

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year A, Volume 1
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year A, Volume 2
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Lent, Easter, Pentecost

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year A, Volume 3
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Season after Pentecost, Proper 1–14

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year A, Volume 4
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Season after Pentecost, Proper 15–29

*

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year B, Volume 1
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year B, Volume 2
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Lent, Easter, Pentecost

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year B, Volume 3
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Season after Pentecost, Proper 1–14

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year B, Volume 4
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Season after Pentecost, Proper 15–29

*

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year C, Volume 1
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year C, Volume 2
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Lent, Easter, Pentecost

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year C, Volume 3
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Season after Pentecost, Proper 1–14

Nurturing Faith Commentary, Year C, Volume 4
Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching: Season after Pentecost, Proper 15–29

Nurturing Faith Commentary

Year A, Volume 4

Lectionary Resources for Preaching and Teaching:
Season after Pentecost, Proper 15–29

TONY W. CARTLEDGE

Nurturing Faith Commentary is sponsored
by a generous gift from Bob and Pat Barker.

© 2023

Published in the United States by Nurturing Faith, Macon, GA.
Nurturing Faith is a book imprint of Good Faith Media (goodfaithmedia.org).
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 978-1-63528-219-1

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture citations come from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Contents

Publisher's Preface	vii
Introduction.....	ix
Using This Resource.....	x
Abbreviations	xii

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST

Proper 15

Genesis 45:1-15	
Making Peace	1
Psalm 133	
A Good and Pleasant Hope	6
Isaiah 56:1-8 (RCL 56:1, 6-8)	
The World Needs Justice	9
Psalm 67	
Grace and Praise.....	13
Romans 11:1-32 (RCL 11:1-2a, 29-32)	
What About Israel?.....	17
Matthew 15:21-28 (RCL 15:[10-20], 21-28)	
When Crumbs Are More Than Enough	21

Proper 16

Exodus 1:8–2:10	
Life Savers	24
Psalm 124	
Offering Praise	28
Isaiah 51:1-8 (RCL 51:1-6)	
The World Needs to Remember	32
Psalm 138	
Amazing Care.....	36
Romans 12:1-8	
Everyone Is Gifted.....	40
Matthew 16:13-20	
Know, but Don't Tell	44

Proper 17

Exodus 3:1-15	
Meeting Mr. Is	48
Psalm 105 (RCL 105:1-6, 23-26, 45b)	
Don't Forget	52
Jeremiah 15:15-21	
An Incurable Wound?.....	53
Psalm 26 (RCL 26:1-8)	
A Bold Prayer	58
Romans 12:9-21	
A Labor of Love	62
Matthew 16:21-28	
That Far? Really?.....	66

Proper 18

Exodus 12:1-14	
Blood in the Doorway.....	69
Psalm 149	
High Praise and Sharp Swords?.....	73

Ezekiel 33:1-20 (RCL 33:7-11)	
It's Your Choice	77
Psalm 119:33-40	
Teach Me, Lord.....	82
Romans 13:8-14	
Lawful Love.....	86
Matthew 18:15-20	
Confrontation and Community	87

Proper 19

Exodus 14 (RCL 14:19-31)	
The Day That Never Died	91
Psalm 114	
Happy Memories	95
Exodus 15:1-21 (RCL 15:1b-11, 20-21)	
Singing by the Sea	99
Genesis 50:15-21	
Mysterious Ways	104
Psalm 103 (RCL 103: [1-7], 8-13)	
Forgive Me, Lord.....	107
Romans 14:1-12	
A Qualified Welcome?.....	111
Matthew 18:21-35	
The Power of Forgiveness.....	115

Proper 20

Exodus 16 (RCL 16:2-15)	
What Is It?	119
Psalm 105 (RCL 105:1-6, 37-45)	
Don't Forget	123
Jonah 3–4 (RCL 3:10–4:11)	
An Unexpected Evangelist	124
Psalm 145 (RCL 145:1-8)	
How Great Is God?	129
Philippians 1:21-30	
Live Worthily	130
Matthew 20:1-16	
A Question of Fairness	134

Proper 21

Exodus 17:1-7	
Unbottled Water	138
Psalm 78 (RCL 78:1-4, 12-16)	
Convict Me, Lord.....	142
Ezekiel 18 (RCL 18:1-4, 25-32)	
No More Sour Gapes.....	147
Psalm 25:1-10 (RCL 25:1-9)	
Deliver Me, Lord.....	152
Philippians 2:1-13	
Living Mindfully.....	157
Matthew 21:23-32	
Who Decides What Is Right?	158

Proper 22

Exodus 20:1-20 (RCL 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20)	
A Covenant People.....	162

Psalm 19	
A Prayer for Goodness.....	167
Isaiah 5:1-10 (RCL 5:1-7)	
The Worst Vineyard Ever.....	171
Psalm 80 (RCL (80:7-15))	
Restore Us, Lord	175
Philippians 3:3b-14	
Living with Purpose	176
Matthew 21:33-46	
Can Stony Hearts Break?	180
Proper 23	
Exodus 32:1-14	
Rebels Without a Cause	184
Psalm 106 (RCL 106:1-6, 19-23)	
Guilty as Charged	189
Isaiah 25 (RCL 25:1-9)	
Mountain High and Sewer Low	194
Psalm 23	
Lead Us, Lord	198
Philippians 4:1-9	
Live Joyfully	199
Matthew 22:1-14	
Hoping for Hyperbole.....	203
Proper 24	
Exodus 33 (RCL 33:12-23)	
Holy Boldness	207
Psalm 99	
Who Needs a King?.....	212
Isaiah 45:1-7	
A Surprising Messiah.....	213
Psalm 96 (RCL 96:1-9 [10-13])	
Be Honored, Lord	217
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10	
Marks of Maturity.....	218
Matthew 22:15-22	
A Taxing Question	222
Proper 25	
Deuteronomy 34:1-12	
A Good End to a Good Life	226
Psalm 90 (RCL 90:1-6, 13-17)	
Gaining Perspective	230
Leviticus 19:1-18 (RCL 19:1-2, 15-18)	
Being Holy.....	234
Psalm 1	
Living Wisely	235
1 Thessalonians 2:1-8	
Leaders Who Care.....	239
Matthew 22:23-46 (RCL 22:34-46)	
The Right Questions	243
All Saints Day	
Revelation 7 (RCL 7:9-17)	
A Hallelujah Chorus	247
Psalm 34 (RCL 34:1-10, 22)	
Call and Response.....	252
1 John 3:1-10 (RCL 3:1-3)	
Following Jesus and Doing Right	256
Matthew 5:1-12	
Teaching Upside Down	260

Proper 26	
Joshua 3:7-17	
Crossing the Jordan	261
Psalm 107 (RCL 107:1-7, 33-37)	
Gratitude Squared	265
Micah 3 (RCL 3:5-12)	
Unfounded Assumptions.....	269
Psalm 42–43 (RCL 43)	
Don't Give Up.....	273
1 Thessalonians 2:9-13	
Bony Fingers	277
Matthew 23:1-12	
The Right Stance	281
Proper 27	
Joshua 24:1-25 (RCL 24:1-3a, 14-25)	
Making Choices	285
Psalm 78 (RCL 78:1-7)	
Convict Me, Lord.....	289
Amos 5:18-24	
Being Just.....	290
Psalm 70	
The Last Resort	294
1 Thessalonians 4:13-18	
New Hope, or No Hope?	297
Matthew 25:1-13	
The Right Preparation	301
Proper 28	
Judges 4 (RCL 4:1-7)	
What Women Can Do.....	305
Psalm 123	
A Spiritual Psalm.....	310
Zephaniah 1:1–2:3 (RCL 1:7, 12-18)	
People, Get Ready	314
Psalm 90 (RCL 90:1-8, [9-11], 12)	
Gaining Perspective	318
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11	
On the Lookout	319
Matthew 25:14-30	
The Right Investment.....	323
Proper 29	
Ezekiel 34 (RCL 34:11-16, 20-24)	
The Good Shepherd	327
Psalm 100	
Good God!.....	331
Ezekiel 34 (RCL 34:11-16, 20-24)	
The Good Shepherd	332
Psalm 95 (RCL 95:1-7a)	
A New Song	333
Ephesians 1:11-23	
At Home with the Saints	334
Matthew 25:31-46	
Wait. What?	338
Index of Lectionary Texts: Year A, Volume 4.....	339
Index of Lectionary Texts: Year A.....	340

Publisher's Preface

More than a decade in the making, *Nurturing Faith Commentary* is unique in its intent and content. Anyone seeking to teach, preach, and/or learn from a broad swath of carefully explored biblical texts will find this to be a reliable, helpful, and treasured resource.

Tony Cartledge brings the mind of a scholar, the heart of a pastor, and the writing skills of an experienced author to this extensive yet accessible multi-volume resource. Rooted in a trusted weekly Bible study, lessons are provided for every possible Sunday of the Christian Year.

Following scripture texts as found in the three-year cycle designated by the Revised Common Lectionary, these lessons are both scholarly and applicable.

The purpose of these Bible studies goes beyond gaining knowledge — although the insights are plentiful — to discovering the inspiration and fresh possibilities for living out biblical truth in one's daily experiences and spheres of influence.

The many years of excellent work in which Tony poured himself into writing thoughtful, weekly Bible studies now form the basis of these volumes. These lessons reflect his wisdom, interpretive skills, diligence, and humility that never prescribe how others are to think and believe.

“Nurturing Faith” is more than just the overall title of this multivolume resource. Learning is seen as the road to redemption and transformation by an individual encountering not just facts, but a living God.

Each week, Tony's lessons have impacted individuals and classes of all shapes and sizes in seeking to learn and apply biblical truths. Having these volumes easily at hand will provide access to a multitude of ideas, insights, and illustrations for those heeding the call to equip disciples to more faithfully follow in the ways of Jesus.

A unique mark of these lessons is the way readers and listeners are treated respectfully and intelligently regardless of their backgrounds. The lessons are never dumbed down to the point of ignoring known scholarly findings.

Yet the purpose is not to impress, but to communicate. Though a Bible scholar and teacher of note, Tony seeks to convey biblical insights effectively rather than using language exclusive to the scholarly community.

When it comes to sharing helpful insights from biblical scholarship with his readers, Tony — intentionally using double negatives for effect — has often said: “I'll never not tell you something I know if it's relevant.”

This honest and appreciated approach contrasts with a long history of Bible study curriculum providers that “hand-cuff” writers and therefore “mind-cuff” learners with narrow doctrinal and marketing parameters.

In contrast, *Nurturing Faith Commentary* has no such restrictions — allowing for the freedom of both writer and readers to question, pray, seek, disagree, or apply whatever arises from the exploration of these ancient texts.

The Nurturing Faith approach to Bible study does have a lens, however. It is based on the belief that Jesus is God's fullest revelation, the Living Word through whom all else is filtered in a search for truth.

These insightful and inspiring lessons are a gift — coming from the sharp mind and generous spirit of a minister-scholar who helps us dig more deeply into the rich soil of truth formed by the many layers of experiences, reflections, and stories compiled in what we know and value as the Bible. Dig in!

John D. Pierce
Executive Editor/Publisher
Good Faith Media

Introduction

The 12 volumes of *Nurturing Faith Commentary* are the product of a committed desire to provide quality Bible study for Christians who come to the scripture with open minds and a desire to go beneath a surface reading. Our goal has been to provide pastors, teachers, and other Bible students with both academic and pastoral insights in approachable language.

The project began in early 2011, when John Pierce, editor of what is now *Nurturing Faith Journal*, envisioned the idea of including a weekly Bible study in the print version of the journal, along with additional resources provided online. The studies were to be based on texts from the Revised Common Lectionary and use the New Revised Standard Version as the primary text. Use of the lectionary had become increasingly common in worship among progressive Baptists, who had been our primary audience, but resources for Bible study were lacking.

With many years of experience as a pastor, academician, professor, writer, and editor, I was asked to take on the challenge of writing these studies. With some trepidation, I accepted, and the first studies appeared in the July 2011 issue of *Baptists Today*. The studies have continued

now for more than a decade, even as the newspaper-style *Baptists Today* morphed into the magazine format of *Nurturing Faith Journal and Bible Studies*.

For those who subscribe to the journal, additional resources are available online, including detailed insights through “Digging Deeper,” helps for troublesome issues through “The Hardest Question,” a weekly video in which I offer a summary of the lesson, plus additional teaching resources for youth and adults prepared by other writers. In this resource, Digging Deeper and The Hardest Question are incorporated into print.*

As years of publication and lectionary cycles piled up, we thought it fruitful to update and compile these lessons in a convenient format for teachers, preachers, or others who rely on helpful Bible studies, especially when lectionary based. That, plus the addition of many new commentaries for texts not previously covered, is now coming to fruition in a 12-volume set of Bible studies, with four volumes for each of the three lectionary years.

The project is a massive undertaking, and we are grateful to all who have contributed time, energy, and finances to the project.

*All photos used in *Digging Deeper* and *The Hardest Question*, unless otherwise indicated, are by Tony Cartledge.

Using This Resource

The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), devised by a consortium of Protestant and Catholic representatives on the Consultation of Common Texts, was published in 1992. Since then, it has become a standard resource for both Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants.

The lectionary contains hundreds of texts chosen to reflect a progressive study of primary texts in the Bible, along with texts representative of the church year. It follows a three-year cycle known as “Year A,” “Year B,” and “Year C,” then repeats the cycle, using the same texts. Year A relies mainly on Matthew for the gospel readings, while Year B focuses on Mark, and Year C draws mainly from Luke. Selections from the gospel of John are scattered through the three years.

Most days on the lectionary calendar include four readings. These typically follow a pattern of one reading from the Old Testament narratives, prophets, or wisdom; one text from Psalms; one text from the New Testament gospels; and one text from the epistles. Exceptions are many, especially during the Season after Pentecost, when most Sundays include two additional readings as options.

The RCL includes texts for both Sunday worship and other special days. *Nurturing Faith Commentary* focuses on texts for Sundays rather than every “feast day” on the church calendar, many of which are not observed through active services, especially in Protestant churches. We do include texts chosen for New Year’s Day, Epiphany, and All Saints’ Day, however, because sometimes they fall on Sunday.

A small handful of optional texts from the Apocrypha or “Deuterocanonicals,” which are regarded as scripture by Roman Catholics, appear in the lectionary. Given that I write as a Protestant and our audience is mainly Protestant, apocryphal texts are not included in this resource.

The studies in these volumes are not dated, because we want them to be useful in any calendar year, and no year contains all the potential Sundays. Persons who use the text for preaching and teaching may easily consult

online and print resources for the specific dates associated with each lectionary Sunday. (Vanderbilt University’s library provides an ideal resource at <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu>.)

The RCL sometimes uses the same texts on multiple Sundays. When those occur, the study for that text will be printed only once per volume, with appropriate notes to indicate where it may be found if it is indicated on multiple Sundays.

Lectionary texts follow the church year rather than the calendar year, beginning with Advent, the four Sundays prior to Christmas day. Three optional sets of texts are provided for use on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. These are sometimes referred to as “Christmas 1, 2, and 3,” or as “Proper 1, 2, and 3” for Christmas. The first three potential Sundays after Trinity Sunday are also called “Proper 1, 2, and 3,” so in this resource we will use the terms “Christmas 1, 2, and 3.”

For the sake of completeness, we include studies for all three Christmas options in Volume 1. Many churches hold Christmas Eve services, and Christmas Day sometimes falls on Sunday.

One or two Sundays may follow Christmas, depending on the number of Sundays between Christmas Day and Epiphany. Texts for the second Sunday after Christmas are rarely used and always the same. Studies on those texts are also provided in Volume 1. The texts are sometimes similar to texts for New Year’s Day.

Epiphany is celebrated with special texts on January 6, which commonly occurs during the week, but studies on these texts are also included in this resource because Epiphany sometimes occurs on a Sunday. Ministers also sometimes choose to use texts for Epiphany on the Sunday nearest January 6.

The season of Epiphany may include from four to nine Sundays before concluding with Transfiguration Sunday. The number of weeks depends on the date of Easter, which moves about on the calendar, likewise affecting the dates of Ash Wednesday and the beginning

of Lent. The last few weeks of Epiphany aren't used in each cycle, but they are included for the sake of those years that do have them. Their location is in Volume 3 of each year, as will be explained below.

Lent always includes six Sundays, concluding with Palm Sunday, which can be celebrated with texts focusing on Jesus' entry to Jerusalem, or on the following passion. Both are provided.

The Season of Easter has seven Sundays leading up to the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Easter.

The first Sunday after Pentecost is always Trinity Sunday. Depending on the calendar, from 23 to 29 Sundays follow Pentecost, ending on the last Sunday before Advent. These are called "Proper" Sundays. The RCL handles the dilemma of differing calendars by starting at the end with Proper 29 as the Sunday before Advent, then working backward. In this system, the texts for Proper 7 through Proper 29 appear in each year's cycle. Texts for Proper Sundays 1–6 are not always used, but are provided for those calendar years in which they appear.

Since Epiphany 6–9 and Proper 1–4 are the least likely to occur, they share the same texts: Epiphany 6 = Proper 1, Epiphany 7 = Proper 2, Epiphany 8 = Proper 3, and Epiphany 9 = Proper 4. Studies for these Sundays are included in Volume 3 for each year, which begins the Season after Pentecost, with their location noted in Volume 1, which contains lessons for the Season of Epiphany.

The number of "Sundays after Pentecost" for a given "Proper" Sunday is different from year to year, so in this resource they will be designated by the "Proper" number, which can be coordinated with each year's number of "Sundays after Pentecost," which will vary.

Texts, especially from the psalms, are often short and designed more for liturgical reading than for individual study. Even so, all texts receive full treatment in Bible study form.

Readers familiar with the RCL know that texts are often chopped and spliced for liturgical reading, which isn't always ideal for a connected Bible study. In many of those cases, the Bible study in these volumes will expand the RCL selection to provide greater context and continuity. Texts listed in the Table of Contents, with each lesson/commentary, and in the index, are based on the actual text examined, which may be longer than the RCL text, but not shorter.

The basic outline of the series is as follows, for each of the three cycles:

Volume 1 – Advent through Epiphany

Volume 2 – Lent through Pentecost

Volume 3 – Season after Pentecost (Propers 1–14)

Volume 4 – Season after Pentecost (Propers 15–29)

Abbreviations

BCE	Before the Common Era
cf.	confer
ch., chs.	chapter, chapters
cp.	compare
CE	Common Era
CEB	Common English Bible
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
e.g.	for example
et. al.	and others
etc.	and others
f., ff.	the following verse, verses
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV	King James Version of the Bible
LXX	Septuagint
MSG	<i>The Message</i>
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB95	New American Standard Bible, 1995 edition
NASB20	New American Standard Bible, 2020 edition
NET	New English Translation of the Bible
NET2	New English Translation, 2 nd edition
NIV11	New International Version, 2011 edition
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
RCL	Revised Common Lectionary
v., vv.	verse, verses

Season after Pentecost: Proper 15

First Reading Genesis 45:1-15*

Making Peace

And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him. (Gen. 45:15)

Have you ever “kissed and made up” with someone? A disruption in personal relationships can be exceedingly painful, especially when the other party is a spouse, a parent, a brother or sister. Sometimes relational breakdowns grow from innocent misunderstandings, sometimes from callous selfishness, sometimes from unhealthy competition.

Repairing broken or strained relationships begins with a mutual desire for reconciliation. It progresses through communication that honestly confronts the issue and works toward resolution. That usually includes an apology – sometimes from both parties – and a promise to be more considerate going forward.

Making up can be hard to do, but it can also be awesome. Feeling the walls of resentment come down, receiving forgiveness, and embracing again can bring a renewed sense of closeness in a cleansing, life-giving experience.

Many things can be forgiven, but do you think you could forgive someone who had stolen your favorite coat, thrown you in a pit, threatened you with murder, and then sold you to a gang of slave-traders? If things had not turned out so well for Joseph, we wonder if the story would have ended differently.

A story of success

A brief review is in order. Joseph was one of 12 sons born to the patriarch Jacob. As his father’s favorite and prone to big dreams, he was despised by his brothers. While pasturing

their sheep many miles from home, they sold Joseph to a caravan of traders, who took him to Egypt and re-sold him to a government official named Potiphar. As an honest and impressive young man, Joseph advanced quickly and was given charge of Potiphar’s estate before a false accusation from his master’s wife landed him in prison (39:1-20).

Behind bars, Joseph’s positive attitude and actions paid off again, as the head jailer soon put him in charge of the other prisoners. While there, Joseph displayed a knack for interpreting dreams. The royal cupbearer, a fellow prisoner, promised to intercede for Joseph after he correctly explained a portentous dream that resulted in his freedom, but the cupbearer failed to follow through immediately (39:21–40:23). When the pharaoh later had two troublesome dreams that none of his officials could analyze, however, the cupbearer remembered Joseph.

Joseph was called before the king, whose dreams he explained as obvious indications that Egypt would enjoy seven years of plenty, followed by a famine of the same length. Joseph suggested a planned system of taxation to store surplus grain against the coming famine, and the king put him in charge of the effort, second in power only to the pharaoh (41:1-45).

Joseph’s family and other residents of Canaan had no similar plan in place, but they did face the same famine. In the second year, the drought brought Joseph’s 10 older brothers to Egypt in search of food for Jacob’s clan, leaving only the youngest brother Benjamin behind. The brothers

*Genesis 45:3-11, 15 is also read for the Seventh Sunday after Epiphany/Proper 2 in Year C.