



SHARING SCRIPTURE

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Crisis of Identity

For use: December 27 - January 2

Texts: Isaiah 1:1–9; 1:10–17; 1:18; 1:19–31; 5:1–7

Gwen Ellen Jones only wanted to be loved--but her decision to pursue concurrent, torrid love affairs met a fatal ending and left her two children orphaned on Christmas Day, 1909. [1]

Jones' daughter Gwladys found herself without a mother and was forced to move over 100 miles away with her new adoptive parents. Even in the face of adversity, she made the best of her circumstances and became a successful nurse. And Gwladys kept her family's history hidden for more than a century ... until the infamous story resurfaced in recent Welsh news reports.

"When I saw the photograph of Gwen Ellen Jones in the news reports last year," the murder victim's great-nephew Gwynfor shared with BBC, "I was struck by how much she resembled my grandmother, Jane." By a stroke of luck, Gwynfor learned his grandmother Jane was, in fact, Gwen Ellen Jones' younger sister. This discovery led him to connecting with Gwladys' niece.

Just as the Jones family was eventually reunited, despite a century of trials and tribulations, so will God's children be reunited in a celebration beyond our fathoming. However, the prophets remind us that if we seek to be in this reunion, we need to beware of the destructive consequences of actively resisting the Lord.

This week's lesson examines how we take God's blessings and warnings for granted, and risk losing our inheritance to salvation and the heavenly kingdom. It also reveals that acts of rebellion can have a far-reaching impact on ourselves and others.

Like Gwen, we may supersede the love of God in our hearts with our own selfish desires, and if reparations are not made, we risk separating ourselves

from our heavenly family. And like her jealous lover, when we forsake the Lord and take vengeance into our own hands, we can cause irreparable damage to innocent bystanders.

Fortunately, God is “forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call” on the Lord (Psalm 86:5). Just as it was for Gwladys and her mother’s family, no distance is ever too great to separate us from the One who loves us. By repenting and washing our hearts via the work of the Holy Spirit, we can be transformed into the redeemed children God yearns to bring to the heavenly home.

~ Stefani Leeper

[1] <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-55350216>

For Reflection

Connecting: Have you discovered any family secrets? Did they bring you closer together or drive you apart? Be prepared to succinctly share with your online small group.

Sharing: What does reconciliation look like?

1. Accepting the situation and moving on
2. Repenting and forgiving
3. Showing compassion
4. Living “together” in peace, even if that means keeping a distance
5. Repenting, forgiving, and living a renewed life
6. Other:

Applying: Think of a relationship you may have run from or damaged. What reparations can you make to reconcile? Pray for guidance on how to proceed.

Valuing: Caught up in demanding schedules and a stressful pandemic, it’s easy to fall into rituals rather than heartfelt worship. Pray with one other person from your small group, asking for the Spirit’s leading and for reinvigorated worship that will break the bonds of our tired, rotten ritualism.

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Executive Director

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