

December 3  
Lesson 1 (NIV)

# FAITH

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## IN JESUS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 118:1-14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 3

### ACTS 3:11-21

<sup>11</sup> While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>12</sup> When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? <sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. <sup>14</sup> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. <sup>15</sup> You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. <sup>16</sup> By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

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<sup>17</sup> "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. <sup>18</sup> But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. <sup>21</sup> Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

### KEY VERSE

*By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.—Acts 3:16*

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recall key points from Peter's speech in the temple.
2. Explain how saving faith relates to committed trust in the risen Jesus.
3. Demonstrate such faith by affirming God's blessing of spiritual wholeness.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### Introduction

- A. Five-Tool Players
- B. Lesson Background

#### I. Wholeness—From Where? (ACTS 3:11-15)

- A. Looking for Human Saviors (vv. 11, 12)
- B. Rejecting the Divine Savior (vv. 13-15)

*The Servant Leader*

#### II. Wholeness—From Whom? (ACTS 3:16-18)

- A. Jesus' Name, Our Faith (v. 16)
- B. Jesus' Payment, Our Debt (vv. 17, 18)

#### III. Wholeness—When? (ACTS 3:19-21)

- A. Beginning with Repentance (vv. 19, 20)  
*Restorative Justice?*
- B. Finished at the End of the Age (v. 21)

#### Conclusion

- A. Finding Genuine Wholeness
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Five-Tool Players

When looking for a future superstar, most baseball scouts seek players that excel in five facets of the game. Those five are hitting for average, hitting for power, base running, throwing, and fielding.

Such “five-tool players” are rare, however. In the history of the game, only a handful merit that designation. Willie Mays was one. A lifetime .302 hitter, he had 660 career home runs and collected 3,283 hits along the way. Mays was also a great base runner, stealing 338 bases. “Hammerin’ Hank” Aaron slugged 755 home runs, drove in 2,297 runs, and stole 240 bases while posting a career .305 batting average during his career. Ken Griffey Jr. was named to his league’s all-star team 13 times and won seven Silver Sluggers awards. Other players fall into the five-tool category, but the list is short.

As scouts look for five-tool players, employers look to hire someone who is the “complete package,” and we admire a person who seems to “have it all together.” But the Bible tells us that there is only one way to be perfectly whole.

### B. Lesson Background

The book of Acts narrates the history of Jesus’ followers in the first generation following his death and resurrection. Written as a companion volume to the Gospel of Luke, Acts portrays the church as the continuation of God’s work, in Jesus, to reclaim a people for himself from all nations ([Acts 1:1, 8](#)). God accomplishes this purpose as Christians testify to what they have seen and heard: that in fulfillment of God’s promises, Jesus willingly surrendered to death and was raised to life again by God. The resurrected and ascended Jesus remained active through the words and deeds of his followers as they were empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The conflict between the Jewish council (also known as the Sanhedrin) and Jesus continued as persecution of Jesus’ followers. The council consisted of the high priest and 70 leaders appointed by him. Under the watchful eye of the Roman overlords, the council supervised operations of the temple of Jerusalem and served as something of a combination legislature and judiciary. Members of the council had seen in Jesus a rival to council authority and vested interest ([John 11:48](#)). Thus council members had fomented the movement to put him to death, although the decision was not unanimous ([Luke 20:19; 22:66-23:1, 50, 51](#)). The people feared the council ([John 7:13](#); etc.), but the council also feared the people ([Mark 11:18, 32; Luke 20:19; 22:2](#); etc.).

The center of the council’s power was the temple. The temple was not merely a building; it was a 35-acre complex that included courtyards and semi-enclosed areas where people could gather. Jesus had taught in these environs ([John 7:14, 28](#); etc.), and there his followers continued to teach and pray after his ascension ([Acts 2:44-3:1](#)).

Immediately before today’s text begins, the apostles Peter and John had come to the temple. As they did, they crossed paths with a man who was disabled and begging. Rather than give him money, Peter declared “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” ([Acts 3:6](#)). The man’s instantaneous healing was reminiscent of Jesus’ own healing miracles (compare [Luke 5:17-26; 6:6-11](#)). The man then entered the temple courts on restored legs and praised God, by whose power he had been made whole ([Acts 3:8](#)). Today’s text picks up as people reacted.

## I. Wholeness—From Where?

([Acts 3:11-15](#))

### A. Looking for Human Saviors ([vv. 11, 12](#))

**11. While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade.**

Having received an unimaginable blessing from *Peter and John*, the formerly disabled man vigorously grabs the two apostles in joy and gratitude. No one who witnesses the scene can doubt that he believes that these two have played a key role in his being granted wholeness of body. The man familiar to everyone as the beggar who “used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful” is now seen by all “walking and praising God” ([Acts 3:9, 10](#)). We can imagine a crowd of hundreds being *astonished* by this miracle. They are more than ready for the explanation!

**12. When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?”**

Peter addresses the crowd as fellow members of the nation of Israel who share a common knowledge of God’s actions and promises. Their common background of being covenant people is the context for understanding this miracle. That context should remind them that Peter and John have no *power or godliness* of their own by which to have *made this man walk*. They, like all humans, are imperfect, subject to frequent failures of judgment and action (examples: [Luke 9:51-56; 22:31-34](#)). The people should know that the power to bring the miraculous wholeness now evident belongs to God alone.

#### *What Do You Think?*

How can we ensure that people can see that it is God’s power that undergirds our accomplishments?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding our reaction to compliments and criticism
- Regarding the scale of our undertakings
- Other

### B. Rejecting the Divine Savior ([vv. 13-15](#))

**13. “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.**

Peter has explicitly called on the authority and power of Jesus in commanding the man to stand and walk ([Acts 3:6](#)). Now Peter gives credit where credit is due,

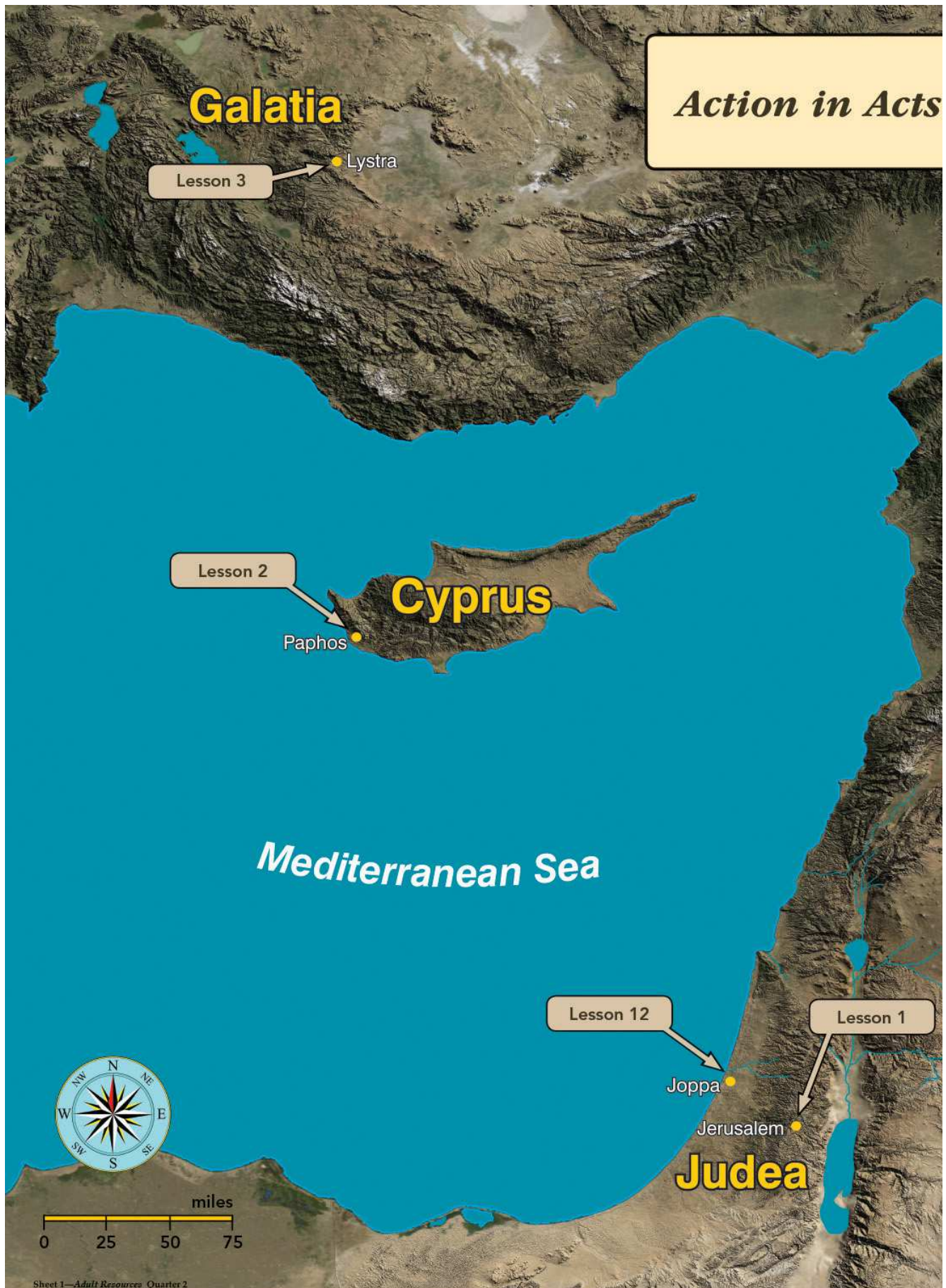
meaning that he and John are only instruments of the miracle (compare [14:8-15](#)).

Peter stresses that it is none other than *the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob* who is due the credit. This phrasing condenses much of the storyline of Scripture; knowing that storyline is the key to understanding the healing miracle just performed. The storyline is further condensed in the phrase *the God of our fathers*. Those *fathers* include the three patriarchs mentioned by name here (compare [Hebrews 7:4](#)).

Those men were the first to receive the promise that God would reclaim his rebellious world by blessing all nations ([Genesis 12:3](#); [22:18](#); [26:4](#)). That reclamation is underway, and the miracle points unmistakably to God's *servant Jesus* as the one with the power to have made it happen. Thus Peter joins the story of Jesus with that of the ancient patriarchs.

The Greek word translated *servant* here and elsewhere (examples: [Luke 1:54, 69](#); [7:7](#); [12:45](#); [15:26](#)) can also be translated "boy" (examples: [Luke 2:43](#); [9:42](#)). By using the term *servant*, perhaps Peter is remembering that God's servant is a key figure in the book of Isaiah. The song of God's servant in [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#) predicts that exalted servant's debasement and rejection by his people. Even so, he is willing to be punished and killed for the wrongdoing of others. But in the end God gives him the place of victory and strength. Isaiah says that God will absolve guilt and restore wholeness through one in whom all rejection and suffering will climax.

That is the story of Jesus' life. His rejection and crucifixion fulfill promises God made through Isaiah. Jesus willingly took the lowliest of positions to serve others; in so doing, he fully expressed the glory of God before the world. That glory continues to be displayed as a man with a severe disability is healed by the power of Jesus, the once lowly, crucified servant who now sits at the right hand of God (compare [Hebrews 8:1](#); [10:12](#); [12:2](#); [1 Peter 3:22](#)).



This visual will help your learners keep a geographical perspective during the lessons from Acts.

*What Do You Think?*

What are some ways that our personal limitations can serve as a basis for bringing glory to God?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Regarding what other see in us

Regarding what we alone see in ourselves

**14a. “You disowned the Holy and Righteous One**

Peter now underlines and personalizes the tragedy of underestimating Jesus. He is *the Holy . . . One* in a way like no other. He is *the Righteous One*, meaning just in all his ways. The concepts of being just and right (or righteous) are frequently interchangeable in Scripture, and that is the case here (compare [Deuteronomy 32:4](#); [Ezekiel 18:5](#); [Romans 3:26](#)).

**14b. “and asked that a murderer be released to you.**

When Pilate offered to release Jesus, the crowd called instead for the release of Barabbas, a man imprisoned for insurrection and murder ([Luke 23:13-25](#)). Thus the long story of human rebellion against God reached its lowest point. But the Son of God, supremely innocent, did not stop the process. The innocent gives his life willingly for the guilty as a guilty man is set free.

In this way members of the crowd now present had denied Jesus. Peter knew of this all too well since the climate of that moment had led to his own denial ([Luke 22:34, 57-61](#)). He therefore speaks not as a pure example but as an impure but forgiven messenger of the one who forgives.

**15a. “You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.**

The word translated *author* brings with it the idea of originator or “pioneer,” as it is translated in [Hebrews 12:2](#). Peter therefore may be referring to Jesus both as the divine Creator (compare [John 1:3](#); [Colossians 1:15, 16](#)) as well as the one whose death restores life. The spiral of irony boggles the mind: without realizing it, the angry crowd had sent to death the one who came to restore life to humanity trapped in the grip of death. Yet it is by Jesus’ death that life is restored because his death paid sin’s price ([Isaiah 53:5](#); [Romans 3:21-26](#); [1 Peter 2:24](#)).

By raising Jesus, God reaffirmed the Son’s identity, brought him to the heavenly throne as divine king, and fulfilled ancient promises to restore humanity to wholeness. Jesus’ resurrection is the definitive proof that in him God’s gift of eternal life will triumph.

Reading this text today, we must listen carefully. In centuries following the writing of the New Testament, many misread this text and others as saying that all Jewish people bore responsibility for the death of Jesus. But Peter makes the statements we see here only about the people of Jerusalem, some of whom were in the crowd that called for Jesus’ death ([Acts 13:27](#)).

**15b. “We are witnesses of this.”**

The concept of witness is vital to the establishment of fact ([Deuteronomy 19:15-21](#); [Matthew 18:16](#); [2 Corinthians 13:1](#); etc.), and the word appears dozens of times in the Bible in that regard. Pharisees tried and failed to discredit Jesus on the basis of inadequate witness ([John 8:12-18](#)). Peter’s stress on *we are witnesses of this* should be understood in this light (see also [Acts 2:32](#); [5:32](#); [10:39, 41](#); [13:31](#)).

### THE SERVANT LEADER

Victor Herman (1915-1985) accompanied his father to Russia in 1931 to help build a car manufacturing plant. When Victor became an adult, he refused to become a Russian citizen and was imprisoned for 18 years. His memoir *Coming Out of the Ice* tells the story. He and 15 other prisoners were locked in a small cell 24 hours a day, forbidden to move or speak. At night they slept jammed together on the cold concrete floor.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Barabbas Buh-*rab*-us.

Deuteronomy Due-*ter-ahn*-uh-me.

Ezekiel Ee-*zeek*-ee-ul or Ee-*zeek*-yul.

Nazareth Naz-uh-*reth*.

Nehemiah Nee-*huh-my*-uh.

patriarchs *pay*-tree-arks.

Pilate Pie-*lut*.

Sanhedrin San-*huh-drun* or San-*heed*-run.

One man, “the Elder,” voluntarily took a place near the door. The spot was closest to the stench of the latrine. This position also made him the first to be beaten by sadistic guards. The Elder made sure that each man got his daily bowl of soup. Herman says the Elder’s example of servant leadership in that horrible setting taught him that “only the one who is most exposed to the blows of the system can claim authority to lead and serve.”

Peter informed his audience that Jesus placed himself in the greatest jeopardy in order to bring salvation. He served in a way no other can so that we would be servants of sin no more ([John 8:34](#); [Romans 6:6-18](#); etc.). What should we learn from Jesus’ example?

—C. R. B.

## II. Wholeness—From Whom?

([ACTS 3:16-18](#))

### A. Jesus’ Name, Our Faith (v. 16)

**16. “By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.**

No human power has made the man whole. Only God could do so. It happened by the power of Jesus ([Acts 3:6](#)). The miracle done *in the name of Jesus* demonstrates the truth of all Peter’s claims.

*What Do You Think?*

What steps can we take to stay mindful of the ways God has shown his power in our lives?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- In our worship
- In our families
- In our private devotions

As the righteous, divine king, Jesus acts on behalf of his people—people who, like Peter and John, have faith in him. They have confessed him as king and have sought his mercy, mercy that he always gives to those who seek it. Jesus’ self-sacrificial death and God’s raising him from the dead give the basis for this faith. The man’s healing is a visible manifestation of the invisible but no less real wholeness that King Jesus grants to his faith-filled subjects.

### B. Jesus’ Payment, Our Debt ([vv. 17, 18](#))

**17. “Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.**

Those who had called for Jesus’ death had no idea of the gravity of their deed ([Luke 23:34](#)). Even Jesus’ closest followers did not understand what was unfolding before their eyes ([18:31-34](#)). God’s purpose, though revealed in Israel’s Scriptures, remained hidden until he had accomplished it. Only with Jesus’ resurrection could others understand who he truly was and how he had fulfilled God’s promises ([24:25-27, 30-32, 36-48](#)). Now Peter passes the truth along. Ignorance is now ended, and the people are without excuse. They must seek the king’s mercy urgently.

*What Do You Think?*

How can we help each other get past blind spots in understanding Jesus properly?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding methods used by Jesus himself
- Regarding methods used by the apostle Paul
- Other

**18. “But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.”**

Peter affirms, as Jesus did also ([Luke 24:27, 44](#)), that the suffering and death of the Christ was the event to which all the words of the prophets pointed. The divine drama of Jesus’ death, resurrection, and heavenly enthronement were not just predicted by a few prophets in a few texts such as [Isaiah 52:13-53:12](#). Rather, it is the outcome of everything that God said *through all the prophets*, whether the subject was that of people’s sin and its judgment, God’s mercy and grace, his people’s suffering and oppression, or humanity’s longing for true justice and goodness to be realized. Jesus’ death brings all prophetic declarations to their focal point, resolving human need by means of divine self-sacrifice.

## III. Wholeness—When?

([ACTS 3:19-21](#))

### A. Beginning with Repentance ([vv. 19, 20](#))

**19. “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,**

Those who have rebelled against the true king must abandon their rebellion and seek the king’s mercy. This is the meaning of *repent*, a turning away from evil—first of all the evil of having revolted against the rule of the divine king.

To *turn to God* is the step that complements the first. Thus we do not just abandon rebellion and seek the king’s mercy; we further commit as loyal subjects, obediently to trust the king to provide, protect, and rule.

*What Do You Think?*

What should others see in us as evidence of genuine repentance?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Regarding changed speech patterns
- Regarding changed behavior
- Regarding changed goals
- Regarding changed attitudes

The phrase *times of refreshing* refers to the promise of God from the first instance of human rebellion forward, the promise to break the destructive cycle of human rebellion. This revives humanity to the state of blessed life that God intends.

These times of refreshing are the hopes expressed by the prophets: of the gathering of scattered Israel, the establishment of God’s true temple, the turning of the nations to the true God, and the reign of God as king to the farthest reaches of the earth. The fulfillment of those promises has begun with Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. Peter’s audience can receive the benefit if they embrace the truth (compare [Acts 2:38](#)).

### RESTORATIVE JUSTICE?

Conor McBride walked into a Tallahassee police station on March 28, 2010, and said, “You need to arrest me; I just shot my fiancée in the head.” He was telling the truth. He and Ann Margaret Grosmaire had argued for 38 hours. Then he shot her. In the hospital, Ann was unconscious when her father was sure she said “forgive him” before she died.

Conor was charged with first-degree murder, but Ann’s parents didn’t want him to spend his life in prison. A prison chaplain told them about the concept of restorative justice. It’s an approach to sentencing in which the prisoner, his family, officials, and the family of the victim try to agree on a lesser sentence than the law requires. It happened; Conor’s sentence for murder was only 20 years.

God’s system of restorative justice works differently. We are offered a restored, right relationship with him only on the basis of Christ’s payment for the penalty of our sins. A more appropriate designation for God’s system of restorative justice is *grace*. This system requires no gathering of various parties to agree to a reduced sentence. God’s grace means there is *no* sentence! Why would anyone reject such an offer?

—C. R. B.

**20. “and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.**

The promised times of refreshing will climax with Jesus’ return. His life, death, and resurrection show that he is the Christ, God’s promised king. Christ’s rule as king would seem to be a disaster for those who had called for Jesus’ death. But the king offers mercy. He invites repentant rebels to be restored as his subjects by their faith in him and his offer of grace. Those who respond to that offer anticipate Jesus’ future return as king as do faithful servants when their absent master returns ([Luke 19:11-27](#)).

### B. Finished at the End of the Age (v. 21)

**21. “Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”**

As Peter announced previously, Jesus is enthroned at God’s right hand until his victory is complete ([Acts 2:34-36](#); compare [Psalm 110:1](#)). That period of heavenly enthronement grants his enemies the opportunity to turn from their rebellion and seek his mercy. But it is not an unlimited opportunity. The king is determined to see his kingdom come in its fullness. He will indeed renew the world to his design. To wait is foolish. Now is the time to put faith in him, acknowledging him as the king that he is.

Peter’s message to the gathered crowd prompts many to do exactly what he says, and the company of Christians grows from about 3,000 to 5,000 ([Acts 2:41; 4:4](#)). But not all the rebels turn. The same Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to death goes on to arrest Peter and John ([Acts 4:1-3](#)) and orders them not to preach ([4:17, 18](#)), an order boldly defied ([4:19, 20](#)). No earthly authority can silence the faithful witnesses of the true king!

### Conclusion

#### A. Finding Genuine Wholeness

The challenge of trust confronts every generation. Will we continue to put our trust in ourselves, with our miserable record of failure and our evident brokenness? Or will we find genuine wholeness as we faithfully commit to the risen King Jesus?

#### B. Prayer

Father, we submit to your Son Jesus as King, our Sovereign Lord. We trust in his merciful forgiveness. Strengthen us to live out your gracious gift of wholeness in lives that reflect your renewal of creation, already begun. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

#### C. Thought to Remember

Only Jesus fills the God-shaped hole  
to make us whole.

## VISUALS FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 124) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Winter Quarter. That packet also contains the very useful *Presentation Tools* CD for teacher use. Order No. 2629118 from your supplier.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

### Into the Lesson

Bring to class several things that are incomplete in some way. Possibilities are a remote control with no batteries (cover to the battery compartment missing), one chopstick, a single sock, a doll with one shoe, etc. Pass the items around and ask students what the items have in common. Talk about which items are still functional as they are, and which are useless at this time. Discuss what each item needs in order to be whole or complete.

As a variation of this activity, provide a jigsaw puzzle that contains fewer than 100 pieces. Keep a handful of pieces hidden away. Ask the class to assemble the puzzle. When they realize the puzzle is incomplete, talk about how they feel about the process and the result.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “What’s Missing?” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in small groups.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “That which is whole or complete is more useful, more valuable. The same is true with people. Employers look to hire someone who is ‘the complete package.’ Secular psychologists advise how to become ‘self-actualized,’ and we admire a person who ‘has it all together.’ But the Bible tells us that there is only one way to be perfectly whole. Let’s talk about that today.”

## Into the Word

Divide the class into two groups. Have groups read [Acts 3:11-21](#) together and then complete the following research assignments. Anticipated responses are in italics.

### Group 1—

Why were the people looking to Peter and John for answers? *They thought Peter and John had healed the beggar by their own power or holiness.*

According to Peter, why was the beggar’s infirmity reversed? *It was by faith in Jesus’ name.*

How did Peter urge people to respond to what they had seen and heard? *They needed to repent.*

### Group 2—

To whom did Peter tell the people that they should look for answers? *Jesus/God.*

What was the stated purpose of Christ’s suffering? *It was to fulfill what the prophets had foretold.*

How had God promised to respond to their repentance? *He would wipe away their sins, refresh them, send Christ, and restore everything when the time comes.*

Allow groups to share their responses. After the key facts of the healing are recalled, ask how saving faith relates to committed trust in the risen Jesus. Refer to the commentary as needed. After discussion say, “People who are broken want to be made whole—not just those who are broken physically, like the beggar, but also those who are spiritually broken. But we often search for wholeness in the wrong places, through the wrong people, at the wrong times, and in the wrong ways. Peter proclaimed that only Jesus can restore us to wholeness. It was true then, and it holds true today.”

Close the activity by reading aloud [Acts 3:16](#). Then give each person the opportunity to read the verse, inserting his or her own name in place of each reference to the man. Remind students that it is still our faith in Jesus that makes us strong and heals us from the infirmity of our sins.

## Into Life

As a group, choose a person or family going through a period of brokenness. Brainstorm possible ways to help and, as a group, choose an option to implement in coming weeks.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of “Helping the Hurting” from the reproducible page. Have students complete the activity individually.

After either activity, say, “We are all broken. And as we strive to remain faithful in this life, we have the responsibility to care for each other until that time when all is restored.”