

Life: Freed by God's forgiveness

November 27, 2015

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Dec. 13 focuses on John 8:2-11.*

Carrying extra weight results in a burden. Extra weight in the bed of a pickup truck steals fuel economy. Extra weight around one's midsection reduces the overall quality of life. Extra weight in a suitcase may result in an additional charge by your airline carrier.

Carrying around the extra weight of a pack rocks doesn't make any sense, yet some people do just that. They carry around a bunch of rocks. This week's lesson involves just such a group of people carrying rocks.

God's law calls for the punishment of sin (John 8:2-6)

In John 8, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery. They weren't concerned about the woman, her spiritual condition or even the sin she committed. Their interest lay in setting a trap for Jesus.

Simply put, adultery violated the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18), and the Old Testament called for those caught in the act of adultery to be stoned (Leviticus 20:10). Nothing is said of the man who was with the woman. He's not important for the story. All the teachers of the law and the Pharisees needed was a woman to set their trap.

So, Jesus had to decide. He could call for the woman's execution. Even in the first-century world of Palestine, this would have come across as cruel punishment, and run contrary to Jesus' message of grace and salvation. Or Jesus could say to let the woman go free. This only could be done by ignoring the Old Testament law, thus making Jesus a law-breaker.

What would Jesus do? Which way would he decide? Violating God's law had consequences, so what would Jesus say?

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees carried a burden of rocks around with them all the time, waiting for the chance to throw them at someone. Jesus was a constant target at whom they hurled their rocks. In this story, a woman caught in adultery also was their target.

Some people are like the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. They carry around a bunch of rocks ready to throw at someone else. Of course, their targets easily are labeled as "sinners." Their rationale for throwing rocks at these individuals is they "deserve" it. After all, they are sinners.

People don't literally carry rocks around to throw at people, but think about it. Don't we hurl rocks of harsh words, critical comments, sarcastic remarks and mean-spirited accusations? Our words can do just as much damage as physical rocks.

It's time to stop throwing rocks at other people. It's time to stop carrying around rocks to throw. It's time to drop your rocks.

None of us is without sin (John 8:7-9)

The reply given to the teachers of the law and Pharisees was classic Jesus. He stooped down and began writing on the ground. I imagine Jesus drawing in the dirt. No one knows what Jesus wrote, but that hasn't stopped people from conjecture. What Jesus wrote was not important; otherwise, it would have been recorded. Jesus seemed to ignore the teachers of the law and the Pharisees and pay no attention to their accusations. He had better things to do, like writing in the dirt.

The woman's accusers kept after Jesus. They demanded an answer, and Jesus gave them one. Naturally, he didn't fall into their trap. He gave allowance for the stoning to take place. He gave one provision. The first

stone should be thrown by someone who was sinless.

One by one, the rocks dropped. First, the oldest ones dropped their rocks and slipped away. Everyone remembered they were sinners. Soon, no one was left but Jesus and the woman.

Can you imagine what was going through the woman's mind? Fear, shame, guilt. She knew her sin. She probably had been beating herself with her own rocks even before being caught in adultery.

When we engage in sin and the guilt takes its hold on us, we pick up our rocks and begin to hurl them at ourselves. We can't believe we've fallen into the same sin again. How could we mess up so badly? We should be stoned. We should throw more rocks at ourselves. Down deep, we know we deserve them.

When you mess up, when you miss the mark, when you sin, it's not time to throw rocks at yourself. It's time to confess your sin to God. It's time to accept his forgiveness. It's time to get back on the right road of following Jesus. It's time to drop your rocks.

God forgives us out of his grace (John 8:10-11)

Jesus asked the woman where her accusers were. They were gone, and no rocks had been thrown. Jesus told her he wouldn't be throwing any rocks, either. What she needed to do was leave her life of sin. It's ironic the only one in the story who could have thrown rocks was Jesus. He was the only sinless one, and he seemed the least interested in throwing them.

God doesn't throw rocks. They hurt. They damage. God reveals our sin and the damage it has already caused in our lives. God offers the chance at healing and at grace.

Some refuse such a wonderful offer. They prefer sin and the damage it does

in their lives. Don't blame God for their choice. God didn't throw any rocks at them.

For all Christians, the lesson is simple. Drop your rocks.