

Eyeing Easter, Walking through Lent:

A Bible Study with Global Baptists

Leaders Guide

Eight online adult Sunday school
lessons



Produced in partnership by the Baptist Center for Ethics
and the Baptist World Alliance

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A separate Student Guide for *Eyeing Easter, Walking through Lent: A Bible Study with Global Baptists* is available by free download at www.ethicsdaily.com.

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Table of Contents

Create In Me a Clean Heart	2
Prepare the Way	6
Look Beyond the Here and Now	9
Ask, Seek, Knock	12
Shout for Joy!	15
Invite the Poor	19
Depend on God	22
Come, Bless the Lord	25

Create In Me a Clean Heart

Leaders Guide

Theme: Confession opens the door to renewal.

**Text:
Psalm 51**

Before You Lead

- ▶ To frame the context of Psalm 51, read 2 Samuel 11-12. Make a list of key events from this passage that led to David's confession. Be prepared to summarize the story of Uriah, David and Bathsheba when you lead this Bible study.
- ▶ Read Psalm 51, the Preface and "Create In Me a Clean Heart" from the Students Guide. Then read the following suggestions.
- ▶ If possible, purchase enough bottles of drinking water for each person in your group to have one. Also obtain a pitcher, a basin or bowl and a towel. Before this session begins, fill the pitcher with water.

As You Lead

Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Involve adults in a friendly competition to see who can find the most references to *cleansing* or *water* in Psalm 51.

List these on a board or chart as adults suggest them; review them and their verse references once the list is complete.

► Note that the Bible includes hundreds of references to water: 442 in the *New International Version* and 363 in the *King James Version*.

Point out that water is considered a purifying agent in most religions, and many in addition to Christianity incorporate ritual washings in their practices, including Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Shinto.

Stress the importance of water by relating these facts:

- All known forms of life depend on water. In order to function properly, the human body requires between one and seven liters of water daily to avoid dehydration (the precise amount required depends on activity level, temperature, humidity and other factors). And humans require water that does not contain too many impurities or bacteria.
- Throughout history, civilization has flourished around water. Mesopotamia, known as the cradle of civilization, lay between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers; major cities like Rotterdam, London, Montreal, Paris, New York and Tokyo owe a large part of their success to their easy access to water and the subsequent expansion of trade.
- The converse is also true: In places where water is scarce and pure water even scarcer, people struggle to maintain existence and face disease, famine and death.

- The availability of clean water is a major social and economic problem. Around 1 billion people around the world routinely drink unhealthy water. Even if we meet the 2003 G8 Summit goal of halving the number of people worldwide who lack access to safe drinking water, an estimated half billion more will still lack this access, and over 1 billion will remain without access to adequate sanitation facilities.
 - In 2000 alone, more than 2.2 million people died from diseases related to the consumption of contaminated water or drought. The UK charity WaterAid reported in 2004 that a child dies every 15 seconds from water-related diseases that are easily preventable.
 - Overpopulation in some parts of the world, mass consumption, misuse and abuse and water pollution have resulted in an inadequate and shrinking supply of drinking water worldwide. Water has become a strategic resource and an important factor in many political conflicts.
 - In developing nations, 90% of all wastewater goes untreated into local rivers and streams.
 - Forty percent of the world's people lack sufficient fresh water for minimal hygiene.
- Suggest that these facts make the story in the Introduction of the Students Guide even more poignant. Stress that, just as people in many parts of the world must undergo a ritual cleansing before being allowed "at the table," we too must assume a similar stance spiritually in order to receive forgiveness, experience renewal and enjoy full fellowship at God's table. Note that our appeal must begin as David's

did: “Have mercy on me, O God,” and that Lent provides us with an opportunity to begin the journey toward restoration and renewal.

► As time permits, review some of the symbols and important elements of Lent, using the information in the Introduction to the Students Guide and the appendix at the back of this Leaders Guide. Ask adults to consider these questions:

- *In what ways is Lent a journey?*
- *What should be our goal as we journey through Lent toward Easter?*
- *Why is a privatistic faith an incomplete one, and how does Lent challenge the notion of a purely private faith?*

Explore the Bible

► Lead adults to recall events in the lives of David, Bathsheba and Uriah that led to David’s remorse and guilt as expressed in Psalm 51. Point out specific verses from 2 Samuel 11-12 as necessary to explain David’s circumstances.

► Read aloud Psalm 51:1-9 and lead adults to discuss it by asking such questions as:

- *How do you define mercy?*
- *On what occasions have you experienced mercy? What was the result?*

- *When have you extended mercy to another person? When have you failed to do so?*

Suggest that to admit the need for mercy is often interpreted as an admission of weakness. Our contemporary therapeutic culture encourages us to push the responsibility for our actions onto others. Scapegoating is much more common than confession. Yet only through confession and repentance can God restore us and equip us for service.

► Note again the images of cleansing, purification and water in these verses and stress the fact that only God’s mercy could do what was necessary for David.

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 51:10-16. Point out how within this section, David’s prayer begins to move beyond his concerns and broadens in scope to the needs of the world. Note David’s recognition that God’s forgiveness is not a private and personal matter but is instead a reason to be vocal about God’s grace to others who need to find it for themselves.

Stress the progression of this prayer and how David disappears the farther along it goes. While the opening verses are filled with the first person, the focus shifts to what David would do once he had been restored. David’s very personal prayer ends with a request for the good of the people.

Note what lesson writer Carla Nelson suggests: “As much as David’s desires are for his own release, they are also for God to be God. Be the God that you are yes, for my sake, but not just for my sake. ...”

Then ask:

- *What does this mean to you?*

- *How did David envision his life differently when God was God for him?*
- *When God is God for you, how is your life different? How is your engagement with the world and its people different?*

Stress that when God is God and we are in right communion with God, we can also be in right communion with others, seek justice for them and work for the common good.

► Read aloud the remaining verses of Psalm 51. Stress that confession, forgiveness and restoration are not an ending. Instead, they mark the beginning of a transformed life that is lived in service to God and others. We receive mercy and restoration for a purpose that extends to others.

Apply Biblical Truth

► Call attention to the explanation from the Students Guide of Lent as an “in-between time.” Stress that our journey during Lent toward Easter must begin with the confession that comes from a broken and contrite heart.

To symbolize confession, repentance, forgiveness and cleansing, pour water from the pitcher into the basin or bowl, wash your hands and then dry them. Then pass the basin or bowl and the towel from person to person in your group, inviting them to wash their hands to symbolize the cleansing that comes from God’s mercy and forgiveness and to remind them of the millions of people around the world who assume this posture regularly as a hygienic practice.

► Next, give each person a bottle of water and ask them to keep it somewhere throughout the season of Lent to remind them of the importance of spiritual cleansing and of the people around the world who lack access not only to clean water but also to the living water of Jesus Christ.

► Close with prayer for those who work through the ministries of the Baptist World Alliance and Baptist World Aid to provide wells, irrigation systems and hygiene education to those who lack clean water and adequate sanitation.

Relief and Development in Sudan

One of the current projects of Baptist World Aid involves helping The Sudan Interior Church in the North with relief and development. Drought has caused crops to dry up and good drinking water is not available. Many animals have died and people are starving for lack of food. This project seeks to help some 2,000 families by purchasing, transporting and distributing grain and providing them skills and management training.

Prepare the Way

Leaders Guide

**Texts: Psalm 120
Luke 3:1-18**

Theme: Our walk with God begins when we admit our need for God.

Before You Lead

► Read Psalm 120, Luke 3:1-18 and “Prepare the Way” from the Students Guide. Then read the following suggestions.

As You Lead

Introduce the Lesson

► Begin with the following illustration:

Linda Koroma has been an eyewitness to the pain and terror of the war in Sierra Leone. Yet she believes that God allowed her to witness the horrors of war so that she could testify to God’s goodness.

A member of Regent Road Baptist Church, Linda and her family at one point took shelter in the basement of their home for eight straight days when fighting was especially intense. Neighbors came to stay with them and share their small amount of food. Linda encouraged them to trust God,

assuring them that God is the only one who could save them.

The rebels finally retreated from the city, but not before they burned houses and tortured numerous civilians, chopping off their limbs. Linda believes it was God’s divine mercy that saved her from this cruelty. Sadly, her church was burned, and the rebels destroyed or burned most of the schools, clinics, hospitals and other churches of the Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone.

The ten-year war in Sierra Leone is over. While the rebels destroyed the structures of the churches, they did not destroy the Church, the body of Christ. These Christians in Sierra Leone acknowledge their need for God and depend upon God.

► Suggest that we might have difficulty identifying with Linda’s circumstances. War, poverty, famine, disease and other tragedies come only as close as television or computer screens for many of us. We can easily become self-sufficient and may be guilty of living, at least at times, as though we do not need God. Yet an authentic walk with God can begin and continue only when we admit our need for God.

► Read aloud the Barbara Brown Taylor quotation from the Introduction in the Students Guide. Then ask:

- *Is it worthy for us to think more in terms of what we behold—what we see and then tell—than in what we believe?*
- *What would happen if we did?*

- *What might we discover about our world that we could change? What wrongs could we help make right?*
- *How would this help us “prepare the way for the One who has come to show us the way”?*

Explore the Bible

► Introduce the Psalms of Ascent, using information from the series Introduction and from the lesson in the Students Guide. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 120. Then lead adults to discuss it by asking such questions as:

- *In what ways does Psalm 120 reflect life for most of us most of the time? At what points do you most identify with the psalmist?*
- *How do our individual and collective deceits create problems not only for us but also for others? What examples can you give?*
- *In spite of his distress, what did the psalmist conclude?*
- *What was the real source of the psalmist’s distress?*
- *What conditions around the world in the present moment cause you distress? What role does the global Christian community have in helping alleviate some of these conditions?*
- *In what ways can we help bring peace and justice when we often feel like the psalmist, who said, “I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war”?*

► Ask adults to locate Luke 3:1-18. Suggest that John’s message points to good news for those who, like the psalmist, earnestly seek peace and justice for our world.

Read aloud Luke 3:1-6, calling attention to the list of names in verses 1-2.

Barbara Cawthorne Crafton, an Episcopal priest and writer, has suggested that we usually “understand this list of bosses to be intended to locate the story of Jesus in time. We think it’s there so we’ll know that these things took place in the historical space historical figures occupy. So we’ll know that they really happened. And maybe that *is* why Luke tells us who was running what when John began to preach.” Yet she believes another message may lie in this roll-call of important people: “All those power people — emperors, governors, high priests — and to whom does the word of God come? John Nobody” (<http://www.geraniumfarm.org/dailyemo.cfm?Emo=714>).

“Probably sooner or later,” Crafton says, “we should envision our world as it will be when we are not in the center of it. Sooner than later, we should prepare for our own meekness. It’s coming. Which is good news. Because the word of God came to John. The word of God didn’t come to the big boys that time. They were busy with other things.”

Point out that God chose this particular point in history to begin the ultimate act of redemption, working through an unlikely messenger and ordinary listeners.

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 3:7-15 and lead adults to discuss it by asking such questions as:

- *What was John the Baptist’s primary message?*

- *Who responded favorably to it?*
- *Why do you think Luke was careful to specify these three particular groups?*

Point out that each of these groups responded to John’s message in the same way: “What then should we do?” (vv 10, 12, 14). Note John’s reference to them in verse 7 as “brood of vipers,” making their positive response to his message even more significant. Then ask:

- *What did John tell them to do?*
- *How do you understand or explain John’s reference to Abraham?*
- *Why are fairness, generosity and ethical reform necessary in helping prepare the way of God’s coming for the purpose of redemption?*
- *How will our lives change when we genuinely repent? How will repentance affect the way we relate to other people and the problems they face?*
- *In light of our repentance and God’s gracious redemption of us, “what then should we do”?*

► Read aloud Luke 3:16-18. Call attention to the process Luke describes using phrases such as “winnowing fork,” “chaff” and “unquenchable fire” (v 17). Then note verse 18 that describes this as “good news.”

Reinforce lesson writer Randy Hyde’s conclusion to this section in the Students Guide: “Baptists, historically, have focused on individual repentance, but Lent offers a wider perspective. John baptized the people individually, to be

sure, but he spoke of a collective ethic that begins with just one changed heart. It is impossible for one person to be changed without the resulting desire to share that good news with others. When that happens, society changes, culture shifts, worlds are turned upside down.”

Apply Biblical Truth

- Summarize the information about Premila Priyangani in “Building the Kingdom” from the Students Guide.
- Stress that the Lenten journey provides us with opportunities to show our desire to participate in an unseen kingdom, just as Premila does where she serves. Our walk with God requires that we carefully and creatively show our love to our world, relinquishing our tight grip on what we have and opening our hands to share with those who have needs. Such is the mark of a repentant person.

“The way of God is an ethical way. Fairness and generosity are marks of the kingdom of heaven and enable the true believer to help prepare the way of a coming God whose ultimate purpose is the redemption of the world.” —Randy Hyde, “Prepare the Way”

Look Beyond the Here and Now

Leaders Guide

**Texts: Psalm 121
Luke 12:22-34**

Theme: God's provision changes our priorities.

Before You Lead

- ▶ Read Psalm 121, Luke 12:22-34 and “Look Beyond the Here and Now” from the Students Guide. Then read the following suggestions.
- ▶ Consider obtaining *Stars Lighting Up the Sky* by Tony Cupit. In this book, Cupit tells the stories of Leena Lavanya and 14 other individuals he considers “contemporary Christian heroes” whose lives reflect the truths of these Bible study lessons. For information about the book’s availability, contact the Baptist World Alliance by email at bwa@bwanet.org or by phone at 703.790.8980.

As You Lead

Introduce the Lesson

- ▶ Call attention to the work of Leena Lavanya as explained in the Introduction and conclusion of the Students Guide. Then relate the following additional information about Leena:

After she and her family had purchased a sewing machine for a destitute woman and taught her to sew, providing her with a way to earn a living, Leena became convinced of great potential for change in the lives of other such women. She went on to establish a sewing school through which over 400 poor women have learned a marketable skill, and in the process have learned about God’s love for them through Jesus Christ.

Always confident that God will provide all of her needs, Leena finances the sewing school in a rather imaginative way. She visits animal markets and bargains with merchants to purchase goats, which she then hires shepherds to tend. As new goats are born, she returns with them to the markets to sell them for cash.

In spite of the uncertainties and risks such business ventures entail, this has provided her with enough revenue to purchase new sewing machines that she in turn distributes to the school’s neediest graduates.

A Christian businessman familiar with Leena’s ministries said, “It is clear Leena has not been siphoning any money off for herself or abusing people’s trust in any way...she lives very meagerly.”

Leena Lavanya’s priorities of serving God by meeting the needs of some of India’s poorest people grow from her confidence in God’s provision. She lives faithfully and generously, demonstrating through her selfless actions that God is personally concerned for everyone.

- ▶ Challenge adults to consider how God’s provision in their lives has changed their priorities. Ask them to reflect silently on the following questions:

- *How honestly can I sing “All to Jesus I surrender”? What do I tend to hold back for myself?*
- *To what degree am I willing to sacrifice so that someone else might have what they need?*
- *Have I become immune to images of poor and hungry people around the world? What is my response to the reality of massive global poverty?*
- *To what extent am I willing to be the expression of God’s care and provision to those in our world who need it?*
- *Do our church’s budget, facilities, programs, emphases and other components reflect a commitment to serve “the least of these”? What should we change?*

Explore the Bible

- ▶ Ask a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 121:1-6. Lead adults to discuss it by asking questions such as these:
 - *Given the indisputable fact of God’s care for us, what should be our response?*
 - *Where do most people place their trust, or on what do they depend for the “small stuff” of life—the “everyday” things?*
 - *What assurances do people look for in trying to secure a good life for themselves and their families?*

- *What reasoning did the psalmist follow for trusting fully in God?*

▶ Read aloud Matthew 6:24, and using the information in the last paragraph of “Care in the Smallest Things,” explain the concept of *Mammon* as Jesus used it here. Note specifically: “*Mammon* represents a system in which riches dominate the human person and the human *milieu*, determining who and what we are socially and personally. Systemic riches oppress humanity and misplace our values. *Mammon* makes the person live depending more on money than on God, making riches the ultimate value and ultimate allegiance. The psalmist, and Jesus, said otherwise: our ultimate allegiance relies on God, who takes care down to the most menial details of our daily lives.”

▶ Read aloud Psalm 121:7-8 and stress the fact that we cannot get away from God’s care for us. The best and only appropriate response to this fact is to place our complete trust in God.

▶ Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 12:22-26; then ask:

- *How would you summarize Jesus’ philosophy of anxiety?*
- *Where do you think most people stumble or fall short when it comes to trusting God completely?*

▶ Read aloud Luke 12:27-34 and lead adults to further consideration of faith versus anxiety by asking them to respond to questions such as these:

- *Why is worry useless, according to Jesus?*
- *What is the origin of anxiety?*

- *How does the logic of the kingdom run contrary to the logic of the world in terms of “giving” and “having”?*
- *How does Lent challenge us to change our values and realign our priorities? How will our lives be different as a result? How might our world change if each Christian aligns his or her priorities according to the purposes of the kingdom of God?*

Apply Biblical Truth

► Point out that Baptist World Alliance President David Coffey has pledged to give HIV/AIDS high profile during his term of service. While Baptists have recently made strides in focusing on the “devastating reality of the disease,” Coffey reminds us that it is a global problem that carries much stigma and discrimination worldwide.

“The strength of being a Baptist is knowing you are not alone. We are a global community and fighting HIV/AIDS is something that we can, and should, do together,” he wrote.

“Thinking and caring for those living with AIDS takes commitment. May I suggest that we make the time for this. Make it a priority. Meeting people living with HIV, their families and Baptists working on AIDS issues should be a priority. Simply listening to their stories and praying with them is a powerful encouragement and a blessing to your own life. I have done this in my own ministry and invite you to join me in making it a priority commitment.

“Jesus gave us a new commandment to love one another as he had loved us,” Coffey concluded. “He said when we fulfill this commandment of love, then the world will know we

are his true followers (Jn 13:34-35)” (www.bwanet.org/News/06Oct-Dec/aidsdaycoffey.htm).

► Suggest that whether it is poverty and lack of economic opportunity, HIV/AIDS, famine, disaster or any number of other problems, we can respond in helpful ways that reflect our commitment to follow Christ. The ultimate question, as the Students Guide writers remind us, is: “Whose kingdom are we pursuing? . . . Generosity, acceptance, hospitality, community; these—among others—are the values of God’s kingdom. . . . Living by them is not optional for us if we want to reflect in our daily lives the character and the mighty acts of the One who called us ‘out of darkness into his marvelous light’ (1 Pet 2:9)”.

AIDS Education in Mozambique

An estimated 16.4% of Mozambique’s population—over 20 million people—are HIV positive, with some 600 new infections every day. Of these new infections, 45% are among people under the age of 24. Students attending schools outside urban areas lack information on HIV/AIDS and basic preventive measures. One of the projects of Baptist World Aid involves providing students and teachers outside urban areas with basic AIDS education and prevention information.

Ask, Seek, Knock

Leaders Guide

**Texts: Psalm 125
Luke 11:5-13**

Theme: God surrounds us and gives us what we need.

Before You Lead

► Read Psalm 125, Luke 11:5-13 and “Ask, Seek, Knock” from the Students Guide. Then read the following suggestions.

► These articles from EthicsDaily.com may be helpful in supplementing your preparation and in leading group discussion:

“Baptists Trapped, Need Supplies in Escalating Attacks on Lebanon,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7641);

“Arab Baptists Help in Lebanon’s Worsening Humanitarian Situation,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7644);

“Christian Leaders Call on Political Leaders for Ceasefire in Lebanon,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7662);

“Global Baptists Condemn Violence in Intensifying Middle East Crisis,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7655);

“Baptists Question Why Ceasefire Took So Long, Look toward Relief Efforts,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7757);

“Baptists Build Bridges Between Muslims, Christians in Lebanon,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=8165).

See www.ethicsdaily.com for additional related articles and editorials.

As You Lead

Introduce the Lesson

► Begin with this scenario:

Imagine being at home with your family when suddenly you hear the unmistakable sound of air strikes and artillery fire. You look out the window and see smoke billowing from homes and buildings and people on the streets running for cover.

Such was the case for hundreds of thousands of Lebanese citizens in July 2006 when they became victims of Israel’s attacks on Lebanon in response to Hezbollah terrorism. Over 1400 people, many of them civilians, were killed during the conflict, which began July 12 and continued until a United Nations-brokered ceasefire went into effect on August 14. The conflict formally ended September 8, 2006, when Israel lifted its naval blockade of Lebanon.

During the war, as many as 900,000 Lebanese were displaced, as were around 300,000 Israelis. All of life in that region was disrupted and Lebanon's infrastructure was terribly damaged, including airports, roads, bridges and other transportation systems; food, water and hygiene supplies; gas stations and electrical stations; medical facilities and stores. Even after the ceasefire went into effect, much of southern Lebanon remained uninhabitable due to unexploded cluster bombs. Many civilians who could return home found that their homes were no longer standing.

Six days into the conflict, Lebanese Baptist leader Nabil Costa, executive director of the Lebanese Society for Education and Social Development, reported, "Day by day the targeted zone is expanded, and more people lose their lives and homes. Merciless killing machines target innocent people—including infants and children" (see "Baptists Trapped, Need Supplies in Escalating Attacks on Lebanon," www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7641).

The elderly, women and children fled their homes in search of safety. Several hundred Muslims displaced by the fighting in southern Lebanon found refuge among Baptists, many at the Beirut Baptist School and others at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary. Among the refugees were at least one pregnant woman and a mother with a six-day-old infant.

► Note that while the situation in Lebanon was horrifying, good news came in the form of the response of global Baptists. Point out these examples:

- Within days of the war's outbreak, BMS World Mission, the British Baptist mission organization, provided funds for relief aid.

- Working with BMS and the European Baptist Federation, Baptist World Aid provided relief support to displaced families through its Baptist partnerships in Lebanon.
- Both Canadian Baptist Ministries and the Baptist General Association of Virginia provided funds for emergency relief and aid for displaced people at Beirut Baptist School and Arab Baptist Theological Seminary.
- Elie Haddad, provost at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, contacted a respected Shiite clergyman about the situation in his neighborhood, which had been viciously bombed. The clergyman, a participant in past forums at the seminary related to pursuing better relationships between Christians and Muslims, was overwhelmed that Baptists were lending a hand to displaced Shiite families. He told Haddad, "You are different."

Suggest that in spite of the devastation resulting from the war, God's comfort and provision became evident to scores of people who benefited from acts of love and mercy shown by God's people.

► Note that Martin Accad, writer of this lesson for the Students Guide, lived through the terrifying experience that became known in Lebanon as the July War. Through his eyes of faith he was able to apply to this experience some biblical principles about hospitality and the safeguard of human dignity and trust.

Refer to Accad's statements in the Introduction about "the voice of the world and that of the Word." Then ask:

- *What does the voice of the world tell us, and what does it call us to do?*
- *How does the voice of Word differ from the voice of the world?*

Explore the Bible

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud the parable from Luke 11:5-13. Using information in the Students Guide, note the important Middle Eastern code of honor that affected how Jesus' listeners heard and responded to this story. Point out that while the setting and story are hypothetical, those listening as Jesus told it would have easily identified with either character.

Lead adults to discuss the parable by asking:

- *What two possible responses would Jesus' audience have given upon hearing this story?*
- *What prompted the needy neighbor's seemingly unreasonable request?*
- *Why did the neighbor have no choice but to give the man what he needed?*
- *What dilemma did the man face who was forced to go to his neighbor at such a late hour?*
- *What do you think this parable teaches us about prayer and how we should pray? Is Jesus saying that God will respond to any and all of our requests, whatever they are?*
- *What does this parable teach us about God?*

► Refer briefly to the parallel account of this parable in Matthew 7:7-11 and to the explanatory information in the Students Guide. Then ask:

- *How do you understand verse 6?*
- *How can some "asking" be dangerous?*

► Preface your reading of Psalm 125 by noting that it is addressed to faithful and righteous people. After reading the psalm aloud, ask adults to suggest how it is connected to the parable from Luke.

► Point out Psalm 125:3 and explain the possible meanings of "scepter." Then ask:

- *What do you understand this verse to mean?*
- *What symbols of power and authority are we tempted to allow in place of God's authority in our lives?*

After rereading verses 4-5, ask:

- *In what ways do we take God's grace for granted?*
- *How does Lent encourage us to reexamine the lines of authority in our lives?*
- *How are these verses a warning to us?*

Apply Biblical Truth

► Use the personal illustration from Martin Accad at the end of the Students Guide lesson to lead adults to apply these biblical truths. Ask them to reflect silently on these thoughts and questions:

- *The voice of the world convinces us that we should seek to possess as much as we can to secure our own comfort. The voice of the Word challenges us to ask, seek and knock in dignity and as honorable children of God.*

To which voice do I most readily respond?

- *What and whom have God entrusted to me? How faithful and accountable am I to that trust? For what should I ask God on behalf of those entrusted to me?*
- *How do I need to adjust the lines of authority in my life?*
- *In what ways can I demonstrate God’s faithfulness and provision to those who most need it?*

“The voice of the world calls us to fear and hatred and rejection, whereas the voice of the Word calls us to hospitality and trust in God.” —Martin Accad, “Ask, Seek, Knock”

Shout for Joy!

Leaders Guide

**Texts: Psalm 126
Luke 12:13-21**

Theme: God is the source of our hope.

Before You Lead

► Read Psalm 126, Luke 12:13-21 and “Shout for Joy!” from the Students Guide. Then read the following suggestions.

► These articles from EthicsDaily.com may be helpful in supplementing your preparation and in leading group discussion:

“British and Australian Baptists Spearhead Effort to Fight Global Poverty,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4855);

“Australian Baptists Are Chief Advocates for Micah Challenge,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7569);

“Global Baptists Support the Micah Challenge, Will U.S. Baptists Get on Board?,” (www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=6461);

“The Challenge and Joys of the Micah Challenge,”
(www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=6743).

► Before your group meets, copy each of the facts from Apply Biblical Truth (see below) on a separate piece of paper or small poster board. Plan to display these around your meeting area.

As You Lead

Introduce the Lesson

► Retell the story of lesson writer Craig Sherouse when he visited the Lutheran Frauenkirche in Dresden, Germany.

Suggest that today’s lesson theme of joy may at first seem odd, since the Lenten journey is a journey toward the cross. Ask volunteers to suggest how we can find joy in such a journey.

► Encourage adults to notice themes common to both scripture passages for this lesson, including joy versus merriment; gratitude versus greed; sharing versus hoarding; authentic life versus inauthentic life.

Point out that these texts remind us that joy is different from merriment. Joy endures suffering and shares resources, while merriment is fleeting, delusional and self-serving. Our Lenten journey challenges us to find joy in releasing our tight grasp on things and sharing what we have with those who have less.

Explore the Bible

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 126. Suggest that this psalm probably refers to the return of the exiles from

their Babylonian captivity, the subsequent rebuilding of the Temple and the resumption of worship. Then ask:

- *How was this experience unusual for captive nations during this ancient time?*
- *What image does the psalmist use to illustrate the power of joy emerging from sorrow?*
- *What role did memory play in the lives of these worshipers?*
- *What role can memory play for us?*
- *How do you understand and explain the sowing/reaping proverb in verses 5-6?*

► Note that the lesson writer suggests that “All Lenten journeyers should learn that the more we move out of ourselves, the further down the road to the cross we are. The more we weep over the souls of others, the more authentic our lives will be. The more we weep over the rubble of poverty and injustice, the closer we are to worshipful, biblical joy.” Then ask:

- *What did the psalmist believe must happen before people could experience rejoicing and harvest?*
- *What must happen for us in order to have this joyful experience?*

Stress that the joyful worship the psalmist described grew from his memory of God’s divine restoration and enabled him to live in hope. The same is true for us.

► Next, guide adults to examine the Luke passage. Read aloud Luke 12:13-15 and note that it falls within Luke's account of Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem. This conversation between Jesus and someone "in the crowd" sets the stage for an usual parable Jesus told. The listeners here were not disciples; they were "the crowd." They were not necessarily religious people, or what we would consider "church people."

Remind adults that before Jesus told the parable in Luke 12:16-21, he first denied a man's request that he prod the man's brother to divide their inheritance. Jesus recognized the man's greed for what it was. In Jesus' economy, life's value comes not by what we hold in our hands but in what we give away.

► Ask a volunteer to read aloud Luke 12:16-21. Contrast the "our" and "we" terminology of Psalm 126 with the "I" and "me" emphasis in this parable. Ask adults to suggest ways a "Lenten journey" would have helped this man. Then ask:

- *What was God's assessment of this man?*
- *In what ways was this man foolish?*
- *How would knowing the truths of Psalm 126 have helped this man? What did this man lack?*
- *How is sharing the bounty that God gives us connected to worship?*

Stress that this man knew something about sowing and reaping, but not much about weeping and rejoicing. He lacked the sacred memories, joyful worship and sense of community both the psalmist and Jesus valued.

Apply Biblical Truth

► Relate this illustration:

Childbirth is hard and hazardous in Papua New Guinea (PNG). Because of rugged terrain, it is next to impossible for pregnant women to travel to a hospital or for babies to get neonatal care. To make matters worse, custom dictates that when a woman is about to give birth, she is sent into the bush to have her baby alone. Sometimes the baby lives; but far too often both mother and baby die alone in the bush.

Kaa Simon, president of the Baptist Women of PNG, wants to change this. A nurse and public health worker in PNG, she was administrator of the leading hospital in the highlands for several years. Since she grew up in a village, she is burdened by the need of pregnant women to have a safe and sanitary place to give birth. With her family's support, she gave up her hospital post and income to promote places for women to give birth. Her goal is to provide a "birthing hut" for every village.

Kaa goes first to Christian villages and talks with the village chief. When she has his support she meets with all the men, to share her vision. Then she trains health workers among both men and women. She appeals to the volunteer health workers to begin by cleaning homes, schools—if there are schools—and places of worship. Men are taught how to build toilets. She uses biblical ideas to teach the importance of cleanliness and equality among men and women. Against this background, she inspires the villagers to build a place where the pregnant woman, with assistance of a midwife, can have her baby.

At present, eight huts have been built, with thousands of villages yet to be reached. The huts are round, enclosed, thatched-roof structures with dirt floors covered by plastic.

Since most of the villagers are illiterate, Kaa has prepared detailed manuals with pictures of how to do certain things relative to health within the home and environment. Others show what is involved in delivering a baby, along with procedures to assist women in childbirth and care for the newborn. Kaa's work has gained recognition from the PNG central government and she has been honored for helping to make villages healthier.

Kaa Simon is pointing countless people in Papua New Guinea to the source of her hope and joy. She models for us qualities of generosity, authenticity and community.

► Call attention to the following facts you have displayed around your meeting area. (You may want to supplement these facts with others you find at www.micahchallenge.org and www.bwanet.org.)

- A billion people worldwide try to survive on less than \$1 per day.
- 77 million children of primary school age are not in school.
- 10.5 million children died before their fifth birthday in 2004, mostly from preventable causes.
- More than 500,000 million women die each year during childbirth, most of them in developing countries.

- 39.5 million adults and children around the world are living with HIV/AIDS.
- Almost 4.3 million new infections of HIV/AIDS occurred in 2006.

► Review the Micah Challenge and the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations as listed in the conclusion of the Students Guide. Note the strong connection between the Micah Project, the themes of the scriptures for this lesson and the purpose of Lent.

Challenge adults to examine their progress on the Lenten journey in light of the scriptures and the opportunities the Micah Challenge presents. Ask them to reflect silently on these questions:

- *Which best characterizes my lifestyle: greed or generosity?*
- *Do I tend more toward isolating and protecting myself and my family or toward working for peace and justice for the global community?*
- *Do I use resources carefully or frivolously?*
- *Do I hoard wealth and possessions to the point that others are denied things they need, or am I willing to sacrifice for the sake of others?*

► Close with prayer, asking God to fill your Lenten journey with the joy that comes from memory, hope, worship, community and service.

Invite the Poor

Leaders Guide

**Texts: Psalm 127
Luke 14:7-14**

**Theme: Discipleship fosters humility,
practices generosity and welcomes
the poor.**

Before You Lead

► Read Psalm 127, Luke 14:7-14 and “Invite the Poor” from the Students Guide. Then read the following suggestions.

► Visit the Resources on Poverty section at www.ethicsdaily.com for an overview of and information on the Micah Challenge, as well as a collection of stories and columns related to global poverty. You will find this information helpful in preparing for and leading this study.

At that link you can also find more information about “Always ... Therefore: The Church’s Challenge of Global Poverty,” a DVD and study guide produced by Baptist Center for Ethics. Your church or group may want to consider ordering and using this resource as a follow-up to this study.

As You Lead

Introduce the Lesson

► Engage adults in a verbal quiz to determine their awareness of facts about poor and hungry people. Use questions such as these (see www.bread.org for these and other facts from which you can form questions) and challenge them to respond:

- **True or False:** The number of hungry people worldwide has increased rather than decreased in the past year.

(**True:** The number of hungry people worldwide increased by 2 million in the past year.)

- **True or False:** One child dies from hunger-related causes every 30 seconds.

(**False:** One child dies from hunger-related causes every 5 seconds.)

- **True or False:** Starvation and famine are the only ways hunger manifests itself.

(**False:** Most poor people who are hungry also live with chronic undernourishment and vitamin or mineral deficiencies, resulting in stunted growth, weakness and heightened susceptibility to illness.)

- **True or False:** Most people who are hungry could be helped if they would take advantage of soup kitchens and social programs.

(False: Soup kitchens, government-assistance programs and job-training programs do not exist in most of the countries in which a large percentage of the population is hungry. Families who cannot grow enough food or earn enough money to buy food have nowhere to turn for help.)

- **True or False:** Nearly one in five people die prematurely or have disabilities due to poor nutrition and calorie deficiencies, according to the World Health Organization.

(False: The ratio is actually **one in three.**)

- **True or False:** Elderly people face the greatest risks from undernourishment.

(False: Women who are pregnant, mothers who are breastfeeding and children are included among the most at risk of undernourishment. Sadly, many hungry people in developing countries do not live long enough to be considered “elderly”; when they do, they also face considerable risks.)

- ▶ Continue to guide adults to consider what life is like for those who are poor and hungry. Note specifically the effects of poverty and hunger on children and people living with HIV/AIDS. Most children who die from hunger-related issues, for example, die not from outright starvation but from easily preventable diseases that their small, frail bodies cannot fight. The common childhood illnesses of diarrhea, acute respiratory illness, malaria and measles—all preventable and treatable—lead to the deaths of thousands of children worldwide each year simply because their parents lack access to immunizations and medicines.

The epidemic of HIV/AIDS is a major obstacle in fighting poverty and hunger in developing countries. Many of those living with the illness are young adults who would normally harvest crops and help produce food. Because their illness prevents them from working, food production drops off, affecting entire communities and regions. Those infected with HIV/AIDS also are the primary caregivers for children and elderly relatives, and their illness renders them unable to provide this consistent care.

Stress that we have the means to end global poverty and hunger. The annual financial costs to meet the basic health and nutrition needs of the world’s poorest people are less than what animal lovers in the United States and Europe spend each year on pet food. We can end poverty and hunger when we make it a priority.

Ask:

- *How is an emphasis on the world’s poor and hungry people connected to Lent? Why should we focus on them during this time?*

Remind adults of Jesus’ particular interest in and concern for the poor and oppressed. Suggest that the wisdom of the psalmist and Jesus’ teachings are particularly significant during Lent, as they challenge us not only to help and care for the poor but also to seek them out and include them in our lives.

Explore the Bible

- ▶ Read aloud Psalm 127 and lead adults to discuss it by asking questions such as:

- *How do you interpret “build a house” in verse 1? To what areas of life might this phrase refer?*

- *Why does the psalmist say worry is needless?*
- *How does God want to be involved as we “build a house”? What does this mean?*
- *How does your understanding of verses 1-2 frame your interpretation of verses 3-5?*
- *In what ways have you heard these verses explained? Have you always agreed with these explanations? Why or why not?*
- *What is our responsibility to the world’s children? How can we best help children of parents who struggle to provide them with life’s basic necessities? Why should we care?*
- *Who are those within our spheres of influence that we tend to exclude or ignore? What steps can we take to include them?*
- *What might happen when we begin including those on the fringes of society? What will happen if we do not begin to include them?*
- *How is doing this uncomfortable for you? Will it create controversy? How?*
- *Do you think the church in some cases has made a choice to remain “respectable” over being faithful to the gospel when it comes to certain people and issues?*

► Next, ask a volunteer to read the parable from Luke 14:7-14. Guide discussion by asking such questions as:

- *What lesson was Jesus trying to teach through this parable?*
- *How did Jesus tell guests to act?*
- *What did he tell hosts to do?*
- *In what ways do we make judgments about others in public and social settings? How do our judgments affect how we treat others?*
- *How does genuine discipleship turn social customs and expectations upside down? When is the last time you have been challenged to do this?*

Apply Biblical Truth

► Close with this illustration from the ministry of Leena Lavanya:

Leprosy is a terribly misunderstood disease through much of India. While drugs are available to cure it and stop its spread throughout much of the world, Indians in some villages believe people with leprosy are unclean and highly contagious and force them to live in leper colonies. Instead of receiving treatment that could cure them, they are marginalized and ostracized by family, friends and communities, their only resources coming from begging.

Yet to this group of otherwise shunned and ignored people, Leena Lavanya has become a friend, encourager and spiritual guide. Burdened for many years for this group of people who have only the stars for a roof over their heads, Leena wanted to find a way to provide them with some kind of housing or shelter. As a result of the generous financial

gifts of a couple in Virginia's McLean Baptist Church, Leena was able to purchase a house for some of her special friends.

When they moved into their new home, however, they were met with anger, hostility and opposition from the community. Some of the villagers who knew Leena was responsible for securing the house confronted her and verbally abused her. They also forced her to remove the lepers from their home and return to the sides of the roads, seeking shelter under the stars and trees.

Leena continues to minister to her friends in spite of this setback, taking them blankets, food and other items they need. She has not forgotten her commitment to them and models for us the qualities of humility and generosity, showing us how to "welcome the poor."

► Close with prayer, asking God to give you the courage to place faithfulness to the gospel ahead of the desire to be "respectable." Ask God to take you to the margins of your community to seek out those in need of your care and concern.

Depend on God

Leaders Guide

**Texts: Psalm 130
Luke 23:44-49**

Theme: God saves and redeems us.

Before You Lead

► Read Psalm 130, Luke 23:44-49 and "Depend on God" from the Students Guide. Then read the following suggestions.

As You Lead

Introduce the Lesson

► Begin with this illustration:

Nunia Tupou lives in Suva, the capital of Fiji. She works tirelessly for reconciliation among the peoples of her island nation whose divisions along ethnic lines have resulted in several political coups. Yet the ministry of Fiji's Baptist women, which includes both Indians and ethnic Fijians and of which Nunia is a part, models the reconciliation they desire for their nation.

Nunia has for a number of years led a ministry to women in the Suva prison, visiting them weekly and leading them in

Bible study. “Right now our involvement is trying to reconcile the girls to their families,” she says. “So we are visiting their families to try and build up their relationship, and we need a lot of prayers for wisdom and discernment.”

A busy wife and mother, Nunia nonetheless devotes quality time to this ministry, as well as to caring for her family. She says, “I can say with confidence as Paul puts it, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,’ (Phil 4:13 NKJV).”

Nunia’s example reminds us that God has saved us and redeemed us for a purpose, and we can depend on God to help us fulfill that purpose. Our lives of faithful and obedient discipleship point others to God’s salvation and redemption.

Explore the Bible

► Provide adults with some background about Psalm 130, using the information in the Students Guide. Point out its themes of sin, God’s forgiveness, waiting for the Lord, hope and redemption. Then ask:

- *Why is Psalm 130 an especially appropriate one for Holy Week?*

Ask a volunteer to read aloud verses 1-4. Guide discussion around such questions as:

- *When have you most identified with the psalmist and felt like you were in “the depths”? What were the circumstances, and how did you respond?*
- *How are we sometimes solely responsible when we find ourselves in “the depths”?*

- *What assurances does the psalmist give us when we face such circumstances?*

► Read aloud Psalm 130:5-8. Explain the concept of “wait” in Hebrew thought, using comments from the Students Guide. Then ask:

- *What ideas are behind the waiting expressed in these verses?*
- *How should we wait, according to the psalmist?*

Connect these verses to your observation of Lent by asking adults to respond to such questions as these:

- *Why are these verses especially significant during this particular week of Lent?*
- *What is the result of patient, expectant waiting on God?*

► Read aloud the narrative of Jesus’ final moments on the cross from Luke 23:44-49. Call attention specifically to verse 46 and note that it represents a prayer of Jesus to God. Then ask:

- *Why did Jesus pray?*
- *How did Jesus depend on God?*
- *How did Jesus display his humanity?*
- *What evidence do you find that Jesus felt completely alone and abandoned at this time? (See Matt 27:46, Mk 15:34.)*

- *What does Jesus' experience from "the depths" teach us about depending and waiting on God?*

► Relate the following insights from a sermon titled "The Commendation" based on Luke 23:44-46 by Barbara Brown Taylor.

When Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit," he "shifted the entire context of his death. Until he said it, it looked to everyone as if his life was being taken away from him. His perverse religious cult had been stopped. His sinful scheme had failed. He was on the receiving end of the worst punishment the empire knew how to inflict, which should have made him their victim. But by saying what he did, he took himself out of their hands. By commending himself to the God whose enemy they said he was, he redefined what was happening to him. He gave away what they thought they were taking away from him, and the whole scene lost its balance" (*Home By Another Way*, p. 94).

In this final act from the cross, Taylor says, Jesus "introduced us to the shocking power of sacrifice, which can turn something that looks for all the world like loss into something that feels for all the world like gain."

Even when someone tries to take something from us, she says, when we voluntarily give it up for love, it becomes holy and takes on new meaning.

Stress that genuine discipleship often calls us to choose to give away what we might otherwise want to clutch tightly to ourselves. It may remove us from the familiar and comfortable. It will no doubt put us at odds with our culture and sometimes with our family and friends. Lent calls us to remember the depths of God's sacrificial love and the way

we should live, following Jesus not only by verbally confessing our faith but also by devoting ourselves daily to obedient and sacrificial discipleship.

While Jesus' death represented for many at the time the death of hope and the birth of despair, we know that the opposite was actually true. Unimaginable loss became indescribable gain for all humanity. We can depend on God to "turn something that looks for all the world like loss into something that feels for all the world like gain."

Apply Biblical Truth

► Close with this illustration:

Jesus' sacrificial death and his words from the cross, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34), made all the difference for a young Japanese Buddhist woman named Chiyo Murakami. She became a Christian and was baptized in December of 1976 at the age of 25.

As her faith grew, she recognized the contrast between her old life and her maturing walk of faith in Christ. Jesus' love as expressed through the cross moved her deeply. She began to sense God's call to Christian ministry and committed her life to serve God.

She subsequently attended Seinan Baptist Theological Seminary, graduating in 1995. At that time, Japan's Kobe-Osaka area was still suffering results from a horrific, 7.2 magnitude earthquake. Japanese Baptists and missionaries continued to distribute food, clothing, blankets and survival supplies to those left homeless by the earthquake. Chiyo was called to become the director of earthquake disaster relief for the Japan Baptist Convention. This

experience instilled in her a deep compassion for all disaster victims, especially those without knowledge of the hope Christ provides.

Following this experience, Chiyo served as apprentice to the executive director of the Japan Baptist Women's Union, participating in missions work, evangelism and service projects. She became director of this organization in 1999, was ordained as associate pastor of Keisen Baptist Church in Tokyo in 2000 and was elected president of the Asian Baptist Women's Union in 2004.

In spite of opposition to women in the pastoral role, Chiyo has remained faithful to her calling, focusing her time and energy on the physical and spiritual needs of others. Her past experiences with disaster relief continue to place her in demand when natural disasters strike in her area. In recent years, she has been involved both in Japan and across Asia in response to flooding, landslides, earthquakes, drought, famine and tsunami. She has also responded in ministry to women and children who have been abused, abandoned, violated and discriminated against.

One observer said of Chiyo, "Her ministry is an excellent balance of being and doing."

► Close with prayer, committing yourselves to a thoughtful, purposeful walk toward Easter this week, one that gratefully recognizes Jesus' sacrifice and results in genuine repentance, dependence upon God and the willingness to sacrifice so that others might experience God's love and grace.

Come, Bless the Lord

Leaders Guide

**Texts: Psalm 134
Luke 24:1-12**

Theme: Easter invites us to see God's love in action and follow it.

Before You Lead

- Read Psalm 134, Luke 24:1-12 and "Come, Bless the Lord" from the Students Guide. Then read the following suggestions.
- Spend some time reflecting on your Lenten experiences this year and recalling Easter observances from your past. Think about how your understanding of Christ's resurrection has grown and influenced your life. Think also about the role of memory in shaping your understanding of Jesus and the Christian life.
- Recognize that the resurrection account recorded in the Luke passage may be quite familiar to most people in your group. That familiarity can lessen their openness to seeing and learning new spiritual truths from it. One of your challenges is to help guide and frame thoughts about and discussion of an old story in new ways that can challenge people to walk the path of discipleship more faithfully and completely.

As You Lead

Introduce the Lesson

► Begin by quoting from lesson writer Parush Parushev, who said, “To remember is not merely a cognitive evocation. It is also, and importantly, bringing to mind the insights that guide responses to what is recalled.”

Ask adults to explain how they understand that statement. Guide their thinking by asking questions such as:

- *Why is memory important?*
- *How does memory affect and influence behavior?*
- *Does the memory of significant events always evoke response from you? Why or why not?*

► Suggest that just as memory—specifically the memory of Jesus, his life and sacrifice—played a major role in the lives of the first disciples and then the early church, it should also shape and inform our lives. Use the following example as an illustration of the power of memory and its ability to evoke response and change.

Baptists in Chile have a rich history of almost 100 years. Many years ago, however, disagreement about the handling of money led to a profound separation between some pastors and churches. As a result, two separate conventions formed and organized ministries: The Baptist Union of Chile and The Baptist Mission of Chile. While the two groups shared many of the same visions and priorities, they operated independently and without dialogue. This pattern continued for decades.

During the past three years, however, the two groups have looked for ways to come back together, according to Raquel Contreras. “We believe God has called us to live in unity,” she says. “This unity is based on the love of our Lord through his son Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit that is within us and should be expressed in real actions.”

Individuals, pastors and churches from both groups have begun meeting together for forgiveness and reconciliation. These meetings include remembering their shared history, emphasizing their commonalities and praying for each other.

Of one particularly meaningful meeting, Raquel Contreras said, “Together with our brothers and sisters we not only share doctrines, beginnings, organization, forms, liturgy and hymns, but also we share our common roots As we come close to our centennial of the organization in Chile, we believe that this has been an historic step that will help us share together our walk” of growing God’s kingdom.”

► Stress that Easter, the culmination of the Lenten journey, encourages us to recall God’s unprecedented love in action as demonstrated through Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. That memory demands from us a response.

Explore the Bible

► Note that Psalm 134 is the final Song of Ascent. It challenges us to do at Easter what the Hebrew pilgrims did when they reached Jerusalem: praise the Lord.

Read aloud the psalm. Then note that its references to the people blessing God (vv 1-2) and God blessing the people (v 3) recall a common theme from the Psalms of Ascent.

This mutuality of blessing reflects God's forgiving and redeeming love and the people's appreciation of it, and God's approval of their faithfulness in spite of life's hardships.

Stress that the people's memories of God's dwelling in their midst nurtured their faith and led them to anticipate the joy that results from being in God's presence.

► Before reading Luke 24:1-12, ask adults to select one of the following and assume that role as they listen to this passage:

- the women who went to the tomb (v 1);
- the men "in dazzling clothes" (v 4) who spoke to the women;
- the "eleven" (v 9);
- "all the rest" (v 9).

Then ask someone to read aloud Luke 24:1-12. Ask adults to respond to these questions based on the roles they assumed as they listened to the scripture:

- *What was your reaction to the news of the empty tomb?*
- *When you realized Jesus was no longer in the tomb, what memories, teachings or sayings of Jesus did you recall?*
- *What did the reality of the empty tomb cause you to do?*

- *How did memories of Jesus influence your actions and reactions?*

► Stress that while the Easter experience evokes in most Christians today vivid images and memories, it is incomplete without response based on those memories. Note specifically verses 6-9 and the role of memory in the lives of the women who went to the tomb and the men who spoke to them there. Reminded of Jesus' teachings, the women returned to tell "the eleven" and "all the rest" what they had seen and then been reminded of.

► Note the reactions of Peter and the others as described in verses 11-12. Then ask:

- *Why do you think Peter and the others first dismissed the women's report?*
- *What compelled Peter to go to the tomb and see for himself?*

Recall what lesson writer Parush Parushev stressed as a major point in this account: "The empty tomb is little more than an unresolved mystery apart from its place in the entirety of Jesus' ministry. For the Evangelist it is clear that the sequence of events requires interpretation (cf. Acts 8:31-35), and the key to understanding is Jesus' own prophetic delineation of the purpose of God."

Then ask:

- *Who and what has helped interpret the sequence of events surrounding Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection for you? What has been most helpful to you in understanding them?*

- *How does Jesus' empty tomb drive us to look for Jesus beyond that particular moment and place in time?*
- *Where do we look for Jesus today, and where might we expect to find him?*
- *What does the memory of Jesus, what he said and did and the places we find him today require or compel us to do?*

Apply Biblical Truth

► Recall for adults the examples from the “Memory and Blessing” section of the Students Guide. Note how even painful memories serve as life lessons and motivate us to right wrongs of the past, undo social injustice and work for peace and the common good.

Suggest that the story of Easter, handed down from those first at the empty tomb on to those who formed the early church and then through generations to us, is Christianity’s most compelling memory, the one that motivates us to actions that bless the lives of others.

► Invite volunteers to recall meaningful moments from the past eight weeks of this Lenten journey. Following this, stress that the way we demonstrate Easter’s effect on our lives beyond the day we observe it is to place ourselves, as Jesus did, deliberately and squarely in the midst of those he came to seek and save—the poor, those in bondage, the sick, the oppressed, the marginalized. We “bless the Lord” when we serve them.

► Invite adults to pray silently the following prayer from St. Francis of Assisi as you read it aloud:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

—*St. Francis, 1182-1226*

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