

## Jesus Silences Critics

Devotional Reading: [Hebrews 4:1–10](#)

Background Scripture: [Luke 14:1–6](#)

### [Luke 14:1–6](#)

<sup>1</sup> One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. <sup>2</sup> There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. <sup>3</sup> Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” <sup>4</sup> But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

<sup>5</sup> Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” <sup>6</sup> And they had nothing to say.

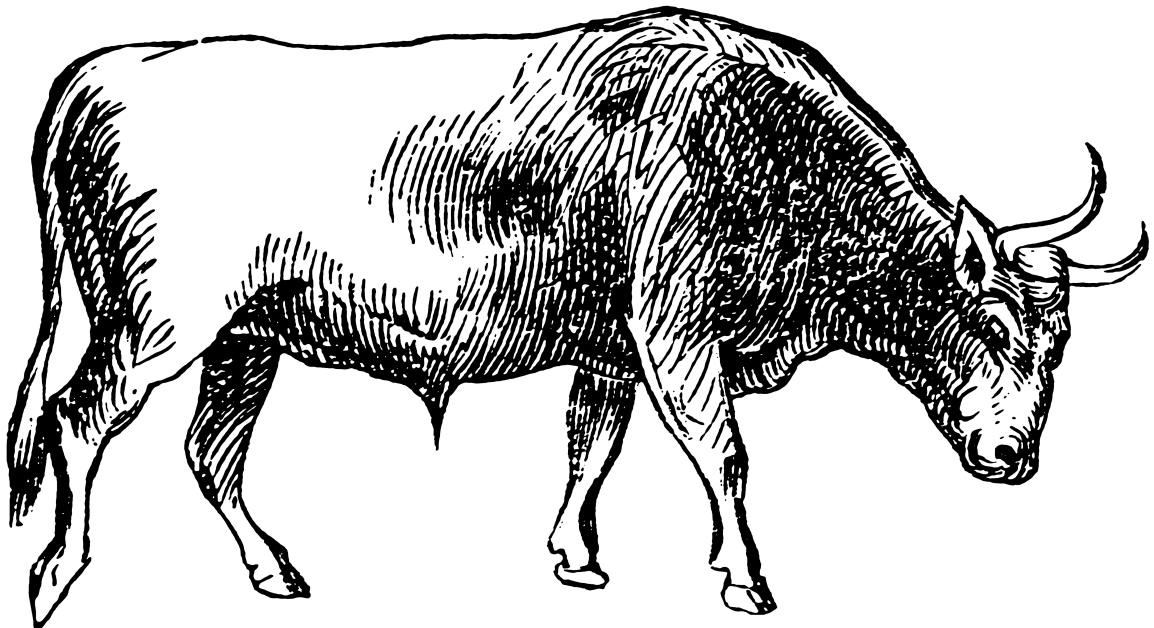


Photo © Getty Images

## Key Text

Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.—**Luke 13:3–4**

## God’s Law Is Love

### Unit 1: Love Completes, Law Falls Short

Lessons 1–4

### Lesson Aims

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

1. Identify the Sabbath law at issue.
2. Contrast the viewpoint of the Pharisees with the viewpoint of Jesus.
3. Suggest why the lesson’s passage is (or should be) relevant to him or her.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Loving God by Loving the Least
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Tense Hospitality (Luke 14:1–2)

- A. The Meal (v. 1)
- B. The Sick Man (v. 2)

#### II. Two Questions (Luke 14:3–6)

- A. The First Question (v. 3)
- B. The Healing (v. 4)  
*A Suspicious Stethoscope*
- C. The Second Question (vv. 5–6)  
*How Much Is a Pet Worth?*

#### Conclusion

- A. Holiness in Time
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

### How to Say It

Hillel *Hill-el*.

Judaism	<i>Joo-duh-izz-um</i> or <i>Joo-day-izz-um</i> .
Mishna	<i>Mish-nuh</i> .
Nazareth	<i>Naz-uh-reth</i> .
rabbi	<i>rab-eye</i> .
Sabbath	<i>Sab-buth</i> .
Shammai	<i>Sham-eye</i> .

## Introduction

### A. Loving God by Loving the Least

As attendees at the memorial service for Dorothy Day (1897–1980) listened to the sermon, they were reminded of the following quote from her writing: “You love God just as much as the one you love least.” This quote was her way of paraphrasing Jesus’ commands in [Luke 10:25–37](#) to love God and show love and mercy to others. The minister giving the sermon went on to describe how this quote anchored Dorothy’s life and work.

Demonstrations of mercy, love, and justice have been the tenets of the Catholic Worker Movement, established by Dorothy and others in the 1930s. The movement consists of over 200 communities (“houses”) in 14 countries. Each house works to show hospitality and mercy to the most vulnerable members of their city. This work is done through their feeding of the hungry, tending to the sick, and providing stable housing for the unhoused.

God desires that his people love him and love their neighbors. People can demonstrate such love toward others through acts of mercy. In doing so, God’s people follow Jesus’ command to “be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” ([Luke 6:36](#)). This lesson’s Scripture reveals how Jesus responded to a group of people who wanted to add boundaries and limitations to acts of mercy.

### B. Lesson Context

This lesson depicts the third occasion in Luke’s Gospel that Jesus shared a meal with a Pharisee (see also [Luke 7:36–50](#); [11:37–53](#)). All three interactions share a common pattern of events. First, a Pharisee invited Jesus to join the meal. Second, a tense moment between Jesus and the host led to a conversation regarding issues of religious observance. Third, Jesus used the opportunity to instruct those in attendance on issues regarding how to follow God. In doing so, Jesus taught his fellow diners to act mercifully in their dealings with other people.

The issue of doing work on the Sabbath is the primary concern of [Luke 14:1–6](#), today’s Scripture. The Jewish Sabbath was established based on the day that God rested after six days of creation (see [Genesis 2:2–3](#); [Exodus 20:8–11](#); [Deuteronomy 5:12–15](#)). As a result, the people were commanded to cease work on the Sabbath. Such requirements regarding that day were a sign of holiness between God and his people (see [Exodus 31:12–17](#)).

As the ancient Israelites left Egypt, they were commanded to take certain steps to prepare for

Sabbath observance (example: [Exodus 16:21–30](#)). Later, as the people entered the promised land, the Law of Moses provided further descriptions regarding proper observance of the Sabbath (see [34:21; 35:1–3](#)). Defiance of these commands brought harsh consequences to the people (examples: [Numbers 15:32–36; Nehemiah 13:15–18; Jeremiah 17:27](#)). The Israelites understood the Sabbath to be “a delight” ([Isaiah 58:13](#)) and a day for worship (see [Leviticus 23:3](#)). Even certain psalms were to be sung on that day (example: [Psalm 92](#)).

By the first century AD, certain expectations regarding proper adherence of the Sabbath had been established by the Jewish religious leaders. In the time between the testaments, an oral tradition later codified as the *Mishna* (rabbinic law) attempted to define the rules regarding proper Sabbath observance. These included nuanced definitions of work, as well as complex regulations regarding what was allowed and disallowed on the Sabbath. Such intricacies made it challenging for most first-century Jews to accurately interpret how they should observe the Sabbath.

Jesus never disputed the importance of the Sabbath. His high regard for it can be seen in his habit of teaching in synagogues on the Sabbath (examples: [Mark 1:21; Luke 13:10](#)). Further, he was willing to use the day to show mercy toward suffering people (examples: [Mark 1:21–34; Luke 6:6–11; 13:10–17; John 5:1–18](#)). As “Lord ... of the sabbath” ([Mark 2:28](#)), Jesus demonstrated the true intent of the Sabbath: to remind God’s people of his mercy (see [Deuteronomy 5:15](#)). The day was not to be a religious burden or an excuse to limit works of love and mercy.

## I. Tense Hospitality

([Luke 14:1–2](#))

### A. The Meal (v. 1)

**1. One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched.**

This Scripture takes place as Jesus traveled to Jerusalem ([Luke 9:51–19:44](#)). Immediately before this text, upon being warned regarding Herod’s intentions to have Jesus executed, Jesus expressed sorrow for Jerusalem ([13:31–35](#)). An unknown amount of time had passed between that teaching and this meal.

Because Jesus was considered a rabbi by at least one member of the Pharisees (see [John 3:2](#)), the group likely deemed him to be an appropriate guest for a meal. They could spend the meal discussing the law and its associated tradition and commentary.

The Pharisees rose to prominence as a sect of Judaism because of their interpretation of the Law of Moses, its oral commentary, and its related tradition. Several schools of interpretation came from the Pharisees. Teachers from the first century AD, Hillel and Shammai, attracted students to their respective schools of interpretations. Their interpretative work included determining guidelines regarding Sabbath observance for first-century Jews.

As a Pharisee, the host likely enjoyed some degree of wealth (compare [Luke 16:14](#)). This assumption is further bolstered by his elevated position as *a prominent Pharisee*. In addition to financial benefit, this particular Pharisee was likely held in high regard as a teacher of the law (see [Matthew 23:1–2](#),



5–7).

Additionally, the Pharisees had strong concerns regarding ritual purity and physical cleanliness. For this reason, the host likely invited only Pharisees and people who would be considered clean. Other people, such as “tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 5:30), would not have been invited. Pharisees had certain expectations regarding the cleanliness of the guests and even the dishes of the meal (compare Mark 7:3–5; Luke 11:38).

The timing of this meal (on *one Sabbath*) would have required advance planning by the host in order to observe the Sabbath day as required by the Law of Moses (see Lesson Context). This meal was likely prepared before the Sabbath and served during the 24-hour period beginning at sundown on Friday.

The Pharisees who assembled for this meal treated Jesus with suspicion. They *watched* Jesus in order to find fault with him, just as they had done previously (see Luke 6:7; 11:53–54; see also 20:20). The atmosphere of the meal had a tense edge, rather than being one of relaxation and conversation. This was not the first time that the Pharisees had presented Jesus with an issue regarding what was acceptable on the Sabbath (see 6:1–10; 13:10–17).

#### What Do You Think?

How do you behave in situations where it seems like you and your faith are being observed by others?

#### Digging Deeper

How does Jesus’ teaching regarding salt and light (Matthew 5:13–16) inform your response in these situations?

## B. The Sick Man (v. 2)

### 2. There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body.

Luke does not describe whether this certain *man* was a guest of the Pharisees, an intruder, or a living “prop” brought to test Jesus. Either the man was a surprise to the entire party, or his presence was the result of the Pharisees’ cunning intentions. But Jesus knows the hearts of all people (compare John 2:23–25); he knew the true reason the ailing man was in their midst.

The man suffered *abnormal swelling*, likely in his limbs, resulting from an underlying issue regarding the heart, kidney, or liver. Older English versions of this verse (like the *King James Version*) use the outdated medical term *dropsy* to describe the man’s condition.

Modern medicine would treat the condition with diuretics. In the first century AD, however, no such treatment was available. The man would have continued to suffer and would have depended on the charity of others to meet his basic needs.

Some students of this Scripture have argued that Luke’s description of the man’s disease served as a form of literary foreshadowing to Jesus’ later criticism of the Pharisees in Luke 16:14–15 regarding their greed. A disease like the one suffered by that man caused insatiable thirst, even as the body retained water. Some first-century philosophers thought of swelling diseases as a metaphor for the disease of greed. Greed caused a swelling of a person’s pride, which led that person to seek more

wealth. The Pharisees had brought a diseased man before the group in hopes to trap Jesus. Instead, it was the Pharisees who were experiencing a disease in their spirits.

## II. Two Questions (Luke 14:3–6)

### A. The First Question (v. 3)

#### 3a. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law,

First-century experts in the law were not primarily legal advocates in criminal or civil courts as modern-day lawyers are. Instead, these *experts in the law* were regarded as experts in the Torah. (The Torah, also known as the Law of Moses, is comprised of the first five books of the Old Testament.) We might compare these individuals to modern-day scholars of the Bible. These experts in the law are mentioned more often in Luke’s Gospel than in any other Gospel (examples: [Luke 10:25](#); [11:45–52](#); [14:3](#)). Luke describes them alongside the Pharisees as having “rejected God’s purpose for themselves” ([7:30](#)).

#### 3b. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”

Jesus’ question concerned the heart of the Law of Moses. The law was never intended to burden the people (compare [Deuteronomy 30:11–14](#)). And Jesus never abolished the Law of Moses (see [Matthew 5:17–20](#)). Instead, he wanted his audience to consider the principles of goodness and righteousness intrinsic to the Law of Moses (compare [Romans 7:12](#); [1 Timothy 1:8](#)). *To heal on the Sabbath* violated the Pharisees’ strict reading of the law regarding what was acceptable on that day.

This was not the first time that Jesus taught a expert in the law regarding the importance of mercy (see [Luke 10:25–37](#)). God does not desire for humans to limit works of mercy, either regarding the timing or the recipient of those works.

#### What Do You Think?

How can you incorporate the practice of asking questions as an act of accountability or evangelism?

#### Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to improve your question-asking skills?

### B. The Healing (v. 4)

**4. But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.**

The Pharisees and the experts in the law were speechless and unable to answer Jesus’ question. Their silence does not mean that the religious leaders agreed with Jesus. Rather, they *remained silent* and avoided confronting Jesus at that particular moment.

Luke does not describe how Jesus took *hold of the man* and *healed him*. Rather than focus on the way that Jesus healed, Luke focused on the results of that healing. Jesus *sent* the sick man *on his way*, thus freeing him from his physical suffering. This healing is similar to another healing that Jesus did

on the Sabbath. On that occasion, Jesus healed a woman and declared her free from her bondage (Luke 13:10–17).



Visual for Lesson 2. Point to this visual as you discuss the lesson commentary associated with Luke 14:3b.

Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth describes his work, in part, as one of bringing physical healing (Luke 4:14–21). The arrival of God's kingdom would be demonstrated by such healings (see 9:1–2, 10–11; 10:9). These miraculous works were evidence that the rule of God's Messiah, as promised by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 35:1–6; 61:1–2), had come.

### A Suspicious Stethoscope

A comedian once revealed that he always kept a stethoscope in his car's glove compartment. Then, if he was pulled over for breaking the speed limit, he would put the stethoscope around his neck and say, "Officer, I'm a doctor! If I don't get to the hospital *now*, a patient is going to *die*." The comedian claimed he never received a ticket when *correctly* using this strategy.

But once when the comedian was pulled over, the officer looked puzzled by the comedian's lie instead of alarmed about the fake emergency. Still, the officer let the comedian go with only a warn-

ing. As the comedian drove away, he realized that instead of a stethoscope around his neck, he was wearing his car's jumper cables! He had bent the rules and been caught.

The Pharisees were hoping to catch Jesus bending the Law of Moses. What they missed, however, was that Jesus had no need to bend the Law of Moses. Rather, he fulfilled the law (see [Matthew 5:17–20](#)). Jesus demonstrated this by showing mercy and healing on the Sabbath. To what extent are you willing to show mercy to your neighbors regardless of others' trying to enforce limits on you?

—A. W.

### C. The Second Question (vv. 5–6)

**5. Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?”**

The Law of Moses required that people help lost or injured livestock of neighbors and enemies alike ([Exodus 23:4–5](#); [Deuteronomy 22:1–4](#)). An attitude of mercy (even to livestock) was at the heart of these commands. By the first century AD, disagreement had arisen among interpreters of the Law of Moses regarding if a person could rescue a stranded animal on the Sabbath. Strict interpretations allowed the animal's owner to feed the animal and ensure its survival until the end of the Sabbath day. Freeing the animal, however, was not allowed. In this interpretation, the work of freeing the animal broke the command to do no work on the Sabbath (see [Exodus 20:8–11](#)). Other interpretations were more lenient and allowed for the animal's owner to work to free the animal, even on the Sabbath.

Jesus' question assumed a positive answer: yes, even *on the Sabbath day* would a person rescue *an ox that falls into a well*. Without assistance, the stranded animal was at risk of suffering injury or facing harm from predators. All of the people at the meal likely agreed that saving the life of this hypothetical animal was accepted. If there was disagreement among the guests at the meal, then it was likely regarding the *extent* that work could be done to save the animal. In short, Jesus expected that all of the guests would agree that showing mercy to an animal even on the Sabbath made sense. In that case, how much more legitimate was showing mercy to *people* on the Sabbath?

Possible endangerment of *a child* would also be an appropriate (and necessary) reason for a person to act on the Sabbath. If a person showed effort to save livestock on the Sabbath, then that person would surely show more effort to save a child.

Jesus could have waited until the next day to heal the man. However, the opportunity for Jesus to show mercy presented itself on the Sabbath. The Sabbath served human well-being, not the other way around (see [Mark 2:27](#)). If some religious leaders considered that it was acceptable to work on the Sabbath (see [Luke 13:15](#)), then Jesus argued that his work was also acceptable, if not all the more so.

Jesus' question in this verse parallels another question that he asked of the Pharisees in [Matthew 12:11–14](#). Both accounts have the same emphasis: doing good and showing mercy on the Sabbath is at the heart of the Sabbath itself.

#### What Do You Think?

How can an unhealthy focus on human traditions lead a person to fail to show mercy?



## Digging Deeper

What steps do you take to overcome any tendencies to be unmerciful?

### How Much Is a Pet Worth?

I had known that it was only a matter of time before my young daughter's beloved guinea pig would become sick. These animals are prone to having respiratory issues. The day came when my daughter showed me how her guinea pig struggled to breathe and refused to eat. Her love for the pet was evident. And my love for my daughter meant that I had to help her suffering pet.

The veterinarian confirmed our fears: the guinea pig had pneumonia which was likely to become fatal. Replacing the pet would have been cheaper than treating the pet. But I spent my money on treatment instead, for my daughter's sake. After attentive treatment and several veterinarian visits, the pet's health improved. My daughter was relieved that her beloved—and for me, rather costly!—guinea pig was on the mend.

Love can make us spend a great deal, in time, money, and other resources, to demonstrate our care. Jesus desired that the Pharisees demonstrate their love for God and for others with action. How will you demonstrate your love for God and for others in the upcoming week?

—A. W.

#### 6. And they had nothing to say.

For the second time during the meal, the Pharisees were left speechless (compare [Luke 14:4](#), above). Their refusal to answer might have indicated their collective humiliation and shame (compare [13:17](#); regarding human silence and shame in response to God's work, see [Ezekiel 16:63](#)). This tense interaction likely contributed to later hostility that the Pharisees would demonstrate toward Jesus.

The Pharisees were well educated in the Law of Moses; they knew what was required of them for good. Their silence and repeated failure to see what Jesus was teaching indicated that their hearts had refused to exercise the capacity to show mercy, even on the Sabbath. The silence of the Pharisees and experts of the law did not end the meal. Instead, Jesus used their silence as an opportunity to question them and teach them (see [Luke 14:7–24](#), not in our printed text).

#### What Do You Think?

How can a believer know whether or not silence is an appropriate response to observing God's work?

#### Digging Deeper

How do [Psalms 30:11–12](#); [39:1–2](#), [9](#); [40:9](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:7](#); [Lamentations 3:28](#); [Ezekiel 16:63](#); and [Luke 19:37–40](#) help you answer this question?

## Conclusion

### A. Holiness in Time

The emphasis of this story is not on the ailing man. Instead, this story at its heart is a caution

against focusing on religious practices at the expense of showing mercy. Jesus was not trying to nullify the Pharisees' practice of observing Sabbath. Not only did the Sabbath require a pause on work, but it also provided time for people to consider how they could show mercy to others.

Further, the question of whether or not a person could heal on the Sabbath was an obscure point. Most people are unable to heal another person on any day of the week. Only the one who is the Lord of the Sabbath (see [Luke 6:5](#)) has the ability to heal on the Sabbath. Sometimes we unintentionally limit our expectations of what God ought to do. What are some traditions we hold to that perpetuate this? God's work is not limited by human expectations. We are to trust God and his timing of his work. When we exercise faith by trusting him in this way, we commit to lives of mercy, following the ways of our heavenly Father.

Twentieth-century Jewish scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972) describes the Sabbath as being an expression of holiness based in time. Although Christians today are not required to observe the Jewish Sabbath, we can still apply similar principles. The idea of observing specific time in order to show mercy to others meets a vital spiritual need for Christians. Followers of Jesus should desire to show mercy in sustained and tangible ways. Although we may sometimes get tunnel vision and focus on other parts of our (busy) lives, we must remember to keep mercy at the forefront of our minds, regardless of the situation.

#### **What Do You Think?**

How would you answer a person who says that this Scripture is irrelevant to modern-day Christians because they are not required to obey Sabbath laws?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How would you communicate the main points of this story by using modern-day examples?

### **B. Prayer**

Heavenly Father, you have shown us great mercy, just as you have shown mercy to your people throughout history. We want to be people marked by lives of mercy. Heal us from spiritual ailments that cause us to act in unloving ways. Grant us deeper awareness of the needs of our neighbors so that we might show love and mercy. Help us be merciful, just as you are merciful. In the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Remember the Lord of the Sabbath and live accordingly.

## **Involvement Learning**

*Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity*

## Into the Lesson

Before class begins, write the following sentence on the board:

*Rules are made to be broken.*

Divide learners into two groups: **Rule Breakers Group** and **Rule Followers Group**. Ask the **Rule Breakers Group** to develop arguments that defend and affirm the sentence written on the board. Ask the **Rule Followers Group** to develop arguments that refute the sentence. Challenge groups to include personal experiences in addition to logic-or law-based reasons in their arguments.

After five minutes, ask for two volunteers from each group to take part in a friendly debate. Ask the volunteers from the **Rule Breakers Group** to give one argument in defense of the given sentence. Then ask the volunteers from the **Rule Followers Group** to give one argument in critique of the given sentence. Continue in this manner until each group has given all their arguments. Allow five minutes for the volunteers to respond to the other group's arguments.

Lead in to Bible study by saying, "Today, we will see how Jesus responded to an opinion regarding the interpretations of the Law of Moses. Let's see if we can understand Jesus' reasoning."

## Into the Word

Divide learners into groups of three. Distribute a handout (you create) that contains the following statements. Ask groups to read [Luke 14:1–6](#) and decide if each statement is true or false.

1. The Pharisees had little to do with Jesus and only noticed what he was doing with villagers on the street.
2. The Pharisees at the meal closely watched Jesus.
3. While at the meal, Jesus encountered a man who suffered from something like the common cold.
4. Jesus healed this man in secret so as not to stir up the anger of the Pharisees.
5. Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath day.
6. The Pharisees engaged Jesus in a long and complicated debate regarding the issue of healing on the Sabbath.
7. In teaching the Pharisees, Jesus gave the example of an ox and its predator.

(Answers: 1. False [v. 1]; 2. True [v. 1]; 3. False [v. 2]; 4. False [v. 4]; 5. True [v. 4]; 6. False [vv. 3–4]; 7. False [v. 5].)

After five minutes, ask for volunteers to share their groups' answers. If needed, provide further information from the lesson commentary.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Three Meals, One Pattern" exercise from the activity page,



which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “Remember the Sabbath” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated

## **Into Life**

Write the following unfinished statements on the board, with space under each sentence:

*Today’s Scripture is irrelevant because ...*

*Today’s Scripture is relevant because ...*

*In light of today’s Scripture, I will ...*

Ask volunteers to give reasons that some people might perceive today’s Scripture to be irrelevant to a modern audience. Write responses on the board under the first phrase.

Ask volunteers to give reasons that today’s Scripture is relevant to the lives of believers. Write responses on the board under the second phrase.

Ask learners to join with a partner and complete the third phrase. Close class by having pairs pray for each other to have wisdom and confidence to live in the prescribed manner and complete the given action in the upcoming week.