

# Daily Bible Study

Fall 2020 • Vol. 39, No. 1

A Word From the Editor 1

Our Writers for This Quarter 2

Introduction to the Study 3  
Randy Cross

## Encounter

Unit 1: So That You Can See 5  
*September • Randy Cross*

Unit 2: Remember Who You Are 33  
*October • Gary Thompson*

Unit 3: In This Place 61  
*November • Clara Welch*

### Editorial and Design Team

Jan Turrentine, Editor  
Tonya Williams, Production Editor  
Ken Strickland, Designer

### Administrative Team

Rev. Brian K. Milford, President and Publisher  
Marjorie M. Pon, Editor, Church  
School Publications

DAILY BIBLE STUDY is designed to help adults better understand the biblical message for their lives.

DAILY BIBLE STUDY (ISSN 0742-065X) is published quarterly by The United Methodist Publishing House, 2222 Rosa L. Parks Blvd., Nashville, TN 37228. Periodicals Postage Paid at Nashville, TN. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to DAILY BIBLE STUDY, Nashville, TN 37228.

Copyright © 2020 by Cokesbury.

To order copies of this publication, call toll free: 800-672-1789. FAX your order to 800-445-8189. Telecommunications Device for the Deaf/Telex Telephone: 800-227-4091. Automated order system is available after office hours. Order through Cokesbury.com. Use your Cokesbury account, American Express, Visa, Discover, or MasterCard.

For permission to reproduce any material in this publication, call 615-749-6421; or write to Permissions Office, 2222 Rosa L. Parks Blvd., Nashville, Tennessee 37228-0988.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Common English Bible, copyright 2011. Used by permission. All rights reserved. New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover photo: Shutterstock

Cokesbury 

# Taking Sides

## When have you found yourself on the wrong side of a conflict?

As a superintendent in The United Methodist Church, I am often asked to be a mediator in church disagreements. Sometimes it feels more like being a referee, coming into the conflict only when a lot of damage has already been done.

The hardest situations, oddly, are not those in which you can see and respect that each side has some truth to it. No, the hardest is when it is clear that one side is the offender and is just plain in the wrong, and the other side is the victim. It's the hardest because, most often, I hope for a win-win situation; and when someone is clearly wrong, it becomes a win-lose event, with hard feelings and judgment. Still, there are times when *wrong* is not merely an opinion.

Members of the Jerusalem Council were wrong to stone Stephen, even if they disagreed with his preaching. The Scripture makes clear that Saul "was in full agreement with Stephen's murder" (Acts 8:1).

After the murder, the persecution of the early church began, with Saul leading the way. In what sense could that ever be right? But the wrong was powerful, and the energy and effort to destroy the church quickly spread. It was a terrible time to be right.

What's sad is that this is not unusual in our world. We humans tend to spend more time pushing our power to show that we are right than allowing the truth of who we are and perhaps even the rightness of our convictions to be our

witness. The sad fact of our humanity is that we like to be right. And if we are not right, we like to make sure that no one opposes us in our wrongness.

Can you think of a time when you have experienced that? Was there ever a time when, even though you were absolutely right, an individual or a group served as your antagonist, discounting, denying, or discouraging you? Can you recall a time when you were wrong but had the power to silence or push aside someone or some group that spoke the truth? The problem is, even if we know deep down that we are wrong, we think that if we shout loudly enough or act powerfully enough, that will make it right.

A wise friend once told me that, when I am positive that I am in the right, that is the time for me to go into the chapel and pray. You see, our rightness must not simply arise out of our own judgment or mindset. It must be given as a gift from God.

How will you live your right life today? What role will prayer and honest listening to God play in directing your decisions?

**O God, forgive me, and guide my thoughts and decisions this day. Amen.**

# Consumed With Evil

## Where have you experienced evil?

To call someone mean or nasty is to call their behavior into question. It suggests that they are ill-mannered or rude. To call someone wicked originally meant that he or she was living a life separate and apart from God. *Godless* is a good synonym. But to call someone evil means something far deeper than any of those other words.

Evil people do more than act badly or ignore God. Evil people intentionally act in ways that make them enemies of God, living against God in all they do.

During the time he was known as Saul, Saul gave himself over to evil. He sought out the followers of Christ, imprisoned them, tortured them, and threatened them with murder until or unless they denied the Son of God.

Some Bible translations say that Saul “harassed” Jesus’ followers, but he didn’t just bother them. He persecuted them, took away their rights, and voted for their deaths (Acts 26:10).

Why would Saul take on such work intended to destroy an entire group of faithful people? Of course, it was because their very testimony called Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord of all, and that was unacceptable to the first-century Jewish faith. However, the evil did not come in a difference of opinion. It came with actions that were intended to wipe out a difference of faith.

Now this is tricky, because we Christians talk about Jesus being the one way, one truth, one life to God. Most Christians don’t confess, “Well,

I could be wrong. Maybe there are lots of ways to get to heaven.” Our faith calls us to say, “This is what I believe, and this is the path to salvation.”

The difference between our faith and Saul’s is that we believe and trust in that truth, but we (hopefully!) don’t feel compelled to destroy someone who holds a different truth for their lives. Our task is to share the good news of Christ, not to kill off all who do not believe as we do.

Our calling is to invite others to know Christ as we do and to do so in love, not evil, and in good news, not in threats of murder. It is in the sharing of the love of God in Jesus Christ that we find the power of the gospel and the hope of life.

What a joyful way of living! To be able to offer the gift of Christ instead of the threat of Christ to those who don’t know him is to understand Christ’s call to us each day. Saul had it wrong. Hopefully, in our relationships with others, we will be able to avoid the judgment of Saul and instead live out the grace of God in Christ.

Who do you know who needs something other than judgment? Who needs to be reassured of Christ’s love for them? Instead of seeking to imprison them in any way, how can you free them to become joyful followers of Christ?

**Grant me the gift of good news, gracious God, and let me share it with the world. Amen.**

## **When have you experienced something that turned your life around for the better?**

When I was barely 50, I started having trouble with my knees. They just hurt all the time, to the point that I couldn't even take a nice walk with my wife, Cheri. I remember the day I finally told her that if they didn't get better, I'd have to have surgery or something so I could continue to walk.

That evening, I saw a television commercial for a vitamin supplement that promised to fix achy joints. I'm not gullible, but I was desperate. The next day, I bought a large bottle of the supplement and began to take it.

In three days, my knee pain was gone. I could hardly believe it! Even today, with periodic aching, that vitamin supplement makes life so much more enjoyable, and I feel healed. I wish there were all sorts of pills that would turn our lives around. Pills for bad behavior, loss of jobs, hurting relationships, and fear of the future would all be nice to keep in the medicine cabinet!

Usually, however, when something happens in our lives that causes us to no longer behave or believe as we once did, we find ourselves going in a different direction. Sometimes it is a powerful conversation or a situation that collides with our lives and forces us to change. Whatever the specifics, we look back later and have to admit that, as hard as the conversation or event was, it did change our lives for the better and brought us to a new place.

I think Saul wins first prize with a turn-around event in his life! Can you imagine a bright light, a voice that speaks directly to you, and then a time of blindness? Saul was heading to Damascus to arrest Christians, and he ended up being led there by the hand after encountering the living Christ.

I guess there are times when God says, "That's enough." We get stopped in our tracks, unable to move forward with life as usual, maybe even recognizing our own blindness. In that moment, a transformation begins. It might be painful and unwanted at first; but as we begin to change, we recognize that we, too, might be led by God's hand to a new way of life, a life that has been turned around. Life can become deeper, more focused, and more hopeful than going it alone with our own big ideas.

Have you prayed, or are you praying now, for that to happen? Or are you right now unaware of how you might need to change, to set aside your idea of how you will act in this world? Do you desperately need for God to take you by the hand, put you on a new path, and give you a new perspective or a new life? Frankly, I think that should be our daily prayer, that God would indeed take charge and transform our lives into those formed by God's hand and love.

May we take on that approach to living! It will be then that we will hear Christ's voice calling to us, inviting us to get up and do his will.

**Take my hand, O God, and lead me to a new life by your grace. Amen.**

## Available for God's Work

### **In what ways do you live available and obedient to God's call on you?**

My sister had to testify in court in a matter concerning the probate of our mother's will. Normally, I would have been there, but I happened to be 1,200 miles away, so the lawyer said she could do it instead.

Now for me, something like that would have been a piece of cake. I am used to speaking in public, dealing with difficult issues and such. Easy. For my sister, however, who is skilled in doing so many different things, the idea of having to speak out loud on a stand in a court of law made her nearly freeze with anxiety. The first court date was postponed, and you could hear the relief in her voice, until she realized she had just put off the inevitable.

But my sister did fine, and everything turned out well. And more important than her ability to speak in public in that setting was her availability to do what was required.

Poor Ananias sounds a bit like Moses. Ananias, the Scripture says, was a faithful disciple of Jesus, living in Damascus, when the Lord spoke to him and gave him the mission to restore Saul's sight. As is usually the case, we don't hear Ananias say, "Right! I'm on it!" Instead, we hear a great deal of hemming and hawing based on the fear of horrible reports the Christians had heard about Saul, true reports that were scary and life-threatening.

But the Lord still said, "Go!" Isn't it interesting that God never negotiates

when we are to be on a mission God sets before us? There are no halfway or altered plans or accommodations. No. Just "Go!" I need you, God says, to be my voice, my feet, and my angel (a word that means messenger) to this world on my behalf.

One thing we find out is that Ananias was faithful and did what God commanded, probably with shaking knees. But as a result, not only was Saul's life transformed, but we expect Ananias's life was as well.

I don't know if any of us is ready to take on a mission from God when God steps into our normal lives and tells us that something critically important requires our availability. God also doesn't try to convince us. God knows our hearts; and over and over again throughout history, God has depended on people who have depended on God to bring love and hope to this world.

What would have happened if Ananias had said no to God? Of course, he didn't; but even then, God would have found someone faithful and obedient to answer the call.

I hope that when God calls us—even with knees shaking, unsure of ourselves—we will answer the call, the invitation to be faithful, and share God's good news with another person.

Are you ready to do that? Are you prepared not to be, necessarily able but available, for God to use you in this world to bring holy love?

**I may not be ready, O Lord, but use me anyway. I am your servant this day. Amen.**

# The Appearance of Christ

## Where have you seen Christ in your life?

One early winter morning while it was still dark, I was driving through the countryside, on my way to travel on an early plane, when I noticed something crossing the road in front of me. What I saw was too big to be a dog and too stocky to be a deer. I slowed down and put on my bright lights to see it better.

There, going across the lanes, looking neither left nor right, was a full-grown, big, nearly giant mountain lion. He trotted across the interstate and then down the ditch toward the small creek running by. I was shocked to have encountered something so magnificent that is usually so secretive.

In today's Scripture, Paul gives his testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He recounts Christ's death, burial, and rising on the third day and then lists those to whom Jesus appeared in his resurrected state. Hundreds witnessed the resurrected Christ. Then Paul said, "And last of all he appeared to me," recalling his experience on the road to Damascus (1 Corinthians 15:8).

Why did Paul include himself on that list? He probably wanted the people in Corinth to recognize his place as an apostle, one who never knew Jesus while he was on earth but experienced him and saw his glory. Perhaps he wanted to prove his place as one who could present the gospel to the world and to them. Whatever the case, Paul concluded that from whomever they heard the gospel, it was the same message and deserved

to be honored and believed by all who heard it.

I have seen a mountain lion. I wish I would have or could see the living Christ. To see Jesus face-to-face would be such a holy and wonderful thing to experience, but I expect that's only going to happen after I have left this earth.

Still, can I confess that I, too, have seen Christ in my life? Most certainly. With eyes that look beyond what is physical, to see the heart and soul of others, I have encountered Jesus in so many different places and events and people. Through worship and mission and teaching and learning, Jesus has appeared in many ways to strengthen my faith and my love for this world in Christ's name.

What about you? Where do you believe you have experienced Christ in your own life? As you spend time with other followers of Jesus, as you hear their stories, can you also, with eyes that are not limited to what is flesh and blood, see Christ in your midst? How will you share what you have experienced of the grace of Jesus Christ, as though he were right beside you? Who needs to hear that good news and see Christ for themselves?

The message of Paul and the first disciples is our message, too. As we live it out with lives of faith, perhaps others will see Jesus Christ in us.

**Let me present you to the world, dear Jesus, and may others see you in me. Amen.**

## What title do you give yourself as a follower of Jesus?

I'm sure the PBS historical drama *Downton Abbey* was part of it; but the fact is, I have always been fascinated by British royal titles: *Knight, baron, viscount, earl, marquis, duke, prince, queen*. We in the colonies are not born to titles.

Some may think that last names have rings of royalty, but it's only self-flattery. People earn their titles in this country, whether they be occupational, educational, or political. All of them require achievement of some kind, which is far different than being born a duke or an earl. (My grandfather's name was Earl, by the way, but I don't think he was royal!)

Still, titles—whether earned, inherited, or conferred—are used to identify us in one way or another. They also help to distinguish us from one another. In fact, our last names were once titles of sorts and identified us by our profession, for example, *cooper* or *smith*; or by where we grew up; or by the tribe we belonged to. My wife has deep Scandinavian roots, so in her family history, each successive ancestor changed a last name, as the “title” came from the father, such as *Lars-son* or *Sjunes-dotter*.

And then we come to Paul, once known as Saul, of Tarsus. He might have been known by his father's name at some point, such as “Saul Ben Something” (*Ben* meaning “son” in Hebrew). But in the first verse of Romans, Paul identifies himself by a different title, one I'm sure he cherished. He wrote, “From Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle.”

Two titles were self-imposed. First, he was a slave of Jesus. A slave in this case was a lifelong servant, cared for,

and given position. In return, the slave offered loyal and faithful obedience to a master. Paul didn't call himself Jesus' friend, his brother, or anything of the sort. His life was committed to serving Christ as faithfully as possible, so the slave relationship offered Paul's understanding of who he was in relation to Jesus and also what he would do to live out Jesus' call and claim on him.

Second, he was an apostle. Paul was an apostle, not by his own ideas or actions, but because he was called by Jesus' command. An apostle is under the authority of the one who sends him or her. Paul was sent by Jesus and obeyed him.

What difference did it make that Paul had these titles? The purpose was that they identified him to the Roman congregation, and they described how he saw himself and his approach to following Jesus.

How far Paul had come from his earliest mention as a persecutor of the Christians! Now he was a slave, sent by the one to whom he now offered all faithfulness and allegiance. Paul indeed was a follower of Christ.

What title would you offer that describes your relationship with Jesus? How would others recognize your understanding of your place in Jesus' world?

**Thank you for accepting me, dear God, and help me learn more how to serve you. Amen.**

# Being Part of the Announcement

## What is the best announcement you can recall hearing?

In the spring of my senior year in high school, I was on the speech team. The year before, I had competed and won State in humorous interpretation; but that category was filled when I finally agreed to compete, and the only category left was radio broadcasting. In about ten minutes, while watching television one night, I wrote the commentary to read over the radio for the state competition. No revisions. I read it over twice and then went to State.

Can you tell my heart wasn't in it? I somehow made it to the final round, which meant I had read the commentary four times by then. I prepared my newscast, went into the radio booth, did my reading, and then I had to leave for another important event on my calendar.

During homeroom at school that next Monday morning, we heard announcements, the last of which was to congratulate Randy Cross for winning the state speech tournament in radio broadcasting. They asked me to go to the office to pick up my trophy! It was a good day, to have that kind of notoriety and a neat trophy. I just wonder sometimes about what might have happened if I had actually taken things more seriously!

Announcements are sometimes surprises; other times, they confirm what we already expect. Our world is full of announcements, if we listen: babies being born, couples getting married, financial markets booming or crashing, new restaurants opening, bad weather coming. Like any news, an announcement requires the speaker, the hearer, and the message itself. Even the words

*I love you* announce a wonderful message to the hearer by the speaker.

Our two verses from Mark's Gospel are a great announcement. John had been arrested. His ministry was over. Now, the news the world had been waiting for was here! Not "Stay tuned for something possible coming sometime next year," but "Now is the time! Here comes God's kingdom!" (Mark 1:15).

As Jesus began his ministry, he announced the kingdom of God, but he did one thing more. Did you read it? He said, "Change your hearts and lives, and trust this good news!" (verse 15). The big announcement came as an invitation, a call, a summons to us to respond! God's kingdom is here. Will we change, transform, give up, and take up the good news so that our lives and hearts are in line with and are under the call and claim of God's wonderful reign?

When we read Mark's Gospel, it's important for us to understand that the announcement of God's kingdom is new today as well! We are invited to change our hearts and lives and trust this good news ourselves. How will you respond with your life to this big announcement today? Let it happen as you share your love with this lonely world.

**Gracious God, thank you for announcing your kingdom. Help me share in this good news today. Amen.**

# Are You the One?

## How do you know Jesus is the Messiah?

Secret handshakes and door knocks are an essential part of growing up as a boy. When I was young, it seemed every week we were forming a new, exclusive club that few could belong to (for some reason). Usually, that meant our four sisters were banned. The only way to ensure strict security was to come up with complicated handshakes and door knocks that were impossible to guess! Of course, that also often meant that they were incredibly confusing and easy to forget.

If you had the sad misfortune of being outside the boys' bedroom and wanted to get in, you had better hope that you had first been given the latest door knock (they changed perhaps hourly) and then could remember what the newest one was. There were no exceptions. If you forgot, then you had to run outside to the boys' window, get the right knock, run inside, and knock again. Sometimes it's complicated growing up!

In prison, John the Baptist wasn't concerned about secret knocks, but he had heard of what Jesus had been doing. So "he sent word by his disciples to Jesus, asking, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?'" (Matthew 11:2-3). What an exciting thought!

Verses 4 and 5 indicate that Jesus "sent back the code," the key to understanding who Jesus was. It wasn't a secret. It was in broad view of the world. Healing the blind, the crippled, the diseased, the deaf, and raising the dead were all happening by Jesus' hand, actions that had

been predicted to be part of the Messiah's life. Jesus didn't come right out and say so, but he did say, "Look around! My actions speak for themselves."

What do we see as we look around our world today? Granted, we don't see Jesus in the flesh performing miracles, but what do we see through our eyes of faith? Have you witnessed healing? Have you seen lives and relationships restored? Have you seen the powerful effects of holy love?

When we observe the power of the Holy Spirit, it becomes possible and makes sense to answer the question, "Are you the one?" by saying, "Indeed. He is the Messiah, the one who has ushered in God's reign on this earth, and who has saved my life as well."

If for some reason you can't honestly say that, read the Gospels once again, pray, and look to see things, not just as they are, but as God has made them and blessed them to be.

What effort would you need to affirm that Jesus is the one? What do you see around you right now, in the lives of those you know, where Jesus has indeed made all the difference in living abundant and hopeful lives?

**Open my eyes, dear God, so that I, too, may see the one Jesus Christ in my own life. Amen.**

# Ignoring What's There

## How has Jesus been revealed to you in your life?

I know it sounds silly, but even now as our sons are adults, when Easter rolls around, we still lead them on an Easter egg hunt, with plastic eggs full of candy hidden all over the main level of our home. Some eggs are simply hidden, while others are in complicated, hard-to-find spots. It seems always to happen that, maybe even days after the hunt is over, someone discovers yet another hidden egg! We laugh over the idea that adults can't find an egg hidden away.

The writer of Hebrews isn't talking about hidden eggs we can't see, but he does urge us not to ignore or act blind to the message of salvation. Jesus and those who follow him have announced the message over and over again, and God has "vouched" for the message with "signs, amazing things, various miracles, and gifts from the Holy Spirit" (Hebrews 2:4).

How is it that anyone could miss such an obvious revelation of who Jesus is and the fact that salvation has come to this earth? Verse 1 reminds us that it is necessary for us to pay more attention to what we have experienced so that we indeed do not miss it or somehow ignore the power of that message. Why is that important? For a couple of reasons.

First, we would not want anyone to ignore salvation. Part of what it means to live a new life in Christ is that we acknowledge our need of God and our tendency to walk away from God to sin. By the gift of Jesus Christ, we have

been brought back into God's arms, and we pray for each person in the world to know that gracious joy.

Second, once we have offered our hearts and our lives to God, that message and that power should recreate us as new persons. However, if for some reason, we grow careless or lazy in our relationship, not taking the time to pray and act out of love, it's possible that we, too, might drift away and forget the grace of God and all that God hopes for us to be.

What a sad waste of life that would be, compared to the abundant and joy-filled existence in God's presence! It's for us, rather, to spend our lives continuing to learn, observe, and claim the "signs, amazing things, various miracles and gifts from the Holy Spirit" that God continues to provide.

How would you describe your salvation? How has God freed you to live a different life? How has God infused you with holy love and given you the ability to care for others with that same love? How have you experienced God's forgiveness and claim on you?

When we let those kinds of questions guide us and lead us daily, then our minds and our eyes are indeed on Jesus, and our lives do reflect the growing awareness of a grace-filled existence, as we simply pay attention to what brings us true life in Christ!

What questions will you ask that will reveal Christ to you today?

**Lead me deeper into my love for you, O God, as you have loved me with new life; in Jesus' name. Amen.**

# Standing on Shoulders

## Who will follow you in the Christian faith?

By the time you read this, I will have retired from active status as a United Methodist elder. Forty-one years spent as a pastor in a local church and as a conference leader have been a joy and a burden, as all careers are. As I retired, I gave a great deal of thought about those pastors and laypersons I worked with over more than four decades. So many of them taught, guided, and challenged me to be and to do more.

I have also thought about those who will follow me, some who, hopefully, have learned from my successes and my mistakes. Time is like an interesting river, and we are blessed to see only a portion of it during our lives.

The writer of 1 Peter reminded “God’s chosen strangers in the world of the diaspora” (1 Peter 1:1)—and us, as we read—that a significant faith history preceded them. Indeed, as they received the joy of salvation, in a way, they were standing on the shoulders of the prophets and others who foretold and inquired deep within their hearts about the coming of Christ and what that would mean for this world.

It’s a different perspective to think that, for so many generations before Christ came, so many faithful people held onto the dream of him coming to usher in the kingdom of God. They did not see Jesus, at least in this world, but they did proclaim that it would happen, and indeed it has happened.

And the writer as well told the Jews scattered abroad that, even though they had never seen Christ in the flesh, it was clear that they loved him and trusted

him, so salvation was theirs. The same is true for us.

We’ve never seen Jesus, but our faith invites us to love and trust as well and to declare his place as Lord of the universe as we wait in this meantime until Christ comes again. We have the joy of abundant life and hope ourselves, just as these Jewish believers did; we also stand on the shoulders of our faith ancestors and hope deeply for the bright future that is ours as we live faithfully.

So, the big questions are, Who will follow you? Who are you preparing now to stand on your shoulders? Each generation is the final one to know faith in Christ, unless it is shared with the one that follows. Will we be the last, or will our children and grandchildren in faith come to know the joy we have, the hope that is ours, and the courage to live out of love because we know Jesus Christ?

We have a powerful opportunity and a sobering responsibility to continue to share and to experience the good news of Christ with all we meet. We are called to live in expectation of Christ’s coming to this earth, even if we are not alive to experience it here.

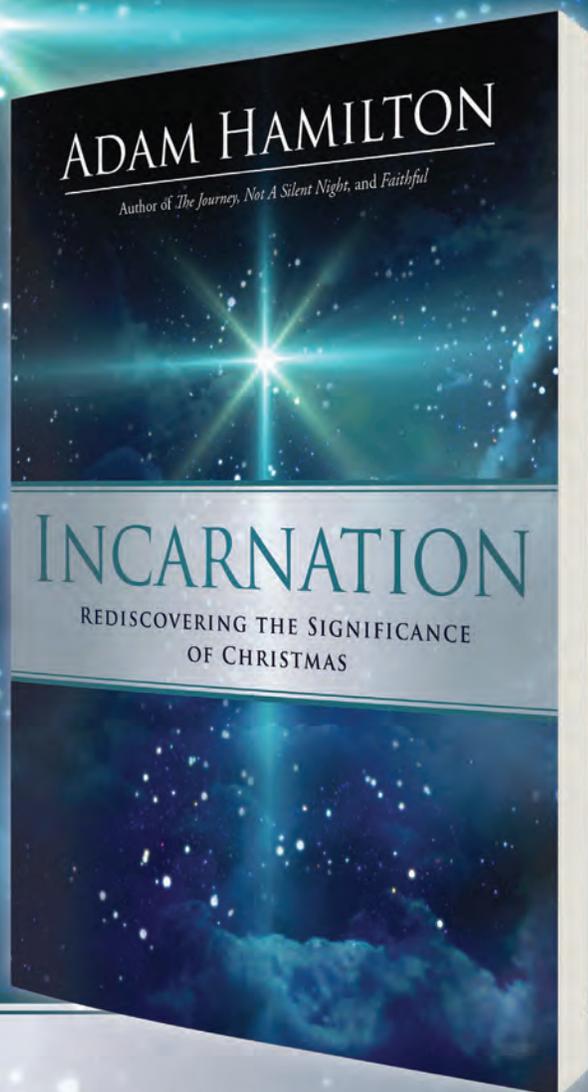
What moves you today to share your faith? Who needs to stand on your shoulders and come to know the blessings of salvation and the joy of a life lived in faith? Who are you praying for today, to know Jesus as you know him?

**O Lord, thank you for the privilege of sharing my faith today. Amen.**

# REDISCOVER THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTMAS

His parents gave him the name *Jesus*. But the prophets, the shepherds, the wise men, and the angels addressed him by other names. They called him Lord, Messiah, Savior, Emmanuel, Light of the World, and Word Made Flesh.

In *Incarnation*, best-selling author Adam Hamilton explores the meaning of these titles and what they tell us about the Child whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. Join him and reflect upon the significance of the Christ Child for our lives and world today!



## Chapters Include:

- The Royal Titles: Lord and Messiah
- The Deliverer's Title: Savior
- The Incarnate Title: Emmanuel
- The Light of the World
- The Word Made Flesh

A DVD, leader guide, and youth and children's resources are also available for a four-week study.

RELIGION | Christian Education | Adult \$13.99 US

ISBN-13: 978-1-5018-9539-5



Learn more at [AdamHamilton.com](http://AdamHamilton.com)



Abingdon Press Copyright © by Cokesbury. All rights reserved.