature, then Christianity would be only idolatry.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 8.5: Church Monasticism

Building Block 8:  
Your Church



### Objective

Introduce the children to the basic concept and history of monasticism and to learn from their dedication to Christ.

### Application

Understand the importance of monastic life, and apply some of the concepts to our own lives.

### References



Scripture: [Hebrews 13:5](#); [Matthew 19:11-12](#), [John 8:51](#)



Liturgy: [The Great Abba Antony \(Great Hymn\)](#)



Patristics: [Athanasius of Alexandria](#)



Story: [Saint Anthony the Great – Desert vs. Jacuzzi](#), [Life of St. Anthony](#)



Theology Academy:

[The world's first monks - 4th Century \(Church Histo...](#)



Other: [Theology Academy - 4<sup>th</sup> Century | History of Monasticism](#), [Grade 12 Week 1 Monasticism](#), [The Monk as a Messenger - St. George's Sunday School](#), [What is Monasticism by Pope Shenouda](#), [Monasticism](#), [Coptic Monasticism](#), [Coptic Monastic Hood](#), [Monks Garment](#)

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + How did Monasticism begin?

*Consider discussing: What is a monk? How does a monk live? Has anyone ever been to a monastery? What did you see? Hear?*

- Monasticism began in the Coptic Orthodox Church towards the end of the third century, and flourished in the fourth.
- There were hundreds of monasteries and thousands of caves in the mountains of Egypt.
- For monks, monasticism was the life of prayer, contemplation, solitude, worship and purity of heart.
- They had nothing in their minds, hearts and feelings except God alone. They lived a calm and quiet life, abiding in the Lord, detaching themselves from everything and everyone, to be attached to Him alone.

#### + Forms of Monasticism

- Monasticism took three main forms, all of which are still to be found in the Church today.
- Monarchism:
  - The anchorites or hermits lived in complete seclusion, only visiting the abbot when they needed counsel.
  - Each hermit organized his own prayer, clothing, food and work. The first anchorite in the world was Saint Paul.
  - He lived for eighty years in the Egyptian desert without seeing a single person.
  - Some hermits entered into the inner deserts and settled there for tens of years, seeing no one. Saint Mary of Egypt was one of these, and is also considered as one of those hermits who are called 'Pilgrims', who had no specific cell but lived homeless, wandering in the wilderness.
- The Coenobitic System:
  - Under this system, founded by Saint Pachomius in Upper Egypt, the monks lived in a community inside the walls of the monastery, in association with each other, governed by an abbot and by rules.
  - Even through this system Christian monasticism never lost its yearning for monarchism.
- The Communal System or Semi-eremitic Life:
  - This form of monasticism is mid-way between monarchism and the coenobitic system. The mode of Saint Anthony's life as described

by Saint Athanasius was actually semi-eremitic in essence, for the monks lived in separate caves or cells and assembled occasionally for the Divine Liturgy or spiritual meetings.

- Saint Anthony prepared the way for the communal order.
- In the wildernesses of Nitria and Scetis the communal order was established by Saint Amoun and Saint Macarius the Great.
- There, the ascetics lived, not in absolute isolation, but in cells built at such a distance that they could neither see nor hear one another.
- They gathered for communal prayer on Saturdays and Sundays.

#### + Who is St. Anthony the Great and how is he related to Monasticism?

- Saint Anthony the Great is known as the Father of monasticism, and the long ascetical sermon in The Life of Saint Anthony by Saint Athanasius (Sections 16-34), could be called the first monastic Rule.
- Share the story of St. Anthony.
- When one chooses the road to monasticism, they follow the footsteps of the saints who walked the path before us.
- They also seek spiritual guides to teach us where to begin and how to progress, to tell us the mysteries of this life and to help us recognize the deceptions of the evil one and how to overcome them.
- However, when St. Antony began his path where there were no previous fathers to learn from, the Lord our God was his only guide and thus he became a guide to all of us.
- He is not only the Father of all Monks, but he is also the Father of Monasticism across the world.
- During the liturgy and after the commemoration of the Saints, the deacons may sing “The Great Abba Antony” hymn.
- Coptic Monasticism was born in Egypt with its first monastery established by St. Pachomius sometime between 361 and 363 A.D – Saint Anthony Monastery in the Red Sea – the oldest monastery in the world today.
- By the end of the fifth century, there were hundreds of monasteries, and thousands of cells and caves scattered throughout the Egyptian desert. A great number of these monasteries are still flourishing and have new vocations to this day.
- In recent years, Coptic Monasteries have opened in Europe and North America and are continuing to grow yearly by the grace of God.

#### + Monasticism 3 Principles:

- Obedience Leading to Salvation, “Most assuredly I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he shall never see death (John 8:51).” “...We will give an account to God not only of deeds but even of words and thoughts. For under liberty, a man is more severely tested as to whether he will reverence, fear, and love the Lord...God desires obedience, which renders His worshippers secure—rather than sacrifices and burnt offerings, which avail men nothing towards righteousness” Irenaeus
- Poverty reveals the power of God, “Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have” (Hebrews 13: 5).
- Chastity, “But he said to them, ‘All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given; for there are eunuchs who were born thus...and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it’ (Matthew 19:11-12). In the Lord Jesus Christ’s teachings He praised those who had made themselves “eunuchs” by free choice and according to God’s will for their lives.

#### + Are there special Monastic Garments and do they have a special meaning?

- The monastic garment is not only intended to be a distinction in front of people. As a matter of fact, it has sublime spiritual value as well as holy symbols, since it represents the form of angels.
- The black color of the garment is to remind them that they have died to this world and are seeking eternal life.
- The monastic garments that are presently used in the ordinary ceremony of monasticism are long gowns with loose sleeves and a bonnet. The garment also includes a girdle that three crosses are braided on to and are all made of leather.
- The head covering is called, qalansuwa, used at present resembles to a great extent the one which St. Anthony had.
- The qalansuwa covers the whole head and hangs down on the back of the head until the shoulders.
- In the upper part of this hood, the part that covers the head, there are twelve embroidered crosses, six at each side, that symbolize Christ's twelve disciples. On the other hand, these crosses refer to the twelve virtues of the Holy Spirit.
- The cross which is embroidered on the back of the qalansuwa stands for the Lord Jesus Christ whom the monks/nuns bear in their heart and mind; the Lord controls their thoughts and becomes the center of their interests and concerns.
- In the middle of the qalansuwa is a rip that starts from above the forehead up to its third. This rip is sown with crochet, and the qalansuwa is tied to the neck with two thin strings.



- For the nun the qalansuwa is totally covered by the nuns' head veil or scarf.
- The girdle - "Fasten on your waist all the bonds of God and the power of repentance through our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen".
- The girdle is also made of leather, as well as the three crosses braided on it. The nun puts this girdle on her waist so that it is located directly over the kidneys opposite to the center of the sexual drive. With the power of these crosses and stamps the nun is able to keep her purity and suppress the desires. This also helps in fasting and enduring hunger as well as in making successive genuflections.

#### + Monasticism's Famous Personalities

- Saint Paul, of the lower Thebaid in Egypt, was the first hermit. In 250 AD, upon the death of his parents when he was 16 years old, he inherited great wealth. He fled to the desert where he lived over ninety years. Each day a raven would bring him half a loaf of bread. His biography was written by Saint Jerome in 374AD.
- Saint Anthony, (251-356AD) was born in Middle Egypt. He was eighteen years old when he entered the church and heard the words of the Gospel: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell all you have and give to the poor; and come, follow Me" (Matthew 19:21). He sold his land, entrusted his sister with a community of virgins, and lived in a hut under the guidance of a recluse. He visited Alexandria in 316 AD to assist the martyrs and in 352 AD to help Saint Athanasius in his fight against Arianism.
- Saint Pachomius (290-), was born in Upper Egypt. He was converted to Christianity in Upper Egypt, when he witnessed the generosity of Christians and their love even of their enemies. He left the army and was baptized in 307 AD, becoming a disciple of Palamon the Hermit. He established the Coenobitic System. He founded two monasteries in Egypt, and two nunneries under the guidance of his sister. He laid the coenobitic laws which were later translated into Greek and Latin and used by Saint Basil the Great.
- Saint Macarius the Great, (300-390 AD) founded the communal order in the desert of Scetis, and visited Saint Anthony at least twice.
- Saint Shenouda the Archimandrite ('Head of the Anchorites') was the Abbot of the White Monastery of Atribe in the desert of Thebes for more than 65 years (in the 4th and 5th centuries), leading 2,200 monks and 1,800 nuns. In 431 AD he accompanied Saint Cyril the Great to the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus.
- Saint Sarah the Abbess, lived in Pelusium, and was endowed with the grace of true leadership and spiritual discernment. Her sayings were treasured by the desert fathers.
- Saint Syncletica founded the first monastic community for women in the world in Alexandria. Her biography and teachings were preserved by Pope Athanasius.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 8.6: Church Shapes & Iconography

Building Block 8:  
Your Church



### Objective

To understand that everything in the Coptic Orthodox Faith has meaning, nothing is done without reason.

### Application

When you walk into a church, look around and see what's different and the same with other churches you've been to. Understand why things are the way they are.

### References



Scripture: [Romans 6:3-4](#), [Col 2:12](#)



Liturgy: [Prayer of the Consecration of Icons](#)



Patristics: [St John of Damascus](#)



Story: [St. Veronica](#)



Other: [The Spirituality of the rites of the holy liturgy in the coptic orthodox church](#), [What does the Church believe about icons and their use?](#), [Structure Of The Coptic Church](#), [The Church The House Of God \(lv\): The Icons](#), [Architecture of the Coptic Church](#), [The Spirituality of Icons](#), [The Coptic Treasures](#), [Consecration](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + 3 Shapes, 1 Message, 1 Church

- The church is a representation of God's house, and is considered the attachment of God with His people. The congregation lives at both an earthly level and a heavenly level at the same time in the church. For this reason, churches are designed with much symbolism. However, even though we use many different materials such as stone, bricks, wood, gold and silver and employ architectural designs, decorative arts and painting; the buildings are worth nothing without the Holy Spirit, who grants it a heavenly and spiritual nature!
- There are 3 different designs, the cruciform, the circle, and the ship.
- The cruciform: It uncovers the church's mystical nature, as being the Crucified Body of Christ. Its prime draw is to take all mankind to Golgotha, in order to gain unity with the Beloved Savior.
- The circle: It refers to the eternal nature of the church, as being an endless line (without beginning and without end). She bears the nature of her Bridegroom.
- The Ship: It is the most common shape in our Coptic churches. The Pharaohs, who believed in immortality, regarded death as a journey in a ship to the other world. In the Old Testament, Noah's ark was a symbol of God's salvation and love. Christians are like those who are sailing among frightful danger, i.e. persecution and temptations; but as long as they remain within the Lord's ship, i.e. His Church, they are filled with the hope of reaching Eternal rest.

#### + Symbolism in nearly everything

- The building of the church has specific requirements, like the towers, dome, baptistery, nave and much more. Even these features have to be facing a certain direction or be a certain shape.
- **The baptistery** is the birthplace of a "new" Christian. According to Didascalia, the baptistery should be built at the northwestern side of the church (left side of entrance). While the altar faces the east, the baptistery is built at the west so it may act as a medium to transport those who are in the west to our Lord, our True East.
- The baptistery has different shapes, each has different meanings.
- The quadrilateral type resembles the shape of a tomb. The hexagonal type refers to the sixth day of the week (Friday), in which Christ was crucified and buried. It stresses the belief that baptism is a death and burial with Christ, as taught by St. Paul the Apostle: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

“When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12).

- The octagonal type symbolizes the day of resurrection of Christ, which is the eighth day of the week. This time it is about the resurrection with Christ in baptism. The circular type serves as a reminder of eternity, in which the baptized enjoys a life beyond all boundaries, in a heavenly atmosphere. The cruciform type is directly related to the manner of Christ’s death, showing baptism as a Cross. St. John Chrysostom says: “Baptism is a Cross. What the Cross was to Christ and what His burial was, that baptism is to us.
- The cover of the baptism includes a dome on it, when ascending from the water, the view of the dome above the baptized individual is meant to attract his/her thoughts to heaven. Baptism is the beginning of a heavenly life, where the newly baptized partakes of the kingdom of God.
- There are also stairs in the baptistery as there is in the nave. One set is located on the east and the other is located in the west. On one of the stairs, the candidate descends and is submerged into the water, while the priest or deacon of the sacrament stands at the other side. The icon of St. John the Baptist baptizing Jesus is usually hung on the apse of the baptistery.
- **The dome** - The representations of domes symbolize heaven. Some Coptic churches have one dome, called a cupola. The dome interior is usually painted with the icon of our Lord or in a bright blue color decorated with angels and stars. This resembles Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church who is seated in the heavens. Some churches have three cupolas, which represent the Holy Trinity. Other churches have five cupolas. The larger one is located in the center representing our Lord Jesus Christ, and the four smaller ones surrounding it represent the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- **The church towers** - the churches have two towers, mainly found in Coptic monasteries. As ships have a watchtower, the church’s towers represent the Lord’s ship voyaging towards heaven. The church towers include a belfry, where the bells are hung. The bells replaced the trumpets of the Old Testament. Bells are rung during the offertory, during communion, and on feasts. The bells were also used to call the faithful to go to church.
- **The Nave** - Is usually divided into two parts or “Choirs”:
  - The Chancel, or Chorus of Deacons.
  - The Chorus of Believers, or the nave of the church.
- The chancel contains seats for deacons, two candelabra and two lecterns on which the lectionaries are placed. It is separated from the sanctuary by the iconostasis and from the rest of the nave by a screen or a fence. This is to show a distinction from the sanctuary to the rest of the church. It allows people to still see inside the sanctuary using its cross-shaped lattice appearance.

#### + A Heavenly Surrounding: Icons.

- In the Orthodox concept, icons carry the real feeling and teaching of orthodoxy. They are not to be worshiped but serve as points of connection with Christ and the community of saints. Of course Christ and the saints are close with or without icons, but icons help to serve as constant reminders that we live in the presence of God and in the midst of a “cloud of witnesses.”
- **What are the rituals of dedicating the icon?**
  - The dedication of the church for the divine service is by the consecration of the altars, sacred vessels, icons, etc.
  - The bishop consecrates the building through praying all the night long (vigil) together with the priests, deacons, and people. Thus the building is to be a church where the Lord of angels is glad of.
- **Why are icons put in the church?**
  - “In former times, God, who is without form or body, could never be depicted. But now when God is seen in the flesh conversing with men, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake.” St John of Damascus [First apology against those who would attack the divine images]
  - “O Master Lord God, the Pantocrator, Father of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ who [...] manifested Yourself to your chosen apostles through the incarnation of Your only-begotten Son [...] we ask and entreat You O lover of Mankind to send Your Holy Spirit on this icon that it may become an anchored harbor of salvation and steadfastness for all who approach it faithfully to receive though it grace and forgiveness of their sins from God.” [Prayer of the Consecration of Icons – Coptic Orthodox rite]
  - We believe that iconographers are not merely artists, but have the potential to become theologians in their own rite. They are doing spiritual work and not only artistic work. And while beauty is always appreciated, the Church places less emphasis on the esthetic beauty of the icon and much more on its proper content and meaning within the liturgical life of the Church. It is for this reason that every aspect of the icon has a meaning, every color has a significance. And each of these makes a statement about what the Church believes. This again testifies to the fact that we do not merely see icons as decorative ornaments within the Church and our homes, but rather as vessels by which we see the light of God.
- They serve two great purpose:



- 1. They allow us to surround ourselves with all that is heavenly, reminding us that God has come down among us and His kingdom is truly at hand and is accessible to us, and
- 2. It allows us to get glimpses into eternity and to embrace a divine light that shines through those who are depicted in the icons who have passed on to be with the Lord in paradise. And in so doing, icons proclaim the faith of the Church!
- The positioning of the various icons upon the Iconostasis is traditionally governed by a number of guidelines:
- On the right side of the altar, the icon of our Lord Jesus Christ is fitted. He appears holding a sheet of the Gospel showing the verse "I am the Good Shepherd ". This icon reminds us that Jesus Christ is the unique gate leading to the heavenly kingdom. He is the Good Shepherd who opened the gates of heaven through His life - giving sacrifice.
- Next to this icon appears the icon of ST. John the Baptist, the angel who prepared the way for the Lord's coming.
- Next, comes the icon of the "Patron Saint" or the "Icon of the Church" , for it portrays the Saint of whose honor the Church was built. It is usually followed by a number of selected icons of Saints and Martyrs, or incidents from both the New and Old Testaments.
- On the opposite side of the altar appears the icon of ST. Mary, the Mother of God (THEOTOKOS). She represents the whole church and the Queen who sits on the right hand of the King; Jesus Christ.
- This icon is followed by the icons of the Annunciation, Archangel Michael, ST. Mark the Evangelist and perhaps a selection of famous Apostles.
- Directly above the altar the icon of the last supper is mounted. It shows Christ giving communion to His disciples, which illustrates and signifies the sacerdotal office of Christ as a priest.
- On both sides of the above icon we usually find icons of the twelve disciples. They assure us of the apostolic nature of our church. It is established in the apostolic faith, and continues to exist in an apostolic way, and is shepherded by apostolic pastors.
- On the top of the Iconostasis a cross is mounted and a view of the Golgotha is displayed: the Virgin Mary stands on one side and ST. John the disciple stands on the other side.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 8.7: The Seasons and Feasts of the Church

Building Block 8:  
Your Church



### Objective

Introduce the students to the feasts of the church and how we can benefit from them.

### Application

Add the google calendar to your calendar and follow the spirit and life of the church. By understanding the time of year, look for the differences in the church: hymns, readings, prayers. Be joyful and charitable on feast days; remember those who don't have enough.

### References



**Scripture:** [Matthew 13:17](#), [Matthew 21:9](#), [Romans 6:4](#), [Colossians 2:11](#), [Ephesians 2:6](#), [John 20:29](#), [Isaiah 58:7](#)



**Liturgy:** [Discuss the different parts of the liturgy that change with the church season](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Jerome](#)



**Story:** [Palm Sunday](#)



**Other:** [The Feasts of the Church](#), [Liturgical Seasons](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Is the Coptic Church a sorrowful Church or a Joyful one?

- It is true that the Coptic Church is known as the “Church of the Martyrs” and for bearing the cross, but the Coptic Church is continuously suffering and joyful at the same time, her feasts are uninterrupted, and her hymns with a variety of melodies are unceasing.
- St. Jerome informs us about an abbot called Apollo who was always smiling. He attracted many to the ascetic life as a source of inward joy and heartfelt satisfaction in our Lord Jesus. He often used to say: “Why do we struggle with an unpleasant face?! Aren’t we the heirs of eternal life?! Leave the unpleasant and the grieved faces to pagans, and weeping to the evil-doers. But it befits the righteous and the saints to be joyful and pleasant since they enjoy the spiritual gifts.”

#### + What feasts does the church celebrate?

- We celebrate 7 major feasts of the Lord, 7 minor feasts, monthly feasts, weekly feasts, and feasts of the saints.
- The months and year are then divided up into seasons and feasts based on events in the life of Christ. These, when viewed from the whole or in part, assist us in entering into the fullness of Who Jesus Christ is, and help us in exploring the depth of what has been and is being accomplished for us and in us, through Him

#### + The Seven Major Feasts of the Lord in the Coptic Orthodox Church

- The Annunciation (Baramhat 29, c. April 7): In it we recall the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, and the attainment which the men of God had longed for across the ages, namely the coming of the Word of God incarnated in the Virgin’s womb “I for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (Matt. 13:17).
- The Nativity of Christ (Christmas) on Kiahk 29, c. January 7: It is preceded by a fast of 43 days. Its aim is to confirm the divine love, when God sent His Only – begotten Son incarnate. Thus, He restored to humanity her honor, and sanctified our daily life, offering His life as a Sacrifice on our behalf.
- The Epiphany or the Baptism of Christ on Tobah 11, c. January 19: It is connected with Christmas and the circumcision feasts. For on Christmas, the Word of God took what is ours (our humanity) and in the “circumcision” He subjected Himself to the Law as He became one of us, but in the Epiphany He offered us what is His own. By His incarnation He became a true man while He still being the Only-begotten Son of God, and by baptism we become children of God in Him while we are human being In this feast, the liturgy of blessing the water is conducted, and the priest blesses the people by the water on their foreheads and hands to commemorate baptism.





- Palm Sunday: It is the Sunday which precedes Easter. It has its characteristic joyful hymns (the Shannon – “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’
- Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt. 21:9) and it's a delightful rite. The church commemorates the entrance of our Lord Jesus into our inward Jerusalem to establish His Kingdom in us and gather all in Him. Therefore a delightful procession of the redeemed believers, starts -God’s plan for Christ’s self-oblation. The procession moves towards the nave of the church where it stands before the icons of St. Mary, the Archangels, St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, the marthe ascetics etc... and before the church doors and the baptismal basin, praising God who embraces all together in His Son Jesus Christ. The procession ends by re-entering the sanctuary, for the God of the Old and New Testaments meet with the heavenly in heaven (sanctuary) forever. The end of the liturgy of Eucharist, a general funeral service is held over water, which is sprinkled on behalf of anyone who may die during the Holy week, since the regular funeral prayers are not conducted during this week. By this rite, the church stresses on her preoccupation with the passion and crucifixion of Christ only. She iterates on the marvelous events of this unique week with its glorious readings and rites which concern our salvation.
- Easter (The Christian Pasch or Passover): It is preceded by Great Lent (55 days) and is considered by the Coptic Church as the Feast.” Its delight continues for fifty days until the Pentecost. Easter is also essentially celebrated on every Sunday by participating A sacrament of the Eucharist. For the church wishes that all believers may enjoy the new risen life in Jesus Christ “ Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4).
- Ascension: It is celebrated on the fortieth day after Easter Is on a Thursday. In this feast we recall Him who raises and lifts us up to sit with Him in heaven “6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” (Eph. 2:6).
- Pentecost: It represents the birthday of the Christian Church. Only-begotten Son paid the price for her salvation, He ascended heaven to prepare a place for her. He sent His Holy Spirit in her, offering her existence, guidance, sanctification and adornment as the Heavenly Bride. In this feast, the church chants hymns, being joyful with the resurrection of Christ, His ascension and the dwelling of His Holy Spirit in her, thus she connects the three feasts in one whole unity. On this day, the church conducts three sets of prayers, called “Kneeling,” during which incense and prayers are offered on behalf of the sick, the travelers, the winds, and it gives special attention to the dormant, as a sign of her enjoying the communion and unity with Christ that challenges even death.

#### + The Seven Minor Feasts of the Lord in the Coptic Orthodox Church

- The Circumcision of our Lord: It is celebrated on the eighth day after Christmas (Tobah 6, c. 14 January), by which we remember that the Word of God who gave us the Law, He Himself was subjected to this Law, fulfilling it, to grant us the power to fulfill the Law in a spiritual manner. Thus we enjoy the circumcision of spirit and that of heart “II In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body [a]of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,” (Col. 2:11), instead of the literal circumcision of the flesh.
- The Entrance of our Lord into the Temple (Amshir 8, c. February 15): We remember that the Word of God became man and does not want us to be careless about our lives, but to set our goals early since childhood. Thus we have to work and fulfill our goals regardless of people related to us, in spite of our love and obedience to them..
- The Escape of the Holy family to Egypt (Bashans 24, c. June 1): The Coptic Church is distinguished among all nations with this unique divine work, by the coming of our Lord to Egypt among the Gentiles.
- The First Miracle of our Lord Jesus at Cana (Tobah 13, c. January 12): Our Lord changed the water into wine, as His first miracle, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, confirming His eagerness for our attaining the heavenly wedding, and granting us the wine of His exceeding love.
- The Transfiguration of Christ (Musra 13; c. August 19): The unity of the two testaments was manifested in this feast, for Moses and Elijah assembled together with Peter, James and John. The glory of our Lord was revealed to satisfy every soul who rises up with Him to the mountain of Tabor to enjoy the brightness of His Glory.
- Maundy Thursday: This is the Thursday of the Holy week. In it we commemorate the establishment of the Sacrament of Eucharist by our Lord Jesus, when He offered His Body and Blood as the living and effective Sacrifice, capable of sanctifying our hearts, granting us the victorious and eternal life. This is the only day of the Holy Week in which Sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered, and the rite of washing the feet is practiced in commemoration of what Christ did for His disciples. On this day also an unusual procession takes place, starting from the south of the church nave, during which a hymn of rebuking Jude the betrayal is chanted as a warning to us not to fall like him.
- Thomas’s Sunday: This is the Sunday that follows Easter; In it we bless those who believe without seeing so that all might live in faith through the internal touch of the Savior’s wounds “29 Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29).

#### + Other Feasts:

- The Monthly Feasts: The believers joyfully celebrate the commemoration of the Annunciation, Nativity and Resurrection of Christ on the 29th of every Coptic month, the commemoration of St. Mary on the 21st and the feast of Archangel Michael on the 12th
- The Weekly Feast: Every Sunday stands as a true Sabbath (rest), in which we find our rest in the resurrection of Christ. There is no abstention from food on Sundays after the celebration of the Eucharist, even during Great Lent.
- Feasts of the Saints: There is almost a daily feast, so that the believers may live in perpetual joy and in communion with the saints. In addition there are other special feasts and occasions
- The Apostles' Feast (Abib 5, c. July 12): This is the feast of martyrdom of the Apostles SS. Peter and Paul. It is preceded by a fasting period which starts on the day following the Pentecost. In this feast, the liturgy of blessing the water takes place, in which the priest washes the feet of his people (men and children) commemorating what the Lord did for His disciples. Thus, the priest remembers that he is a servant who washes the feet of the people of God and not a man of authority.
- The Nayrouz Feast (1 st of Tout, c. September 11): The word "Nayrouz" is Persian, meaning "the beginning of the year." The Egyptian calendar goes back to 4240 B.C. Copts restored the calendar with the beginning of Diocletian's reign in A.D 284, to commemorate the millions of Coptic martyrs. His reign is considered a golden era in which the church offered true witnesses to Christ, when the souls of martyrs departed to paradise and kept shining as living stars therein. This feast, with its joyful hymns, continues until the feast of the Cross (Tout 17, c. 27 September). Thus the church announces her joy and gladness with the martyrs through bearing the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the sufferings and martyrdom were turned into a source of joy.
- The Two Feasts of the Cross: The first feast is on Tout 17, (c. September 27). It commemorates the dedication of the Church of the Holy Cross which was built by Queen Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine. The second feast is on Barmahat 10 (c. March 19) and commemorates the discovery of the Holy Cross on the hands of the same empress in A.D 326. During these two feasts the church conducts a procession similar to that of Palm-Sunday and uses the same tone in chanting (Shannon-Hosanna), to announce that the cause of her joy with the Cross is the openness of the hearts (the inner Jerusalem) to receive the Savior as the King who reigns within us

#### + Why does the church celebrate St. Mary throughout the year?

- The Feasts of St. Mary: The Coptic Church venerates St. Mary as the "Theotokos," i.e., the Mother of God, whom the Divine Grace chose to bear the Word of God in her womb by the Holy Spirit. Since she is considered to be the exemplary member in the church, and the interceding mother on behalf of her spiritual children, she is exalted above heavenly and earthly creatures. Therefore, the church does not cease glorifying (blessing) her, and celebrating her feasts in order that we imitate her and ask her intercessions on our behalf
- St. Mary's main feasts are:
  - The annunciation of her birth (Misra 7, c. August 13);
  - her Nativity (Paschans 1, c. May 9);
  - her Presentation into the Temple (Kyahk 3, c. December 12);
  - her Dormant (Tobah 2 1, c. January 29);
  - the Assumption of her body (Paoni 21, c. June 28);
  - her apparition over the Church of Zeitoun (Baramhat 24, c. April 2);
  - and the apparition of her body to the Apostles (Mesra 16, c. August 22).

#### + How does the church celebrate the feasts:

- "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; When you see the naked, that you cover him, And not hide yourself from your own flesh?" Isaiah 58:7
- Beside fasting, prayer, and attending the liturgy, the bible teaches us to open our home to those less fortunate.
- Isaiah 58:7 tells us to remember the poor on our feasts. One of the best things to do on feasts (especially the big ones) is to remember our brothers and sisters who don't have enough. You can help get them food, clothes, or just call and ask about them wishing them a happy feast.
- We are also called to keep the days of the Lord Holy. We should pay special attention on feast days to surround ourselves with holy things. This typically happens by going to church, attending liturgy and then engaging with our family or church members after.
- Remember what the feast is about! It's great to celebrate with your family (eating meat, buying new clothes, etc...), but in the middle of this it is important to remember why we are celebrating incorporating that in our day.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Building Block 8: Your Church



### Lesson 8.8: Fasting

#### Objective

Explain the reasons and practical applications of fasting and understand why the church implements the guidelines that exist.

#### Application

Understand the reasons behind fasting, and begin fasting regularly with the guidance of a Father of Confession. Don't be a showoff when you fast, but also don't be lazy when you fast. Do what you can and do it for God alone.

#### References



Scripture: [Genesis 3:2](#); [Matthew 6:16-18](#), [Matthew 17:21](#)



Liturgy: [Fraction for the Great Lent](#)



Patristics: [St. Isaac the Syrian](#); [Matthew the Poor](#); [Didache: Apostles 7:4](#);



Story: [Jesus Fasted for us](#)



Theology Academy:

[Early Christian Writings: Didache Fasting](#)



Other: [Father Matthew the Poor. The Communion of Love. Chapter 8 "Fasting"](#), [Father Matthew the Poor. Orthodox Prayer Life. Chapter 13 "Fasting"](#), [Fasting and abstinence of the Coptic Orthodox Church](#); [Didache - Father Matthew the Poor - Orthodox Prayer, Chapter 8](#), [Article on Fasting](#)

#### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

##### + When did fasting begin?

*Consider starting by asking a few questions: What are the first commandments God gave to Adam and Eve? When he tells them don't eat from this certain thing, what can we call that? (When you abstain from something to deepen your relationship with God what is that called)? – Fasting!*

- Fasting means depriving the body of food, water, or any earthly vice that is detrimental to the soul.
- Fasting is a commandment. It can be looked at as one of the earliest commandments (fasting from the fruit of one tree in the '3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' Gen 3:2
- It is also the first thing the Apostles wanted a believer to do (even before baptism): – '7:4 But before the baptism, let him who baptized and him who was baptized fast previously, and any others who may be able. And thou shalt command him who is baptized to fast one or two days before.' (Didache: teachings of the Apostles 7:4)
- Fasting by itself is not a virtue, without prayer and charitable deeds it becomes a diet or punishment only.
- "We may liken fasting to a burning coal and prayer to frankincense. Neither has value without the other, but together, the sweet savor of their incense fills the air." Abba Matta El-Meskeen (Matthew the Poor) in Orthodox Prayer Life" 2]
- Fasting is not to deprive ourselves from certain foods because we have to, but rather to voluntarily abstain from food intended to calm the desires of the body.
- Our bodies are beautifully made by the hand of God, they are not evil and they do not need to be punished. Fasting is therefore not a humiliation or a punishment to the body, instead it is a refreshment to the spirit.
- It can be used to help us train ourselves for self-control and has been used by many saints along the ages to make sure the body is being controlled by the spirit, not vice-versa.
- Fasting is also a very powerful weapon against the enemy; 'However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting' (Matthew 17:21); What weapon is more powerful and gives more boldness to the heart in the time of battle against the spirits of wickedness, than hunger endured for Christ's sake?... He who has armed himself with the weapon of fasting is afire with zeal at all times – St. Isaac the Syrian
- The point of fasting is not to feel good about ourselves or to show off that we are fasting. Christ talked a lot about this: "Moreover, when you



fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Matthew 6:16-18)

#### + When and how does the Coptic Church fast?

- In the Coptic church, we have seasons of fasting like no other Christian community because we fast for over 210 days out of a 365 day year.
- All Coptic Christians are expected to fast following a prescribed set of guidelines. Exceptions are however granted under special circumstances, such as pregnancy and sickness, through the guidance of a spiritual father.
- When fasting, the Copts can eat no animal products, including poultry, meat, fish, eggs, and milk.
- There are times when we abstain from food for a certain amount of hours, for instance before communion or through strict abstinence on Wednesday and Fridays as well as the Great Fast.
- The major fasting periods during the year are:
  - The Advent fast- begins on 16 Hathor (November 25) - 29 Koiak (January 7) - lasts 40 days
  - The fast of Nineveh - is 2 weeks before the Great Lent - last 3 days
  - The fast of Pre-Lenten - this is the preparation week for the Great Lent
  - The fast of Great Lent - this lasts for 40 days
  - Pascha week - this holy week ends with Easter
  - The Apostles' Fast - Its length varies yearly depending on the date of Easter, which in turn determines the date of Pentecost. - The length varies from two to six weeks (15 to 49 days).
  - The fast of St. Mary - It begins on 1 Messori (August 7) and ends on 16 Messori (August 22) -last 15 days.
  - Wednesday and Friday Fast - Weekly Wednesday and Friday - Exceptions are the Wednesdays and Fridays between Resurrection and Pentecost (the 50-day period of joy during which fasting is not permitted) and any day whereon a Major Feast falls.
  - The Paramon Fast - The day or days preceding the Feast of the Nativity and the Feast of Theophany is/are a fast day(s) in preparation for the Feast day

#### + Great Examples of fasting:

- We read in Matthew 4:1-2, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry."
- During those forty days, when Jesus' flesh was at its weakest, He endured relentless temptation from Satan. Satan offered Him alternatives to God's plan, compromises that would satisfy His natural desires, and attacks upon His very identity as the Son of God. Jesus used the Word of God, not His own strength, to defeat those temptations and remain victorious over sin. He demonstrated for us that fasting can strengthen us spiritually when we use it to draw closer to God.
- Consider going through the Fraction for the great fast, and use all of the examples as others in the Holy Bible that practiced fasting in times of tribulations. We pray in the Fraction for the great fast that, "Fasting and prayer are those which raised Elijah to heaven and saved Daniel from the lions' den. Fasting and prayer are those which Moses pursued until he received the Law and Commandments written with the finger of God. Fasting and prayer are those which the people of Nineveh pursued until God had mercy on them and forgave them their sins, and lifted His wrath away from them. Fasting and prayer are those which the prophets pursued, and prophesied concerning the advent of Christ many generations before His coming. Fasting and prayer are those which the apostles pursued, until they preached to all nations and made them Christians, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Fasting and prayer are those which the martyrs pursued until they shed their blood for the Name of Christ, who confessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate. Fasting and prayer are those which the righteous and the just and the cross-bearers pursued until they dwelt in the mountains and deserts and holes of the earth because of their great love for Christ the King."

#### + How to prepare yourself for fasting?

- How one begins and conducts their fast will determine how they will grow spiritually
- Plan to make time with the Lord more meaningful and spiritual.
- Ask yourself... Why are you fasting? Is it just as a tradition of the church or Is it for spiritual renewal, for guidance, for healing, for the resolution of problems, for special grace to handle a difficult situation?



- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what is needed for this fast; this will enable you to pray more specifically and strategically.
- Through fasting and prayer one humbles themselves before God so the Holy Spirit will stir their souls.
- The very foundation of fasting and prayer is repentance. Unconfessed sin will hinder your prayers.
- Prepare your heart and ask God to help you.
- Confess every sin that the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness.
- Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you.
- Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit according to His command.
- Surrender your life fully to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Master; refuse to obey your desires.
- Meditate on the attributes of God, His love, sovereignty, power, wisdom, faithfulness, grace, compassion, and others.
- Do not underestimate Satan; he intensifies the battle between body and spirit.



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 8:  
Your Church



## Lesson 8.9: BB Review and Open Discussion

### Objective

Review

### Application

Review

### References

Review

### → Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Review Questions:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where did the Coptic Church start?</li> <li>- Who started the Church?</li> <li>- What happened to St. Mark's sandal? What did the shoemaker say that started the conversation?</li> <li>- Who was the first Bishop after St. Mark?</li> <li>- What book did St. Mark write?</li> <li>- What do we believe in as Christians today?</li> <li>- What did the Christians believe in 2000 years ago?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who was the first "Monk"?</li> <li>- What did the angel teach him about Monasticism?</li> <li>- What is Cenobitic Monasticism? Who started it?</li> <li>- Are there still Monks and Nuns today? Where are they?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why are icons put in the church?</li> <li>- What are the rituals of dedicating the icon?</li> <li>- What is the difference between pictures and icons that we see in the church and the other pictures?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who is (Our Lord) Jesus?</li> <li>- What did Arius say?</li> <li>- What did St. Athanasius say?</li> <li>- What is the Council of Nicaea?</li> <li>- What is the Creed? What does it tell us?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How many major Lord feasts are there? What are they?</li> <li>- How many minor Lord feasts are there? What are they?</li> <li>- How many feasts of the cross are there?</li> <li>- What are some of the feasts we commemorate St. Mary in?</li> <li>- How should we celebrate the feasts?</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What was the School of Alexandria?</li> <li>- According to tradition, who started the school?</li> <li>- Who officially structured the school?</li> <li>- How old was Origen the teacher when taught in the school of Alexandria?</li> <li>- How was the modern school a little different than the ancient school of Alexandria?</li> <li>- Which Archdeacon lead the school of Alexandria in modern times?</li> <li>- Which well-known leader graduated from the Clerical School of Alexandria in modern times?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is fasting intended to punish our bodies?</li> <li>- Is fasting by itself enough? What else do you need with it?</li> <li>- How many days is the Great Lent (including Holy Week) in the Coptic Church?</li> <li>- How long is the Nativity Fast? What is the significance of that number?</li> <li>- What can we eat during the Apostles fast and St. Mary's fast?</li> <li>- Outside of the Church fasts, can someone fast on their own if they wanted to?</li> <li>- How should we fast?</li> </ul>	



# Building Block 9: True Christian in a Non-Christian World



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 9.1: Why Live as a True Christian? Titus 2

Building Block 9:  
True Christian in a  
Non Christian World



### Objective

Students will understand the importance of setting a good example of a true Christian living.

### Application

Jesus said He came so His followers “may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Living a Christian life is a great privilege but is not easy. It requires dedication and responsibility. The challenges and difficulties of this way of life are designed to help us grow to have Jesus Christ’s mind. We are to learn to think and act like God because He wants us to be His children forever. Discuss with your father the confession of what you need to pay attention to be a true Christian!

### References



Scripture: [Titus 2](#); [James 2:15-16](#); [Matthew 28:20](#); [John 10:10](#)



Liturgy: [The Prayer of Reconciliation of the Divine Liturgy According to St. Cyril the Great](#); [Start at 2min](#)



Patristics: [St. John Chrysostom](#)



Story: [The impact of the 21 martyrs of Libya on the Coptic Community and the world](#)



Other: [Titus 2 Commentary](#); [The Letter of St. Paul to Titus Chapter 2](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Who Was Titus and what was happening in Crete?

- Titus was a Gentle Christian who accompanied St. Paul in his travels.
- Titus had proved to Paul a good problem solver, therefore St. Paul appointed him as responsible of the church in Crete.
- The people in Crete were stereotyped as being scoundrels and pirates.
- Because the people were seen as mischievous, St. Paul provided him with some instructions to help him lead the church.

#### + What was the purpose of Titus’s letter?

- St. Paul wrote this letter to Titus as a reminder of the importance of setting a good example of Christian living.
- By obeying the Holy Spirit, we can be good examples for every Christian . “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility,<sup>8</sup> sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, <sup>10</sup> not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” Titus 2:1-10
- These instructions were set for Titus when he deals with male and females, young and old, and those who are servants.
- Discuss the examples of Sound Doctrine, Good Works, and Enduring hope.

#### + Set an example of sound doctrine

- "speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine" Titus 2:1
- “Having demanded from servants so great virtue, for it is great virtue to adorn the doctrine of our God and Savior in all things, and charged them to give no occasion of offense to their masters, even in common matters, he adds the just cause, why servants should be such: For the grace of God, that brings salvation, has appeared.” St. John Chrysostom
- St. Paul wants Titus to fulfill Jesus' commandment in Matthew 28:20, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."





- The Bible tells us how to live. It is hypocrisy to say that we believe its truth if we ignore how it tells us to live our lives
- Sound Christian beliefs are grounded in the gospel, therefore instead of following Jewish fables, teach what is proper for sound doctrines.
- Examples of these are:
  - Sober: Not given to wine
  - Temperate: Exhibiting self-control
  - Sound in faith: True believers
  - In patience: Steadfastly persevering
  - Not slanderers. Not given to insinuations of evil
  - Teachers of good things: by example and precept

#### + Set an example of good works

- "in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works" Titus 2:7
- The apostle was reminding believers that the way we live and relate to others ought to match with what we teach about the gospel as we read in James 2:15-16 "15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"
- As we pray in the Prayer of Reconciliation of the Divine Liturgy According to St. Cyril the Great, "Not with a vile sense that defies Your fear, nor with thoughts of guile filled with the wickedness of the traitor."
- Set an example of faithfulness, "Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things." Titus 2:9-10
- A Christian attitude and lifestyle can have a powerful impact on others regardless of the Christian's circumstances. We ought to speak and act in the same Christlike way at work and at home as we do at church.

#### + Set an example of enduring hope

- "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" Titus 2:12-13
- We are taught that by grace that we must deny ourselves all sinful lusts, and live godly lives
- The attitude of Christians is that of waiting in expectation of the fulfillment of a glorious hope
- The Lord who will appear gave the greatest of all things, Himself, for us
  - Redeem: To deliver us from sin, not only from its power, but its penalty
  - A special people: Separate, chosen, holy in life
  - The Jews were, under the old covenant, a peculiar people; now, Christians, are God's Israel
  - Let none have any just cause to despise you
  - Warn them with such authority that no one may think himself above the need of admonition

#### + How can you begin to set an example of Christian living?

- The book of Titus reminds us that our beliefs about God impact every decision we make.
- Our spiritual growth relies on our true faith which should be always changing us in ways that only we know about.
- We are, "the salt of the earth ... the light of the world" Matthew 5:13-14. The believer influences the unbeliever by what he is. The believer's very presence in the world acts as salt and light, preventing moral corruption and exposing error. The only question is whether or not we are "tasteful salt" and "visible light".
- St. John Chrysostom says, "You are the salt of the earth. It is not for your own sake, he says, but for the world's sake that the word is entrusted to you. I am not sending you only into two cities only or ten to twenty, not to a single nation, as I sent the prophets of old, but across land and sea, to the whole world."
- It is in our service and our way of living that all will see God's grace in action.
- Many atheists deny God because of the Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips and deny Him with their lifestyle.
- Our negative impact and Mahatma Gandhi's view of Christianity "I like your Christ, but I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ ... The Christians above all others are seeking after wealth."
- As Christians, we have a duty toward others. It is not a choice, but it is required.
- A great example of living as a true Christian is the 21 martyrs of Libya. Their lives had a great impact on the Coptic Community and the world.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 9: True  
Christian in a Non  
Christian World



## Lesson 9.2: Purpose: Why on earth am I here?

### Objective

Students will understand the value of living with a clear knowledge of or commitment to a purpose.

### Application

The purpose of our lives is union with Christ. And that purpose is fulfilled daily by union with Christ in all things. Think about what kind of person you want to be rather than what career you want.

### References



**Scripture:** [Exodus 9:16](#); [Eph 1:4](#); [Eph 2:10](#); [Gen 1:27-28, 2:18](#); [Isaiah 43:1-7](#); [1 Peter 4:10](#); [Romans 12:2,6](#); [Acts, 20:35](#); [John 17:3-4](#); [Jer 18:6-10](#); [Acts 13:36](#); [John 17:4](#); [Eph 2:10](#)



**Liturgy:** [The Conclusion to the Coptic Catholic Epistle](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Gregory of Nyssa](#)



**Story:** [Judas Iscariot](#)



**Other:** [The Purpose of Life](#), [Our Purpose In life](#), [Living Purpose](#), [Why did God create man?](#); [Lecture V: Predestination in The Orthodox Concept](#); [Living with Purpose Series Part I](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Three Major Questions

- Almost every individual asks three basic questions: the question of existence: Why am I alive? For thousands of years people have asked this question. Many people of the Bible did. Jeremiah asked this question, “Why did I come forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow, That my days should be consumed with shame?” (Jeremiah 20:18).
- There’s the question of significance. Is there some meaning and purpose to my life? Is all that I’m doing just a waste of time and energy? Is my life significant? Job asked the question, “Why should I work so hard for nothing?” If there’s no meaning and purpose, why am I even doing this?
- And there’s the question of intention: “Is there a purpose for my life?” Why were we born? The most important thing about our life on this earth is that we understand its purpose. Nothing is accomplished without purpose.
- Define Purpose: The reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists.
- The British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, who described himself as an atheist, said, “Unless you assume a God the question of the purpose of life is meaningless.” In other words, if there is no God, there is no grand scheme or significance to anything. If there is no God, your birth was an accident. You simply represent a random chance. If there is no God, there is no right or wrong and no Heaven or Hell.”

#### + Predestined for a purpose before creation:

*Consider having this discussion: Have you ever wondered what your purpose in life was? Have you ever wondered why exactly you were put on this earth, and what exactly you’re supposed to do with the time you have here?*

- God more than simply has a purpose for us, he predestined us from creation for a purpose.
- “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,” Ephesians 1:4-5
- God, through His divine foreknowledge and recognition of what would take place in the future, knows who would do the things that please Him in righteousness and goodness using their free will.
- God also knows who would choose to do evil and disobey Him misusing the gift of free will.
- God’s foreknowledge does not interfere with our given free will. Moreover, the divine universal saving will of God is different from His foreknowledge in case of those who perish. In other words, God wants them to be saved but He knows that they will make the wrong decisions.



+ What is my Mission?

- “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers” Acts 13:36. This verse defines one's success, therefore we are made to know and love God. Since one is made in the image of God, then I need to become Christ-like, in my words, actions, dress, and service. Now we have a mission and a role model and God gave us each a talent to serve yourself by serving others.
- By our actions and service I become a witness of Christ and His life, one can tell the story of Jesus Christ.
- “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” John 17:4

+ The potter has purpose in His creation and has something in mind, thus the real question is, what is God's will for me in my life?

- We need God's help to know our purpose. If we didn't create ourselves, how can we possibly know what we were created for?
- “Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down. And to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good which I said I would benefit it” (Jer 18:6-10).
- It is clear from the above passage that God (the potter) is even willing to revoke His judgment if a person turns from his evil way and seeks his own salvation. The story of Nineveh is a clear example.
- The potter (God) has power over the clay to make whatever he wants from it whether a vessel for honor or dishonor. But the potter (God) is also wise and just. It is absurd that a wonderful lump of clay comes into the hands of this wise potter and he makes it a vessel of dishonor. On the other hand, if the clay is rough and not fit to be a vessel for honor, the potter, then, will be obliged, due to its bad state, to make from it a vessel for dishonor. Thus it all depends upon the condition of the clay because the potter's will is to make all the clay vessels of honor.

+ What was the state in which God created man ? (In His Image, With Dominion, With Others - Genesis 1:27-28,2:18)

- IMAGE: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” We possess the one by creation; we acquire the other by free will. In the first you also in the likeness, where would your privilege be? Why have you been crowned? And if the Creator had given you everything, how would the kingdom of heaven have opened for you? But it is proper that one part is given to you, while the other has been left incomplete: this is so that you might complete it yourself and might be worthy of the reward which comes from God. – St. Gregory of Nyssa
- WITH DOMINION: ““You will rule over savage beasts.” How though, you may ask, since I have a beast within? Actually, there are a myriad, a countless number of beasts within you. You should not take offense in these words. Rage is a small beast, yet when it growls in the heart is any dog more savage? Is not the treacherous soul like fresh bait staked in front of a bear's den? Isn't the hypocrite a beast? ... [Rule] then over the beasts inside you. Rule your thoughts so that you will become a ruler over all things. So the same one who provides the power to rule over all living things provides power for us to rule over ourselves.” – St. Gregory of Nyssa
- FOR HIS GLORY: So the ultimate meaning of life is to glorify God in everything you do and when you do this, you will experience the true meaning of your life “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

+ How can our purpose Glorify God?

- Through talents/gifts: Peter 4:10 “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of .,” 1 Peter 4:10 and from the book of Romans “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Serve God with Spiritual Gifts... Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;” Romans 12:2,6
- Through service in our relationship with Him (Acts 20:35) “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”
- Always ask yourself: Am I living for my own purposes, or am I living for God's purposes?
- Our ultimate goal is to be with God in eternity, as we conclude the Catholic Epistle reading during the liturgy saying: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. The world is passing away, and its lust; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”
- A great example of someone who lived for his own purpose is Judas Iscariot and therefore, he lost everything. Read John 13 & 18
- Judas lived a life we can only imagine. Judas ate, traveled, and served with Jesus.
- He saw all the miracles and heard all the parables, but his heart was evil and he didn't have the intention to Glorify God, he was blinded by worldly lust and greed.



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 9.3: Hearing the Voice of God; Elijah hears God

Building Block 9:  
True Christian in a  
Non Christian World



### Objective

Students will understand that in order to be on the right track in life, they must put away distractions and listen to His voice.

### Application

Let us be attuned to the Voice of the Lord as it comes to us through the mouths of His servants and His word.

### References



Scripture: [I Kings 19:1-18](#); [I Kings 22:1-28](#); [I Kings 17-19, 22](#), [II Kings 1-2](#); [John 10:27](#); [Luke 8:8](#); [Romans 13:14](#) [Luke 8:8](#), [Matthew 6:6](#)



Liturgy: [Bow down before the Gospel](#).



Patristics: [St. Augustine](#), [St. Basil](#)



Story: [Conversion of St. Augustine](#)



Other: [How to Hear God's Voice](#), [To Hear God's voice through scripture](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + What does He sound like?

- What is it like to hear the voice of God?
- The following story is told of the conversion of St. Augustine. One day, while he was struggling with his inability to overcome his own passions and desires, he went into his garden carrying the Letter of Paul to the Romans. While in agony of mind over his struggle, he suddenly heard a child's voice from the neighboring garden saying, "Take up and read, take up and read." He immediately opened Paul's letter and read from Romans 13: 14, "clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." This experience was the moment of his conversion. He became the greatest of the early Church Fathers because he heard the voice of God speaking as if through the voice of a child.
- Have you ever heard the voice of God speaking to you? What would it be like if you could hear God speaking?

#### + In what ways do we expect God to speak to us? Can I hear Him?

- God speaks in many different ways, God's voice also comes from our parents, teachers, priests, and the Bible
- Luke 8:8 Says "He who has ears, let him hear".
- Primary method God speaks to us is through the bible.
- Ask the Lord to open your heart so you can accept hear and accept His word.
- Schedule a time to spend time with God and make sure you eliminate distractions, turn off your computer and cell phone.
- Go to your room and close the door, and submit to the Lord.
- 6 "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you[a] openly." Matthew 6:6
- Before reading the Gospel in the liturgy, the deacon announces that we, "Stand in the fear of God. Let us hear the Holy Gospel." We have to be attentive to hear God's word, voice, and message.

#### + Elijah

- When we read in the first book of Kings of the life of this great Prophet we find that not too much is written, but the events of this little written about him are profound. One of the lessons to be learned from his life is the need for us to be open at all times to God's message and His inspiration
- Scripture Reference: I Kings 17-19, 22, II Kings 1-2. The prophet Elijah arose during the reign of the evil King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. The



people of Israel turned to worship Baal, and Elijah had to stand up for God against formidable odds. But, later, Elijah ran from Jezebel's anger. Elijah had demonstrated courage before Ahab in the king's palace and on Mount Carmel. He had also witnessed God's supply by the brook, in the home of the widow, in the years of famine, in the fire from heaven that consumed the sacrifice, in the coming of the rain, and in the ability to outrun Ahab back to Jezreel. However, when faced with the threat of Jezebel and the obvious fact there would be no immediate revival in the land, he suddenly became fearful and discouraged and then ran for his life.

- I Kings 19:1-18. In this passage we see how the prophet Elijah gave in to discouragement and despair.
- He counted himself as a failure, stating that he was "no better than my fathers," meaning, the prophets that had come before him. Elijah believed his work on Mount Carmel had no greater effect on turning the people back to the worship of God than did the work of any previous prophets of Israel. So, he desired to not only resign from his prophetic ministry, but also to die. He hit rock bottom. But in this moment of despair, the Lord sent food to Elijah and let him rest. By doing so, God provided Elijah with the necessary strength to keep going. God was still there, ministering to Elijah during his lack of faith and his despair.
- In response to Elijah's circumstances, God revealed Himself. Even in our moments of fear and disbelief, God is with us.

#### + Developing Good Spiritual Hearing

- Have you ever heard someone speak to you and you knew without even looking who it was? How did you know? It was because you recognized the voice.
- Studies have shown that often babies know their mother's voice at birth. Why? Because they have been hearing her voice for weeks before they were born.
- Did you know that sheep recognize their shepherd's voice? Many strangers can call to the sheep, but they will not follow them. However, when the shepherd calls, the sheep will come because they know his voice. Jesus was referring to this when He said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).
- Read I Kings 19:11-12. God was not found in a strong wind or in an earthquake or in a fire. It was in "a sound of gentle stillness" that Elijah heard God's voice. To hear God's voice often requires us to be quiet. Psalm 46:10 tells us we need to "Be still, and know that I am God." It's in stillness, not busyness, that we tune our spiritual ears to hear the voice of God. The Lord constantly speaks to us and gives us His direction. It's never the Lord who is not speaking, but it's us who are not hearing.
- Just as it can be difficult to hear someone talking to you in a noisy, crowded room, too many times a noisy, busy life makes hearing God's voice a difficult challenge.
- Have you ever "turned into" a favorite radio station? The station was broadcasting continually, but it was not until you "tuned in" that you could hear what was being said. It is the same with God. He is trying to talk to you, but you must have "ears to hear" (Luke 8:8). Let us be attuned to the Voice of the Lord as it comes to us through the mouths of His servants and His word.

- + "As it is impossible to verbally describe the sweetness of honey to one who has never tasted honey, so the goodness of God cannot be clearly communicated by way of teaching if we ourselves are not able to penetrate into the goodness of the Lord by our own experience." (St. Basil the Great, Conversations on the Psalms, 29)

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 9.4: How to Handle Temptation

Building Block 9:  
True Christian in a  
Non Christian World



### Objective

To understand that temptation happens but with God, one can remain faithful.

### Application

Be aware of the temptations that are present around us and have developed ways to handle them. Be prepared for temptations and arm ourselves with Christ's example. When we are aware and prepared for temptations we are more likely to flee, turn to God, and succeed.

### References



Scripture: [Matthew 4:1-11](#); [Luke 4:2](#); [Hebrews 4:15](#); [1 Corinthians 10:13](#); [Matthew 26:41](#); [James 1:13-15](#); [Galatians 6:1](#); [Galatians 5:16-17](#); [Eph 6:11-18](#), [James 1:12](#)



Liturgy: [The Lord's Prayer](#)



Patristics: [St. Basil the Great](#); [St. Augustine](#); [St. Isaac the Syrian](#), [St. John Cassian](#), [Abba Arsenious](#)



Story: [St. Moses the Strong](#)



Other: [Temptation Sunday](#), [Sermon about the temptation of our Lord](#), [Temptations](#), [Temptation & Addiction](#), [The Victorious Christ in temptation](#), [The Practical Coptic Orthodox Youth Regardless of a Tumultuous Culture](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Temptation :

*Consider having this discussion: Life is filled with choices, and the choices that you make can change your life and the lives of those around you. Can you think of a famous person who made a choice that seemed to surprise everyone and yet affected their life in a really negative way? One may say, "Why did they do that? But no one would really want to do something illegal, or hurt my family, or lie and get caught! Ask yourself if you've ever thought any of these common thoughts that often lead us right into temptation: That would never happen to me. Just one lie won't matter that much. No one else will know. Everyone else is doing it. Every single one of us is very close to the line of temptation.*

- Temptation doesn't come from God - it comes from Satan (through the flesh) [James 1:13](#)
- There are some major types of temptations in this world like the Social Media, drugs, alcohol, wrong friends, clothes, music, and sexual orientation are just to mention a few.
- But all those major temptations begin with smaller temptations: a desire to fit in, a lustful look, a desire for popularity or power, etc..
- Remember that we ought to be, "sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

#### + Types of Temptations: There are so many temptations in the world but they can be summed up in three categories.

- The first one is the lust of the flesh. These are natural wants and desires of our body; excessive eating, drinking, sleeping, sexual desires, excessively pampering yourself, emotions, jealousy, greed, selfishness.
- The second one is pride in life. These are desires of the ego to seek excessive power, authority, knowledge, popularity, attention, strength, prestige, selfishness, recklessness, irresponsibility
- The third major one is lust for the eyes. These are the desires of what we see in the world, possessions, materials like big houses, a nice car, the newest cell phone.

#### + Why do you think we need to avoid these temptations?

- St. John Cassian enlightens us that "Fasts and vigils, the study of Scripture, renouncing possessions and everything worldly are not in



themselves perfection, as we have said; they are its tools. For perfection is not to be found in them; it is acquired through them.”

- If we live in sin and temptation, we are far from the Lord.
- Self control is important to help one build a relationship with Christ. Without self control we have given in to satan and his tricks.
- Enduring Temptation makes us stronger and has its reward

+ Why do you think it's so hard to avoid these temptations and that it sometimes seems so easy to give into them?

- To avoid anxiety: Anxiety results from the expectations and pressure of the Church, parents, and society, creating a build-up of tension in our lives. The clash between these expectations can overwhelm the depths of our souls.
- We must not allow it to reach the extent that it frustrates us with unease. Then society plays a role in your life, pressuring you with “fun” such as prom, teen clubs, and inappropriate parties, rumored to guarantee a “good time”.
- As a teen, how are you supposed to keep God’s Commandments, finish an endless list of chores, uphold a high GPA, and enjoy social events with peers without having any of these conflicts? The solution is simple: pray and rely on God with confidence that He will guide your paths.
- Living in the world, we are always surrounded by temptations that lead to sin. Being imperfect and unclean people, repentance is the answer for purity. Confession (without question) is essential and necessary to gain eternal life.
- "Strive with all your might to bring your interior activity into accord with God, and you will overcome exterior passions." (Abba Arsenius).
- Temptation is not a sin - giving into it is. James 1:12
- Blessed indeed is the man who endures temptation because after passing the test he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him' (James. 1:12)."

+ Can we always resist temptation?

- Yes, (1Cor.10:13). God always provides the opportunity and tools necessary to do what is right. Jesus can deliver us from temptation 2 Pet. 2:9. You aren't alone (Heb 2:18). Jesus endured everything we do (Heb. 4:15). Resist Satan and he will flee from you (James 4:7)

+ Jesus is the Best example:

- Jesus went through these temptations too and showed us how to overcome the devil, who is the source of them. We are not alone
- In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus shows us how we should overcome temptations just like He did. Read the verses out loud
- First we see that Jesus willingly went to the wilderness to accept the temptations of the devil and He chose to accept them as they come because He knew it would make His Spirit stronger, Matthew 4:1
- We see here that the devil first tempted Jesus with the lust of the flesh. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” Matthew 4:3. Yes this may look so innocent and looks like it makes sense because Jesus was fasting and hungry but this is us that we must not let our basic needs take authority over us
- We must have self control over ourselves and not just give the body whatever it seeks. God does not want you to worry about these things and instead to rely on Him only. “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Matthew 6:25. Just because it makes sense, it doesn't always mean it's right
- Next, We see how the devil tempted Jesus with pride in life. Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’ ” Here we see that the devil tries to tempt Jesus to be prideful and prove Himself in a reckless and irresponsible way. We should never test God’s love and protection in such reckless ways and always trust He is working even when we don't see it. The devil wants us to think worthless and lose your identity in Christ. The enemy wants us to think God isn't there when we don't hear Him and that God left us but we always have to have faith that He will never leave us
- We then see the devil testing Jesus with lustful things in the eyes. Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Matthew 4:8-9. We see here that he tries to tempt Jesus with possessions, power and position of the world like the devil tries to do with us everyday. The devil tries to trick us everyday to fall for worshipping things of this world and sometimes we don't realize it. We slowly start to obsess with money, our clothes, we start to compare ourselves on social media and run after popularity. The devil wants us to find sneaky ways to manipulate us into glorifying anything but God. He will distract us with wealth, prestige, materials of this world, new phone, new car, new house, big time career...these things can all look so innocent but it starts to replace the time and love we're supposed to give to God. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Matthew 6:24



+ Examples from the Bible: The Bible gives us lots of practical ways to handle temptations, especially in the life of Jesus

- When Jesus was tempted, he responded in ways to show us how to handle and respond to temptations too
- Study the Word of God: Jesus resisted Satan through the Word of God. Matt 4. Temptation often comes as a lie in disguise. The truth reveals lies. Satan misused scripture to tempt Jesus. Jesus knew all the truth as revealed the lie.
- Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Matthew 4:5-7
- Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Eph 6:11-18).
- Pray and rely on God with confidence that He will guide your paths. Seeking God and His will can grant security and a peace of mind knowing that all your problems are being taken care of by the All-Mighty. Seek Him through prayer, fasting, the Bible, Agpeya (even reciting one psalm in distress), and counsel from a father of confession.
- When a lustful desire enters our thoughts we must immediately dismiss it before it has the opportunity to become an action, for "When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:15). We must practice this healthy habit routinely to purify our thoughts. When we become disciplined, we will yield fruits of the Spirit, furthering our relationship with the Father. As we acquire more fruits, it becomes easier to defeat temptation. In fighting the good fight, we must not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we persist (Gal 6:14)
- By our service, this is how we handle relationships with Non-Christians
- "He said to him again a second time, 'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?' He said to Him, 'Yes, Lord; You know that I love You' He said to him, 'Tend My sheep.'" John 21:16
- Who are the sheep? God's people all over the world
- Here Jesus tells us that if we love Him, we will also tend to His people by our care, works or services
- And tend and serve God's people even in relationships where they are bad to us
- God wants us to handle our relationships by serving people in a selfless way
- Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Philippians 2:3-4. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Mark 10:45, "...I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the most. I Corinthians 9:19. "I cannot persuade myself that without love to others, and without, as far as rests with me, peaceableness towards all, I can be called a worthy servant of Jesus Christ." St. Basil the Great
- As we pray, And lead us not into temptation, Matthew 6:13
- "A temptation arises: it is the wind. It disturbs you: it is the surging of the seas. This is the time to awaken Christ and let Him remind you of these words, "Who can this be? Even the wind and the waves obey him." St. Augustine
- When you want to make a beginning of a good deed, first prepare for temptations, which will come to you, and don't doubt the truth [of that which you do for God.] (St. Isaac the Syrian)
- Without temptations, it is not possible to learn the wisdom of the Spirit. It is not possible that Divine love be strengthened in your soul. Before temptations, a man prays to God as a stranger. When temptations are allowed to come by the love of God, and he does not give in to them, then he stands before God as a sincere friend. For in fulfilling the will of God, he has made war on the enemy of God and conquered him. (St. Isaac the Syrian)
- Sometimes though, we can become weary, but we take heart in the example that our Savior Jesus Christ left for us. Reflecting on His life and how He conquered all temptation in the flesh, reminds us that we too can conquer if we strive for perfection.



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 9.5: God is the Source of Pleasure

Building Block 9:  
True Christian in a  
Non Christian World



### Objective

To understand the real pleasure is to have a true relationship with God.

### Application

Be content with whatever God gives us and learn to enjoy it with Him. Set God Himself as the source of our pleasure and joy, which will prevent us from being greedily distracted by material things. Live in God's joy and seek pleasure in Him not in material things. Adopt the view that it is a pleasure to be with God!

### References



**Scripture:** [Psalm 16:11](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13](#); [Proverbs 21:17](#); [1 Timothy 6:17](#); [Ruth 1:16](#), [John 6:68](#), [Matthew 13:44](#), [Psalm 34:8](#), [1 Cor 10:31](#), [Psalm 73:25](#)



**Liturgy:** [The Conclusion to the Coptic Catholic Epistle reading](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Isaac the Syrian](#), [St. John of Kronstadt](#)



**Story:** [Ruth and her love of God](#), [St. Anthony](#)



**Other:** [The Source and Giver of New Life, Joy](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + Who would leave everything to follow Christ?

*Consider having this discussion: How many saints do you all know? How many of these saints left things and just followed Christ? Why do you think they would do that?*

- Many saints left everything to follow Christ. Some examples are St. Anthony, St. Demiana, St. Paul and many more.
- Tell the story of St. Anthony the Great, how he came from a rich family, how he was very well educated, but one sermon he heard changed his life and encouraged him to leave everything and follow Christ.
- Tell the story of Ruth, how even after her husband died, she knew that she found peace and love in the God of her husband and was determined to stay and serve her mother in law.
- The disciples left their nets and their jobs to follow Christ.
- The monks and desert fathers left everything and went to the desert.
- The martyrs were willing to give up everything, even their own heads.

#### + Why would anyone leave their riches, home, and family to follow Christ?

- No one leaves everything to be miserable! These saints left it all and followed Christ for a reason, they saw something that he gives that no one else can: Pleasure, Comfort, Peace, etc... But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68)
- The saints figured being with God is great! For them God Himself was the ultimate source of pleasure, nothing else in the world could match!
- "The soul that loves God has its rest in God and in God alone. In all the paths that men walk in in the world, they do not attain peace until they draw nigh to hope in God." St. Isaac the Syrian
- Once they found their pleasure in God, nothing else could even come close. They were willing to let go of anything just to be with God and in His presence. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." (Matt 13:44)
- This kind of pleasure is a spiritual kind, where the enjoyment that results from prayer, fasting, and living in God's word brings overwhelming joy. It strengthens our love for God through knowing Him better, knowing how much he loves us, and knowing that we can trust Him with all our lives. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:8)
- God doesn't only give us Spiritual pleasure, but He all holy enjoyment in the world is a gift from Him. Even simple things like good food or tasty drinks are gifts of God that can bring simple enjoyment to our lives. When the physical things that God gave us are used in their



intended way and limits, they can be enjoyed guilt-free. "I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God." (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13)

#### + Is our Real Enjoyment with God?

- However, we should seek pleasure in God. Even if we enjoy things, we enjoy it with Him. Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31)
- The problem comes when we seek pleasure in the things themselves, rather than seeking pleasure in God and enjoying things with Him. Slowly we can start to abuse the things God gave us and that will ultimately bring us misery.
- This can even be used by the enemy to distract us from God Himself, who is the source of all holy pleasure. "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not be rich." (Proverbs 21:17)
- It is okay to enjoy the things that God gave us. Even riches and material things could be enjoyed, but they can not become our focus. They can not have a place in our hearts, our hearts need to be totally for God and God alone. But riches can be enjoyed and can be used for good! "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy." (1 Tim 6:17)
- In the end though, even if we have everything we want. Even if we have nothing, we can still find enjoyment and pleasure in life through having God. "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You." (Ps 73:25)
- As we conclude the reading of Catholic epistle during the liturgy: "Do not love the world or things in the world. The world is passing away, and its lust; but he who does the will of God abides forever. Amen."
- Ruth insisted on going with Naomi because of her love for God, "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." Ruth 1:16

#### + Pleasure in Christ through Joy:

- Joy is listed in the Fruits of the Spirit, so what is extra or different about Joy received directly from God?
- To fully appreciate it requires us to personally experience it. When we do we realize that it is an incredible gift, for it is a taster of the life to come after this one.
- God's love for us mixed with His desire to share His Kingdom with us spills over into our life on earth now. He has prepared a great place for us; He wants to share His joy and Kingdom.
- He wants to live with us hence He tells us He is with us everywhere we go. He not only wants to live with us, but also live in us. Thus the Holy Spirit lives in us.
- Once experienced the joy of the Lord stays with you even if it was a one off experience the memory of it is enough to keep you feeling joyful. Hence St. John of Kronstadt can say: "Oh, what great happiness and bliss, what exaltation it is to address oneself to the Eternal Father. Always, without fail, value this joy which has been accorded to you by God's infinite grace and do not forget it during your prayers; God, the angels and God's holy men listen to you".
- The Joy of the Holy Spirit does not compare to the Joy of the world, and it is available freely to all who seek a life of repentance and strive to live a life in Christ.
- When sadness enters our life we must closely examine our lives for without diligence and spiritual discipline we can quickly lose hope and forget that all sadness is temporary and Joy will always follow.



# Theme: Choosing my Faith

Building Block 9:  
True Christian in a  
Non Christian World

## Lesson 9.6: How to Handle Relationships with Non Christians

### Objective

To understand how to handle relationships with non Christians.

### Application

Identify traits (not physical) that you want in your friends and abide by them in choosing your friends.

### References



**Scripture:** [Matthew 5:13-14](#); [Proverbs 12:26](#), [13:20](#), [14:7](#), [22:24](#), [24:21](#); [1 Corinthians 15:33](#); [Sirach 6:14](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:9-10](#); [Hebrews 10:24](#), [2 Timothy 2:24-26](#); [John 17:15, 16](#); [Deuteronomy 13:6-10](#); [1 Kings 11:4-6](#); [10:24](#); [11:2](#); [11:9](#); [James 5:16](#); [Luke 7:34](#); [1 Corinthians 9:20-23](#)



**Liturgy:** [The Conclusion to the Coptic Catholic Epistle reading](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Augustine](#); [John Chrysostom](#)



**Story:** [King Solomon](#)



**Other:** [SS Curriculum G7 on Christian Dating](#), [LAcopts Article on Dating](#)

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

#### + What is friendship?

*Consider having this discussion: Can I be friends with non-Christians? Should I just mostly avoid non-Orthodox people? Should I form friendships with those who have different religious views than me? Let them respond.*

- The book of Proverbs has some great passages about choosing and the importance of friendship: "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray" (Proverbs 12:26). Stay away from foolish people (13:20, 14:7), from "an angry man, and with furious man do not go." (22:24), and from those who rebel against God (24:21). All these things describe people who have not trusted their lives to Jesus Christ.
- Friendship is so valuable, we read in Sirach 6:14, "a faithful friend is a strong shelter, and he who finds one finds a treasure"
- Who are some people in the Bible who were friends? [Jesus and the apostles; Jesus and Lazarus; Paul, Timothy and Barnabus; King David and Jonathan; etc.]

#### + How is friendship important?

- The Bible talks about the importance of true friendship, "Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up." Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
- Also, Hebrews 10:24 tells us to encourage our friends to do good things.
- "The claims of friendship, moreover, are not to be confined within too narrow a range, for it embraces all to whom love and kindly affection are due, although the heart goes out to some of these more freely, to others more cautiously." St. Augustine
- "Though you should name infinite treasures, none of them is comparable to a genuine friend. And first let us speak of the great delight of friendship itself. A friend rejoices at seeing his friend, and his heart expands with joy. He is tied to him with an union of soul that affords unspeakable pleasure. I speak of genuine friends, men of one soul, who would even die for each other, who love each other fervently." John Chrysostom, Homily 11 on 1 Thessalonians.

#### + To socialize or not to socialize?

- Although it is not wrong to be friends with non-Christians, it is important to take the time to consider our friendships.
- All throughout the book of Proverbs we see this constant wrestling of this idea. We read things such as "The righteous should choose his



friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray” (12:26).

- So, we may take some risks having a few non-Christian friends. If we are not grounded in the truth of the Bible our walk might suffer because of this kind of friendship.
- God never intended us to isolate ourselves completely from society.
- There is some good in hanging out with non-Christians as long as you are in a place where you can influence them, not the other way around.
- In fact the Lord wants us to still be in the world, and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13, 14). Oftentimes it is only through the relationships that non-Christians have with us that they will be able to learn about Christ and be saved.
- But while God wants us to be in the world, He also wants us to be careful not to be of the world (John 17:15, 16). And what this means ultimately is that we must have a balance in our relationships with non-Christians.
- On one hand we must be close enough to them to influence them with our Christian lives, but on the other hand we must not be so close to them as to be influenced by their non-Christian lives.
- Having this balance is not an easy thing to do.

#### + Important guidelines for relationships with non-christians:

- We need to study what God’s Word says about these relationships by looking at some important guidelines that we should follow closely in our relationships with non-Christians.
- Guard yourself from being influenced by them to compromise your faithfulness to God
- This principle can be seen clearly in Deuteronomy 13:6-10. The Bible shows us the disastrous results of violating this principle in the life of Solomon, First Kings 11:4-6.
- King Solomon was the richest and wisest king of his day as we read, “Now all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart.” 1 Kings 10:24. However, he was led astray because he disobeyed God and took wives “from nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods’” 1 Kings 11:2
- And it happened, “when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God.” 1 Kings 11:4
- Solomon had a great beginning and God appeared to him twice, but the influence of his non-believers’ wives changed him. We read, “so the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord god of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.” 1 Kings 11:9
- Ask: What changes have there been in your relationships with others because of your relationship with God?
- How, do you think, do the non-Christians you meet daily perceive your conduct?
- Are there relationships in your life that are hindering your spiritual life?
- Have your standards been compromised? Are you being uncaring and insensitive toward things in, say, movies or on television or in language that you were not once uncaring to, but sensitive to?
- Are we loving these people for their sake – that is, that they would come to faith, and they would become godly – or do we really love them because we love what they enjoy and just like being with them in their worldliness?
- As Christians, it is important to keep an accountability partner, not let ourselves become a part of this world, and more importantly, allow God’s light to shine through us in order to glorify Him.

#### + Light in the darkness

- Although these close relationships are not recommended, it does not mean we ignore unbelievers, either.
- 2 Timothy 2:24-26 tells us that as children of the Lord, we are to be kind to and not battle or struggle with anyone. We should gently teach those who oppose the truth and be patient with difficult people.
- Matthew 5:16 tells us, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” We should serve unbelievers so that they may see God through us and turn to Him in praise.
- James 5:16 says “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”, so bring your concerns for unbelievers before God, and He will listen.
- Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners and He was called the “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 7:34)
- And St. Paul saying, “and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake,” (1 Corinthians 9:20-23)



- We are going to be in the world together with non-Christians. We should take opportunities. You should become all things to all people in a biblical way.

+ Our Focus:

- Our focus ought to be on our relationship with God
- As we hear in the conclusion of the Coptic catholic Epistle reading in the liturgy: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. The world is passing away, and its lust; but he who does the will of God abides forever. Amen."
- Many people have been saved because of the prayers and service of Christians, so do not turn your back on unbelievers, but having any kind of close relationship with a non-Christian can quickly and easily turn into something that is a hindrance to your walk with Christ.
- We are called to evangelize the lost, not be remarkably close with them. There is nothing wrong with building quality friendships with unbelievers – but the primary focus of such a relationship should be to win them to Christ by sharing the Gospel with them and demonstrating God's saving power in our own lives.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 9.7: How to Witness to Christ in a Non Christian World

Building Block 9:  
True Christian in a  
Non Christian World



### Objective

To understand how to become walking witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world and society we live in.

### Application

Try to always do better, be better in all your thoughts, deeds, actions, words.  
Being kind to someone who needs a friend at school or helping a friend or peer with school work or helping out at a shelter are all ways you can let the Holy Spirit work through you.

### References



**Scripture:** [Psalm 34:8](#), [Matthew 10:33](#), [John 15:18-19](#), [Ephesians 4:15](#), [2 Peter 2:19](#), [John 17:15](#), [Philippians 2:15](#)



**Liturgy:** [Midnight Praises/The Song of the Three Saintly Children](#)



**Patristics:** [St. Anthony the Great](#)



**Story:** St. Paul the Apostle



**Other:** [LAcopts Article on Witnessing Christ](#)



### Body Overview Bullet Points

- + How can I be a faithful Christian in such a “politically correct” society?
  - Everyone should refrain from communicating anything that can potentially hurt a person’s feelings, cause distress, or in any way, offend them.
  - This is especially true when dealing with issues on sex, gender, race, and religion.
  - Political correctness has somehow become an excuse to silence people who have something to say and many are afraid to speak up in fear of being tagged as politically incorrect.
  - Towards the end of His ministry, the Lord explained to the disciples that the world was going to hate them because they belonged to God. Jesus Christ said "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before if hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:18-19)
  - The standard of wisdom, truth and righteousness has been, is, and always will be God.
  - Saint Paul says, in Ephesians 4:15, that we ought to “speak the truth in love.” He is calling us to the same standard that Christ himself set! Our Lord was sympathetic to sinners and outcasts. He loved in ways Humanity had never known and He extended His compassion to those that the world hated.
  - Speaking the truth in love is not just about what we speak, but also how we speak it! It is not enough to spread the message of the Gospel; we must also be an incarnate image of Him who gave the world that very message of salvation.
  - If our message rubs people the wrong way, although it is spoken in wisdom, humility, and love, then our conscience ought to be clear and at peace.
  - We ought to witness to those who do not know Jesus by showing His love, His kindness and His joy.
  - Jesus is the greatest example of what it is to witness to those who do not know the Father, He did this by simply just walking alongside people and by being Himself.
  - “A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, ‘You are mad; you are not like us’” - St. Anthony the Great
- + How to live a genuine Christian life.
  - We first need to understand that we are different and the Holy Spirit abides in us and because of this, we have a greater responsibility to follow in the steps of Jesus Christ despite the world we live in and the temptations and struggles we face.
  - In the midst of a society that wants to do away with Christianity, it’s easy to fall into the temptation and forget about our calling and duty to let the Holy Spirit shine through us as Christians.



- Jesus Christ calls His Church to mission, which means we are disciples of the Church and all of our words, deeds, actions should be Christian like.
  - It is not meant to be an easy thing to do as the world and society is full of sin and the sins of the world are easy to fall into.
  - Therefore being the light of the world is challenging but very rewarding at the same time.
  - St. Paul: The primary impact the Apostle Paul has left on Christianity is through his letters, but was primarily an Apostle to the non-Jews, brought to them, in an extraordinary way, the message of the crucified Messiah.
  - If we look at those places and cities that he visited to preach the good news, we see that each of them is on a major Roman road or it is at a major seaport, or great trading centers of the world, and are the center of migrations of people.
  - He knew that the spread of Christianity depends upon getting it to those major centers.
  - And we know that he suffered, “in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)
  - St. Paul was able to relate to everyone, “For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.” (1 Corinthians 9:19-22)
- + As Orthodox Christians, we recognize that there are certain truths, which are central to the Gospel message and way of life.
- We are not afraid to remain faithful to them despite ridicule and even persecution. Examples are the many Saints and Martyrs that have devoted their lives to Christ and never stood down from what was the Truth despite the risk of persecution.
  - As Christians, we are called to live in purity in an impure world (2 Peter 2:19). This is how we witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - From a Christian view, there is depth to life, which is often lacking in our current society. It is the life according to the Spirit.
  - As Orthodox Christians, we can say that man’s hunger for depth ultimately springs from the image of God in us, which has been obscured and distorted by so much secularization.
  - There is more to our life than the surface life of safety, comfort, status, and power. This deeper purpose is communion with God.
  - When we distort the image of God within us, we lose our true self, and thus become unhappy. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is set apart, yet not taken out of the world (John 17:15).
  - God leaves the Church in the midst of the world to witness to His goodness, love, and grace. This is our responsibility in this life, sustained by the grace of God.
- + By spiritual discipline, we can live a fruitful and righteous life, obeying the Truth.
- Being Christian goes beyond just belief in Jesus Christ. It requires changing kingdoms from that of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - As the Church of Christ, our actions and lives must witness and confess to the Kingdom of God present here on earth.
  - The key to a Christian life in a materialistic society is the virtue of dispassion, which includes constant refraining from treating physical things as ends in themselves, and maintaining a certain detachment from them.
  - The problem lies in seeing our work as a way of personal gain and luxury and not as a way to serve others. We manifest our love for God in our worship and our love for our fellow man by self-sacrificing service. Thus the Christian seeks to do good work for the glory of God, and this is how we witness to our Lord.
  - On the Last Judgment, we will have to answer to what we have been given in this life, and we have been given an enormous treasure in our Church and our faith.
  - The process of Christian growth requires commitment of our free will to walk in holiness and righteousness.
  - St. Paul said, “That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.” (Philippians 2:15) This is how we witness to our Lord.

# Theme: Choosing my Faith

## Lesson 9.8: BB V Review and Open Discussion

Building Block 9:  
True Christian in a  
Non Christian World



### Objective

### References

### Application

### ➔ Body Overview Bullet Points

- + How can you begin to set an example of Christian living?
- + Who is our opponent? Why are non-Christians looking at believers? What do they hope to find? Do they find what they are looking for when they observe your life?
- + What is our purpose? Why does the church and the world need the gifts you bring? How do we sometimes forget the main purpose in our lives?
- + How can our purpose Glorify God?
- + What is it like to hear the voice of God?
- + Read Hebrews 1:1: What is this saying about God speaking in the OT and NT?
- + Why do people struggle with blaming God when they are tempted?
- + How can James 1:13-15 change the way you view temptations?
- + What are some practical steps we can take to handle temptations?
- + Why did the saints leave everything and just follow Christ? Why do you think they did that?
- + Discuss the following verses 1 Corinthians 15:33, 5:6; Proverb 13:20; Psalm 1:1
- + What do you fear the most about inviting those in your life space to "come and see Jesus" at your church fellowship?





# ARCHIVE



Version I lessons are being redeveloped.

Access to ALL Lessons available in Version I found in the archive.

Redeveloped lessons will be delivered every 6 to 8 weeks.

PK-G12: VERSION 1, 2020-2021 – [DRIVE ARCHIVE](#)